

# 2005 NSNA/NURSING SPECTRUM ESSAY CONTEST GRAND PRIZE WINNER

**L**ynette Melby, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, won the Essay Contest Grand Prize in which students were asked to respond to the question: "How Would You Encourage Underrepresented Populations to Choose Nursing as a Career?" Melby won a Nursing Spectrum continuing education tour to Scandinavia, a \$1,000 travel stipend, and complimentary registration to the 2005 convention in Salt Lake City, held in April. Four other students were recognized

for their essays, which will be published in upcoming issues of *Imprint*: First place: Kelly Kaufman, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY; Second place: Shannon M. Fenner, Northcentral Technical College, Wausau, WI; Third place: Martha Phillips, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Honorable mention: Karen Crone, College of Lake County, Grayslake, IL. Following is the Grand Prize Essay:

## Passion and Possibility



by Lynette Melby



**F**irst, you create the passion. Then you make it possible. Passion and possibility are the necessary elements in the

creation of new nurses. I am asking you to change your thinking. Instead of asking, "What can be done?" ask yourself, "What can I do? What can one nurse do to encourage those from underrepresented populations to become nurses?"

Start with one person at a time. If each of us encouraged just one person from an underrepresented population to become a nurse, the ramifications for our profession would be huge.

How can you kindle a passion for nursing in a young person? By being a role model. In talking with nurses, I have observed that many of them remember the moment they decided to become nurses. One saw a nurse care lovingly for her ill grandmother and decided she wanted to help people that way too. Another saw a flight nurse in an emergency department prepare an accident victim to be flown to a trauma center. She watched as that nurse helped save a life, and she wanted to do the same someday. An ill adolescent struggled with the difficulty and boredom of being hospitalized for weeks. What made his long hospitalization tolerable? His nurse. The boy couldn't wait until

his nurse appeared each night, ready to talk about sports, or play video games with him. Anything to cheer him up. The boy knew that he'd like to do for others some day what this nurse did for him.

As nurses, each of us is an ambassador for our profession. We have the power to leave a positive or negative image with potential future nurses. A positive impression can create a spark in someone who may have never considered nursing as a career. But how many young people will become nurses if they see only negative images? Never underestimate the power of an encouraging word in your interactions with your patients and with the public.

Some may already have considered becoming a nurse, but may need that extra push to help them take that first step. I was a volunteer at our local care center, when one night a nurse said to me, “You’d make a good nurse.” Now I expect to graduate in May! Encouraging words have power beyond measure.

Share your love of nursing with the community. Contact area schools and ask if they need speakers on various health topics, or for a career day. With the permission of your facility, invite high school students from inner city schools to shadow you for a day. Teach first aid to scouting groups. Talk to Head Start students about the importance of hand washing and how to avoid spreading germs. Bring stethoscopes, and let each child listen to his own heart. This kind of magic will create wonderful impressions on potential future nurses. Go to underrepresented populations instead of waiting for them to come to you. The possibilities for sharing your passion for nursing with potential future nurses are many.

“Share your love of nursing with the community. Contact area schools and ask if they need speakers on various health topics, or for a career day.”

Once you have created the passion in future nurses, will it be financially possible for them to reach their goals? There are many loan, grant, and scholarship programs available to potential nursing students. So why are some populations still underrepresented in nursing? It’s one thing to have the programs in place, but making them known is vital. Financing is available to most students, especially those from underrepresented populations, but this information must get into the hands of potential students. You can play an integral role in your community by making this information available. If each nurse accepted the responsibility of getting information to their local high school, think of the possibilities, particularly for inner city high schools and those on Native American reservations.

Another resource is the workplace. Ask your facility if you can circulate information on nursing careers and financial aid on the premises. Help the staff sponsor a nursing open house, and invite area students and their parents to attend and learn more about nursing. Invite other nursing schools to participate. Your facility may consider offering a partial nursing scholarship to an interested student from an underrepresented population.

I challenge all of you to take action to solve this dilemma. Don’t underestimate the personal touch. Passion? Possibilities? Share them with others, and you will ultimately rekindle your own passion for nursing and see new possibilities. ☺



See p. 85 for information on the 2006 NSNA/Nursing Spectrum/Nurseweek Student Writing Contest.