



TIME OUT

Stories from *Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul*

Jack

By LeAnn Thieman, LPN

As nurses work longer hours with less staff to care for sicker patients, our profession has become more stressful than ever. Sometimes we leave work with hearts as achy as our feet. This nurse's story reminds us of what makes it all worthwhile: our patients and their families.

My work as evening charge nurse in a small convalescent hospital brought many frustrations, but the biggest was the lack of enough qualified help. Still, everyone working there had a genuine love for the patients, and we all did our best to care for them.

Alice, an elderly, alert woman with bright blue eyes, was everyone's favorite. Her only living relative was her son Jack, a large, tough man habitually dressed in filthy jeans. A scraggly beard grew haphazardly on his chin and tattoos covered his arms and chest. No matter how cold the weather was, Jack always wore a tank top so the dragon and snakes could be admired by all. His loud and gruff manner terrified most of the staff.

But this monstrous man loved his tiny mother. Every day he roared up to the hospital entrance on his old motorcycle, flung open the front door, and tromped down the hall to her room, his clacking boot heels loudly announcing his arrival. He visited at unpredictable hours so he could surprise anyone he suspected of not taking proper care of his mother. Yet his gentleness with her amazed us.

One particularly bad evening, three aides called in sick, the food carts were late and cold, and one of the patients fell



and broke his hip. Jack came in at supper time to help his mother with her meal. He stood gawking at me in the nurses' station as I busily tried to do the work of three nurses. Overwhelmed, and near tears, I avoided his stare.

At the end of the shift, after the patients were finally fed, bathed, and put to bed, I sat at the desk and put my head down on my arms, exhausted. Then the door burst open. Startled, I thought, "Oh no! Here comes Jack, checking up on us again!" As he stomped to the desk, I looked up to see his burly hand gripping a pickle jar with a bit of colored yarn tied in a bow around the neck. And in the jar was the loveliest long-stemmed red rose I'd ever seen. Jack handed it to me and said, "I noticed what a bad time you were having tonight. This is for you, from me and my mother."

With that, he turned around, marched

back out the door, and with a roar from his motorcycle, rode out into the darkness.

Of all the many gifts I've received from the many grateful patients over all the years, nothing has touched me more than the red rose in the pickle jar so many years ago.

Kathryn Kimzey Judkins, RN

We could all use a lot more pickle jars and roses in our lives today, couldn't we?

Not all stress is bad. *Eustress* acts as a positive stimulus to help us cope with pressure, be creative and productive, and make beneficial changes. But a little stress goes a long way, and nurses are crying, "Enough already!"

To deal with all the stress in our lives today, we must have our lives in balance physically, mentally, and spiritually. But we may get so caught up taking care of others that we forget to take good care of ourselves. We educate our patients about eating right, then don't eat well ourselves. We remind them of the importance of sleep, yet frequently deprive ourselves of it. We advise them to exercise every day, yet are too busy to take our own advice.

Let's commit to taking time every day to eat, sleep, and exercise—to nurture ourselves physically and emotionally. Let's learn to care for ourselves as lovingly as we care for others. ✦

Kathryn Kimzey Judkins has lived in California since 1962. Having retired from nursing in 1998, she spends much of her time writing poetry and short stories. LeAnn Thieman, a certified speaking professional, is a motivational speaker and the coauthor of *Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul* and *Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul, Second Dose*. To learn more about her books or presentations, visit <http://www.NurseRecruitmentandRetention.com> or call 1-877-THIEMAN.