

ON THE FRONT LINES



ST. OLAF NURSING GRADUATES
COMBINE COMPETENCE AND SKILL WITH A
SPIRIT OF CARING, A COMMITMENT TO SERVICE
AND A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALING.

BY **CAROLE LEIGH ENGBLOM**

Photographs courtesy of the Shaw-Olson Center for College History

A FEW MONTHS AGO, the president of Taiwan, Chen Shui-bian, traveled to the island of Penghu to visit its most beloved citizen, Pai Pao-chu, an ailing 87-year-old American woman famous for her care of Taiwan's leprosy patients.

Pai Pao-chu's compassionate heart and 50 years of faithful service earned her enormous gratitude and respect from Penghu residents. According to *Taiwan News*, President Chen Shui-bian praised Pai Pao-chu as a "spark of light in the darkness" and directed the local government to build a statue to commemorate her legacy.

Pai Pao-chu, which means "precious white pearl" in Chinese, is a household name in Penghu. In the St. Olaf community, she is better known as Marjorie Ingeleiv Bly '41, a Lutheran missionary and a nurse.

In the early 1950s, when Bly began serving in Taipei, Taiwan had the world's highest percentage of leprosy sufferers — many of them living in the isolation of the Pescadores Islands located between Taiwan and mainland China. The afflicted would not or could not leave the islands to receive medical treatment, so Bly went to them. Every morning she stood on the docks at dawn and waited for a boat that would let her hitch a ride to any one of the 50 islands. Wherever it landed she sought out those suffering from leprosy, slowly gaining the trust and confidence of villagers and farmers.

Armed with a simple medical kit, she treated the young and the old, educating them and their families about leprosy and weeding out the superstitions of centuries. She planted principles of good health and hygiene, and explained doctor's orders, speaking both Mandarin and native dialects. Her aim, she said at the time, was to concentrate not only on the needs that patients had while receiving treatment but also on the needs they would have when returning home. Tending to patients' emotional and spiritual health was equally important. "For this work a person needs a second heart, the heart of Christ," she remarked in 1966. Even after her retirement a decade ago, Bly continued to concern herself

with her adopted country's quality of, and attitudes toward, healthcare.

St. Olaf has long excelled at producing servants like Marjorie Ingeleiv Bly: outstanding nurses who exemplify the college's mission of answering God's call, serving unselfishly and living responsibly in a complex world.

"We have prepared leaders in nursing for half a century," says Rita Glazebrook, a professor of nursing for 25 years and department chair. "As the roles for nurses have expanded, so have opportunities to prepare our graduates to fill them. It's a tradition of excellence we are proud of."

NOW AND THEN

Today's healthcare system, St. Olaf and its nursing program all look dramatically different from the way they appeared to the 40 young women who entered the college's first nursing classes in the fall of 1952. Conversations about establishing a nursing program at St. Olaf began as early as 1936 between the college and Fairview Hospital (now Fairview Health Services) in Minneapolis, also a Lutheran-affiliated institution at that time. Their first joint venture into nursing education unfolded in 1941. Bly, a biology and sociology major, received her registered nursing (RN) diploma from Fairview Hospital's School of Nursing, as did many of St. Olaf's first nursing students and faculty.

In the early 20th century, nursing education was largely technical with apprentice students learning at a patient's bedside with experienced nurses as their teachers and mentors. The scope of practice was narrow, with nursing subservient to medicine. A nurse, generally female and wearing white, followed "doctor's orders" and did as she was told, giving medications,



changing dressings and performing other necessary duties at the bedside.

But by the 1950s, following World War II, the Korean War and a period of groundbreaking scientific discovery, the role of the nurse became more complex and demanding, as physicians were able to better manage disease and prolong the lives of their patients. It became necessary to increase a young nurse's formal education in order to prepare her — and, with few exceptions, all of the students were women in those days — for professional practice in the ever-expanding roles of educator, counselor, patient advocate, researcher and administrator as well as care provider.

