



50TH ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS TO THE CLASS OF 1972

BY BETH DUTHIE



The class of 72 was beckoned to the heart of Greenwich village in August of 1969 filled with pride at having been accepted to one of the most prestigious nursing schools with a reputation for turning out the finest nurses; and filled with trepidation about living up to those high standards. We quickly became alphabetical friends as our roommates and neighbor's last names started with adjacent letters. The tumultuous 60s challenged cultural norms and gave voice to the younger generation with the advice "don't trust anyone over 30." The 70s gave birth to several movements including civil, women's and gay's rights. It was against this backdrop that our coming of age emerged but, it was the values of St. Vincent's that truly shaped us into the individuals we are today.

Elizabeth Kubler Ross, the renowned scholar on death and dying noted that "People are like stained glass windows. They glisten and sparkle when the sun is shining, But you can only see them in the darkness when there is an inner light."

The class of 72's inner light continues to shine brightly across a span of 50 years despite the darkest of times, including the fall of the trade towers, the closing of the school of nursing, and the heartbreaking loss of the hospital. We witnessed in sadness as the heartbeat of Greenwich village went still. That inner light was sparked from the moment we entered the front doors of the dorm. Our big sisters welcomed us with a warmth and friendliness that guided us on our journey in those early days. This morning's sermon reminded me that they were rich in kindness; the hallmark of all St. Vincent's nurses.

Legendary nursing instructors, little known by the outside larger world, were heroic figures with exemplary values that nourished us through the arduous years in training and beyond. Graduation wasn't the





end of our St. Vincent's days but rather the birth of a journey to make a difference in the world. The values imbued in us became foundational to us as nurses, spouses, parents, grandparents, friends, and lovers. Being a St. Vincent's nurse transcended the boundaries of a career.

There are three values imparted in our first six weeks that have I have never forgotten. They have been a sustaining force in my life. Ms. Dibble told us that we are responsible for our actions. She said that no one could ever make you do something wrong. It would only happen if you gave our permission. We can't hide behind a doctor's order to deny our responsibility. Ms. Finnerty told us that every action we take has a rationale and that if we don't understand the rationale, we have no business performing that action. It was the foundation for guiding physicians when they were making mistakes empowering us to rely on our own knowledge and judgement... we owed that to our patients. On two occasions I stood my ground in the face of hurricane gale force abuse from physicians who were enraged that I had the audacity to challenge them. Each physician tried unsuccessfully to convince me that my only job was to follow their orders. But with Miss Finnerty's and Dibble's wisdom echoing in my heart, two fatal errors were averted. Another SVH grad told me that she is dumping her doctor as she is so done with not getting the care she deserves. It struck me that empowerment and courage are hallmarks of all St. Vincent's nurses.

This morning's sermon spoke about prayerful encounters nurses have with patients, which is akin to what Ms. Dibble expressed at our capping ceremony on April 5, 1970. She spoke of the symbolic significance of nursing as entering sacred space. It is characterized by comforting, understanding, meaning, dignity, suffering, sorrow and shared joy. For five decades the class of '72 followed in the footsteps of those who went before us, sharing that sacred space with the lives we touched; fulfilling the promise of the cap we accepted on that long ago spring day.

Someone once told me that becoming a nurse is akin to baptism. It may not be outwardly visible, but it will last a lifetime. I read a quote among the congratulatory letters posted in the reception area that said entering nursing is like joining the Mafia. Once you're in, you can never leave.... you know too much. Being a St. Vincent's nurse is even more of a profound gift. So, we gather before you today, carrying the imprimatur of St. Vincent's with the winds of time at our backs, the song of St. Vincent's coursing through our souls, the memories of fulfilled dreams warming our hearts, and the promise of unfulfilled dreams dancing in our heads. For the class of '72 is still looking forward as we recognize that sometimes the last innings are the most exciting. And yes, our inner light is still burning brightly.



Patience, Fortitude, Perseverance





Faith, Hope and Charity



