

Suzanne

Category: Hands

written by Priscilla Mainardi | June 9, 2016

I still remember the night I decided to become a nurse. My eight-year-old daughter had been admitted to the hospital following an emergency appendectomy, and I stayed overnight on the pediatric unit with her. A nurse named Suzanne came on at 11:00. She had short blond hair, a pink jacket and an air of matter-of-fact confidence. I can't picture her face any more, but I can still see her hands—checking my daughter's dressing, using a pillow to prop her on her side, smoothing the blanket over her shoulders.

I had always liked using my hands to make repairs around the house, to work in the garden, to sew my daughter's clothes. I thought: *I could do those things.*

But some of the tasks Suzanne was doing—affixing my daughter's IV tube with lots of tape so she wouldn't pull it out by accident, hanging an antibiotic bag from the IV pole—seemed exotic and difficult. *What special knowledge does a nurse need to have?* I wondered. The strong, capable way Suzanne used her hands suggested to me that this special knowledge was contained in her long fingers, her smooth palms and her trim, unpolished nails.

When I got to nursing school, I always took notice of the competent-looking hands of my instructors, especially next to my own fumbling ones. Now, years later, my hands can do all the things a nurse needs to do. And I know that nursing is more than a set of facts, a body of knowledge. It's also a way of thinking, even a way of being, that begins with reaching out a helping hand.

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