In 1952, the nursing department and St. Olaf formalized the baccalaureate nursing program to provide the depth and breadth necessary to meet the changing demands of professional nursing. "This visionary decision came well before the American Nurses' Association declaration in 1965 calling for the professional nurse to be prepared with a baccalaureate degree," says Glazebrook. St. Olaf nursing students had the advantage of an exemplary undergraduate education. Then, as now, liberally educated students learned to think critically and philosophically



◀ In 1957, St. Olaf nursing students were clocking 40 hours of clinical experience, including weekends, evenings and night rotations.

about life and careers, about moral and ethical reasoning, and about how concepts and theories drawn from other disciplines could be applied to the health and care of their patients.

“Just wanting to be a nurse wasn’t enough,” recalls Kathryn Voss Vigen ’56, director of North Park University School of Nursing in Chicago. Vigen, a member of the pioneering nursing class of 1956, says she and her classmates knew they were setting important precedents and felt a keen responsibility for the nursing students who would come after them. “We wanted to leave the world a little better than when we found it. The standards were — and still are — very high,” she says.

Those early years were exciting but challenging. The late Elizabeth Olsen ’40, the program’s first director and only full-

time faculty member, set the tone for the college’s fledgling nursing department. Elegant, sophisticated, soft spoken and kind, Olsen inspired awe in her students, and her colleagues held her in high esteem. “She looked for the best in everyone and built on it,” says Professor Emerita of Nursing Valborg Tollefsrud, who in 1953 became the nursing program’s third full-time faculty hire. “We were a very young faculty, not knowing one another and what we needed to do. She held us together.”

In 1986 the Minnesota Intercollegiate Nursing Consortium was established by St. Olaf College, Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, and the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul (though it withdrew from

the consortium in 1991). The merging of these academic nursing programs allowed the colleges to strengthen financial and educational resources (see page 39).

From the beginning, St. Olaf’s nursing majors displayed an inner strength and

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GO, AND SERVE

ST. OLAF NURSING STUDENTS are expected to develop cultural competence and a commitment to service, foundational elements to becoming responsible citizens in a global society. In 1975 — and for the next 20 years — Professor Emerita of Nursing Valborg Tollefsrud led the study-service Interim at Christian Medical College and College of Nursing in Vellore, India. “They said they wanted only one student,” Tollefsrud recalls. “There was no way I would let one student travel all the way to India alone.”

Instead of one student, she brought 13 and stayed with them every day, in the classroom, in the lab and in each clinical setting.

“Valborg Tollefsrud instilled in me high standards and the expectations that patients and their families had a right to excellent care,” says Nancy Gelle ’77, manager of hospice and home care for Park Nicollet Health Services in the Twin Cities. “It felt like such an accomplishment when, during clinicals, Miss Tollefsrud’s gaze would emerge into that wonderful smile, with a twinkle in her eye, and we knew we were on our way.”

Tollefsrud served on the St. Olaf

nursing faculty for 44 years. A retired colonel in the United States Army Nurses’ Reserve and the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Minnesota Nurses Association for 50 years of membership, Tollefsrud left St. Olaf in 1995. The day after she retired from teaching, she became parish nurse of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, her church home for the past 59 years.

Tollefsrud looks after 75 percent of Redeemer’s congregation, those who are in “advanced years,” she says, and who are in long-term care or assisted living. If a parishioner is in the hospital, she visits that person every day — twice a day if the patient is in intensive care. “They need extra care until they’re stronger,” she explains. Tollefsrud drives her charges to doctor appointments, helps them with their medications, answers their questions



VALBORG TOLLEFSRUD: “Ole nurses are deep thinkers and they ask relevant questions.” PHOTOGRAPHED BY TOM ROSTER

and makes sure “they’re comfortable and at peace, and that their surroundings are pleasant.” She also brings the shut-ins to church for communion, arranging wheelchairs and walkers so they can receive the elements of bread and wine.

For a lesser individual, such 24/7 care would be unsustainable. For Valborg Tollefsrud, “It’s a rich opportunity.” ■

— Carole Leigh Engblom

resiliency as they dealt with the life-and-death issues that typically elude most college students. Each class experienced a closeness and camaraderie that graduates say went beyond the bonds typically found among college students. “Being responsible for someone else’s life was an awesome experience, and we needed to talk about it with our fellow nurses,” says Professor Emerita of Nursing Mary Johnson ’60.

