

Summer thoughts

The warm weather is making it hard to concentrate on professional matters. At the height of summer, who feels like fretting over the future and the *health system*? I'm more inclined to think about my own health, my life, the passing years and the joy of living.

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This fall will mark my twelfth year as President of the Order. Twelve years of thrilling challenges, of course, but also of fulfilment, thanks to the wonderful people I have met throughout Quebec.

I remember how nervous I used to be at the thought of speaking in public and how much time I would spend preparing the day before giving a speech. Talk about butterflies! Then, one day as I was driving down highway 20, I told myself "Gyslaine, these meetings are really a gift, above all!" That's right, a gift! A fabulous chance to enjoy touching, rewarding encounters, in short a way of staying connected with real life. So gradually, rather than seeing invitations to visit a hospital, CLSC or long-term care centre as a duty, something to feel anxious about, I began enjoying the opportunity to share, to chat and to learn about the many facets of nurses'

lives in Quebec, from rural nurses in Abitibi to nurses in the Far North in Nunavik, Native nurses, ingenious nurses dealing with young people, generous nurses dealing with seniors, determined nurses in emergency clinics, devoted nurses in the classroom, enthusiastic nurses in perinatal practice, and many more.

In every instance, some of them would tell me how discouraged and disappointed they were feeling. One day, I happened to see one nurse start crying, because a doctor had asked her to take a blood sample for some test. It was the straw that broke the camel's back! Gently, in a soft voice, she explained to him "But doctor, you can't ask me to do that. I'm the only experienced nurse in the unit." This unwanted responsibility was too much for her. I would have liked to do something to reassure her, but some burdens in life can't be shared. Most of the time you just have to find a way to cope yourself.



Photo Marcel La Haye

Keeping the flame burning...

Life's tragedies, personal suffering and fatigue can end up wearing us down and making us forget just why we chose this profession. But there is always someone extraordinary around us to step in and rekindle the flame. Let me tell you another story. This spring, at the Hôpital du Haut-Richelieu, I was introduced to two amazing nurses. The first one is in her seventies, and not only is she still working at the hospital, but every year she and her colleague spend a month in Haiti working as volunteers in a dispensary. I asked the younger nurse if this meant she never took any vacation. "When I go to Haiti," she said, "I take my husband and children and the whole family has a wonderful time." You should have seen her shining eyes. Such an incredibly generous person!

Two friends of mine, both nurses, were literally struck down by cancer this year: one in the space of four months and the other in one month. I would like to tell you a bit about them. Marjolaine Gobeil, a pediatric

nurse, finished her career as a director with the OIIQ before retiring. I got to know her when we were both working for the Association des hôpitaux du Québec, and we enjoyed exchanging confidences. Francine Beaulieu-Préfontaine graduated at the same time as I did (1972) with her baccalaureate in basic training from the Université de Montréal. When she died, she was still Director of Nursing at the Hôpital Sainte-Anne. She had so many plans. We had just signed an agreement with the Secrétariat international des infirmières et infirmiers de l'espace francophone (SIDIEF) and she was to represent her hospital, which had become a supporting

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member, on the SIDIEF Board. She was the first of our year to die. A friend from our class called me and told me "I hope this makes you think, Gyslaine, that you have to take care of yourself and stop working so hard!" Still, my father always told me that hard work never killed anyone. In fact, a nurse from Rouyn-Noranda, Danielle Gélinas, during a visit for Nurses Week, reminded me of one of Confucius' sayings: *Choose a career you love and you will never work another day in your life.* Fortunately, I love my job.

... and taking care of yourself

Nonetheless, I was shaken by their passing. We get caught up in our busy lives and tend to think that we'll always have a chance later to do all the things we don't have time for today. How can we learn to live each day as though it were our last? How can we make the right personal and professional choices? Losing these friends has reminded me of my own fragility and the brevity of our time on Earth. Now I understand what people mean when they say "don't waste your time" by spreading yourself too thin.

But vacation is the perfect opportunity to take care of your body and mind—to make time for yourself. I wish you all a pleasant summer, and hope you will allow yourselves to enjoy the warm evenings, savour the brisk sea air, climb your own mountains, get your fill of speed on your bicycle, sip a beer at a sidewalk café, or just quietly appreciate a beautiful sunset.

Have a great summer! ●

Gyslaine Desrosiers
President