

10-19-2006

Nancy Janssens interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project

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Repository Citation

Curry, D. M., Pingrey, E., & Janssens, N. (2006). Nancy Janssens interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project. .

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

NANCY JANSSENS
OCTOBER 19, 2006

DONNA MILES CURRY: Okay, I think we're ready to go.

NANCY JANSSENS: Okay.

EMILY PINGREY: Okay, great.

DMC: Today is October the nineteenth; two thousand six and this interview is with Nancy Janssens as part of the Wright State University Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project. Present we have, the interviewer is myself, Donna Miles Curry. Present we have Emily Pingrey, graduate student and Nancy Janssens. Hi, Nancy.

NJ: Good Morning.

DMC: Okay, Nancy as we start off this interview, why don't you tell us a little bit of your personal background and how you came to Wright State.

NJ: Um, when I came to Wright State I was an RN from a diploma program in Detroit, Michigan. I had always been motivated to pursue my baccalaureate in nursing but the opportunity never presented itself because I was a military wife and we traveled extensively. So, I never could really get settled into a school and then Wright State offered the program. I was, I entered the very first class at Wright State for the baccalaureate program. At that time there were eight RN's and I believe five or six traditional students, people who had not pursued nursing at that time.

DMC: Great. Um, so what do you remember about when you started? What were the classes like that you took? What were those early times like?

NJ: Ah...

DMC: Anything that you remember.

NJ: Yes.

DMC: (Laughs) It's okay.

NJ: Um, I'm afraid my first reaction to that question is chaos.

DMC: Okay.

NJ: We were new kids on the block. It was a new program. It was evident there had not been extensive planning or background for it. In fact, our very first dean was a psychologist. I believe she, I'm not even sure now, recall, I believe she may have been an RN but her PhD was in psychology. And the general tone at that time was we were like the adopted child. We came on board and nobody kind of new what to do with us. There wasn't a curriculum in place and I do want to commend that beginning faculty because they developed the curriculum, in essence, as we went along. And I remember my interview with the dean at that time and it sort of portrays the attitude that we experienced because the majority of us were RNs who had come back to pursue their degree and I remember asking her what in fact, how much credit would I get for my three year program. And she just looked at me and said nothing. I still remember that.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: And I of course was devastated. Now I could understand and there are ways to deal with that but I'm afraid that she was very abrupt and just said that and in essence told me you start from the beginning here. And of course I interpreted it very personally that what I had done before was worth nothing in this program but as I said I was motivated to pursue the baccalaureate despite anyone or anything that might have gotten in my path. So that is my first impression, quote, of administration in the program. Now as I said the classes were of course very small. It's kind of; they developed the curriculum as we went along. There was much difficulty in clinicals to get us into the system in the community because we were like aliens.

And there was a resentment in fact by the nursing staff because they knew we were RNs and that we were going back to get a baccalaureate in nursing which was threatening, as I saw it anyway.

DMC: Uh-huh.

NJ: And in clinicals we also were only assigned one patient and if it was a very difficult patient there was two of us to one patient. Well, you know, we got looks that anybody could interpret. So, we were not welcomed in the community at that time. Anything else?

DMC: Where did you do your clinicals? What were they like?

NJ: Okay, my, well our clinicals were at Miami Valley Hospital.

DMC: Sure.

NJ: And um, I remember I was in the intensive care in the beginning. Lets see, and then as we went along, I'm just trying to recall the very beginning.

DMC: Uh-huh.

NJ: We were first in the intensive care and then later on as the program developed we were in clinicals in the community. I remember going to at that time what was called Drew Health Center. It's still viable but I believe it's under another name.

DMC: Sure.

NJ: And um, we were in clinics. I'm trying to recall. Keep in mind this is a long way back.

DMC: Sure.

NJ: When we were outside the hospital situation we didn't, I will speak for myself, I did not pick up that threatening attitude by the staff that was there and we worked with all kinds of staff in the community. I can't recall any of the others that stand out to me at this point.

DMC: So now when you went through with your, were your clinicals mixed in with the non RN students?

NJ: Yes.

DMC: Interesting.

NJ: Yes, we went together. We were assigned together. You know there was so few of us but yes, when we went we were assigned together.

DMC: And then you guys graduated, didn't most of you RNs graduate before the non, before the traditional ones?

NJ: No.

DMC: No? You all graduated together?