With half the academic year spent at Fairview Hospital and the other half at St. Olaf, the Nursing Department had no real “home” on campus. Classes moved from the Hector Skifter Radio Building to the women’s gymnasium. “Ms. Olsen was always trying to do her work around basketballs and pounding feet,” Tollefsrud recalls. “Through ingenuity and foresight, she raised funds for the program and got us offices in the basement level of the Science Center.” Forty years later, nursing classes are still held in that basement with the whitewashed walls.

THE SPIRIT OF CARING

The Golden Rule remains uppermost in the minds of St. Olaf nursing faculty and students. They think about the kind of care *they* would want to receive if they or their family members were the patients.

“St. Olaf nurses have always taken a holistic and thoughtful approach to health care,” says Johnson. “This desire to provide the best possible comfort, concern and support becomes a firm commitment to treat not just the disease or illness but the whole person: What does the patient need physically, mentally, spiritually? What does the family need? What is the patient’s cultural background? What makes him or her unique?”

The best nurses treat their patients as people first. They approach their work not only as competent clinicians but whole human

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beings. “Nurses play an advocacy role and speak on behalf of patients and their families,” Tollefsrud explains. “They must also anticipate what the patient and family needs will be tomorrow, next week, next month.”

Being grounded in a liberal arts education helps a nurse understand and appreciate an individual’s physical, psychological, socio-cultural, developmental and spiritual makeup. St. Olaf-educated nurses are better prepared to comprehend how someone experiences health or the absence of it, what beliefs guide the actions of a patient, and what healthcare practices and treatment options might be accepted or rejected.

Nancy Gelle ’77, manager of hospice

and home care for Park Nicollet Health Services in the Twin Cities, believes that St. Olaf religion courses were key in preparing her for her life’s work. She especially appreciated Professor Harold Ditmanson’s class “Death and the Christian Faith.”

“The two most important questions we ask individuals in hospice are: ‘What do you hope for?’ and ‘What do you fear?’ The process of dying is frightening,” says Gelle, who has worked in hospice for 27 years. “We had wonderful, thought-provoking conversations about spirituality in these religion classes. When we have a difficult patient situation, an ethical dilemma, a patient with a difficult disease process, I feel prepared.”

What else did Gelle learn at St. Olaf? "To dig deeper, look around the corners, ask questions, find out what's important to people."

Since the first nursing class graduated in 1956, more than 1,700 St. Olaf nursing alumni have made a difference in the lives of countless men, women and children all over the world. Through the years, they have assumed increasing responsibilities in hospitals, rehabilitation and long-term care centers, clinics, hospices and public schools, as well as in the armed services and in people's homes.

St. Olaf nursing graduates also are distinctive for their leadership. They are deans of nursing schools, administrators of hospital nursing divisions, officers in military nursing, missionaries, heads of public health agencies and medical clinics, presidents of nursing organizations, and educators and researchers.



▲ ST. OLAF NURSING CLASS OF 1985.

THE STATE OF NURSING

The largest of the health professions, nursing serves as the backbone of the care-delivery system in the United States. But, as a 1998 Pew Health Professions Commission Report recognized, we have too few nurses in this country, both for current and future needs. About 80 percent of the nation's nearly 2 million RNs already are in the workforce — but they're retiring from the nursing profession faster than new graduates can be produced.

By 2010, some 400,000 additional nurses will be needed to meet demands in all healthcare facilities, and by 2020 that demand will double, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Meanwhile, baby boomers are getting older and people are living longer. Advances in healthcare treatment, more complicated drug and therapy regimens,

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A TRADITION of EXCELLENCE

FOR 50 YEARS THE ST. OLAF NURSING PROGRAM HAS REFLECTED THE MISSION OF THE COLLEGE TO PREPARE THE WHOLE PERSON FOR LIFE IN TODAY'S COMPLEX SOCIETY.

