

**Brigid Mulloy, RN, CNM**

**Convocation Address 2011 Graduating Class of the Fay W. Whitney School of Nursing  
University of Wyoming May 7, 2011**

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*“It is in that place where passion and skills meet  
that you will thrive and make your most profound contribution in nursing.”*

*- Brigid Mulloy*

It is a true privilege and an honor to be here in Laramie greeting YOU, the 2011 class of the Fay W. Whitney School of Nursing, the faculty, your parents and family.

I apologize in advance for reading my speech, but I promise you it's in your best interest. Anyone who knows me can tell you that I can go on and on telling all kinds of interesting stories and today I want to keep a clear focus because I have some specific things I intend to share. And I know you have important celebrating to attend to when we are finished here.

I have been invited to speak with you about some of my experiences in nursing and midwifery. Thirty-two years ago I sat where you are now, as a new graduate ready to begin my nursing practice, and dreaming of a career as a nurse midwife. I have to say the years have gone by surprisingly fast.

I was born and raised in Laramie, and from the very beginning have been influenced by the University of Wyoming's vision, culture and community. I grew up playing on Prexy's Pasture and was present for the original unveiling of the T-Rex at the geology museum. In 1959 my father, an anthropology professor at UW, was granted a two-year sabbatical to teach in South America and do archaeological work on the remote Easter Island.

I had my first experience with birth when we were living on Easter Island and I was eight years old. I broke my arm falling off a horse and spent the night at the tiny island hospital. My mother stayed with me. Early in the morning a woman arrived in labor and gave birth to a beautiful baby girl – in the bed right next to mine. A local nurse and midwife helped with the birth and my mother and I were there the whole time. We saw the new baby when it was freshly born and helped dress it for the first time. My mother always said that I became a midwife because of this experience, and perhaps she is right. I believe that this unique event imprinted on me a deep trust in birth, a knowing that birth is a natural and normal process and that the appropriate attendants for birth are nurses and midwives.

The whole experience of living on Easter Island and Chile for me was transformative; I became not just a citizen of Wyoming, but also a citizen of the world with an international perspective and a developing vision for service. In my work as a Nurse Midwife in Hawaii, I have consistently drawn on that early, rich, cross-cultural background.

You, the graduating class, are the beneficiaries of an impressive high-tech, state-of-the-art nursing education. The new simulation lab at the Fay W. Whitney School of Nursing is world-class. I had the opportunity to tour your beautiful facility yesterday. I met Mr. Sim and attended an accelerated labor and birth with bionic woman Noelle. It certainly made me realize that many things have changed in nursing education. Your training has been thorough and comprehensive, as well as specifically focused on the current healthcare needs of Wyoming, the nation and the world.

Many of you have taken advantage of the opportunity to study international healthcare and have traveled to Honduras for clinical experience. Small towns and rural areas throughout the world share many similar healthcare challenges, whether it's Wyoming, Hawaii or Honduras. The opportunity to work in a foreign country or even a different culture within your own country is extremely enriching. Maybe it has given you a new perspective about the value of your healthcare skills. There is much need in the world, and you are very blessed to have been the recipient of such a wonderful education. I'm sure some of you are already thinking about using your healthcare skills in an underserved area and also already thinking about going back to school and becoming an advanced practice nurse.

We have all been hearing over and over about the current health care crisis, with escalating costs and not enough doctors to care for patients. We have also heard that in the future, patient care in the United States will be in the hands of Advance Practice Nurses. Often this is expressed in the media as if it represents a change for the worse in health care in the United States. I believe the opposite is true, and I know this from personal experience. Better health care will result from a system that is based on advanced practice nurses who are primary health care providers. I know that this is true because of my many years of experience with the Midwifery Service on the Island of Molokai in Hawaii.

Wyoming and the rural places where I live in Hawaii have many of the same healthcare needs and healthcare delivery system challenges, limited resources, long distances, and small isolated rural communities. The island of Molokai has a largely native Hawaiian population of 7500 people, who live in several small towns and large rural coastal areas. Molokai has suffered for many years from economic depression, and has the highest unemployment in the state of Hawaii. There is a small community hospital with an emergency room and several inpatient beds. There are no surgery facilities and anesthesia is unavailable. Travel off island by plane is required for all higher levels of health care service. A medical emergency air transport often takes at least 2-3 hours even under optimal conditions.

Up until 1985 several general practice doctors were delivering all the babies on Molokai. A crisis of rapidly increasing malpractice insurance costs forced them to quit attending births. What followed was a disastrous period of six months where women were expected to fly off Molokai to Oahu to await labor and give birth. The idea of developing a nurse midwifery based care system grew out of this totally unacceptable situation.

The Molokai Women's Health Center's nurse midwifery program was born from a health care crisis and has developed into a model of care that provides better and more comprehensive services for the women of Molokai. Certified nurse midwives provide not just an alternative but they provide better care to more women. Nurse midwives are specialists; they attend births and provide comprehensive prenatal care, gynecology and contraceptive services. They see teens to grandmothers, and provide community outreach and education. They have created a system of care that tracks and monitors patients, and they have excellent obstetrical consultation available to them by phone 24/7. And I should mention they provide this better care at a much lower cost.

The practice model is to have the certified nurse midwives see all pregnant women in the Women's Health Center clinics, and attend births at the small community hospital. In Honolulu on the Island of Oahu, the midwives collaborate with an obstetrician – a wonderful and committed obstetrician who flies over to Molokai twice a month to consult with the midwives and see high-risk patients. All pregnant women on Molokai are midwife patients and some are co-managed with the obstetrician. Some pregnant women, because of anticipated complications in their pregnancy, must go off island to await labor and give birth. And yes, sometimes women need to be transported during labor by plane.

The system actually works very well most of the time. The outcomes statistics have been exemplary. There have been situations where women with high-risk pregnancies gave birth on Molokai because of unusual circumstances. We delivered twin baby boys, their mother was off island awaiting labor, but she decided to come home to Molokai for weekend and went into labor. We had an over-8-pound undiagnosed breech baby that was born beautifully delivered by a nurse midwife. We have delivered several small premature babies who after their birth had to be transported by the emergency team to the neonatal intensive care in Honolulu. The midwives have become experts in anticipating problems early and transporting patients off island as necessary.

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In the last 25 years nurse midwives on the Island of Molokai have delivered over 1500 babies. Nurse midwives have delivered all babies born on Molokai during this period. The Molokai Women's Health Center's practice is the most independent nurse midwifery practice in the United States. It has proven to be both a safe and satisfactory system for the women of Molokai, who highly value giving birth on their own island, and greatly appreciate the care they receive from their nurse midwives.

I am proud to be sharing with you the facts about the midwifery practice on Molokai. The way that the Molokai midwifery service uniquely fits the combination of my personal history, experience and passion is an all important ingredient in my personal satisfaction and professional success there. And the truth is that I have gotten back much more than I have been able to give. It is been a profoundly empowering, personally and professionally enriching experience.

As you graduate and begin your nursing careers I hope that you will continue to explore and expand your vision, with advanced education and lifelong learning. If you follow your curiosity and personal passion you will also find that special place that is uniquely suited to you, your nursing skills and personal history. Don't settle for less. Because, it is in that place where passion and skills meet that you will thrive and make your most profound contribution in nursing.

Thank you for the honor of selecting me as your Distinguished Alumna of 2011 and inviting me to share in the celebration of your convocation. I wish you well; it is an exciting time, the beginning of a new life's path. Aloha.



*Brigid Mulloy, RN, CNM*