

“20 X 20 Choose Nursing” Interview with Patrick Hickey, O.R. Nurse and Mountaineer

1. How did you decide to “Choose Nursing”?

Nursing was actually chosen for me as it was a guidance counselor in high school that suggested this profession for me. She saw something in me that I did not see in myself and suggested that I attend a meeting discussing nursing opportunities in college so that I could further explore my options. At that meeting I discovered that nurses save lives, were very well respected, and helped those that could not help themselves! I was hooked as what better way to live a life than to help others!

2. What is your personal life like and how has that blended with your choice of nursing?

My personal life has been very fulfilling and I attribute that to my choice of nursing as my profession. Nursing has allowed me the opportunity to gain stable employment which inevitably has enabled me to raise the finances to support my love of travel and adventure. Additionally, being a nurse has heightened my awareness of the poor health choices that are made by most and has helped me to attain a level of health and fitness which has given me a better quality of life.

3. How old were you when you decided you wanted to be a nurse?

I was a senior in high school when my guidance counselor suggested nursing as a profession. No one in my family had ever pursued a medical career, and I had never even been in a hospital at that point in time in my life. There were no medical shows on television at that time, such as ER or Grey’s Anatomy, so nursing to me was a great unknown!

4. How did you tell your parents you wanted to be a nurse and how did they react?

I was raised as a Catholic so my Mom was very excited regarding my choice of profession as she felt that this was in tune with the teachings of my religion. Dad, however, was not as excited and it took some time before he was able to accept this choice. I believe that his hesitancy was due to his lack of knowledge specific to the potential opportunities that existed for employment as well as the worldwide level of respect for the profession. Once Dad was made aware of these factors, and saw how much that I loved my profession, he wholeheartedly supported my decision to become a nurse!

5. How did you tell your friends you wanted to be a nurse and how did they react?

In 1973 there were very few males seeking the profession of nursing, there were little to no medical shows on television, and there was a great unknown as far as the profession of nursing itself. It was not unusual for those reasons, and many more, that my male friends in high school teased me quite a lot about my choice of profession. They were good friends but as far as they knew, at that time, only females were nurses. I really had no role models to support my decision, or to contact to answer my questions, so depended on my faith to support me through those times when the teasing caused me to question my choice. Of course, my female high school friends were very supportive of my choice of profession as they could see that my caring nature, my calm personality, and my willingness to go out of my way to help those that could not help themselves were the fundamental characteristics of what a nurse should possess.

6. How did you tell your S/O you wanted to be a nurse and how did they react?

My girlfriend in high school was very supportive of my decision as she me better than most and could see that I had what it took to be in a profession where a caring personality plays such a fundamental role.

7. How did you decide on your current position and what else have you done in nursing?

I believe that my choice to become a member of the faculty in a College of Nursing was a logical progression of my choice of profession of Nursing. I always tell my students that there are many “unwritten rules in nursing” with two of the most important them being that you not only give back to society, but you also give back to your profession. My role as faculty is my choice to give back to my profession as I am now able to teach our future nurses and give to them my many pearls of wisdom derived from 35 years of nursing experience.

8. Are you happy with your professional choice to practice nursing?

I could not imagine doing anything else other than nursing!!! However, before my high school guidance counselor suggested Nursing as my future profession I had actually thought about being a reporter for a magazine, writing my own column, and traveling the world! Through Nursing I have been able to make those earlier dreams come true as I have traveled throughout 57 countries around the world, and have taken 3 year-long “backpacking” trips of excitement and adventure:

1984 – 6 months in Europe and 6 months in Canada/USA

1988 – 1 year around the world

1993 – 1 year in Latin America

Additionally, I have written my own newspaper column, have been published in many travel magazines and journals, and have authored my own book:

7 Summits: A Nurse’s Quest to Conquer Mountaineering and Life

Nursing has also allowed me the opportunity to pursue my dreams of climbing the world’s tallest mountains and in 2007 I successfully completed the “holy grail of mountaineering” when I completed my quest to climb the highest mountain on each of the world’s 7 continents:

2001 – Mt. Aconcagua (Argentina)

2002 – Mt. McKinley (Alaska, USA)

2003 – Mt. Kilimanjaro (Tanzania, Africa)

2004 – Mt. Elbrus (Russia)

2005 – Mt. Carstenz Pyramid (Indonesia)

2006 – Mt. Vinson (Antarctica)

2007 – Mt. Everest (Asia)

On Mt. Everest I was able to blog about the potential opportunities of the profession of Nursing and in doing so advocated for those interested to support my scholarship, aptly named the “Summit Scholarship”. My goal was to raise \$1.00 for every foot of altitude of Mt. Everest (29,035) to support this scholarship. I have attained that goal by endowing this scholarship, but continue to raise funds through my speaking engagements, supported through the American Program Bureau, as well as my book sales. All proceeds from the speaking engagements as well as book sales are donated to the Summit Scholarship as well as the newly created “Nurses Can Do Anything Scholarship” at the National Student Nurses Association (NSNA) and is also endowed.

9. *Did/Do the stereotypes of Male Nurses you have seen on TV discourage you in anyway and if so, how?*

Television and movies do mislead many people on the realities of life and unfortunately the image of nursing as a whole has been greatly misrepresented. I believe that it is up to all of us as a profession to advocate for better representation of our image and to do so we need to be more involved in our communities, politics, professional organizations, television, etc. In doing so the public will have a better idea of who we really are and what we do as a profession.

10. *Have you ever met with any negative reactions from people when you tell them you are a nurse?*

I have NEVER met with any negative reactions and have ALWAYS been greeted with great respect and admiration when I tell people that I am a Nurse!

11. *What kind of advice would you give a young guy still in school or a middle aged man considering choosing nursing?*

My advice to a male considering nursing would be to shadow a male counterpart that has already been in nursing for a few years; and in doing so will be able to make as informed decision as possible to choose this profession as their future. If that choice is not an option, I would recommend at least speaking to a male that has been a Nurse and using contact methods such as the phone, internet emails, texting, Facebook, Twitter, and/or Skype in order to ask the questions that need to be asked, and/or to seek the validation the needs to be sought to confirm their choice of profession. I have used all the above methods to talk to prospective male Nursing students and know that all of my male counterparts would be just as eager to recruit to our profession.

Males are so needed in Nursing, are very highly respected, and in great demand for jobs in every area of hospitals as well as the community. Whether young or old, experienced or not, a high school senior or a veteran of the work environment; nursing is definitely a profession that LOVES men and welcomes ALL with open arms!

12. *Is there anything else you would like to share with us?*

Nursing is a choice of life and lifestyle. It guides us in how we choose to live our own lives and how we are able to influence the lives of all those around us. It is a powerful profession that allows us the opportunity to bring people into the world, and to be there with people when they depart this life. It allows us the opportunity to support those in grief, and to join in the celebration of recovery. In my book I describe Nursing as follows: *“I like to think of my profession of nursing as a journey, with an adventurous route, challenging experiences, and an ever-present fear of the unknown.”*

For me it has been a fantastic journey of which I have never regretted and recommend to all!