

# “I Was Working in the Hospital as an Orderly”

## Oral Histories of the Alexian Brothers Hospital School of Nursing Graduates



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# The Alexian Brothers

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- A monastic order founded in Germany during the 14<sup>th</sup> century
- A nursing order caring for the diseased, the insane, and the rejected poor
- Expanded in Germany and to Belgium

# Expansion to the United States

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- An American congregation founded in Chicago in 1866
- First Alexian hospital in U. S. established the same year – restricted to care of men and boys
- Large German population in Chicago

# The Nursing School

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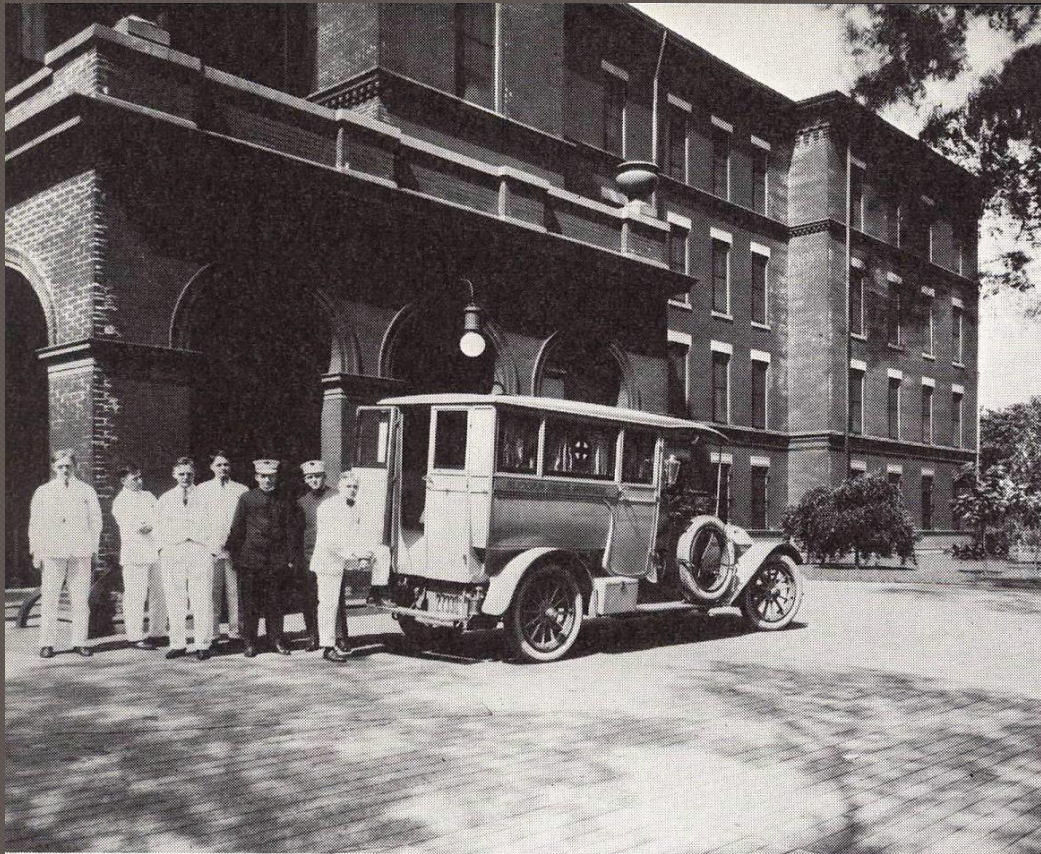
- 1894 – annual series of 24 two hour lectures by physicians
- 1898 – Alexian Brothers Hospital School of Nursing incorporated
  - Fifth all male school in the US
  - Two year program
  - Opened to male religious and lay students

# The Early Years

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- 1901 – lay students excluded
- 1925 – accredited by the state of Illinois  
(second school in state to receive accreditation)
- 1927 – a few lay students admitted
- 1935 – only professed brothers matriculated





Alexian Brothers School of Nursing Students shown with Chicago Police Department's first ambulance.

Photo Credit:  
Diaconian, The  
Yearbook of the  
Alexian Brothers  
Hospital School of  
Nursing

# The Middle Years

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- 1939 – affiliation with DePaul University; three year program; lay students admitted
- 1941 – lay students draft eligible
- 1942-1946 – conscientious objectors worked at the hospital; some became nurses
- 1952 – National League for Nursing (NLN) accreditation

# 1960s – The Declining Years

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- Decrease in vocations
- Financial deficits
- Changes in the educational environment
- Declining enrollment; men admitted into other nursing programs
- Students not used as manpower for the hospital; away on affiliations



# Closing the School

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- 1966 – decision to close the school
- 1966 – hospital closes in Chicago; new hospital opens in suburbs
- 1969 – last class graduates (21 nurses)  
Total number of graduates – 779

Photo Credit:

Alexian Brothers Provincial Archives



# Methodology

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- Interviews were conducted in person in the participants' homes
- Interviews conducted between 2005 and 2009
- Audio-recorded, transcribed, and reviewed by the participants for accuracy
- MaxQDA used for data management

# Participant Profile

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- 23 men were interviewed
- Graduated between 1952 and 1969
- Age at matriculation ranged from 17 to 27
- 2 were religious brothers  
(one of these later left the Brothers)
- 21 were lay students  
(one of these later became a Brother)

# Participant Profile

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- 12 became Certified RN Anesthetists
- 8 came directly from high school
- 7 were in the military prior to entering

# Themes

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- Low cost of education
- Influence of family member who was a nurse
- Desire to be a nurse anesthetist
- Exposure to hospital work



# Low Cost of Education

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The total cost for three years of nursing, including room and board, books, tuition, uniforms – the whole kit and caboodle was \$375 ... and I got a scholarship that paid \$200 of that so my total nursing cost, outside of blood, sweat, and tears, was about \$175.

