

Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984 The Beginnings of a Book, the Completion Story of Diploma Schools of Nursing the History That Just had to be Told and Preserved

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Introduction

Barbara McQuillan and Carolyn Smeltzer, were co-chairs of their 50th class reunion from Evanston Hospital School of Nursing (EHSN) in 2022. We, authors of Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984, were disappointed that Evanston Hospital, lately known as North Shore University Health System, now known as Endeavor Health, did not have any memorabilia of our school.

We were hoping to have images and memorabilia that would highlight the reunion and bring back special memories. We believed images would help make our time referencing the past “come alive.” When we asked for memorabilia of the school, a hospital administration executive stated “all school memorabilia were destroyed in a basement flood.” We felt we had lived on the hospital premises for three years, walked the hospital halls more times than we could count and now we were told there is no existing evidence of our past.

The school was our alma mater of which we were proud and now it was like the school never existed, yet in our hearts and mind, we knew it had. The school had helped shape our values, crafted our future and provided education as well as skills that enabled us to provide compassionate care for others and become leaders in our profession.

Today, if you enter the hospital, you could not imagine Evanston Hospital ever had a school of nursing. It appeared our history of the school had been erased, just like our dormitory had been razed and turned into a parking garage. We felt sad and empty of our past. However, our sadness quickly turned into motivation. The motivation was to have the memories of EHSN and of all diploma nursing schools be recognized and remembered in history.

Our passion of preserving the past led us to explore our school’s history and our time as students. The motivation made us want to explore our school from the beginning of its existence. We also were committed to learn how our school began and taught student nurses in comparison to other diploma schools of nursing. We focused on research as well as self-testimony. We discovered that all diploma schools of nursing had similar beginnings as well as teaching methods and philosophies of “how to prepare students” to become nurses. Some diploma schools of nursing differentiated themselves by culture, location, faculty excellence, an association with a university, state board passage rates, heritage, ethnic groups and/or

religion beliefs. However, all diploma programs were committed to educational and practical hands-on experiences that trained the student nurses to care for the sick from day one after graduation.

We proceeded to ask the EHSN graduates of 1972 three questions; How did you select EHSN as your nursing school of choice? What are some of your favourite memories of living in the dormitory or learning in the school/hospital? and lastly, What about the last fifties years?

The responses were overwhelming, surprising, rich in nature, interesting, diverse, informative, funny and emotional. Even more impressive were the artifacts the graduates retained for over 53 years. Examples included: tickets to graduation, porcelain candle laterans, capping letter invitations, notes from instructors, grade report cards, tuition billing invoices, hospital ID cards, notes from their “big sister”, school logo stamped pillows and sheets and nursing student uniforms. One student kept her freshman note stating, “You have rat duty this week. You are responsible for cleaning the rat cages as well as feeding the rats.” These artifacts were now historic and illustrative of what the school meant to the past students.

The authors, through research, recognized their classmates’ experiences in nursing school were very similar to others who went to different diploma schools of nursing. Some similarities included: how the schools originated, when the school was started, the method of teaching, the value of living and learning together and the skills required to perform nursing functions upon graduation. Some schools were religious based, others ethnic or culturally based, while others were based on reputation.

We soon realized we had too much rich material for just a regular anniversary booklet. We believed our story of EHSN was the story of all diploma schools of nursing and our history was the history of all diploma schools of nursing. In the 70’s much energy was put into the debate of where and how nursing student should be educated.

After the decision was made that student nurses should and would be educated in a university setting, diploma schools of nursing and their history seemed to quietly disappear. We believed our school’s history and other diploma schools’ history had been lost in time.

Once the profession decided where and how nursing education would occur, the nursing profession moved forward without the “look back” on the history or the values of nursing diploma schools. Recognizing this, the authors approached Arcadia Publishing in January of 2022, hoping they would accept a book proposal on the history of diploma schools of nursing with Evanston Hospital School of Nursing being the illustration for all diploma schools of nursing. We had a stipulation that the book needed to be published by September, 2022 just in time for our 50th class reunion. The book therefore had to be written in less than four months.

