



## nursing in God's country

BY CONNIE WOOD

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Haliburton Highlands is a rugged stretch of forest and rock. Famous for glittering lakes, winter sports and fall colours, it attracts tourists year round. Some call it God's country. I call it home.

When I started my career here more than 30 years ago, the hospital was a small Red Cross outpost with eight beds. Now, our community has a new facility that has been praised by Ontario's Minister of Health as a model for integrated health care.

Years ago, when I drove down forgotten back roads delivering nursing care, I sometimes felt as if I was travelling back in time. I remember pulling up to one run-down farmhouse with a sagging porch. I was afraid of the dismal conditions I might see inside. Instead, I found a woman, bedridden with multiple sclerosis, who transformed punishing poverty into a loving family home by the sheer strength of her cheerfulness. Paralyzed and in constant pain, she glowed with good will and kindness. Although her home was isolated, it was the centre of her universe and it became a school of wisdom for me. She taught me that nursing is about building relationships. I learned that, when nurses empower patients and families to be partners in health care, strength of spirit and greater independence is the result. This woman showed tremendous courage in raising her family, and I consider it a privilege to be part of a profession that helps people like her live full and productive lives, despite their health challenges.

Today, I am part of a dynamic team of professionals in a Family Health Team. I know the stories behind the faces I see in the waiting room. I remember their parents and their grandparents. We care for patients as if they are friends and family. In most cases, they are.

## a baby's curl

BY SUE WEATHERBY

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My most rewarding experience happened the first year I was in nursing in a pediatric intensive care unit.

One day, I was assigned to a four-month-old who was an aborted SIDS. It was the first child born to a woman who had tried to conceive for years. As I entered the room, I saw the mother resting her head on the side of the crib, holding her baby's small hand. She spoke of the curl of hair that sat on top of her baby's head, and the little pouty lips she loved to kiss. Over the next few hours, I listened to the mom talk about her love for her baby, and the horrible moment she was found unresponsive in bed. Unfortunately, the baby did not survive. I remember the pain in the mom's eyes. I asked her if she would like to hold her baby for a while. She was scared and unsure.

I bathed the baby and washed her hair with baby soap and shampoo. I wrapped the baby in a small pink sleeper and receiving blanket and, with a small bit of baby oil; I scooped her hair into a curl.

I remember walking into the room with the baby, and the mom immediately cried and said, "You remembered her curl." For hours the mom and her family took turns rocking and singing to the child.

The next day, I went to work and saw something had arrived for me. It was a small glass globe with a floating yellow rose. The note said: "Thank you for giving me my baby back. You brought her to me, as I knew her, and the last few hours (we) had will always be cherished."

Peggy, my extremely compassionate and skilled preceptor, came up to me, put her arm around me and said, "You made a difference. That is what nursing is all about."