Gene (Class of 1959)



Gene Tranbarger  
Class of 1959

First man elected  
president of the  
Illinois State Student  
Nurses Association

Photo Credit: Diaconian, The Yearbook of the Alexian  
Brothers Hospital School of Nursing

# Low Cost of Education

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In August we got a letter...everybody in my class got a letter from Brother Vulkan, the Registrar at the School, informing us that the tuition for the three years had been increased from \$900 to \$1,100; the Brothers had an arrangement, sort of a scholarship type thing, where if you agreed to stay on as a graduate one year after graduation your whole tuition was waived.

Tom O'M (Class of 1964)

# Influence of Family Member Who Was a Nurse

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My father actually graduated from the Alexian Brothers School of Nursing in St. Louis in 1934 and my mother was also a nurse; I worked in a factory for a year where my father was the industrial nurse and got to see a little bit of what he did on the job. I enjoyed watching what his work entailed.

Tom O'C (Class of 1962)

# Influence of Family Member Who Was a Nurse

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My father's sister was an Army Nurse in World War II and she influenced my oldest sister and my oldest brother, both of whom are nurses. My oldest brother preceded me at Alexian Brothers by 10 years; he went to ABH School of Nursing specifically to become a nurse anesthetist.

Steve (Class of 1968)



# Influence of Family Member Who Was a Nurse

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If my brother [class of 1961] had never gone to nursing school, neither would I have chosen nursing as a profession.

Wayne (Class of 1962)

# Desire to be a Nurse Anesthetist

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I went through x-ray school with the Air Force and I became interested in anesthesia when I was stationed in Greenland for a year. I used to go in [to the OR] when they did orthopedic cases to take x-rays and I was always interested in what he [the anesthesiologist] was doing ...

Joe (Class of 1961)

# Desire to be a Nurse Anesthetist

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I was working at Rochester State Hospital as an orderly and they had me work on the surgery unit. They had a school of anesthesia there. We were able to stay at a men's dorm, and two students in their anesthesia school also stayed there and I got to know them and just got interested in anesthesia then.

Jerry (Class of 1963)



Jerry Pierce  
Class Of 1963  
Fall 2009

Estimates that he has  
done 35,000 anesthesia  
cases.

“Never got tired of it.  
Never wanted to do  
anything else.”

Photo Credit: Author's Files

# Desire to be a Nurse Anesthetist

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So that's the reason that I went into nursing, really, was to be an anesthetist. Out of my class I think there were close to 18 of us who were all going in for anesthesia.

Jim C.(Class of 1961)



# Exposure to Hospital Work

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Joe showed me all the procedures in about the two weeks he had me and he showed me sterile technique, catheters – how to catheterize. Along the line then I picked up a lot from the nurses there so that I was doing most everything, doing preps for surgery and giving enemas; the nurse would look over my shoulder – it was a duty nurse – and she said Jack, she said, you're really good at that. You ought to be a nurse.

Jack (Class of 1958)

# Exposure to Hospital Work

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My Navy experience was great... I decided that if I signed up for three years I could choose what field I wanted to work in, so after boot camp I went to [Medical] Corps School, and after that I went to Operating Room Technician School.

Merle (Class of 1955)

# Exposure to Hospital Work

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When I was in high school I was working in the hospital as an orderly and all of a sudden I realized that the hospital was sort of a magical place.

Mike (Class of 1961)

# The Religious Brothers

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I was a member of the Brothers of Mercy and that was a Nursing Order that took care of the sick and the poor and ... one thing led to another and my Provincial called me in and said we're going to send you to Nursing School.

John (Class of 1966)

[left the Brothers several years after graduation ]

# The Religious Brothers

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Brother Daniel was Director of the School of Nursing when he interviewed the four of us. I remember distinctly asking him, “When you say do you want to go into nursing school, do you mean do you want to go into nursing school or something else?” And he said, “I mean do you want to go into nursing school, period.” So that’s why I say, I think they decided that I should go into nursing.

Brother Maurice (Class of 1952)  
[Director of the school from 1954 to 1969]





Brother Maurice Wilson (Class of 1952) in his office in 1955  
Appointed Director of the School and  
Director of Nursing for the Hospital – 1954

Photo Credit:  
Alexian Brothers Provincial Archives

# Was Nursing School a Stepping Stone to Medicine?

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My desire was to be a pediatrician and I had a scholarship lined up for medical school but had to get through college on my own and discovered that, even though I went to a rather inexpensive college, at the end of one year I knew that I couldn't afford four years of college.

Gene (Class of 1959)



Gene Tranbarger (left) receiving recognition as the outgoing president of the American Assembly for Men in Nursing – Fall 2005

Photo Credit: Author's Files

# Was Nursing School a Stepping Stone to Medicine?

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When I graduated [from nursing school] I went to college. I was actually in pre med – I thought I was going to go to medical school and this family doctor of mine that got me interested in nursing school to begin with had told me when I was finishing nursing school that if I get into medical school he would pay my medical school tuition. Then while I was at college, he died.

Jim H. (Class of 1961)

# Was Nursing School a Stepping Stone to Medicine?

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Before I went into anesthesia, I took a three year course in shock trauma at Northwestern University and I had a group of anesthesiologists that told me if I would go to medical school and promise to come back and work with their group they would pay for my education.

Patrick (Class of 1962)





Patrick Downey  
Class of 1962

President of American  
Association of Nurse  
Anesthetists (AANA)  
1983-84

1999 Agatha Hodgins Award for Outstanding Accomplishment  
2007 Ira P. Gunn Award for Outstanding Professional Advocacy

Photo courtesy of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists Archives



# Acknowledgements

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