

Seeking Solace



SEEKING SOLACE: A REPRIEVE FROM NURSING STRESS

GOAL:

To help and encourage nurses to find a place of solace that will help relieve stressful nursing experiences.

KEYWORDS:

Stress
Altruism
Egocentrism/Egocentric
Personal Health
Place to Be
Solace

It was that time of night when a hush went over the household, all family members moved toward slumber, and the house was quiet again. A little girl in a small town in Oklahoma took giant steps to climb to the top floor where there was supposed to be a shared bedroom with her mama—but no mama was usually present. She was alone, and the quiet household caused a collection of personal thoughts—or maybe just no thoughts. Removed from a somewhat contentious family, it was her time, free from less than a desirable familial situation, to do nothing without purpose.

She sat alone at the end of the bed. Her chin was perched on the ledge of an open window. It was dark outside, quiet (for the most part). She could hear the sounds of the night world. To her right, Terry's Drive-In was lit up with a few outdoor lights. In the next block, the Holy Roller's church filled the air frequently with loud music, singing, and lamenting by the congregation. It was otherwise quiet—most of the time. She felt the breeze on her little face and the silence and contentment of the moment.

In her future lifetime, these quiet, unseen moments by others would become her mental "Place To Be" when the world seemed to be too much to bear or a need to gather personal perspective on the challenges and demands on her life. It was "her place" in her childhood memory where she would feel the silence of her oneness with the world. It was "her forever-place" to review the happiness and soothe the hurts of the day. It would be her gathering place for meaningful thoughts for "surviving" another day—and finding a place of solace.

To this day, as I experience the turmoil of daily living, it remains my personal and unspoken place to go for solace and to do nothing without purpose—it is my PLACE TO BE—JUST FOR ME.

THE ALTRUISTIC NURSE

The mind and body of a nurse under today's nursing stress needs time to contemplate their own life in perspective to the true meaning of nursing service provided to others. And, why must we always, as healthcare professionals, be *only* thinking and caring for others as if it were the altruistic and ultimate goal of our entire life? Have we forgotten that we, too, are keepers of our own health, and we are accountable for self-care so that we can extend ourselves to others as competent and caring nurses?

Yes, we find our positive egocentric needs fulfilled by such altruistic nursing behaviors, yet, we often suffer the price of losing ourselves in this physically demanding and emotionally caring service to others. So intense are these requirements of giving that there might seem to be no more to give—so we feel we must (and do) leave the profession that we love.

The patient realities of life and death are experienced by nurses today—especially with Covid patients. We are required to provide care at the risk of our own lives and make choices of care resulting in life or death. This constant mental and physical trauma for many practicing nurses not only causes mental distress but physically strains our bodies beyond work tolerance and pushes us to an unexplainable limit. It puts our bodies at risk, and our tired bodies and minds are often perplexed at the decisions of others.

Therefore, to maintain a nurse's health and their continual needed response to the many requirements of today's healthcare needs, there must be a time to STOP and give care and love to ourselves as nurses. Perhaps do nothing without purpose! It is time for practicing nurses to find an actual physical place or a mental oasis of calmness as a personal intellectual, spiritual, and physical retreat.

As a nurse, I found that PLACE TO BE looking out that window as a child. As the child in me found the same quiet of the night, I experienced the world in its uncomplicated form. I, now, continue to go to those moments of solace today. It is still is a reminder and personal assurance that I am safe and can continue to take my complicated life one day at a time.

FINDING YOUR QUIET PLACE—YOUR PLACE TO HAVE SOLACE

Solace means comfort in a time of stress, sadness, or distress. This quiet time is our intentional time of support, soothing, calmness for an otherwise distressed tired body and mental state. However, some nurses might find comfort in other activities, such as social interactions. We each have our way of helping drown out our difficult thoughts and feelings about our propensity to care for others and their families. Some nurses understand that the time spent alone helps gain a realistic perspective of our demanding nursing world. It grants us time to emotionally soothe our front-line involvement in this complicated world of epidemic crisis, lack of adequate nursing staff, and our fears of personally succumbing to the possible impact of the epidemic.

Finding your quiet PLACE TO BE can mean many things for many nurses. However, solace most often requires time to be by yourself. It is a time to reflect and set aside the stressful times when our professional services are needed. It means setting aside our stoic altruistic personality meant to save lives, comforting the dying, supporting grieving family members, reassuring when there is no cause for reassurance. There are a hundred (or more) other requirements of difficult nursing expectations.

Know this—you, as a nurse, are a special person! Humankind cannot do without your nursing services. Therefore, be kind to the person who provides such loving care—that means YOU! There needs to be a time and place to redirect your attention to your personal needs and those you love. And--time out for doing nothing!

There is a physical place for YOU to find your solace. Is it a walk in the woods to hear the sounds of nature? Is it at church? Is it in bed at night where you can calm and soothe the almost unforgettable difficult memories of the day? Or, perhaps it is when you feel special when you are with the one(s) you love. A hospital director identified the overpass on the highway home as his moment of change between meeting constant patient and organizational needs. Going past the overpass helped provide his needed Place To Be.

You decide—Make YOUR SPECIAL AND PERSONALLY RECOGNIZED PLACE TO BE! Go there often as a silent retreat, so there is easier survival from possible nursing “burn-out.” Only WE can remove ourselves from constantly feeling the battering of a patient’s and family’s pain, suffering, and the constant needs of others. Kindness toward *yourself/ourselves* is as important as the quality nursing care you/we give to others.

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