

## Mary Harris



"I started training at The Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford in 1967 when I was 18. There was 69 of us in our year a really big cohort, only one of us was married and lived locally the rest of us all moved to Oxford to do our training. Our nurses home was some way out from the hospital so every morning at 7.30am a double decker bus would appear to take us to the hospital for our shift starting at 8am. It was hard work but there was lots of fun. The shift pattern was two weeks of days, seven nights on duty then five nights off, good for those of us who had moved away from home, an opportunity to travel home. My wage was £13 a month but I had all my accommodation, food and training paid for.

"I remember being on the surgical wards and all reusable instruments were sterilised on the ward using water/ steam in large metal chambers or autoclaves. There was no central sterilisation unit during those early years. There was no technology with IV/ drips either, you had to manually calculate the number of drops over the time period and stand to ensure it was working correctly and keep checking it throughout your shift. Now they just press a button and it beeps and does it all for them.

"I felt very nervous when I did my turn on the paediatrics ward. I didn't have any children in my family and I was really worried about looking after babies and children and helping them professionally. I also remember on nights we had to be as quiet as possible to encourage the patients to sleep as much as they could.

"I won an award and my mother kept an article about it from the Gloucestershire newspaper. It quotes the Chairman of League of Friends as telling us nurses that we needed to go and get married, have our families and then come back to nursing. It sounds really sexist now, but it wasn't then, it was just the way it was. I worked in nursing homes when my children were very small and then came back into acute hospital when they were of school age. I can't remember there being any nurseries but they would have been too expensive for us anyway, so I was fortunate that my mother took care of one of my children one day a week. I did 11 years of night duty, this fitted in well with childcare.



Miss M.E. Phillips and parents  
 THE CHAIRMAN AND BOARD OF GOVERNORS  
 OF THE UNITED OXFORD HOSPITALS  
 request the pleasure of your company  
 on the occasion of the  
 PRESENTATION OF AWARDS  
 THE JOHN RADCLIFFE SCHOOL OF NURSING  
 by Lady Ogilvie, M.A.  
 Chairman, The Radcliffe Infirmary League of Friends  
 on Thursday, 9 July 1970, at 6.30 p.m.  
 at Arthur Sanctuary House, Sandfield Road, Oxford  
 Wine and Cheese  
 R.S.V.P. by 26 June to Miss A. E. Harrold  
 Principal Nursing Officer  
 Education Division  
 The Radcliffe Infirmary

"When I decided to go back to days shifts, I took some bank work alongside my nights to re-establish a name for myself and decide where I wanted to work within the acute sector, this turned out to be surgical and medical outpatients units.

"With promotion to Sister I transferred to working in a local community hospital in Tewkesbury until I retired in 2009 when I was 60.

"I can't think of anything else I would have wanted to do other than nursing. I have got a caring streak that needs to be fulfilled. I am also very good at organising - you had to be in my job and then as a working mother too - and that can spill over at home sometimes.

"I think working through Covid must have been awful and so frightening, especially for those people who had to work in places they weren't used to such as ICU where there were some really poorly people, a very steep learning curve. So many NHS people lost their lives too, society owes them a great debt."

