



Married to a Nurse

I decided to write this while my wife Betty was at one of her frequent seminars. This time she went to Atlanta, Georgia, for five days, leaving me alone to think about how being married to a nurse makes our life together different than our friends' lives.

Betty — or B.J., as she is called by her nursing colleagues — really enjoys going to seminars, learning new procedures, and having a feeling of unity with her colleagues. As her spouse, it is a feeling I

cannot share. I don't know how it feels when a patient on the brink of death comes into the hospital and, after a period of hospitalization, walks out to go home. Nor can I feel the same sense of loss when a patient dies. Betty can share her feelings with other nurses who have had similar experiences, but her feelings are deep and difficult to put into words.

Nurses form a bond I cannot understand. Through 11 years of being married to a nurse, I can think of only a few of

Betty's friends who are not in the nursing or medical fields. Over and over, it goes back to this special bonding.

Maybe I am jealous of these close friendships; the only people I have ever bonded with were in the military.

Looking in from the outside, I have come to the conclusion that this is what the word nurse stands for:

- N: Nurturing
- U: Understanding
- R: Responsible
- S: Sympathetic
- E: Effort

After reading articles in several nursing magazines, I never understood what possessed the authors to write them. Who really cares if a nurse pricks her finger with a needle, or if a doctor flies into a rage in the middle of an intensive care unit? Who cares if a nurse has to work under conditions that are life threatening? Who cares if a doctor chokes a nurse until she almost passes out and, when confronted, explains, "I was just teaching her what it feels like to have a ventilator set on ten breaths-per-minute with the sensitivity too high"? Who cares if a doctor makes a mistake and then blames the nurse? Well not me!

That was my mentality *before* I gained some insight into nursing. I had to marry a nurse to undergo a change in attitude!

But there are still plenty of people who equate the word nurse with servant. When people check into the hospital, they too often think that for each patient, there is one nurse, and that her only job is to run down to the cafeteria to get a cup of coffee, raise the head of the bed, turn the T.V. channels, and wait on them hand and foot.

True, a nurse's job is to care for the patient, but there is a big difference between caring and being a servant. On any given day, nurses usually work short-staffed, handling from two to ten patients, and dealing with short-fused doctors and family members who are understandably upset.

To me, being a nurse is like walking into flames of fire with a can of gasoline. Because I am on the outside looking in, I have difficulty trying to understand why my wife puts up with it, day after day. I know it is not the money, because no amount of money is worth some of the things she goes through.

After several years, I have figured it

out. Pride! She is proud to be a nurse and has been since she became an R.N. at the age of 20. And I have always been proud of her.

When we first met, however, I thought that all she did was walk around with a clipboard and take blood pressures all day. My first mistake in our young marriage was telling her my impression.

My second mistake came a few months later. A doctor had put his patient on new medication that caused delirium. The patient thought that my wife was his ex-wife and proceeded to hit her. The patient's son came into the room, saw what was happening, and demanded to know, "What the hell are you doing to my Dad?" Betty tried to explain, but the son would not let her finish and demanded to see the doctor. When the doctor gave him the same explanation, the son thanked him, saying "I wanted to know what was wrong from someone who really knew."

The son did not believe my wife because she was "just a nurse." My mistake was asking her, "Well, doctors stand up for nurses, don't they?" Now, I keep my mouth shut! There won't be a third mistake!

I thought that once my wife graduated from nursing school, she wouldn't have to study so much. Again, I was wrong. That is when I found out about Continuing Education Units. From the time I asked her when the studying would stop, I have learned about a lot more courses that nurses study for: Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation, Advanced Cardiac Life Support, Basic Trauma Life Support, and, last but not least, Critical Care Registered Nurse. I know I'm leaving a lot out, but I honestly cannot keep up with all of them!

I guess the thing I dislike most about Betty being a nurse are the seminars which take her away from home for short periods of time. This year, she has been to several, including the big one: National Teaching Institute. But even though I don't like being away from her, I know these seminars make her the type of caring and knowledgeable nurse she is, so I will never ask her to choose between me or nursing — her two loves.

Over the course of our marriage, I have never gone to the hospital to eat lunch with Betty. I simply cannot stand the hospital smell. On one of my recent visits, I was standing in the hallway outside a patient's

room. The door was almost closed, but an odd smell was coming from the room. I asked her what it was and she said, "That is the smell of death."

She went on to explain that the patient was a "regular," the nurses' name for a chronically ill, frequently hospitalized patient. I know that nurses form a bond with the "regulars" and when they die, the nurses feel it is like losing one of their own family members. Betty has come home several times and I could tell she had been crying. After a little while, she would tell me what made her cry, but she tries not to say too much because she thinks I don't understand.

Until recently, I had not thought about what being a nurse was really like. We were at a birthday party and I was standing

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to the side of Betty's chair when she jumped to her feet, handed me her plate, and ran across the room. I was not sure what was happening, but then I saw that she and another woman were helping a child who was choking. After she calmed the little girl and her parents, I remarked that I hadn't heard the child choking. "How did you?" I asked.

"I just did," she replied. That was the only answer she would ever give me. Later, we learned that the woman who had helped my wife was also a nurse. I know that nurses have a sixth sense. Betty will deny it, but I know better.

Another thing about Betty, she will not let a patient die alone. She will sit in the room and hold a patient's hand until death comes. Again, I asked her "Why?" She said that sometimes families live too far

away to get there in time, or they are "too busy" to come and sit by the bedside. "There is no way I am going to let them die alone," she told me. "I want them to know that someone is there that cares."

I get furious when Betty comes home upset and I find out that some family member has cussed her. I've told her, "Get their names and I will take care of them!" I always get the same response — "Honey, it is part of the job."

She explains it to me the same way every time. "The family members are not upset with me, they are upset with the illness and what it is doing to their loved one, and I'm just an outlet for their anger." She says what bothers her more than anything is when a seriously ill patient is admitted to the intensive care unit and everyone does their best to make sure the patient gets the best care possible and then, when the patient starts to improve, who gets the credit? The doctor! He "cured" this person all by himself!

Once I said, "I feel sorry for nurses."

"Do not feel sorry for me or any other nurse," Betty said. "This is my profession. I chose it because I felt like I had the ability to help others. So I do not want anyone to feel sorry for me, because no matter the outcome, I know I have given my best."

Nursing is in the blood. I don't understand what makes a person want to do battle everyday in the hospital "war zone," living with illness and death and always wondering if the next time she pricks her finger with a needle, she will get AIDS or some other disease. I guess that is why I am in another line of work.

But I will tell you I am very proud to be married to one of the special people of the world — a nurse. My feelings can be summarized like this:

God came forth and created the heavens and the earth. The earth was unformed and void. On the first and second days, God breathed life into the void. On the third day, God created doctors to care for the life He created. On the fourth day, realizing the mistake He had made on the third, He brought forth NURSES. ♦

[RICK RICHARDSON is employed in a saw mill supply company and lives in a small town in the Ozarks with his wife Betty, three dogs, and a cat. He said he wrote this article "because of my love for B.J. and my envy of nursing — I would be proud to be a nurse."]

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Bouquets

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By Rick Richardson

Synopsis - This husband doesn't understand what makes a person want to do battle everyday in the hospital "war zone " but he has nothing but ride and respect for a special nurse who does—his wife !