

## **Memoirs of a Hospice Nurse**

Growing up as a child, I never dreamt that I would become a nurse not to mention a hospice nurse. I was orphaned two times over by the time I was fifteen years old. My mother passed away in 1974, from lung cancer when I was seven years old. My father succumbed to heart and kidney disease when I was fifteen years old. After the death of my parents, I had to live with my uncle William and his wife, May Rose. However, three years later when I was eighteen years old, May Rose died suddenly and unexpectedly of a massive brain aneurysm. As I grew older, I experienced other losses of dear ones to me in death. Frankly, I was tired of all the changes and pain that the death and dying caused me. At the age of thirty-three in April 2001, I went to Detroit Michigan to visit a dear older sister-friend, Inez—had just lost her husband, Jim, a few months earlier. Inez and her husband use to live here in New Jersey, and I had become very good friends with her and her family. I met Inez in 1991, and she had become the mother figure that I never had. Inez provided a lot of prudent and motherly advice that I cherished in my heart and valued as a young woman. They moved back to Detroit in 1993, to enjoy retirement. A few years into retirement, Jim was diagnosed with cancer. He fought it bravely for about two years until his death in early 2001. I had come to Detroit to comfort her in her grief as she had always comforted me whenever I needed it. During my visit with my dear sister-friend, Inez, it was difficult to see the pain that was framed on her face due to the death of her beloved husband of forty-one years. In our conversations, she would often repeat how she had placed Jim in a hospice house in Detroit for the last few months of his life and how the hospice agency nurses took very good care of him. She also added that hospice also provided her and the rest of her immediate family members with guest rooms with amenities for living. This allowed her to stay with Jim around the clock for the final few months of his life until he drew his last breath. I remember feeling helpless, as I could not heal the wounds that the effect of death had inflicted upon my dear friend. However, I was an active listener that brought her great comfort. I would hold her hands and this always seemed to bring her some measure of peace. Little did I know that this would set the stage for me to embark on a career, where I would be holding the hands of and providing care to people all over the State of New Jersey. After two weeks in Detroit, the time came for me to bid Inez and her family goodbye and head back to New Jersey. It was a two-hour flight from Detroit Metro airport to Newark Liberty.

During my flight back, I started to do some soul searching. I was turning over several thoughts in my head wondering how I could make a positive difference in other people's lives. I was thinking about patients who were approaching the end of their lives and the impact that their passing had on those who they left behind. I knew that I had to do something. I just didn't know what or how to do it. At this time, I worked for the local area hospital first as a payroll clerk then as a hospital house secretary. I worked the 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. shift, performing nursing administrative duties for the entire hospital. In short, I was the admissions' personnel for the entire hospital at night. All patients that needed admissions came through me.

The night shift always seemed to have patients that required ICU/ CCU and Telemetry care, so I spent most of my time on these units. While working on the ICU/CCU units, I witnessed a lot of death and dying up close and personal. Some of these patients had only been on the floor for a few hours. Most were often admitted for MI, CVA, or motor vehicle accidents. I always felt sorry for the patients during their suffering and many challenges that their illnesses would bring.

The brave and competent nurses would always do their best to save them and make them as comfortable as possible. If they didn't make it out of the ICU/CCU, my heart would often break for their family members that would be left to grieve. I was always very sensitive to people's needs. I attribute it to the many losses I had suffered in my own life. I recall feeling so helpless that I was not able to provide the emotional comfort that these families needed. Why? Because my role was behind the desk as a house secretary, not a licensed nurse. As my eyes settled on the flight attendant who was walking down the aisle, suddenly I had an epiphany. The thought came to me, enrol in nursing school and be a force for good. This would allow me to not only render clinical care to patients, but I could offer the emotional comfort they and their families needed.

#### **End of sample chapter**

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