We accomplished the due date even with some major hurdles that had to be overcome. One of the hurdles included the “very few”

vintage school’s pictures archived in Evanston Hospital’s library could not be released without legal permission. This hurdle as well as other hurdles were overcome with determination. The book, Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984 was published in time to be a surprise gift to our classmates during their 50th reunion. The unveiling of this book was captured by the local newspaper as the responses by classmates were overwhelming.

The EHSN classmates of 1972 were joyful and tearful as they breezed through the book pages. They were “brought back in time” remembering the values, the methods of learning and importance on how EHSN impacted their life. They expressed the book validated them as nurses and validated their type of education. They recognized the importance of their school’s history and realized their school will never be forgotten or extinct. There was silence as they leafed through the pages and said “this book is gift to all diploma graduates throughout the country.” The book indeed is an illustration of all nursing diploma education schools through the eyes of Evanston Hospital School of Nursing graduates of 1972.

The publisher and the authors knew diploma nurses were aging and fading so the time was now to write a book, highlighting diploma education importance to the nursing profession and healthcare history. The book, Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984 brings alive rich history with nearly 200 images, captions and introductory chapters that illustrate EHSN unique method of educating nurses. Our book, Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984 completes Evanston Hospital’s nursing educational history story that was originated by Claire Smith’s 1948 research dissertation, Evanston Hospital School of Nursing.

This book, Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984 is unique with interesting historic images, personal testimony, researched history and bibliography. Others have recognized the relevance of this book in describing and explaining nursing history. This book has been accepted into the Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing archives as a verification of the importance remembrance of nursing diploma education as part of our history. The American Association for the History of Nursing has published an article regarding the writings and the “whys” of the book. Amazon has published reviews of the book that affirm the book is illustrative for all who went to a diploma school of nursing. One reviewer stated, “I covered up the name of the school, Evanston Hospital School of Nursing and found I could substitute my own school of nursing’s name and realized this book was a description of my school of nursing in Pennsylvania.” Another diploma nursing graduate stated the only difference between Evanston Hospital School of Nursing and my school of nursing was that “Robert Redford did not visit our dormitory”. A Chicago local television station aired a full segment on the book as it represented rich healthcare history.

Both authors felt honoured to write and publish our nursing education history and pleased that we were compelled not let our school’s history or any diploma school history be forgotten. The authors believe the book validates all diploma nurse graduates

and their education. The book brings back nurses' memories that were forgotten, evokes emotions of past experiences and most of all preserves the history of the educational systems that prepared the majority of nurses in the United States until the later 1970's.

The Importance of this History

The importance of this book was evidence by the attention in the media and in nursing historical societies as well programmed television.

- A. Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984 book archived in the Evanston Illinois Historical Society Museum, 2022.
- B. The book is in the Library of Endeavor Health, 2022.
- C. The book is in the Library of Congress, 2022.
- D. The book was accepted in the Museum of Nursing History and Science at the University of Illinois, 2022.
- E. The book was highlighted and featured three times in a Wisconsin newspaper, Lake Geneva Regional News. The first during coverage of the EHSN 1972 50th class reunion when the book was un-veiled, September 2022. The second announcing the book lecture and signing, November 2022. The third was the news coverage of the book lecture and book signing, December, 2022. There are three pictures in the attachment of each article, none can be read but they are illustrative of the coverage the book received.
- F. The book caught the attention of Hoda, anchor, NBC Today Show, October 2023.
- G. The authors, based on the importance of history have given numerous speaking engagements on diploma education, based on the book, including but not limited to: International Museum of Surgical Science, 2023, Aurora University School of Nursing, 2022 and Questers of Lake Geneva Historical Society, 2023.
- H. The book was accepted into the Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing archives at the University of Pennsylvania, 2023.
- I. The history and book were recognized by the Hektoen's Institute of Medicine Nurses and the Humanities.
- J. An article about reflecting on writing the book, was published, Smeltzer, "Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984 A Look Back at Diploma Schools of Nursing", American Association for the History of Nursing Bulletin, Summer 2023, No.121, pg. 3-6.
- K. Carolyn Smeltzer, one of the authors was featured on a Chicago local television show (CAN-TV Community Pulse Program, May, 2023) highlighting diploma graduate education based on the book/
- L. Amazon has numerous reviews regarding the book and received all five-star ratings.