NJ: No, there was only a few.

DMC: I didn't realize that.

NJ: There were only a few in our class that was non traditional and we all graduated together.

DMC: I see. Okay.

NJ: We, in essence, went through the same program even though we were RNs.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: Keep in mind what was said to me at my first interview.

DMC: Right. Exactly. I had no idea.

NJ: Yes.

DMC: That is amazing. So, as a student, when you were a student here at Wright State and then a little bit later we'll ask about your role when you actually came back and worked here at Wright State but what would you say were some of the challenges that you faced? Any other challenges?

NJ: As a student?

DMC: Correct.

NJ: Well, I think it's just a summary of what I've just told you about our experiences as first an attitude of no one coming on board and the challenge of we were very aware it was not a developed program. And going out into the community and saving face out there for ourselves individually and for the school because the school as a whole was in crisis also, over a period of time several crises. So, we had to deal with all that.

DMC: Great. Is there anything, any special memories or interactions you had with let's say the faculty that you would like to share with us?

NJ: Oh yes. The first one that comes to mind is Agnes Bennett.

DMC: Okay.

NJ: She was very critical in developing and staying with the program because I know several times the faculty were ready to pack up their bags. But um, you felt the commitment to us. You felt that the faculty themselves, I'm talking about the ones that taught us.

DMC: Uh-huh.

NJ: And in working with us and trying to get us through the program and trying to develop the program as they went. So, Agnes comes to mind. Another faculty member that was like a mentor to me or encouraged me to stay and go on to graduate school and pursue teaching in fact was, and I'm having a mental block. She was one of the older faculty and I remember she had written extensively on neuro in some textbooks in medical nursing.

DMC: Was that Marge Kinney?

NJ: Marge.

DMC: Yes.

NJ: How could I forget her?

DMC: Yes.

NJ: Yes, she was a big support system and always inspired me to keep reaching.

DMC: Great.

NJ: You know, I thought, you know how many times I thought you know, I really don't think this is the way to go in this program anyway I'm going to end up with nothing. But she encouraged me to stay on and because of the faculty commitment to us and that is what it was and then encouraged me to go to graduate school and wrote my recommendation. And then encouraged me to come back to Wright State and so I had very found personal memories and professional memories of her.

DMC: Excellent. Let's see, how about interactions with fellow students? Can you describe any of those interactions you might have had with your colleagues, your students?

NJ: Yes, um, I met in that program Betty Schmoll, Ann Peters who have become lifelong friends. We are friends to this day and eventually all of us went on to Ohio State for our masters and I feel all of us had contributed in our own special way to nursing and particularly to the community and that's a fine bond. The new students, there were several of them, they were of course much younger like Ann and I do want to tell you this, they're older than I am. That's supposed to be funny.

DMC: (Laughs).

NJ: I was the young kid on the block of our group. But the young students, we were encouraging too and a support system for them.

DMC: Great.

NJ: Because you can imagine a new student coming in to nursing in this chaos because that's just what it was, trying and motivated to become a nurse and then seeing this and trying to pursue it and not knowing what they were doing most of the time and didn't understand what was going on. And so I would like to think the RNs were a big support system to them.

DMC: Right.

NJ: And the two I remember, one of the gals and one of the guys, that was our one and only male student, and they both graduated. I know the gal went on in nursing but the guy, it was interesting enough that they went through the program and several times our small group of RNs got together to, you know, address these issues to administration and administration of Wright State also when they were going to close down the school at one time, and he became a pharmacy rep.

DMC: Oh.

NJ: And never pursued it after that. But that's what happened.

DMC: Sure. Very good. Anything you would like to share with us like what were your classes like? What was maybe, a typical class day here on campus?

NJ: Um, referring to nursing?

DMC: Yeah.

NJ: Okay, we met; I'm not sure where the School of Nursing is now. What building are you in?

DMC: We're in University Hall. We have a brand new building.

NJ: Oh okay, I recall that. We were in Allyn Hall. I think it was the fourth floor.

DMC: Right.

NJ: That's where all our classrooms were then. One small room, keep in mind I think there were fifteen, sixteen, how many do you have down there in the first class?

DMC: Something like that.

NJ: Okay. We just sat in a semi circle very casually and the instructor was kind of in the middle of that and lectured from notes and we just took notes. That's basically what it was. And I do remember, because this is just what just floored all of us and I'm sure this humorous for you to know but they introduced to us at that time the nursing process.

