



Interview with a 100-Year-Old Nurse

Submitted by Jack Seigel, MONA Outreach Manager

Jack: Happy birthday, and thank you for being here. Can you tell me about your early life and what led you to become a nurse?

Penny: What made me become a nurse was that my husband was sick, and he died of leukemia. I asked the doctor why he died, and she said, 'Become a nurse so you can figure it out.' Another doctor who took care of me paid for my LPN training, and from there it was just get up and go.

Jack: What was healthcare like when you first started your career?

Penny: It was very wonderful. Nurses were nurses, and they did nursing things. Nurses were proud to be a nurse. Now, I feel so badly that some of them, I think, are working just for the money. That's

the only thing that disturbs me about nursing. I don't think they have the feeling we had way back when. Of course, that was right after World War II, and we had a lot of great nurses who were our professors. When they took off the cap and uniform, I think that changed nursing a lot.

Jack: Did you serve as a nurse during any major historical events, and if so, what was that like?

Penny: I worked for private hospitals until I went to City Hospital. I think that was more educational than book learning. I was there in the aftermath of the skywalk collapse, and I was with a private duty patient during that tragedy. I was there the next day, and all the nurses—day, evening, and

night shifts—came in to take care of everything. I was proud of all of my peers who just showed up.

Jack: What was your specialty?

Penny: Cardiac. I enjoyed and learned so much and had so many wonderful patients. To be able to bring somebody back after a code blue cheered my heart, knowing a life was saved one more time.

Jack: How has the role of the nurse evolved in your view?

Penny: I think the attitude of nursing changed when they were so understaffed and had to take off their uniform. They couldn't wear their caps, and they didn't really work with the doctors. We worked as a team at City Hospital. I think in some places the nurses got tired of being pushed



around by not having enough staff, and they kind of rebelled. I think nurses need to get back to, 'I'm a nurse, and you are a patient, and I'll give you every loving care I can.' Now, we do have great nurses in Missouri. I've met a lot of wonderful nurses, and they do love their vocation. I think nursing should be in your heart, not just for the paycheck.

Jack: What advice would you give a nurse who is just starting out?

Penny: Right now, I am meeting some wonderful aides in the nursing home who want to be nurses from their heart. They truly want to be nurses and are working hard

to get there. Yes, there are good nurses coming up, and I think our program in nursing is fine. The girls and boys just need to have nursing in their heart, not only in their head.

Jack: Looking back on your career, what are you most proud of?

Penny: The opportunity of working with the wonderful doctors I worked with. They gave me the pointers on how to be both a nurse and a person in healthcare. I went to several cardiac workshops, and oh my, I learned so much. That little itty-bitty organ in our bodies keeps us going day by day. I love the heart.

Jack: Anything else you want to talk about?

Penny: I live on memories now. Being 100, I just remember the things we did together. I worked with so many great nurses. I respected all the nurses I worked with, and I still keep in touch with some of them. Of course, we have lost so many, but they are all in a better place, and I am waiting to get with them. Ha ha! Isn't that awful?

Jack: No, I appreciate your honesty and your time. Happy 100th birthday. 🍷



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