Nurses Who Inspire: New Mexico Nurse Nancy Wertz, RN

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Her story reminds us that nursing is not merely a profession. It is a lifetime commitment to compassion, advocacy, service, and making a difference, one person at a time.

For as long as Nancy Wertz can remember, nursing was her calling. After spending much of her childhood in hospitals because of pneumonia, she knew by age four that she wanted to become a nurse. More than five decades later, she reflects on her career with gratitude and certainty: "No regrets. It's been a wonderful career."

A graduate of a three-year diploma nursing program in Pennsylvania, she and her husband, whom she met in high school, began their journey together in 1971. Their path eventually led them around the world through military life, creating opportunities for her to practice in a wide variety of settings, including medical-surgical nursing, IV therapy, dialysis, private duty care, critical care, home health, hospice, emergency nursing, quality assurance, and care coordination.

At the heart of her practice has always been a simple philosophy: **"Treat others the way you want to be treated and do the right thing".** Those values shaped a career dedicated to caring for patients and supporting families through some of life's most difficult moments.

Her work in hospice became particularly meaningful. Recognizing the need for better education in end-of-life care, she became an End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC) Trainer through the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). As an ELNEC Trainer, she traveled throughout New Mexico teaching nurses about hospice and palliative care. She also played an important role in the New Mexico Pain Initiative, advocating for mandatory continuing education related to opioid prescribing and helping healthcare professionals better understand safe pain management practices. Her efforts helped influence nursing practice and healthcare policy across the state.

Like many nurses, she faced personal and professional challenges. Frequent moves required resilience and adaptability, while hospice care demanded emotional strength and compassion. Yet she says every experience shaped the person she is today.

Beyond nursing, she has devoted more than two decades to Rotary International, mentoring young people and promoting leadership, service, and healthy decision-making. Whether supporting community outreach programs or helping someone she meets in a grocery store navigate a health concern, her instinct is always the same: find a way to help.

Although she has officially retired more than once, stepping away from service has never come easily. "You have to keep busy," she says. "I enjoy helping people."

When asked what brings her the greatest joy, she answers without hesitation: her husband, children, and grandchildren. Family remains her foundation, while nursing continues to be an extension of who she is, not simply what she does. Her daughter, following in her mother's footsteps, is also a nurse and plans to advance her career as a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP), providing direct care to those in need.

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