DMC: Oh yeah.

NJ: Which was unheard of, in our circles anyway and they introduced that process to us. And then of course we were, we had to use the nursing process in our clinicals and I don't know how you do it know but when we gave scientific rationale we had to document the page.

DMC: Uh-huh.

NJ: You still do that?

DMC: Some of us older instructors still do. (Laughs)

NJ: Well that give you a clue that anything we did had to be documented with scientific rationale and the page for the resource.

DMC: Yeah.

NJ: And ah, keep in mind some of the classes, some of the students, Betty Schmoll was one, were working and she had five children.

DMC: Oh my gosh.

NJ: And also by the way and this is just a personal thing because she, of course you know, became Director of Hospice and initiated it in the community here. Her mother was dying of cancer.

DMC: Oh my gosh.

NJ: She was taking care of her mother at the same time she was in school.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: So that was pretty much it.

DMC: Uh-huh.

NJ: And then when we went to clinicals we had you know, briefing after and we just got together after and discussed our patients and you know, what in fact our nursing actions and what we did and why we did it and input from each other and then the instructor.

DMC: Cool. Great. How do you feel your experiences as a student perhaps, at Wright State affected your career?

NJ: Um, for me it really affected me because after, when I went on board as faculty after I graduated from Ohio State. I was an instructor at that time and then took awhile in the community because it was still, you know, the clouds were still there and they stayed there for years. To go out into that environment after, as faculty, was very difficult.

DMC: In what way would you say it was difficult?

NJ: Because people would ask me, you know, staff would say are you still in the mess over there?

DMC: Ah.

NJ: Is the dean, who ever it was at that time, because I'd been, I wrote them down. I've been through five deans when I was there.

DMC: Yeah.

NJ: Is she still there? Is the School of Medicine still at your throats? You know, is Gert still fighting with everybody? And I'm saying this professionally now, not the personal comments on her.

DMC: Sure.

NJ: Because Gert came to town from New York on a motorcycle, I was told, in a leather jacket and you know I could say all the power to her.

DMC: Sure.

NJ: However, she was ahead of her time. You know the first thing we heard on faculty was wellness and conceptual framework. Which was first, foreign to the faculty and for us to get indoctrinated with that and then to go out in the community after we were quote teaching this to students was just, you know, something very difficult to grasp. If you're working in intensive

care and you start mentioning wellness while you're taking care of a, you know, paraplegic they would just look at you like you know where are you from.

DMC: Sure.

NJ: So that was an attitudinal thing like I said. She was way ahead of her time and so she was not received well in the community. Of course now that's what we're based in the whole healthcare system. But it was a personality thing too, as I said; I mentioned she's from New York. There's a certain attitude there that comes with people who live there because I live with some here. And you know they're just up right and up front and that's the way it is. That's the way Gert, she was her own person and I thought she brought a lot of very positive, professional things to Wright State University and the School of Nursing. And it was unfortunate that personalities of, just the attitude of the School of Medicine and School of Nursing you know, it was the, at that time, the School of Medicine was always in charge of everything and they assumed they'd be in charge of the School of Nursing. Well, Gert would have none of that and so we have this personal agenda going on between the dean of the School of Medicine and Gert Torres and it did not set well at all. She resigned one time but she stayed on as faculty, in fact her office was right down the hall from mine. She fought tooth and nail for what she thought were the rights of the nursing profession and needless to say it didn't fly.

DMC: So Nancy, when you finished your baccalaureate degree that was what year?
Seventy...

NJ: Five.

DMC: Five. Then what year did you finish your master's at Ohio State?

NJ: It was the end of seventy-six.

DMC: Oh, you did fast.

NJ: Well, at Ohio State it's only a one-year program.

DMC: Oh, it was at that time.

NJ: Yes.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: Yes, it was. And by the way, just for information sake because I want to toot the horn of my colleagues in my class. I was the first one that went on to graduate school.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: Out of that chaos. And I remember sitting in Gert's office and she called Ohio State and talked to the dean of the graduate school there and recommended me because they were well aware of what we were going through at that time. And, you know, concerned that nobody would touch any graduates and that was what I thought probably but as I said Marge Kinney encouraged me and Gert just picked up the phone and she said they told me to apply and they would consider all the things that happened. And I was accepted and on scholarship also by the way.