BY ALLEGRA SMISEK '06

NOW IN ITS 50TH YEAR, the St. Olaf Nursing Department has produced more than 1,700 alumni. They serve as leaders in education, community health, research, hospitals and clinics throughout the United States and the world. "St. Olaf does not only produce nurses. We create nursing leaders," says Professor Rita Glazebrook, chair of the St. Olaf Nursing Department since 1990.

In 1950 the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) Board of Education asked St. Olaf President Clemens Granskou '17 to establish a professional nursing program. Having long recognized nursing as a fulfillment of the Christian mission of service, the ELC agreed to subsidize the program.

The St. Olaf faculty, with strong support from Granskou and Dean of the College Norman Nordstrand, approved a nursing program, and, two years later, the first nursing students were admitted. The inaugural class held a design contest for a St. Olaf nursing pin (still used today), and a capping ceremony was held at the chapel of what was then called Fairview Hospital in Minneapolis.

Students spent three semesters living off campus during their junior and senior years to be closer to Fairview, their clinical site and then an affiliate of the Lutheran church. Living and learning together created special relationships among the students and their instructors. "We have lifelong friends from the nursing group, whether fellow teachers or the students," says Professor Emerita of Nursing Dorothy Evanson Mrkonich '60, who graduated from the nursing program and became chair of the department in 1979. "They are our best friends."

In 1986 the Minnesota Intercollegiate Nursing Consortium (MINC) was established by the College of St. Catherine (St. Paul, Minnesota), Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, Minnesota) and St. Olaf College. The merging of these academic nursing departments increased educational quality while controlling costs.

Students spent their first two years at their respective colleges and then spent three semesters at St. Catherine's, utilizing the broad range of clinical facilities available to nursing students in the Twin Cities. St. Olaf student nurses returned to campus for the second semester of their senior year.

The College of St. Catherine withdrew from the consortium in 1991 to develop an independent program. Although the consortium remains intact between St. Olaf and Gustavus, St. Olaf nursing students were able to return to the Hill, with the benefits of a new nursing laboratory, smaller class sizes and an opportunity for nursing students to become fully involved in campus life.

In 2003, the St. Olaf Nursing Program underwent extensive review. A nursing task force, comprised of St. Olaf faculty and headed by Professor of Economics Steve Soderlind, argued that the program supported the goal of improving diversity at St. Olaf and made intellectual, spiritual and leadership contributions to the campus and greater community, along with international connections.

To the relief of St. Olaf nursing students, faculty and alumni, the college reaffirmed its commitment to the nursing program in 2005. "Nursing is a natural expression of the St. Olaf mission to develop people for lives of worth and service," says Glazebrook, a member of the task force.

"It is exactly what nurses do." ■

Allegra Smisek '06 is majoring in history, religion and American studies.

CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ST. OLAF NURSING DEPARTMENT DURING CELEBRATION WEEKEND 2006 (May 25-27).

stolaf.edu/depts/nursing

Looking around Anderson's office at Denison, you notice immediately that he's a family man. A black-and-white portrait of Priscilla sits to the right of his computer. A photo of Troy, the black lab mixed "with some skinnier breed," shows the dog in his prime, with a young James beside him. The office also sports a Dick Tracy drawing, a box of St. Olaf golf balls that Anderson received after participating in his 30th class reunion, two boxes of Kleenex, a framed award for distinguished teaching from Texas A&M and a cassette tape — a gift from a former student that purports to have the music of Bach but on the cover shows a portrait of Anderson's favorite writer, Samuel Johnson.

Elizabeth, who inherited her mother's large eyes and high cheekbones, says she learned negotiating skills from her father. He picked them up from businesspeople, particularly during his advanced management studies at Harvard. "Academics don't learn to negotiate," Anderson says. Both parents taught her to be open minded, says Elizabeth, "to be a good person in general."

Now, as Elizabeth leaves Granville to study creative writing at Kenyon, 40 miles away, her parents are setting off on their own adventure. For Anderson, a Midwesterner whose parents still live in La Crosse, Wisconsin, the move to Northfield is something of a homecoming. For Paton, who grew up on a dairy farm in Maine, it will be a chance to explore a new landscape and to continue her investigation of animals in a pet-loving, urbanized society. Her recent publications include an article on the practice of swimming with dolphins and another on deer overpopulation.

