

From Flame to Bonfire: A Call for Companions!



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The flame from the lamp of Miss Florence Nightingale which has burned for over one hundred

years has inspired many to proclaim and promote the science, art, and spirit of nursing. The year 2010 is celebrated as "The International Year of the Nurse" in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Nightingale. Her contribution as public health advocate and statistician is legendary. Many continue to admire the light of Nightingale's humanity most typically expressed in her letters and writings documented after her time in the Crimea when Nightingale took to her bed. It was there that she embraced a role recognized by many "good" Victorian women of her day as respectable and proper% she was an invalid (Delamont & Duffin, 1978; Digby, 1994). This part of her history is not often discussed but is important to understanding this nurse-leader's humanity. It is evidence of her very real connection to human suffering and offers reminders that the archetype of nurse is also as that of the "wounded healer."

Miss Nightingale, whilst doing her remarkable service, was a woman of her time. She framed nursing as women's altruistic work when those of her gender and social status were beholden to raising families and managing their homes. She created an educational program in nursing for Protestant women who desired a secularized vocational path divergent from that of religious sisters whose charitable reputations had soared for centuries despite growing anti-Catholic sentiment.

Times have changed. The gender, race, and religious issues of Nightingale's era are very different today. Women have many more venues for career outside of teaching and nursing while men also hear the call to nursing. Though Nightingale's endeavors did serve as an impetus for the emancipation of wealthy white women from the home, it is not clear that her educational program founded upon her religious beliefs achieved secularization (Libster, 2009). Regardless of the outcome, the history of a remarkable nurse-leader is preserved in

the creation story of the profession.

While pondering the actual and potential needs of peoples worldwide in the 21st century, I have asked myself however, if the flame from the lamp of one leader is enough to really motivate, navigate and activate a new level of passion and commitment in nursing. I recently met a colleague from South Africa, Dr. Vicki Pinkney-Atkinson, whom I believe answered my question. She said, "The nurses of my country have been inspired for many years by Nightingale's lamp. But that little flame is not enough! Nursing in the new century needs to build a bonfire!" I agree and would add that nursing needs to "be" that bonfire. Preceding and succeeding Nightingale, there have been numerous leaders in nursing in every culture who have inspired the scientific, creative, and spiritual path that is nursing.

Let's build a historical bonfire made up of many individual flames in nursing in an effort to grow our global community in nursing and extend the creation story of nursing beyond the image of a single Victorian woman. We can use the impetus of the beauty of Miss Nightingale's humanity to grow beyond the image, practice, thoughts and spirituality of the one. In celebration of this one hundredth anniversary why not consider giving Miss Nightingale something that she did not have in her long life as an invalid – companions!

References:

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