

Just a Nurse

The moment the words came out of my mouth, I knew I had not communicated what I had intended. Let me set the stage for you.

Forrest and Kathleen Preston and my wife, Lola, and I had driven to Elkhorn City, Kentucky, to participate in the memorial service for Shirley Hackney. She was a charge nurse with a 25-year tenure at Mountain View Health Care, who was killed by her son in a shooting spree that also claimed the life of her husband and her mother. The son subsequently died in an automobile crash fleeing from police.

In the ceremony, Mary Pankey, regional vice president, had just finished reading a poem written as a tribute to Shirley. It was penned by nurses who had worked with her. Here it is:

The world grows better every year ... Because one special nurse worked here ... She put on her whites and smiles and sings ... And keeps on doing the same ol' things ... Taking the temperature, giving the pills ... To remedy mankind's numerous ills ... Consoling the elderly, answering the bells ... Being polite with a heart that swells ... Longing for home and all the while ... Wearing the same professional smile.

Greeting the new ones, as they enter the desk ... Closing the eyes that are stilled with death ... Going off duty at seven o'clock ... Tired, discouraged and ready to drop ... But called back to duty at seven so early ... With a love in her heart ... And a face that showed no worry ... Morning and evening and afternoon and night ... Just doing it over, and hoping it's right ... When she lays down her cap ... And her thoughts not far ... O Lord, will you give her just one little star ... To wear in her crown, with the uniform anew ... In that city above, watching over me and you.

The reading of the poem was very well received. When I stepped to the podium, I acknowledged such, and wished to thank the nurses who had composed the verses. I said to the crowd, "If you are just a nurse, would you stand to be acknowledged for what you have done?"

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Just a nurse? What I meant by the statement was: would just those nurses who helped write the poem rise to be recognized? It didn't come out that way, and – I believe – it came across as demeaning the important role that nurses play in our centers and in our company at large. Of course, nurses are at the heart of the important service that we deliver. After all, we are a *nursing* home company.

Later, on the long ride back to Cleveland, Tennessee, I envisioned the following scenario:

Shirley Hackney, a Christian by her own testimony, arrives at the gate to Heaven. She is greeted by Christ, Who asks her to share what she accomplished on earth.

“Well,” she replies, “I didn't have much of worldly goods. I didn't amass a fortune. I wasn't a successful business person. I didn't become a lawyer or a physician. I didn't run for public office. I wasn't an athlete or a rock star. I was just a nurse at Mountain View Health Care.”

“And what did you do at Mountain View?” Christ says to her.

“I changed adult diapers. I cleaned up vomit on beds. I gave baths to those who could not bathe themselves. I fed them at mealtime. I kept check on their weight, and I monitored their temperature. I'm just a nurse.”

“What else did you do?” Christ continues.

“I trained others so that they could give the care that our residents needed. I pushed them to develop their professional skills, and I wouldn't let them settle for being average or mediocre. I showed them by example. I tried to bring out the best within them. I'm just a nurse.”

“Was that all that you did for your residents?” Christ inquired.

“Oh, no,” Shirley responded. “For some, they had no family or their family forgot about them. I went out and brought other people in to visit them and brighten their lives with conversation and entertainment. I hugged them. I

encouraged them. I told them that life is precious – every breath and every moment – and that we should value the time that God has given us and thank Him for it. I read the Bible to them when they could no longer read, and I held their hand so that they would not be alone when they were dying. I’m just a nurse.”

Christ put His arm around Shirley. “You believed in Me. And because you were ‘just a nurse,’ and did all these things for the residents you served, you did it unto Me. Enter into the joys of My Heaven.”

--Beecher Hunter