

Boyd serves 50 years in nursing

By Adria Hyde Sun Staff Writer
Mar 4, 2021



JONESBORO — It was the love of a uniform that first lit a spark in a very young Beth Boyd to later explore nursing as a career.

She is now in her 50th year of nursing – the last decade of which she has spent at St. Bernards Medical Center.

Boyd said it was her older sister Ann, 14 years her senior, who first inspired her to consider nursing as a career.

“My sister Ann got a job as a nurse,” she said. “Within three days she was giving shots and working in surgery.”

Boyd said that was in the 1950s before all the training and certifications were required.

“They had these beautiful uniforms,” she said, noting they were very long and had buttons that had to be removed before they could be washed. “It was my job to put those buttons back in after the uniforms were washed. I knew then I wanted to be a nurse.”

She grew up in the small rural town of Grubbs, the youngest of 12 siblings. Boyd graduated in 1966. After a short stint as a telephone operator, in 1967 she went into nursing.

Her first job was working as a nurse’s aide at Harris Hospital in Newport.

“I had 9 to 10 babies to take care of,” she said. “If you have ever heard of faux hawks, I used to have my babies all lined up in little green blankets with faux hawks. My babies looked sharp. I worked there while I finished college at Arkansas State University.”

Boyd said it was the first year A-State had a nursing program.

“That was in 1971,” she said. “It was very new. It was the very first class. I felt so fortunate

to be in that class.”

Of the three instructors, Boyd said she could recollect two of them – Dr. Leon Eldredge, Anita Fuller and one other instructor.

Boyd said Eldridge was brilliant and everyone had a tough time keeping up.

“He would teach us anatomy then go back to being a cancer research biologist,” she said.

Things were much different then, she said.

“The ward secretary, who had no formal training, would prepare the medications,” she said. “When you gave the meds they would be on a one-inch card; the secretary would write the name of the medication and the dosage. It had to be interpreted from the doctor’s orders.”

Boyd said there was no such thing as disposable syringes, noting personnel had to use a machine called an autoclave to sterilize them.

The culture was different at that time also. Boyd said doctors and nurses were almost considered Gods at that point.

“If a doctor walked in, you had to jump up to give them your chair,” she said, noting doctors in that era were very authoritarian. “It was brutal.”

As she progressed in her career, Boyd said times began to rapidly change.

“I thought when I had to learn computers, I would never (master them),” she said. “We had a lot of folks retire at that time.”

In typical Boyd style, she tackled the new skill set, where she learned three different software systems in a single year.

Boyd has not only had an impact on St. Bernards patients, but staff as well.

Co-worker Kellie Carter, a pediatric nurse at St. Bernards, said she gets emotional when she thinks of Beth Boyd.

“She is just an extremely inspirational person, and she runs circles around us at work,” Carter said. “She loves her patients, and I have never seen her not be able to connect with one of her patients.”

Boyd said one of the memories she has of a particular patient was a lady she was helping who was in the hospital.

“I was in her room singing one of the songs from musical Oklahoma,” she said, noting it was the one called “The Surrey with the Fringe on Top”. “When I got to the part about the surrey, her eyes lit up.”

Boyd said her patient began to talk about the time her father bought a surrey for her mother. “She said her mother was so proud, they rode in it to church,” she said.

Carter said Boyd loves to sing at work.

“She sings music from the ‘60s and ‘70s,” Carter said. “She just makes everyone laugh and has a good time.”

In addition to connecting with patients, Boyd also connects with the student nurses who are in clinical rotations. “We have students who follow us and I mentor those students. I even won preceptor of the year,” she said.

Mitchell Nail, marketing director for St. Bernards, said Boyd is an asset to the hospital.

“Serving five decades in nursing is remarkable,” he said. “We are incredibly proud to be part of her team.”

ahyde@jonesborosun.com
