



MY LIFE, MY STORY

JAY



UNITED STATES ARMY

1968-1991



Moving Through Life with Service at Heart

Jay

My father was an Army Air Corps pilot in World War II, flying a B25 bomber over Japan from Okinawa. My mom graduated from Peter Bent Brigham Nursing School and joined the Army with a team from her hospital and served in the Philippines during WWII. They met on a blind date while she worked at the VA in Connecticut. My dad was going to Middlebury College on the GI Bill and I was born there.

We lived in Vermont until his graduation and then moved to Walpole where I grew up, with my three siblings. We watched every WWII movie on our black and white TV and I think I saw “30 Seconds Over Tokyo” at least ten times. I read all the Cherry Ames books – following her as she went from a student nurse to Chief Nurse in the Army. I think I always knew I would be a nurse and I became enthralled with the idea of being in the service.

During the 1960’s, there was a shortage of nurses and the uniformed services had a program of paying for nursing education with a commitment in the service. I often talked with my dad about joining the Army and when he died when I was 15, I knew it would be the only way I could afford college. I remember as a senior in high school, saying that I would serve in Vietnam, my classmates laughed that the war would be over by the



Jay's Mom



Jay's Dad



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time I graduated.

I went to college in North Carolina during the late 60's. My first patient as a student nurse was a VA patient with kidney failure and I can still picture him. In the south at that time, I saw a world very different from what I had known in Walpole. There were anti-war riots, student take-overs of administration, sit-ins, and National Guard tanks patrolling the streets. When my roommate and I joined the Army, we did not make it known because fellow students were so anti-uniforms. Instead of joining the demonstrations, we went into the community to help bring healthcare to the poor and homeless. It was an experience that would affect my view of the world and my place in it.

After graduation, I went to basic training in Texas with doctors and nurses and



Jay in a Vietnam Emergency Room

dust-off pilots, many of whom would also go to Vietnam. And then, after eight months in Kansas, I left for Saigon. We all went as individuals, each having to survive for 365 days. I ended up in Phu Bai supporting the 101st Airborne. The hospital was on the end of the runway, between a fuel dump and the

helicopter hangers, a very

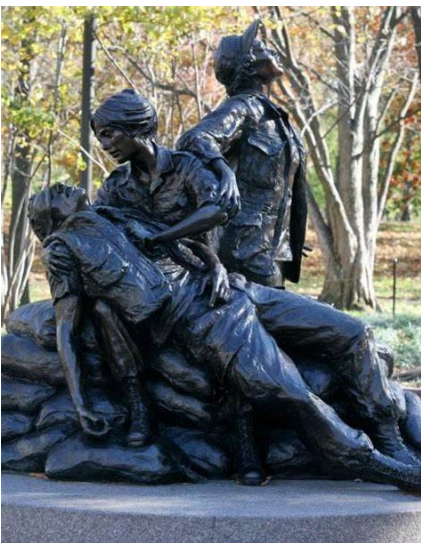
precarious position. The third night there, I was awakened by a loud blast and dirt sprayed on the roof of my hut. I quickly learned my way to the sandbagged bunker and to have my helmet and flack jacket close by. Sleeping was difficult



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and to this day I am easily startled. We worked 12-hour shifts, six days a week. In the ER where I worked, we took care of 18 and 19-year-old boys who stepped on mines and lost legs and arms, boys who were shot and might not make it to Japan in time to save them, head wounds and white phosphorus burns that never seemed to stop burning. We prepared for mass casualties and had a helicopter go down near us with 16 soldiers, several of whom were friends. It turned out that all 16 died and we had casualties from the booby traps that had been laid on and around the wreckage. The nurses in my hospital were mostly all 23 or 24 years old. This was our first real job, less than a year out of school. We were ten women on a base of 10,000 men. We lived through a typhoon that blew over a helicopter, blew off the roof of the ICU and flooded the ER with two feet of water. We took turns ambuing the patients on respirators until a generator could be repaired since we lost all power. We took care of North Vietnamese wounded, seeing 15 and 18-year-old boys who were as scared as we were. We took care of a little boy who was hit in a gunfight that killed his mother and all we knew of the 5-year-old was that his name was Sau – the number 6, meaning he must have been the sixth child. We took care of a little 4-year-old girl from a local orphanage who had neurogenic

bladder and carried her urine bag around like a purse. We thought we were going to be overrun one night and had our evacuation plan ready with who would fly out with which patients waiting in the ER until the sun came up and all was clear. I watched young men, not even adults yet, fight their fears as best they could. Some used alcohol, some drugs, and some just put on a face of bravado and macho. It was an experience that



Statue



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stays with you your whole life.

