

Schnitzel to Syringes

Maria Serena Bartha

How does a person go from devoting her life to making people happy through food—to deciding to be a nurse? That is my story and I will try to make sense of it. For most of my adult life my career was in New York City's restaurant industry. I attended cooking school. I found work first as a cook; later on I overcame my fear of dough as a pastry assistant. I enjoyed food as a child and found pleasure in feeding my family as an adult. Life should be filled with pleasure, and food has been a way to convey that to others.

My father was a physician, so medicine and needles were things I was comfortable being around. I enjoyed visiting him at the hospital emergency rooms where he worked. As a young girl, I found the brisk action in these places curious. I also had a feeling of pride knowing my father was taking care of patients. Seeing him interact with patients was a treat for me. Also, little children get into scrapes and when I had a pustule in my finger from an infection, he would take care of me. It never scared me to see him take out a scalpel or other medical instrument.

As a young teenager my grandfather had a stroke that left the right side of his body paralyzed. My grandmother took care of all his needs when the visiting nurse wasn't there. I would help with the intravenous feeding. Although he was a family member, I never hesitated to help out.

Despite a scientific leaning, I followed my passion for food, which lasted a decade. Then, the year of my thirty-fifth birthday arrived. I felt a need to change my life and thought about different careers I could pursue. Should I open a food business, or get away from food? A deep talk with my mother followed. She said, "If you aren't doing much with your life, maybe you should go back to school?" That is what I did. I decided to head forward to my medical roots and apply to nursing.

I did Internet research on nursing schools. I thought about Hunter-Bellevue, since I had finished my Liberal Arts B.A. at Hunter College. I found out about City Tech, and it all fell into place. I live in the Downtown Brooklyn area and the nursing program had great pass rates of first-time takers of the NCLEX exam. I ran over to the admissions office and, through direct admissions, was accepted. Since I had been to three different colleges as an adult, I'd already completed most of the pre-requisites for the nursing program. All that was left was Anatomy and Physiology 1.

I was nervous about taking a biology course since the last one was a decade ago! Studying hard and focusing were keys to my success. I think there are certain gains in going back to school as an adult, as opposed to being in school as an

eighteen-year-old. If you make the conscious choice to go back to school and spend your own money on it, there are built in motivators to doing well. I won't say the first semester back was easy. But it went quickly and it was fun to make study buddies in the process. Challenging your brain to learn new concepts is rewarding. Those "a-ha" moments, when a piece of information is learned and makes sense, are amazing!

I found out on December 29th that I was accepted to the nursing program and it was a special feeling. The instructors I had this semester inspired me. I have to thank my mom for pushing me to think outside of the zone of what I normally think possible for myself. My father passed away in 2006. I would like to think he would be proud of the fact that I decided to go into nursing. He would tell me I was choosing a career that isn't easy but would be fulfilling.

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