

# Ella Kick: A Trailblazer and Philanthropist

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"My goal is to live to be 100—and I just celebrated my 95th birthday so I'm on my way!" This quote exemplifies Ella Kick's philosophy of life and of nursing: positive and confident with a strong foundation in faith. A long-time advocate of nurses and nursing homes, Ella Kick's story is one of serendipity, transformation and passion. This article will focus on Ella's personal history, change over time, and her plans for the future.

Ella grew up in a 2-room shack in a very poor family. During the depression of the 1930s-1940s, a local hospital offered rooms to girls with meager means. During her high school junior and senior years in the late 1940s, Ella lived in the basement of this hospital in Wooster, Ohio. There she assembled and sterilized "packs" used in the operating room containing instruments, dressings, needles and syringes. The syringes at the time were made of glass and the barrel and plunger of each set were numbered. These two pieces had to be matched by nurses prior to use: the two pieces only fit their numbered pair. Nurses at that time also needed to sharpen needles on a whetstone before sterilizing them. Ella recalls that medications came in large bottles and the nurse shook out the number of pills needed for each patient. Rubber gloves were used multiple times—patched and powdered to extend their life and use. Only surgeons wore "no patch" gloves. IV saline solutions were made in the hospital pharmacy and placed in open glass containers with only a sterile four-by-four on top. Rubber tubing connected the jars to the patients, and the tubing was sterilized and used multiple times as well. The kindness of the hospital staff and the familiarity with equipment and supplies used by nurses inspired Ella to eventually become a nurse.

Most nurses throughout the 1950s were trained in three-year hospital-based programs. The population was mostly single women. Hospitals provided room and board, uniforms and books. Ella earned enough money living at the hospital to eventually enroll and graduate with

a diploma in nursing. She married and lived in Wooster until her husband died at an early age. She dreamed of becoming a midwife, moved to Columbus, and enrolled at The Ohio State University (OSU). OSU did not have a midwifery program, so Ella hoped to pursue gerontology. Although that program was not available either, Ella found a faculty member interested in working at a nursing home after retirement who agreed to work with her.

Ella completed her BSN in 1966 and began working in a nursing home for nine months. Meanwhile, she co-authored a grant for the Wooster City School System to start a practical nurse program that required clinical experience in nursing homes. She attended the National Association of Nursing Homes Conference in St. Louis, MO, just before Medicare became law in January 1967. The keynote speaker recommended not hiring more RNs in nursing homes than the law required. Ella eagerly got her hands on a microphone and challenged him—and she was escorted out of the session! Members from several states approached her about why RNs were needed in nursing homes. This was the beginning of her becoming an expert and trusted voice in the field.

Throughout her career, Ella also worked at the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Northeast Office where she initiated regularly scheduled in-service and continuing education programs such as decubiti care. At this time, she recalled that there was only one textbook on gerontologic nursing. She was pleased when The University of Cincinnati (UC) started one of the first master's degree in gerontology nursing programs.

Ella was awarded a Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) fellowship to study primary care in Colorado for one year. She did not return to UC but went to Wooster to care for family and worked at the University of Akron. Over the years, Ella has conducted research and written 17 journal articles. She currently is an ombudsman and has been a frequent speaker, including at the 1980

White House Conference on Aging.

Ella Kick has seen many changes throughout her career. For instance, she has seen the growth of nursing specialties to include the wide variety available to nurses today, the move to 12-hour shifts, and the shifting acuity of patients in nursing homes. She commented that the advent of disposable briefs and attention to dehydration helped eliminate the odor of urine that had been common in nursing home environments. Advanced practice roles have also grown and expanded the scope of nursing and leadership at all levels.

Ella found a second love in her life when she was 60. She and Joe were married almost 20 years when he became terminally ill. Ella had always planned for her own retirement and when Joe asked her what she wanted as he was re-writing his will, she said she did not need his money. Joe created a charitable trust where two universities received the principal and the interest came to Ella. Ella invested the interest rather than taking it for herself and the estate grew.

As a long-time member of her professional association (American Nurse Association, and now ANA-Ohio), Ella talked with President Rebecca Patton about how best to use the money from her investments from the charitable trust. They agreed that a building was not a priority in today's electronic world. Instead, she donated seed money to start the ANA-Ohio Foundation where funds will be dedicated to scholarships, grants, and other programs that celebrate and honor current and future Ohio nurses.

Ella Kick thrives in her own home, still drives, and remains active in the profession of nursing. Her life story encompasses decades of passion, compassion, and advocacy centered around the profession and patients she loves so much and has given so much to. Her impact will continue to be seen and felt for decades to come through the establishment of the ANA-Ohio Foundation. ■