When I came home, I saw a nation who had disdain for veterans. I was able to process a lot of what I saw and lived because I stayed in the Army for another three years – this time in Colorado. And when I left the Army and returned to Boston, my first job was at the VA in JP when it was a real hospital. I was on 8Baker with 50 patients. Being new, I mostly worked evenings and nights with one or two nursing assistants. I had to go in to work an hour early to pour my meds with tiny cups and med cards. We mixed all our own IV medications and counted the drops to time the medications. It was a very different world! I stayed in the Reserves for almost 18 years. I loved the chance to help train for deployment. I loved being



New England Baptist Logo

able to wear my uniform and set up field hospitals. I loved that I could help to prepare soldiers for an experience that they could not fathom. But when Dessert Storm happened, I realized that I would have difficulty facing a war again. I retired from the Army and became a true civilian.

I got a job in Staff Education at New England Baptist Hospital so I could teach and help to transition new nurses to real life medical care. We wore our school nursing caps, white uniforms and white stockings. We stood when doctors entered the room. We made the first videos for patient teaching on the TVs-really amateur but cutting edge for the times. I wanted to do more and enrolled at



Northeastern University Seal

Northeastern in the MBA program on my GI Bill. After working in Management Development at the Business school, I took a job selling cardiac catheters and dialysis kits and started to travel the US. Then came a chance to manage branch offices for a temporary help company and I left nursing for 20 years. I managed



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sales and marketing in Austin, Charlotte and Raleigh, Denver, Atlanta and southern California. It kicked up my love of travel and I really got to see a lot of the US and how different people from different parts of our own country were so diverse. As the industry changed, I found an opportunity to work for an Israeli entrepreneur who was looking to sponsor nurses to come to the US from overseas to cover the eventual shortage as we baby boomers aged. I travelled to South Africa and India many times, interviewing nurses from all over Africa and India who wanted a chance at a better life for their families. In South Africa, the nurses were mostly Primary Care nurses who lived at the clinics they served, leaving their children in the care of relatives hours away in their villages. They worked 12-hour days, seeing 100 patients a day who had walked miles to get to the clinic. They had a doctor maybe a ½ day a month and had to treat and triage all these people. This was during the height of AIDS and there was no medication for their patients and the anguish and helplessness they felt at not having the resources was evident. They were making \$5-6000 per year. In the interviews, I heard their stories and helped set up classes to prepare them to pass English tests and to prepare them for the NCLEX exams. The process for them to come here was two to three years long. And then the immigration door closed.

I then ran a travel nurse company and followed that by managing a dialysis clinic until the opportunity opened for a Nurse Manager in Women's Health at the VA. Imagine my surprise that they were willing to take a chance on a 64-year-old nurse in a critical position caring for an underserved population.



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At the VA, I have been able to pull experiences from my career to help serve my country again. I have helped to bring educational programs to nurses. I have seen how fortunate we are in Primary Care with resources that may at times be hard to find but are available. I understand how the past can affect the present and how important trauma-informed care can be to the health of patients. I have been involved with Whole Health since the beginning of our transformation from sick care to health care. Seeing video connect evolve has been a real experience for a baby boomer who started out with operator assisted party lines on the one phone in the house!



If it seems that my life has been all work, it hasn't. I have been able to indulge my love of travel by going to all 50 states and to 48 different countries, with 2 more this coming year after I retire. I have a wonderful, supportive family and am friends with my siblings as well as a "big sister." I have been a very involved aunt to my sister's two children who were adopted from Russia. I worked with Boy Scouts as my nephew grew, helping to mentor boys as they grew into young men.

I have been involved in my church where I have held most offices, taught Sunday School and still go to Bible study every Monday night. I have three wonderful cat companions who greet me every day when I come home. I have been very involved in an organization started by a woman who became a close friend – we traveled to Kenya together last September – she began the organization to feed and



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educate children of the Mayan indigenous people in Guatemala where malnutrition of the children is at 75%. And it has moved into helping to empower the mothers and grandmothers who have been left to care for their families after the men have left for the north.

These women have no education and have been raised in a patriarchal society where they have no voice. Now they are standing up and teaching each other about nutrition and hygiene.



I think the most significant events of my life have led me here to the VA. I work with incredible people who are a team that truly lives the ICARE values. We work together with fewer resources than the larger clinics have, caring for women who have served to protect the life we live in America. The doctors and nurses in Women's Health have a mission and I am proud to be able to contribute to that. We have a national project coming up to obtain My Life, My Story from more Women Veterans. It is important to listen to their story and to understand what has





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impacted their lives and their health. We even have our JP clinic back (in 2020) after the flood of 2016. The friends and colleagues I have at the Boston VA are inspiring and I am happy to have this as the final journey on my career path. I salute you all in Primary Care for what you do for our Veterans