

Ruth Dornemann Berry '61

2024 Distinguished Alumni Acceptance Speech

My sincere thanks to Dr. Ruth Merkatz for putting forth the nomination for me to receive this prestigious honor. I truly value our renewed friendship and wish the same for others in our class. Ruth and I wish to reactivate more of our fellow 1961 classmates with the Alumni Association. A special thank you also to the Alumni Association and Linda Saal for granting the honor and for providing a beautiful framed memory of the award. Genuine support from my adult children, friends and colleagues has been invaluable and greatly appreciated.

The faculty and leadership of our undergraduate program provided ongoing wisdom, encouragement, and guidance. We wanted to learn and we were in an atmosphere to learn to care, to serve, and to be aware of immediate and surrounding situations; we were also asked to stretch and take risks to advance to a higher level. We were schooled to be “Lifelong Learners” years before that became a popular educational phrase. I certainly cannot list names of all the memorable persons that influenced us, however, early on, Ms. Overholzer had us venture out to see aspects of life within the city in “Community and the Nurse”. Ms. Henderika Rynbergen instilled exactness and diligent learning in Nutrition and Organic Chemistry courses; she encouraged us to name a favorite pet, “Lecithin” and continue to learn newer enzymes with similar tactics. I have fond memories of leaders, such as Deans Lyons and Carberry, Virginia Dericks, Vera Kean, Catherine Dwyer, Louise Hazeltine and Doris Schwartz. Nursing Supervisor for Pediatrics, Ms. Trudy Aufhauser, was instrumental in encouraging me to pursue graduate education; she suggested a new joint program between the University of Michigan School of Public Health and Wayne State University College of Nursing.

NYH reminders arose again as I began my first faculty position at the University of KY, Lexington, KY. I met CU-NYH faculty who had come to the new Medical Center: Dr. Kurt Deuschle and Dr. Jean French from Community Health, Dr. Barbara Bates and then, Ms. Grace Wallace—our CU-NYH Pediatric nurse faculty was now chairing the Pediatric Nurse faculty Division at UK College of Nursing. A few years later while a research assistant in MCH at the University of NC School of Public Health, it was equally enlightening to work with Carol Fripp who became a member of that university’s nursing faculty.

I am indeed grateful that our profession has provided a wealth of opportunities for new experiences, new learnings, new travel vistas and oh, so many valuable friendships during my career. The early learned and valued CU-NYH essentials were vital, for little did I know that most of my professional days would be spent in communities and fields of nursing that were almost unknown upon completion of our undergraduate program. The Public Health arena made it imperative to work amidst varied disciplines and continually be apprised of the strengths of individuals and communities; to search for disparities and gaps in services; and together to build the best possible outcomes. Coordinating and practicing in two faculty practice sites made it possible to meld the excitement of the educational and faculty

component with the ever changing practice scene that included both students and colleagues. Opportunities to travel nationally and internationally to share these experiences further allowed me to continually admire the strengths and beauty of different peoples, to appreciate the need for excellent health services, and consequently the need to educate adequate numbers of qualified health professionals and para professionals.

Yes, I am truly grateful for my and our collective significant educational and professional experience at CU-NYH School of Nursing. Equally, I am appreciative of the energy, the programs and the accomplishments of the Alumni Association. As we anticipate fewer Alumni gatherings in ensuing years, I would hope that we might focus energies to support educational programs for nursing professionals in our various communities as well as to encourage and mentor young persons to choose nursing for their life's work and service.