M. John Tressa, RN, a diploma graduate from Ravenswood Hospital School of Nursing, Chief Nursing Officer NorthShore University HealthSystem, and a DNP candidate at the time of the book publication, wrote the foreword, highlighting the accuracy of the research on diploma education. His mother, also a nurse, read the book and stated, "this book exactly describes my school of nursing" and she was not an Evanston Hospital School of Nursing graduate.

Lessons Learned from Writing the Book and Reflecting

The first lesson learned and perhaps the most valuable lesson was to remember, acknowledge and recognize those that created the future for nursing education by designing diploma schools of nursing. These pioneers shaped the current education practices and policies in the mid 1800's. They understood the importance of having trained, educated nurses to provide care to patients.

The second lesson revolved around values and connectives. If, in the past, someone would have asked me about my nursing education, I would skip past the diploma education and describe my post graduate degrees. Failing to recognize the importance and essence of the values EHSN instructors instilled in all of us. With shared value we are forever connected to those that received the same values in their nursing education. It is almost like a "sisterhood, or brotherhood" and that bond is never forgotten. Even after fifty years of not seeing classmates, the ease of conversation, and memories that created the book, remained strong. When you are educated in a common classroom, provide patient care in the same clinical setting and live in the same dormitory, there is a common understanding of your past.

The third lesson is we are always creating history and responsible for preserving the past. As diploma graduates we are part of a system of education that is no longer. As we age, if we do not tell our educational stories, the stories will never be told. The stories and history of diploma educational practices, policies and values will be lost in time.

A final lesson or reflection is that memorabilia, although devalued many times, do create memories. A letter, saved for fifty years, telling a student she had rat lab duty which included feeding the rats and cleaning their cages, evoke the sentiment of laughter and the feeling that "this practice would never happen today". And, perhaps, without the hard copy of the letter, no one would ever believe that this was a freshman student nurse's duty. Memorabilia do create emotions of laughter, joy and sometimes sorrow. Memories many times need to be jarred by visible item, even if it has been hidden in a "safe place" for the last fifty years.

In Summary

Our request of the readers is to ask a nursing graduate, student nurse or even a faculty member if they know what nursing diploma education is. Chances are you will get the same answer the authors have received when giving talks on the book, or visiting nurses/ student nurses in hospitals and nursing schools; "I have heard of

diploma education, but I do not know what it is," "My great aunt was a diploma nurse graduate, but I do not know what it means to be a diploma graduate," or "I have never heard of nursing diploma education, what is it?" The main purpose of Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984 is to not let diploma school of nursing history be forgotten and for the history to always be remembered. The diploma schools, their leaders and graduates paved the way for current nursing education, practices and policies.

Many organizations, that at steadfast in the passage of time, like Sigma Theta Tau and the National League of Nursing beginning were started in a Diploma School of Nursing. Sigma Theta Tau was begun by six in nursing students at the Indiana Training School for Nurses

in 1922. These nursing students wanted to recognize scholarship, encourage future leaders, and represent the best in nursing. Sigma Theta Tau's Greek name storgé, tharsos, and timé, mean "love," "courage," and "honor" A perfect description of exceptional nurses then and now. The Indiana training School for Nurses was a three-year diploma program of education. It was founded in 1914 and was very much like Evanston Hospital School of Nursing or any diploma schools of nursing at that time. Let us not forget our heritage and let the book, Evanston Hospital School of Nursing 1898-1984 remind all of us of our beginnings.

