

In Awe of my Career

By Mary Jane McCormick

So many memories flooded my mind as I pondered what it means to be *Awestruck*. I revisited childhood adventures of swinging from vines in the trees behind the barn and exploring abandoned shacks along the creek that ran through our farm. Oh, those were the days when wonder and awe were our natural state of mind.

I pulled out pictures from vacations to the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone and Glacier National Park and reread journal notations from my pilgrimages to Ireland, Scotland, Turkey and Greece.

Surprisingly, my mind then began to take me through a life review of 50 plus years in health care and the hundreds and hundreds of patients and families I met as an RN.

I remembered Mr. Larson, my first patient on rotation through intensive care, struggling for every breath after an auto accident. I followed him through rehab and was awed by how he got his life back through pure determination.

I remembered Johnny in pediatrics battling cystic fibrosis. I learned all I could want to know about courage from this eight year old.

I remembered Mrs. Hollenbeck who grabbed my arm and asked, "Sister, am I going to die?" As I paused to come up with an answer, she said, "It's ok, I'm ready to go. I just wish my family could talk about it." I sat by her bedside as she told me about her life; the fear in her face turned to total peace.

I feel overwhelmed, even awestruck, by the resilience I have witnessed in human beings when faced with life and death situations. Where does this courage reside? I have heard people say, "What choice did I have? To fight my way back was all I could do."

I have seen so many reactions to accidents, sudden illness and scary diagnoses. How is it that some people get through these traumas with grace and dignity? A metaphor always works for me. Life is like Chinese handcuffs. You may know these toys as 'finger traps' or 'finger puzzles'; those small cylinders woven from bamboo that you may have been given as a child as a practical joke. The more we pulled our index fingers outward, the tighter the grip. Eventually we figured out that by pushing inward toward the middle, we could get free.

A health crisis that derails our life is like a finger puzzle. We panic and pull away from the fear, and the grip of the crisis gets tighter. But when we lean into the crisis and push toward the middle where new thoughts, ideas, and possibilities live, hope is given breathing room

I hold a special place in my heart for all the patients, families, nurses, doctors and the myriad of health care professionals that have ... over and over ... left me awestruck.