

## Reflections on nursing



### EDITORIAL

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I can't quite remember at what point in my life I decided I wanted to be a nurse but I do remember that it was my second choice.

Throughout my childhood I had wanted to be a hairdresser, my mother worked hard to discourage me from this career, protesting that I would spend too much time on my feet! Funnily enough I do remember that when I finally announced that I was considering nursing there were no similar protests about being on my feet too much, and how today that makes me smile.

My parents were working class people, today we would describe them as aspirational. They wanted me to achieve more than they and clearly in my mother's mind hairdressing just wasn't going to cut it.

I do recall in year 10 we needed to decide what our top three priorities for work experience were. I only put one on the paper, hairdressing! When the teacher collected the form she looked at my choice, looked at me, handed back the paper and said try again. I learned many years later that they were all in cahoots together but never the less I made three choices nursing, teaching and yes hairdressing!

My work experience was chosen and I by some miracle scored a week at the Children's Hospital in Adelaide. I loved it.

It was much easier in year 11 when I was asked for my work experience choice, I only put nursing and as luck would have it managed to again get my choice. I spent another exciting and interesting week in a private nursing home very close to our home. It became my first experience at paid employment and I worked happily there for three years while I waited for a vacancy to become available to commence my registered nurse education.

I was educated in the hospital system during a time when there were more nurses than were needed and the competition for jobs post registration was fierce. I was lucky; from the first moment I walked into the hospital I knew I was in the right place. Nothing phased me, well almost nothing.

It was during our six week preliminary training block prior to being let loose on real patients that I joined the union. Back then there was none of this freedom of association nonsense. Unionism was never presented to us as an option, but a necessary part of working life. Something that today I believe even more than then. My aspirational parents of course had a different view. Unlike many of my union colleagues, whose parents were trade union families, mine was not. In fact one of my most vivid memories is my father coming home one night cursing loudly about b\*\*\*\*y unions. Today when I remind him about this he smiles and says quietly it's done you no harm! And of course he is right.

I was educated in a time when laparoscopic surgery was just a dream, when transplantation of organs was not as commonplace and the cure rate for cancers was much lower than it is today.

Life was a bit simpler back then but today the advances in medical science are amazing.

I went on to complete my midwifery education and work with tiny pre term infants.

It was during the 1980s to 90s that I became more involved in the union. I marched in South Australia with thousands of other nurses to protest the lack of a nursing career structure.

That was it! I was hooked. I was part of changing the history of nursing in South Australia and I learned about the power of the collective. It was the beginning of my second career and in 1997 I started working in the union office, went on to be elected the state secretary where I stayed for close to ten years and then when it was time for me to move on I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to continue working for the union and the professions that I love.

I have often said if you're going to be union leader then make sure it's for the 'nurses', the most trusted and respected profession in Australia for the last 15 consecutive years.

I have loved every minute of my many years as a paid union official, I suspect one day it will come to an end, but that's ok too because I am now preparing for my third career.

Not content with being a wife, mother and grandmother and slipping quietly into the background, at the beginning of 2009 I started a law degree! My aspirational parents are delighted, my husband shakes his head a lot and I even think sometimes I am a bit crazy, but hey with Rudd wanting us all to work until 67, I've got to have something else to do. And let's face it if I have as much fun doing that as I have had as a nurse and union leader it will be another fantastic career move.