

A Desirable Limitation - The Story of Deaf Nurse Dionne Jaques: Story From Nightingale College

1/16/2018



Don't let your limitations slow you down - A simple, yet inspiring message that deaf nurse Dionne Jaques shared during her valedictorian speech at the May 2017 Nightingale College graduation. While she stood on stage, beneath the bright lights, she recapped her cohort's experiences in nursing school. Dionne mesmerized her fellow graduates and the audience, who sat still as she addressed them.

Becoming a nurse was a goal Dionne set for herself in 1977 when she was caring for her ailing mother and ill daughter. However, finding a program that would fit her needs proved difficult as nursing schools resisted her joining. A deaf nursing student would need too many accommodations to be successful, they reasoned. "Past programs resisted me joining saying that deaf people cannot be nurses," said Dionne. But that discouragement, and other obstacles which may have discouraged others from pursuing their passion did not slow Dionne down. Instead, Dionne optimistically continued her search. Her strategy was simple: discover a school that will teach her, and she will be the one to worry about whether she is successful or not.

From a child, Dionne's hearing impairment was evident as she relied on lip reading and sign language to communicate. Her desire to be a nurse outweighed the challenges she faced with profound deafness. To help her grow and learn, she uses a stethoscope designed for the hearing impaired that can be connected to a phone to "see" sound and rhythm.

Dionne completed an LPN program in 2000 on the Dean's and President's lists. Her journey did not stop there. She knew she would go back to school but didn't imagine it would take seventeen years to get back. Flash forward to 2016, and Dionne was enrolling in Nightingale College's Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) Program. With a few accommodations and supportive staff and classmates, Dionne succeeded throughout the program.

She passed the NCLEX-RN® examination on July 27, 2017 and has been employed as a registered nurse in a health care facility in southern Utah. Again, she decided her education could not stop with an associate degree and returned to Nightingale to attend the RN-to-BSN Program. "Getting my BSN is extremely important to me. Being a nurse is part of my soul," Dionne shared. "I love caring for others and love being part of their lives."

Her journey to a BSN degree was halted when she was contacted by the local Red Cross office acquiring if she would deploy to help the victims of Hurricane Harvey. Placing her education on hold, Dionne eagerly accepted the volunteer position as she had done several times before in the past 15 years:

"I traveled to Austin because Corpus Christi was closed and isolated due to flooding. From Austin, we were transported to Houston, which at that time was also flooded. Once arriving in Houston, I was assigned to Disability Integration, which is a specialized group that focuses on making sure those with disabilities are receiving the care they need. I worked out of the

Houston Headquarters for several days, helping at the GRB shelter, which had over 10,000 evacuees.

"I drove to different communities that had shelters to assess for anyone with access or functional needs. This could be individuals with disabilities, or elderly who needed medical equipment, etc. I was in a unique position as a nurse to be able to assess evacuees for needs that others might not recognize," Dionne continued.

"I also did outreach where I went out to people in their homes, who could not get out. There were several deaf families so I was able to go out and visit with them in American Sign Language, finding out what their needs were and what I could do to help."

Dionne returned after two weeks in Texas to her normal life of work and school. Nightingale College and its instructors worked closely with Dionne upon her return to get her caught up on the weeks she missed.

"The journey to getting my BSN has been stressful, but worth every minute of it," Dionne said. "I have children and grandchildren who need to see how important education is, and see that you are never too old to achieve your dreams!"

Dionne's goal is to eventually work for FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency).

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