



I joined the inpatient Thomas Palliative Care unit at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2014 under our then manager Dr. Clareen Wiencek. Prior to my arrival, my experience on a cardiac intermediate unit attuned me to the evidence of suffering, barriers to providing holistic care, and the desire to bear witness to the human experience both as a clinician and a person. My transition to palliative care changed my nursing practice and continues to impact my personal and professional relationships in unsurmountable ways. The palliative care unit is a sacred place where both life and death are cherished, and where beginnings and ends have permission to meet.

My palliative care colleagues collectively teach me valuable lessons on the power of being present with patients, their loved ones, and the art of making space for legacies to be captured. I entered the PhD Program in Fall 2015, unaware that my palliative care dissertation focus would evolve, later taking me to the mountains of Franklin County, Virginia and pursuing a historical dissertation.

Historical Inquiry in Nursing, taught by Dr. Arlene Keeling, was one of my first doctoral courses. I initially wrestled with a final history paper topic, but this changed when a former advisor asked a critical question: “Who was the first Black nurse to graduate from University of Virginia’s School of Nursing (SON) Program?” My answer was incomplete, I could see the first Black nurse in my mind, yet I had no full name or understanding of her narrative. I asked myself, ‘How did I lose her name? Who else have I lost?’ I felt a deep unsettling and longing to know more about the Black nurses who paved the way for my entry into the profession.

I started locally, investigating the desegregation of our own University of Virginia’s SON for my final course paper. My investigation led me to Ms. Mavis Claytor, BSN ’70, MSN ’85, the first Black student admitted to and graduated from UVA's School of Nursing program. There were two essential leads that directed me to Ms. Claytor. The first lead was Dr. Barbara Brodie, through *Mr. Jefferson’s Nurses: University of Virginia School of Nursing 1901-2001*. The second lead was through Karol Kozak (School of Nursing Alumni

Association). I had the privilege of interviewing Ms. Claytor in her hometown (Franklin County, Virginia) for my final history paper, an experience that has continued to change my life. Following my first completed year in the doctoral program, I decided to pursue nursing history as my dissertation focus in 2016. My dissertation focuses on Black nurses and nursing students experiences in Virginia, 1950s-1980s and utilizes oral histories to address fragmented archives.

The 2018-2019 H 31 Pre-Doctoral Grant supported my participation in the American Association for the History of Nursing, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and in the Center for Race and Public Education in the South. Participation in the respective organizations supported the dissemination of preliminary findings through presentations, networking, and workshopping ideas. On January 25, 2019, I co-moderated and presented at the 2019 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, UVA Health System Program: *Women in the Movement*. I presented my research, as an invited community speaker, at Zion Hill Baptist Church (Keswick, Virginia) for their Black History Month Program on February 10, 2019. I am currently an oral historian and research planning member on the Jefferson Trust Funded project *Reshaping Public and Archival Space*, an interdisciplinary research project through the Eleanor Crowder Bjoring Center for Nursing Historical Inquiry.

My research is personal and builds on my practice of memory making and legacy work as a Palliative Care nurse. My faculty advisor, Dr. Barbra Mann Wall, is cultivating my intellectual skills in archival research and advanced historical methods. Through my dissertation research, I strive to enhance the archival representation of nurse contributors by continuing to add Black nurses' narratives to archival records. Additionally, I remain committed to disseminating findings through accessible and unconventional mediums. There are many narratives that remain untold, I aspire to carve out ongoing space to listen and acknowledge the experiences of others. My dissertation is just a piece of the work I hope to complete in my lifetime.