



Hospital Column for August 28,2010

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Remarkable woman attains dream career

When I first met Katy McGuire (Paxton) Noa, she was working in the kitchen at Geary Community Hospital in 1988. She was one of 12 children from a Junction City family and, understandably, the family didn't have the resources to send all the children to college. She did what she could to help support her own young family while she figured out what she wanted to do with her life.

Jump ahead 22 years to the next time I met her. I was flat on my back and she was a registered nurse in the Geary Community Hospital Surgery Center. As I lay there being readied for surgery, we got reacquainted. I learned that this competent, compassionate, and skilled woman had attained a level of education and confidence most only dream of and it was all because she wasn't afraid of hard work and sacrifice. I needled her story out of her and decided to tell others about this remarkable woman.

Back to Noa's story. She worked in GCH Nutrition Services as a cook from 1988 to 1995 when she decided she needed a change. She also went through a divorce in these early years, which contributed to her feelings of being unsettled. She was in her early 30s when she started working for Footlocker, but soon realized it was not the career she wanted. A friend and she explored the idea of nursing school. Heartland Works, a job training center in the area, gave her some pamphlets and the academic steps she needed to enroll in nursing school. This included taking pre-requisite classes and becoming a certified nurse aide before applying to a licensed practical nurse program.

In 2004, she enrolled at Cloud County Community College at the age of 44 and started taking night classes. Two years later, she enrolled in the licensed practical nursing (LPN) program at Manhattan Technical College and followed that with the registered nursing (RN) program. Through it all, she raised three children (one is still at home) and learned to study again, never losing site of her goal. She graduated in 2008 and is now one of the hospital's best nurses.

“It was really, really hard,” Noa said, “but I hung in there with the encouragement of my family.” Four years isn’t that long to go to school when it affects the rest of your life.”

Before assuming her current responsibilities in the surgery center last May, she was a circulating nurse on the operating room side of the surgery center. Today, she is a RN who admits patients, gets them ready for surgery and discharges them after they have recovered and are ready to leave. “I really like the interaction with the patients,” she said. “When I was an operating room nurse, I missed getting to know the patients.”

During my own experience in the Surgery Center, Noa was relaxed, gracious and interesting, which helped to calm and reassure me, while taking my mind off of the procedure I was to have. It’s satisfying to know that others are experiencing her tender, loving care.

Noa is an amazing woman who struggled, sacrificed and kept her eye on the prize—an RN degree—in order to better her and her family’s future. She, like other staff with similar stories, is to be admired and congratulated.