

PURPOSE AND PERSPECTIVE

My husband and I have friends who own a pet sitting business in the mountains of Colorado. They typically have around 12 dogs they graciously welcome on their sprawling land as well as on their sofas. To be a “guest,” the canine must be current on all vaccinations, be reasonably healthy, and be socialized with other dogs. They enjoy the freedom of playing with their buddies, lots of treats, loving hugs, daily exercise, abundant clean water, two meals per day and a safe, comfortable environment to sleep. If they are injured or become ill, they are given treatment and medication. There is a lot of dog hair, lots of drooling and wiping up around the water trough, and endless beautiful mountain sunsets “hanging out” on the front porch. Definitely a scene only a dog lover could appreciate! And that’s stretching the limit of patience and “gooberness” at times! (yes, it’s a word...believe me!)

We have four dogs...Valentino (as seen with me in the April ‘07 issue of *Nurse Leader*...he’s the pretty one!) Gator, Buddy and Sammy the Seminole. So, we “trade off” pet sitting for our friends, at their house, while they keep our four dogs when we travel.

Anyway, to get to the point of my story...

I have recently been blessed with the opportunity to serve in a medical mission to Uganda, Africa through an organization called *Nurses With A Purpose*.

www.nurseswithpurpose.org

I leave on September 15 for 2 weeks. Before I explain why I’ve chosen to write about this mission in this column, allow me to diverge just one more time (I promise to tie it all together!).

Perioperative Perspectives was created as a voice for Perioperative Leaders to offer solutions and perspective on perioperative management issues that directly affect colleagues on a daily basis. It will remain as such, however I respectfully ask your indulgence in allowing me to venture outside of the specific perioperative arena and travel back with me to a time when we all made the career choice to become a nurse.

What possessed us? Was it an event/person in our life? Was it the curiosity of “medicine” and finding out “what really happens?” Or was it the deep-seated passion to have the ability and the honor to touch a life in a profound time of need? Or was it our **own** need to share our hearts, therefore creating purpose in our own lives?

As many of you, I have been honored to work with some amazing people, whose contributions and talents have inspired and awed me, and have caused me to reflect on how my own achievements and personal efforts could be magnified. The twists and turns of “circumstance” and the opportunity offered is abundant, if we make the choice to take it. Mark Twain said, “Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from your safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

For those of us who are “seasoned” professionals, such as I, we have seen the profession of nursing change tremendously during our careers...good changes and those that we were **told** were “going to be good for us”...ok. We have made our choices accordingly, and here we are today...doing what we do. Most you receiving this e-mail are in leadership roles.

After 18 years in the nursing management search industry, I have found the following to be true and consistent: Nursing Managers generally do not leave current employment for more money...they leave because they do not feel valued by the organization. Their ability to contribute is lost. They feel there is no opportunity to grow.

Having been fortunate to have been a facilitator, participant and consultant on numerous recruitment and retention programs, as well as national association research, the evidence is clear. We became nurses to serve humanity and we remain nurses to do the same. Through the multitude of changes around us, we are committed to our personal, perhaps spiritual cause. When the days turn into months, months turn into years, we sometimes become numb to the reasons and to the opportunities to remember why and, more importantly, to **feel** why we became nurses. We loose the connection...perhaps the passion.

We each have personal ways of refilling our reservoirs, we each have causes that we support that fill our soul with joy, compassion and purpose. As Nurse Leaders, we must take care of ourselves **first** and realize that the energy and graciousness we radiate is sometimes difficult to maintain in our demanding healthcare environment. We must also create opportunity for our nurse colleagues to re-energize themselves. We are the ones that collectively set the bar for others to follow.

My personal reason for “leaping” at the opportunity participate in *Nurses With A Purpose* is simple...I have been waiting for this experience my entire life. The chance to serve the most desperate in a poverty stricken, war-riddled nation speaks to my soul and humbles me to offer my heart, my “rusty” skills, and my resources...I **want** to be taken back to the time when I made the decision to become a nurse. I welcome any opportunity that allows me to open my mind to another culture, a different perspective and a chance to alleviate a tiny slice of suffering in this world. I expect the reality to be raw. I have been told that these trips are life changing...I’m betting on that. I have so much to learn from others.

Now, don’t get me wrong...many of my friends and I are laughing at the irony of this! After all, I am the one who gets a personal Christmas card from the President of Nordstrom every year, drives a nice car, lives in a comfortable home, drinks only Starbucks (way before it was chic!), is a life-long patron of spas, hair dye, jewelry, shoes, purses and all that is “girly.” I live the “American Dream.” I have traveled the world extensively. I have a great husband who I adore, and a circle of very close friends who I think of as my sisters. While all this is nice and wonderful, “things” can all be replaced or done without. “Things” do not fill the reservoir of my soul or allow the self reflection needed to accomplish greater dreams. My life will not end if my “things” go away...but

my purpose in life will disappear if I am not allowed to stretch the boundaries of my heart, my abilities, and create ways to better the lives of others. I **have** survived losing all my “things” in a very big way, and I know for certain that the loss will not kill you.

I have spent much of my life camping in Colorado, and I find the simplicity and lack of everyday comforts (except good coffee) is freedom at its best! I’m an avid hiker and biker, and a day in the dirt doesn’t bother me. (a **day**, ok...) All in all, I’m a “tough chick.” (Remind me of that later!) While the physical challenges will certainly exist, I believe the emotional reactions will be the most poignant...

So, finally back to my story about my pet-sitting week and how this relates to my upcoming trip to Uganda. As I was on a conference call with the President of *Nurses With A Purpose*, Pat Guenther, RN, and my soon-to-be “friends for life,” those clinically proficient (thank goodness!) fellow nurse volunteers, I was struck with an incredible realization...these dogs that lay at my feet are more immune to disease, are provided more fresh water, parasite-free food, readily available medical care, active and playful social interaction and consistent, unconditional love than most **people** in the world. In about six weeks from now, I will not find these most basic needs being met among the people of Uganda. These dogs have a better chance at survival than most of the people, especially the children that I will be treating. That realization became very personal, even though I intellectually knew that was the case, and left me breathless. It was an ironic moment that I’m sure I will be reflecting upon as I see endless examples in my trip, as well as the day I leave Kampala, Uganda on September 29, my 49th birthday. What a perfect gift of life perspective...

I appreciate your indulgence in reading through to the end of my story. Well, not really the end, but ongoing.... As I mentioned earlier, *Perioperative Perspectives* was created as a forum for Perioperative Leaders to share with each other on issues that directly impact the Perioperative arena. I commit to providing that service in the future, however, as a fellow RN, the need to share opportunities, to feel valued, purposeful and serve humanity is critical to **all** nurses. Hopefully, this timeless message will resonate within you, as it did me.