DMC: Excellent. Great. And so you came back to teach at Wright State as an instructor...

NJ: Correct. Yes.

DMC: And so describe your, kind of your experiences, any of your other experiences that you might have had with either administrators here within the department. You've mentioned a lot about Gert, anybody else that you interacted with?

NJ: You mean as far as....

DMC: Within the department or with the University.

NJ: Oh, okay. In the department, the faculty I felt were very close to each other. I think we were just trying to support each other because of the system and the things that had happened. I felt that Gert was very supportive, my personal experience, from the very beginning when she

called Ohio State. Because we were told on the day, when we were graduating they quote gave us a little party in the dean's office.

DMC: Oh, wow.

NJ: And at that time Donna Dean was acting dean and that was before Gert. And I remember the cake and that's the last thing I remember because then I remember Donna saying. "By the way, this school, this class will not be accredited."

DMC: Wow.

NJ: That was our graduation present. Do you see the attitude that we were dealing with?

DMC: Wow.

NJ: And of course, that's fast forward to Gert how came on board and then called the school because we were told we were not going to be accredited. The class wouldn't anyway. But I remember Donna as acting dean and then interim also in different positions and she was always supportive of us and trying to help us, I think as best as she could under the circumstances. Nobody else jumps out at me right now.

DMC: Describe like maybe the team, what did you teach when you taught here? What was that like, that experience?

NJ: Oh, that was very positive. I liked it. Of course I loved teaching but I liked the team approach and the support of the faculty in that. One thing I do remember from that is my interests were psych nursing, community, and then when I became a continuing ed. I remember however and this was not unusual by the way, I don't know how you do it now but since we were basic faculty we had to teach in any clinical we were assigned no matter if we had experience in that or not. So, I'm in pediatric clinics, I know you'll love this Donna.

DMC: (Laughs)

NJ: And I remember seeing those babies and thinking, oh my God! Of course I did a lot of reading and I talked to the peds people and you know but we were going by the, another friend and we were paired together in clinicals.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: She also was a psych nurse. So we end up in all these environments that we weren't really sure about and as I said we were not the only ones.

DMC: Wow, that's very interesting. Do you remember any experiences with your students? How, what was your interaction like with your students? What was your perception of the students at that time as an instructor?

NJ: When I came back my first love were the students. I felt I was there to hopefully teach the essence of nursing, the concepts no matter what field or what we were in. And I guess I leaned a little more towards the students because I was reliving my memories of how it was when I first came on board. And even though I was tried and true and older than the average student I would hope by teaching in example the students could pursue nursing and have a positive attitude about it because there still was some disruption over a period of time. And of course these students knew that and they were unsure on what is this going to happen again, you know and how about this faculty? So, my interactions, I felt, were very positive.

DMC: Great. Do you remember any of your students at all?

NJ: Yes, I do. I don't remember their names but I remember them. I remember one student, well in fact; she is the owner of a holistic health center.

DMC: The one in Tipp City?

NJ: Yes.

DMC: Yes, I know Jeanine.

NJ: She was in the class and I remember it was just a few days before our exam, our final exam and she came to me and she said her grandfather had died and you know she was afraid she wasn't going to be there for the exam but she said if I thought it was necessary you know that she would come. And I said, oh no, I said we'll reschedule this for you. You go to your family. I said that's important. And she just looked at me and she was very thankful and she wrote me a note later and we kind of kept in touch....

DMC: How nice.

NJ: ...after that because in fact having going out to her spa. And then another student and I did keep that, wrote me a personal note and said that you know I had motivated her in nursing by my attitude, I guess, in teaching and concern for the students. And that was worth a lot to me.

DMC: How nice. Yes. Anything, in your role as a faculty member, with interaction with the wider university community? Did you have any...?

NJ: Yes, I was on several university committees as we all have to. And do you know one of the things that I remember is still an attitude about you're from the School of Nursing.

DMC: Oh really?

NJ: They never said directly to me or asked me and said how are things going there but it was just an attitudinal thing. Like when I went on some new committees and you know I would introduce myself and it's just, you know, you pick it up, body language.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: And that was very disturbing to me. So of course I was making sure I didn't miss any meetings and I was on top of things. It forced me to make sure, you know, you keep this commitment and you do a good job at it because it was all over the university of course.

