



## The Joy of Nursing: Reclaiming Our Nobility

**Juliana Adams**

Steamboat Springs (May 1, 2016)

Softcover \$20.00 (256pp)

978-0-9972003-0-0

*This memoir of life in the emergency room takes an uplifting view of nursing as a profession—one which carries its own distinctive light.*

*The Joy of Nursing: Reclaiming Our Nobility* is a candid, moving career memoir by Juliana Adams that examines her fifty years as an RN. Framed by reflections on Florence Nightingale and the nursing industry, the heart of the book lies in a Denver hospital ER, where humanity meets in visceral, sometimes humorous, often bewildering moments, all of which are met with admirable strength. An impassioned view of the healing arts examines the patient-nurse exchange as one that involves advocacy, care, and most essentially, love.

Adams's account follows her path from wide-eyed idealism as a novice in the ICU to wisdom earned through the rigors of working at Denver General. A place where patients include the underprivileged, the destitute, and those whose injuries inspire reflection on the violence people inflict on each other, the setting is brought to life through accounts of staff members pulling together. Rather than inuring the author, witnessing trauma reminds her of the call to remain fully present. Even the treatment of perpetrators, such as drunk drivers, allows for lessons in avoiding judgment.

The ability to search for good in an urban ER lets the work rise above conversations that focus on a community's socioeconomic ills. Everyone is equalized by the reality that illness and injury can, and will, eventually befall everyone; it is this sense of connectivity and empathy that drives the book's message. Less dramatic but equally thoughtful scenes depict the staff's efforts to build a clothing boutique for patients who arrive in need—an unusual, necessary topic that outsiders may not consider.

Especially searing moments include descriptions of a battered woman who begins to miscarry in the waiting room, the death of a feverish child, and a night on which several victims of sexual assault appear. Incidents are thoughtfully recounted, emphasizing the ways in which nursing demands resolve to allow others as much dignity as possible in their vulnerable moments, and to participate, if only briefly, in unthinkable struggles.

A few intriguing threads, including time spent nursing in Germany, are mentioned in passing, though they could broaden the topic by serving as contrasts to the Denver ER. The concluding section turns away from personal recollections toward the increasing bureaucracy in hospitals. An encouraging voice provides suggestions for nurses who feel burdened to guide them back to the original passion that lead them to their profession. Prose remains sharp throughout.

*The Joy of Nursing: Reclaiming Our Nobility* takes an uplifting view of a calling that was once regarded as a lesser role in medicine, proving that it is every bit as critical. Nurses become more than intermediaries between doctors, patients, and families; they carry their own distinctive light.

KAREN RIGBY (June 28, 2016)

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