



Nebraska Nurses Foundation - Lasting Legacy Interview Series

By Teresa Anderson, EdD, MSN, NE-BC

THE NNF IS PROUD to continue our Lasting Legacy Interview Series by featuring Kim Houtwed, MBA, BSN, RN, the Executive Director of the Nebraska Nurses Association and an active member of the ANA/ NNA beyond her staff duties. Kim has worked in a variety of roles including staff nursing, unit-level nursing management, rural health, consultation, project management, grant writing, and small hospital administration before transitioning to the NNA Executive Director role in 2019.

Kim has been a nurse for 45 years and, besides the legacy of her own contributions, she has two daughters who are also working nurses, one in Nebraska and the other in Iowa. I first met Kim when she started her position with the NNA. Within that role she is also included in NNF Board meetings and has been instrumental in supporting many of the Foundation activities, both professionally and personally. I learned so much about

her through this interview and I know that everyone will enjoy learning more about our NNA Director.

TA: How did you select nursing as your career path?

KH: It is interesting how I got started because I really didn't want to be a nurse. My mom was a nurse's aide and she worked the 3-11 shift so as a child growing up, I always felt that she was always at work and resolved that I was never going to do that! I really wanted to go into law enforcement. But in the 1970s, women really didn't go into law enforcement. When I was in high school, I enrolled in program that allowed me to graduate early while completing 'work study' with a local business. At that time, people were prepping to be teachers, nurses, receptionists, and administrative professionals. I looked and looked for a job and I couldn't find anything I really liked. My mother suggested that I try working at the nursing

home in a nurses' aide role. So, I got a job as a nurse's aide, for \$1.10 an hour. I was ecstatic. All my senior high school peers were making 75 cents an hour. The hospital put me through the nurse's aide class. When we were about finished with the course, a wonderful nurse by the name of Carolyn Kelley came up to me and told me "You've done a really good job as a nurse's aide, but I really think you need to go on." I answered, "And do what? I'm 17 years old." She said, "You need to be an RN. You have the skill to be an RN." I thought about it throughout the rest of my senior year and that next spring I applied to the nursing program, interviewed, got accepted, and started in July after I graduated in May. I was still 17 years old. I hadn't even turned 18 yet. That is how I ended up in nursing and it just it felt right. And I loved everything I did - despite the many ups and downs in nursing through the years, but for the whole life, I've enjoyed it. At different times

I thought about doing something different but in the end, I can't think of anything that I would enjoy as much as I enjoy nursing,

TA: How did you get involved in ANA/NNA?

KH: What is funny is that prior to starting the NNA Executive Director role I had never been a member of either ANA or a state association. I knew that they existed, and I had heard about them, but I guess I had never been approached about joining. At that point, I had been a nurse for 30 plus years. No one had said to me, "Hey do you want to consider joining?" I received the Nebraska Nurse, had seen the district reports and photos of the district officers, and I always read about it, but never once did it cross my mind that there was an advantage to me joining. But I knew that there was no question in my mind that once I was working for an organization that I would truly support what it was that they were doing. I've learned so much since my membership. I missed many things through the years that I should have been paying attention to and should have been a part of.

TA: When you think of all those years in NNA and your involvement what are the top three memories or events that come to your mind?

KH: You know, to me, there are two things that are really important and, and bring a lot of pride. One of them is nursing recognition. Whether it be awards, scholarships or our Celebrate Nursing event, PIN Awards and Breakfast, or the Nursing Recognition Breakfast. Recognizing nurses that are honored by their peers to be nominated for those awards. The second thing is the advocacy. I knew

a bit about the legislature and how it worked, and I always paid attention to it. But it wasn't until I was involved with the Legislation and Advocacy Committee (LARC) as the Director that I fully understood how that works, at a very basic level, and what goes into protecting our scope of practice and our right to use the title Registered Nurse. The impact that legislation has on healthcare for all Nebraskans if you're not paying attention. I think this recent 2024 legislative session and the long one in 2023 are a good example. There were a lot of things that changed for the health of people in Nebraska.

TA: What does the NNA/NNF bring today to nurses or the public in the state?

KH: I think that the advocacy, is something that people either really love or they really dislike. I kind of equate it to working OB as a nurse, you either love OB nursing or you don't want anything to do with it. NNA is there to give support to the people that can put the words together to make an impact. Those who testify and can think on their feet to answer questions that the legislature has of them, and not be intimidated by the process. As a nurse, I need to support those people that are willing to speak for us, even if I maybe am not comfortable doing it myself.

TA: Are there any people who come to mind that you've encountered in this last five years?

KH: I can think of a couple people, our current NNA President, Linda Hardy and Kari Wade, the NNA Past President. I consider it an honor to have worked with Linda and Keri as we spend lots of time together. Rita Weber, from LARC and Don Wesley, our lobbyist. That group of people



have so much experience, passion and love for nursing. And I just learned so much from them. I don't think I've ever missed one of our LARC meetings because I learned so much from that group.

TA: If you had a group full of nurses and they said, "What's in it for me? Why should I join NNA or why should I support the Nebraska Nurses Foundation?" what would you tell them?

KH: I think nurses always need their peers to support them. Nursing is a hard profession. It can be draining emotionally and physically. By joining NNA, you work with other like-minded people to promote nursing and to make sure that nursing is here well into the future as the profession constantly changes and evolves. I think of the NNA and the NNF and the different people that I have met across the state that I would've never gotten to know; the different perspectives, different ways to think about things, and that is always important for nurses.

TA: Kim, we have certainly benefitted from your project management, knowledge of nursing and passion for our profession with you as our NNA Executive Director. Thank you for that and for your time and the insights you've shared. 🌟