

Alternative Nursing

Toni Gilbert, RN, MA, HNC

“You are not an alternative nurse. You are a nurse who practices alternative therapies,” Mary advised pointedly. Then she asked, “Why would you want to call yourself an alternative nurse?” We then discussed the large population of nurses who are practicing outside the walls of the institutions using energy work, guided imagery, Tarot, astrology, dream interpretation, and other esoteric tools. I saw it as alternative ways of using our nursing educations.

Mary said, “There is no such title as an alternative nurse.”

I said, “So?”

There was a short pause and then she said, “Well, if you really want to, I don’t see why you can’t.”

Mary Amdall Thompson was my Oregon Board of Nursing contact for the first five years during the development of the professional foundation for my alternative practice. We formed a warm friendship and I continue to seek her professional opinions and advice.

I’m the oldest of six children, married with three grown children and four grandchildren. It seems like I have always taken care of others. Most of the time, I don’t mind. It is my nature to be a caretaker and I love to nurture. I remember a long ago playtime in a gravel driveway. On my hands and knees at the edge of a mud puddle, I gingerly plucked bugs out of the dirty water and place them on hospital beds fashioned from toilet paper. It gave me a good feeling when one healed and flew away.

I was a highly imaginative child. Later, my imagination merged with a youthful idealism. Still later, with my children in school and more time for just me, I felt a churning desire to creatively express myself in the professional world. I was sure nursing was my calling.

My idealistic sensitivities got their first jolt in nursing school. As I completed the first year of grueling tests, obstacle course skills labs and critically monitored clinical experiences; I was saddened to see that we had lost half of our class. It was to be the first of many indications that the mainstream of nursing wasn't the kind of healing profession that I thought it was.

On the plus side, mainstream nursing was an exceptional education; I learned about the many ways the mind and body expresses dysfunction. A bonus was that nursing attracts other care-taking types and I formed many professional contacts and several long-term friendships that continue to nourish me.

Although many years in psychiatric nursing were interesting and gratifying in their own way, I *knew* mainstream nursing wasn't a good fit. It felt limited. As a nurse inside the hospital walls, I took care of patients' physical needs like their safety, security and medical treatments. Issues of spirituality were left to others, usually a Christian chaplain.

Looking back, I can see that I was in my budding and growing years. I was aware of a strong urge to feel like a healer and had a heart-felt desire to practice holistic nursing.

It is understood that nurse healers practice in their special way in and out of the institutions. However, it wasn't until I finished bachelor's degree in art and psychology and my master's degree in transpersonal studies and started my non-traditional private

nursing practice I began to feel like I was on the right path and was actually a practicing healer.

Currently, as a holistic nurse and transpersonal counselor, I see clients who are in crisis due to illness, injury or stressful life situations. First, I help them through the crisis by supporting their strengths and ideologies according to their beliefs. During our time together, the healing process challenges them to learn more about the inner dimensions of their being, which in turn helps them, develop towards their fuller personality.

My professional story is a long one that has seen many twists of fate over the last twenty years. As it turns its present corner, the foundational knowledge of my nursing practice is traditional and I work in a private office. Alternatively, I will soon have my office in a beautiful small temple of my own design. I continue to use several of the aforementioned healing arts, which I am amply prepared to use via intellectual learning and certification and many years of direct experience. On top of everything, I have an on-line journal the *Alternative Journal of Nursing* at www.altjn.com and my own radio show called *It's in the Cards* at www.itsinthecards.com . I am wholly satisfied and wouldn't change a thing.

Toni Gilbert, RN, MA, HNC

Website: <http://www.tonigilbert.com>