DMC: Wow. Interesting. Let's see. I'm trying to think, in the broader community of hospitals or agencies around, any interactions that you had as a faculty member with them that you might want to share with us?

NJ: (Pause)

DMC: Do you have a favorite agency that you liked going to outside of going to Children's? (Laughs)

NJ: Let's see. This is in the role of continuing education since I had so much contact with the community a lot.

DMC: Okay. Yes.

NJ: I had a situation with Miami Valley Hospital and we were co planning a seminar together and it was going to be statewide I believe, as I recall. I got along personally very well with the staff that I was working with there (pause) but I had a situation come up with I was also responsible to the dean of the College of Continuing Education besides the dean of Nursing. And that was difficult to be responsible to two deans and on this seminar Miami Valley Hospital definitely were calling the shots on it. And I believe at that time, I think there was discussion or we already were in that process of combining Miami Valley Hospital and Continuing Education and I got caught in the middle of a political situation. And the dean of the College of Continuing Education said that based on low enrollment because Miami Valley Hospital set the date, it was around Christmas, it was in December and there was low enrollment. And he said we could not put on the program because it would be a loss right off the top because I had to answer financially to him. And I agreed with him but I said you know, we have Miami Valley Hospital involved in this and he knew that and I went through this situation and he was in charge and he said no and he wanted to cancel. And I brought that before the committee at Miami Valley Hospital and their reaction was no, we are not going to do that, you know, the image and the

stuff was already planned, et cetera. So, he said if we get a certain number we might go with it. Well they just decided to, they just took it over and they set up another setting, King's Island in fact, and made a holiday thing out of it. They bussed in students, people; it was interesting for me to see what went on behind the scenes.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: So as a result, that left a bad taste in my mouth and I had to answer to both deans for that even though they knew what happened I got very, in fact I got no support from the dean of the School of Nursing at all for that. I was left out paying the price.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: And of course my image at the Valley which I had a good one, I felt, up to that point and I kind of got it back after because they realized that was not something I decided. But I guess I'm commenting on the power of the institution.

DMC: Sure. Yeah. You were kind of caught in between.

NJ: Yeah, I was. That's just the political situation and I knew that but that was my job so I had to just stick with it.

DMC: Sure. And so then how long then did you work for Wright State in that position then? Did you, after a certain point did you go on to anything else in your career?

NJ: No, what had happened when I left in eighty-six, the intent at that time, my husband was military and was to be transferred somewhere else and I had gone to the dean and she said that she would give me a recommendation and I was going to go on for my doctorate and pursue that since I was kind of in between things. And as it was I believe his assignment was cancelled and then my daughter got married and I just stayed on and did volunteer work in the community. And did not go on, decided I did not want to do that.

DMC: Great. Cool. Is there anything we haven't asked you about that you would like to talk about or share?

NJ: Let me just check my notes here. I think we've covered a lot of things.

DMC: Sure. Yeah, we've done well.

NJ: (Pause) I just would like to say that and I know you are aware of this and so is Pat that all the time after we graduated and went out into the community nobody felt the School of Nursing acknowledged our first class.

DMC: Wow.

NJ: Nobody. Until we would always have to remind them that there was another class, the first class which was us. And that was difficult to take but we realize that's the way it went. Until I recall when we went to the anniversary celebration and I remember seeing all the pictures on the wall of the graduating classes. Now, our class was not there but I remember Pat coming up and saying to us we have a photographer here and the three of you are the only ones that are from the first class and we would like to take a picture. And so that's when I remember the first time I think that publicly we were acknowledged.

DMC: How nice. That's great. I have to say, Emily can you think of any questions that you would find interesting to ask Nancy before we finish our interview? She's pondering. I caught her off guard I'm sure. Because sometimes the students think up something that would have been interesting to hear about.

EP: I guess I am wondering, do you think that everything you went through, looking back are you glad that you went through it for the future or you know, how do you feel about your experiences based on how it affects those of us after you?

NJ: I have no regrets. I feel that was the way it was and if anything it fortified us because if you look at the resumes and what our class contributed to nursing and to the

community I feel that in fact I was glad I did it and I'm very proud of it. And I'm proud of the fact that I'm a graduate of Wright State.

DMC: Great. Very good. Well, thank you very much Nancy. I will, we're going to officially terminate the interview now and I'll turn of the tape.

NJ: Okay.

DMC: Thank you so much.

TAPE ENDS