

REFLECTING

on Mom's Career as a Nurse

•by Beth Lafferty

My mother, Verona Lafferty was a nurse. I don't think it was as much a profession for her as it was a calling; a calling that she answered faithfully for 50 years. Even though she retired in 1985, she maintained her license until her death this past April at the age of 94.

Mom was old school; she stood when a doctor entered the room. She referred to her patients as "Mrs." or "Mr." unless they had given her permission to call them by first names. She considered nurses who called their patients "honey" or "dearie" to be ill-bred and condescending; an embarrassment to the profession. Treating a patient with dignity and respect showed compassion to one made vulnerable by illness and being in a strange place.

Mom served as a nurse/anesthetist in the U. S. Army during World War II. She spent over three years with the 21st General Hospital unit in North Africa, Italy and France, attaining the rank of Captain and earning three Bronze Battle stars. My mother's religious upbringing made her uncomfortable with colorful language and her favorite exclamation was "Good Lord, Gussie!" "Gus" became her nickname and she carried it fondly for the rest of her life.

Mom had a tender touch and a no-nonsense attitude. Each patient or situation was approached with "What do we have? What do we need? How do we accomplish the goal?" And make no mistake, whatever the goal was, it would be accomplished.

She cared for countless numbers of G.I.s during the war, in Veteran's hospitals after the war, and in surgical wards. She wrote letters, held hands, bathed, helped lift patients and changed beds (as all nurses do) with the patient in the bed. She ended her career as the head nurse of an obstetrics ward. In that capacity she often served as labor coach: supporting, encouraging, and occasionally stopping the fearful cries of "I can't do this!" with the surprising "You're going to be a mom and this baby needs you! You are doing this!" These were the experiences that gave her pride in her pro-

fession.

She was also there for the hard times: for soldiers who wouldn't make it home, for chronically ill and disabled veterans, for terminal patients, for women with complicated pregnancies and for those who suffered the bleakest and most painful of outcomes—losing a baby whose arrival had been so joyfully awaited. These were the experiences in which the profession could take pride in her.

Mom worked long hours for little pay. (Her pension paid her 92 dollars and change each month) She often came home late. She always came home dead tired. She worked holidays and weekends and in all kinds of uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous circumstances.

Mom was just one of countless thousands of women and men who dedicate themselves to the care of each of their patients. She worked for 50 years in a back breaking job that hardly paid back what she put into it. And she was proud of it. But what can I say? My mother was a nurse.

