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Former Chief Nurse

I was never going to be anything else than a nurse. When I was seven, and my younger sister was due, I wanted to attend her birth. I missed it because she was born at two a.m., but I had my nurse's uniform on the next morning! It

was when I was 14 that I started to subscribe to Nursing Times through my local post office! I used to read all the case studies and look at the wounds and think, "Wow!"

The other thing that happened was that I was

very ill as a child, with brittle asthma. I spent lots of time during my school days in the Leeds General Infirmary. One summer I spent six weeks there, mostly lying in an oxygen tent. Perhaps because of that, I feel very at home in a hospital. I like the smell that people associate with hospitals, which some people find off-putting. I even like the smell of an oxygen mask, because for me, that was a comforting smell - I felt very cared for, I knew I was going to be OK.

When I was in my teens, I grew out of the asthma, and I started to do lots of sport. I competed regionally in gymnastics and trampolining, and became the Games

Captain at school, even though I was quite tiny. I still love exercise - riding my bike, going walking, keeping fit - with a focus on keeping myself healthy. I think that probably stems from my ill health as a child.

*"I was a bit of a swot at school, and my mother would have liked me to train as a doctor, but I only wanted to work as a nurse"*

My parents didn't have two pence to rub together really - my mum used to sew all our school uniforms! - but they went out of their way to make sure we could have experiences. It wasn't the usual thing to have a

'gap year' then, but I went twice to France as an au pair. This woman from the International Association for Catholic Girls asked me in French, would I like to go to la Corse? I had no idea where Corsica was! I had to go by bus, plane, ferry - a horribly long journey, but whatever was the cheapest way to get me there. While I was there, there were a couple of bombs in the shops of French people, planted by the liberation front there.

I was a bit of a swot at school, and my mother would have liked me to train as a doctor, but I only wanted to work as a nurse, and only at the LGI, because they'd looked after me when I

was a child. When I was training, there were still big old Nightingale wards with sluices at the ends.

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Most things about nursing have stayed the same since I started. Nursing's had a bumpy ride in the last twenty years. When I was very early in my career, and told people I was a nurse, everybody was so proud - we were



all angels. There have been people within the nursing profession that have let us down, but the vast majority of nurses give the most amazing care every day with huge amounts of passion, dedication, enthusiasm and compassion.