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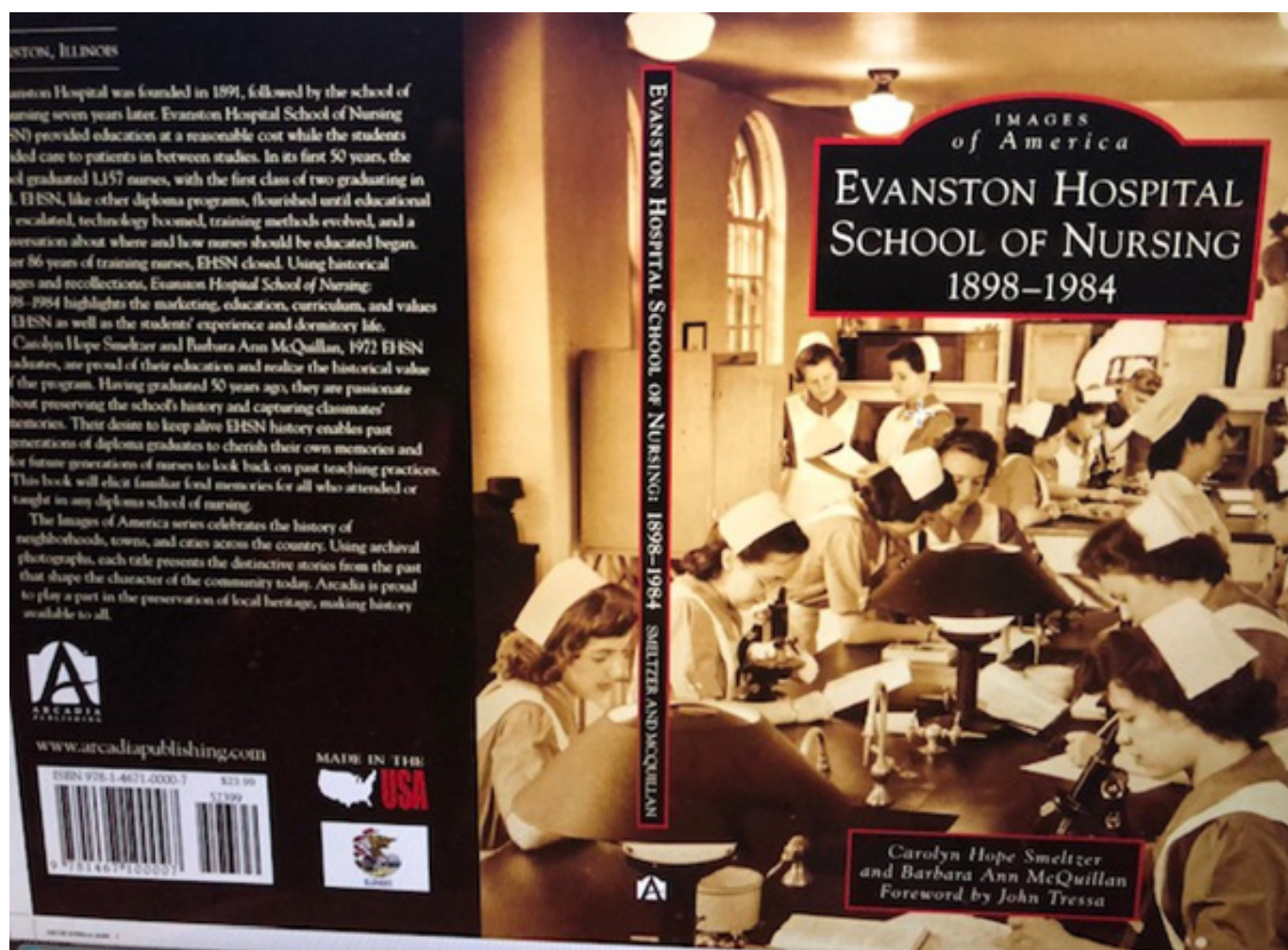


Figure:1