



From the Voices of Nurses



Marilyn Beaton and Jeanette Walsh

This oral history of Newfoundland nurses who graduated prior to 1950 is based on interviews with 33 nurses who worked in communities throughout the province. The two authors are themselves nurses with extensive experience in the profession. Marilyn Beaton has been a nurse for 34 years, teaching at Memorial's School of Nursing for 30 years. Jeanette Walsh is now retired after a 35 year career in the profession, spending the majority of her career in nursing education primarily at the General Hospital School of Nursing. Both women come from a family tradition of nursing.

The idea for the research that led to this book came several years ago at a meeting of the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador (ARNLL). "One of our

oldest graduates was sharing her stories and we realized that if someone didn't soon document these stories they were going to be lost," said Ms. Walsh.

So the two women decided to pursue the project and Ms. Beaton traveled throughout the province and to Labrador to record interviews. "Even though the nursing schools before Confederation were all in St. John's, many of the students had left their homes to come to train and many never went back," explained Ms. Walsh. "We wanted to interview as many nurses as we could who practiced across the island and in Labrador."

Because physicians didn't practice or travel outside St. John's very much before Confederation, nurses at that time found themselves working autonomously. "These were very strong women," said Ms. Walsh. "Above all, their actions were always motivated by the interests of the patients. They had a strong vocation, they were there to serve." Ms. Beaton said "The stories in the book give insight into the commitment and strength of a generation of nurses who were leaders in their community and often the sole source of health care".

The book was published in time for the 50th anniversary of ARNLL, and the two authors plan to make further presentations on their research and eventually archive it at Memorial. "It's the only documented history of nursing from a group of nurses in the province, so it really does capture some 60 years of nursing in Newfoundland and Labrador," said Ms. Walsh. "While it may not be historically accurate in some places it is the experiences these women lived so it makes it very real to them."

Voices of Nurses is published by Jespersion Publishing.