

“My Most Memorable Experience”

Through my twenty nine year career of nursing I have many times contemplated the question; “Why am I doing this?” As I’ve weighed the pros and cons I always come back to the conclusion that as a nurse I do make a difference in the lives of those I care for. The most memorable experience that deeply touched me and my role as a nurse occurred outside of my place of employment and is when I heard for the first time “You saved my life.”

I had worked for several years in the maternal child and women’s health areas at my place of employment which included my involvement with a committee addressing breast care. Breast care is of personal interest to me as my sister-in-law is now a ten plus year survivor of breast cancer. I attended a program about breast cancer which was being presented in my home community and the mother of one of my son’s former elementary school classmates happened to sit next to me. When the opportunity came to practice palpating the breast model for “lumps” it was very obvious she did not understand the proper technique of doing a self-breast exam. Using the model I demonstrated the proper technique to her, a routine I had taught so often that it held little significance at the time. A couple of months later, while grocery shopping, this same woman approached me and hugged me saying “You saved my life.” She had returned home the evening of the presentation, performed a self breast exam using the technique I had demonstrated to her and found a lump in her breast. A biopsy had confirmed malignancy; she was now recovering from surgery and undergoing chemotherapy. She expressed her gratitude for the time I had taken to teach her how to do an exam as she had never done a self breast exam until that night as she believed her yearly physical was adequate.

“You saved my life” were very powerful words for me to hear for the first time in my non critical care nursing career and reinforced to me that I really do make a difference. So many

times the things we do become such a routine that they seem to hold little significance. As I hugged this woman two years latter at a church service honoring our children, the graduating class of 2000, I was again reminded that I, a nurse, do make a difference.