Zavotka, the family pastor, compares Anderson's anticipation of the move to St. Olaf with that of a child on Christmas morning. "He told me, 'I get to help shape a college of the church. I get to do this!'" he says. "Christ's grace is central to David in the way he interacts with other people. The welcoming nature of the Gospel is very important to him. It informs his social conscience.

"At this church he has consistently pushed the envelope without pushing people over the edge," says Zavotka. "We will miss him." ■

Amy Gage is director of marketing-communications at St. Olaf College.

and new technologies allow more people to survive a health crisis and live with ongoing health problems. Changing healthcare delivery and payment systems have resulted in more rapid hospital discharges, increased use of outpatient and home-care services, greater demand for long-term care for the elderly, and increased use of health-promotion and illness-prevention programs.

All of these shifts require more nurses, as well as nurses with more sophisticated expertise. The good news is that nursing at St. Olaf continues to be in high demand. "We continue to receive more applications than we can accommodate and have expanded our enrollment to 48 students, 24 at St. Olaf and 24 at Gustavus, beginning with the Class of 2007," says Rita Glazebrook.

Young women and men are responding to the nursing shortage and discovering new opportunities in healthcare. To stay current, the nursing program has revised its curriculum, with more emphasis placed on health promotion, multidisciplinary practice in integrated healthcare systems, cultural competence, gerontology, care coordination and community-based care — all designed to prepare St. Olaf nursing graduates for leadership roles in the 21st century.

"Ole nurses are strong anchors, move at a deeper level of awareness and have a thoughtful perspective on life, faith and God," says Professor Emerita Mary Johnson. "A patient might think, 'Here's somebody who has reflected deeply about her spirituality and place in the world. Here's somebody whom I can trust.' Every patient interaction has so many possibilities for healing."

Just as St. Olaf nursing faculty point with pride to outstanding graduates, students credit their professors with having high ethical standards and a strong passion for nursing — and with teaching them the art of caring along with the science of health care.

Nursing senior Aubrey Rice has had clinical experiences in pediatrics, oncology, cardiology, public health, maternity and mental health. Like hundreds of nursing students before her, Rice says she will always feel connected to St. Olaf because of the relationships she has developed in the program.

"Every Tuesday and Thursday morn-

ing my alarm goes off at 5 a.m. and I stumble into a dark, cold van with my classmates to head for Abbott Northwestern Hospital for our clinicals," says nursing senior Breanna Peterson. "I arrive at the front door excited to care for patients and a little worried that I won't be able to handle the challenges of the day. I've seen a lot of pain — people who lack access to healthcare, families struggling to care for a loved one — and death."

The St. Olaf Nursing Program has enhanced her compassion, cultural sensitivity and humility. "But most importantly," says Peterson, "it is preparing my heart." ■

Carole Leigh Engblom is editor of *St. Olaf Magazine*.

BACK TO THE FUTURE [from page 47]

work, and if we select them, we take a small percentage of their sales," Lindsay explains.

The affable Todd, who is prone to losing his cell phone, concedes that he is the "scattered and creative" personality in the relationship. Lindsay moves with the efficiency and determination of a woman striving to run a business and maintain a household of four children and numerous pets, including three cats and a pony. And yet she is the one to whom employees turn when they are troubled or have questions.

"You can tell an establishment that has good or bad owners. It shows in the employees' faces and their attitudes," says waitress Peggy Hanson, one of the empty-nest, well-mannered mothers whom Lindsay hires to lend elegance and sophistication to the restaurant.

Hanson teaches etiquette to high school and college students in town, and she recently conducted a class for Ole Store employees at Lindsay's request. The theme: going above and beyond the expected. Hang up a customer's coat. Fold a napkin correctly. Adopt the persona of a hostess welcoming guests to her home.

"I think of this as a place where everyone wants to be," says Hanson, whose younger daughter is a senior at St. Olaf. "I see everybody in town here. It's the gathering place."

Which brings the Ole Store full circle, back to its roots. ■

Amy Gage is director of marketing-communications at St. Olaf College.