

Faculty Interview

A Vision of Our Legacy: Chatting with UBC Nursing Historians

By Jennifer M.L. Stephens, PhD Nursing Student



Glennis Zilm and Ethel Warbinek penned the definitive history of the UBC School of Nursing (SON) program with passion, perseverance, and never-ending curiosity. Their book, *Legacy: History of Nursing Education at the University of British Columbia 1919-1994*, was published by UBC Press in 1994 through generous grants to the SON to celebrate the schools 75th anniversary. As alumni of the UBC nursing program, Zilm and Warbinek offer a carefully researched and enjoyable social history

that offers both personal and professional perspectives. Now almost twenty years later, I asked Zilm and Warbinek to reflect on their days as UBC nursing students, their nursing careers, and the writing of *Legacy*. Graciously they offer here their thoughts and reflections in order to inspire both a love of history and a respect for our profession.

Setting the Stage...

Ethel Warbinek

I am a graduate of the UBC /VGH combined program. In other words, I graduated from the Vancouver General Hospital School of Nursing (diploma 1956) and UBC School of Nursing (BSN 1957). Following graduation as a nurse, I worked in pediatrics at VGH and after a year I was hired as an Instructor at VGH . I resigned from this position in 1968 to enroll in the first MSN program. Following graduation in 1970, I was offered a position in the School as an Instructor, and later became an Assistant Professor. I retired from UBC in 1994. While at UBC I taught in both 2nd and 4th years in the Baccalaureate program. My clinical interest was adult acute care.

In the 1990's, the Nursing Division of the UBC Alumnae Association was an active group who were looking for a special way to celebrate the SON's 75th anniversary in 1994. I can't recall whose idea it was to write the history of the School, but Glennis's name was mentioned as a possible author. Dr Willman, Director of the School as this time, thought the idea of a history detailing the UBC SON was a great idea. I had been an active member of the Nursing Division for many years and was, at this time, the faculty liaison. After several meetings we decided that I would work with Glennis on this project. It took us two wonderful years to write the book. My job was to do most of the research such as finding documents, photographs, conducting interviews, and

other means of gathering information. Glennis and I would then meet and work on a text draft together.

Glennis Zilm

I was a student at UBC Nursing in a “sandwich program” that involved taking a portion of the course with the Vancouver General Hospital School of Nursing and living in nurses’ residence. This is was exactly the same course as Ethel, but I received my BSN in 1958. After graduation I traveled to Australia where I nursed for 18 months. It was an exciting time, being in another country and experiencing healthcare from a different perspective. In 1960 I returned to Vancouver and was a nurse educator at the Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster teaching, among many topics, history of nursing and gynecology.

It was during this time at RCH that I realized my interest really was with journalism. I became the assistant editor with *The Canadian Nurse* first in Montreal and then in Ottawa. There I began working with the CNA Executive and Staff and noted nursing leaders, granting me access to nurses throughout Canada. During this time, I also received a BA in journalism and took additional university level studies in Canadian history and Canadian literature. I then worked as a journalist in Edmonton and then on Parliament Hill (Ottawa) with the Canadian Press.

My love for BC finally won out, however, and I returned to the Vancouver area to become a freelance writer and editor. My nursing friends adopted me back into the nursing circle, from which I have never escaped. I later took a MA in Communications and worked part-time with the UBC SON to support students and faculty with their writing skills. Somehow this path led me to the *Legacy* project in 1992.

Highlights From Nursing School

Ethel Warbinek

I had many memorable experiences as a student at UBC. During my years with the SON I discovered that I really did love nursing and was happy with my choice of career. I have never regretted this decision. There are no other nurses in my family either before or after me. My confidence in being a nurse and leader really increased while at VGH. One highlight was an incident in the operating room. The surgeon was operating on a patient undergoing an appendectomy and his assistant had not yet arrived. The surgery commenced and he asked me to assist him. AH! I was assigned to hand him the instruments. At one point he asked me to clamp a blood vessel which I did successfully. He was pleased. Shortly after this great moment, the other doctor arrived relieving me of duty. I never forgot the principles of asepsis learned in the operating room and used these consistently when teaching nursing students on surgical units.

Why is Nursing History Important?

Ethel Warbinek

If one does not know the past, then errors will be made in repeating failures. This can happen in curriculum planning and in clinical practice. Nurses should have pride in the profession and honour those who made remarkable contributions. The public is really not aware of nursing's contributions to health care. In reviewing archival materials in the UBC School of Nursing Historical collection, I came across Nursing History course outlines that were part of early programs. They made me realize that there was definitely a level of pride by the faculty in providing students with information on nursing history. Sadly, this has been lost over the years.

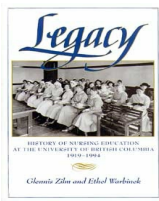
Memories from the *Legacy* Project

Glennis Zilm

It was great fun working on *Legacy* – and I learned so much about UBC Nursing. The best part was trying to fit what was happening in the School into a larger historical context, including what was happening in the world, across Canada, in provincial politics, and into the emerging picture of feminism.

To the *Legacy* project I provided a background of popular journalism, some basic knowledge of Canadian history, a framework related to Canadian nursing politics, and, of course, my experiences as a student at UBC. Because I hated working with committees, I asked that I be paired with a faculty member who would work with me and deal with that part of it. This is how I came to work with Ethel Warbinek. I think we meshed wonderfully. She brought a greater depth of knowledge of the school because of her long time as a nursing faculty member.

Ethel and I had a lot of research to do, but it turned out to be fascinating. I hope through *Legacy* we have managed to convey the tremendous contributions that UBC nurses have made locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally. I am extremely proud of the book and I hope that students today will find time to read it in order to appreciate what tremendous bequests past students have made to smooth the path – and raise the bar – for today's students. Truly, *that* is the *Legacy*.



PLEASE NOTE:

Copies of *Legacy: History of Nursing Education at the University of British Columbia 1919-1994* can be purchased for \$20 from the UBC School of Nursing. Please see the following website for more information: <http://www.nursing.ubc.ca/AboutUs/History.aspx>