

The Light They Brought

The date was Saturday, Sept. 4, 1999. The scene was a funeral home in Cookeville, Tennessee. The woman who gave me birth, whom I loved dearly, had died two days before. Her remains lay in a coffin at the front of the room. My sorrow was indescribable.

It was the appointed time for visitation of friends with the family. A long procession of neighbors, church members, schoolmates and acquaintances filed by. There were hugs and words of comfort. But it all seemed surreal – like going through the motions of a stage play, or struggling to wake up from a bad dream.

Then, appearing in the line were some faces I recognized, although I could not call their names. They were dressed in hospital uniforms, having just ended their workday – three certified nursing assistants and a couple of ladies from the dietary department.

With embraces, one by one they told me, “We loved your mother,” or “She was so kind and appreciative for whatever we could do for her.” And one said, “She was always encouraging with her words and her thoughtfulness.”

The darkness of my grief suddenly began to lift. The light of their compassion illuminated my heart and my soul.

These were not executives of Cookeville Regional Medical Center who might have felt obligated to show up as a gesture of goodwill toward a person who had happily given 25 years as a volunteer at the hospital. No, these were the women who had toiled alongside her in her voluntarism, who had served her when she needed them following her surgery, who had cared for her to her last moments of life on this earth.

They were there because they loved her.

Is it any wonder that I take every opportunity to boldly proclaim my love for CNAs in meetings and facility visits? That I carry such respect for their dedication to their patients, their willingness to do *Whatever It Takes And Then Some*? That I stand in awe of their selflessness in service to others?



Thursday, June 12, is National Career Nursing Assistants Day, the beginning of National Nursing Assistants Week that runs through Thursday, June 19. Its theme is *Nursing Assistants @ The Heart of Caring*. It is appropriate. Look for opportunities to educate your families and the public during this weeklong celebration, and find creative and meaningful ways to celebrate the work of your CNAs.

And I will be reflecting on what their sisters did for me and my family on that dark day years ago.

– Beecher Hunter