

the fine art of
nursing

Denise Blough reminds us
that there is more to nursing
and midwifery than
academic and technical skill

"Nursing is an art: and if it is to be made an art, it requires as exclusive a devotion, as hard a preparation, as any painter's or sculptor's work; for what is the having to do with dead canvas or cold marble, compared with having to do with the living body, the temple of God's spirit? It is one of the Fine Arts: I had almost said the finest of the Fine Arts." Florence Nightingale¹

I decided I wanted to be a nurse when I was about two years old and never changed my mind. You know – the pretty blond type with the first aid kit and cap that you get in a toy set. However, when I moved to London three years ago to begin working towards my nursing degree, I didn't really know what to expect. Of course, I know now, working in a hospital you never do. My first few days of placement on a busy hospital ward left me shell shocked and not sure I knew what I was getting myself into. I was either lost, out of my depth or desperately trying to remember the door code.

I'm now a final year student starting to think about qualifying; a prospect both terrifying and exhilarating. I think I am starting to catch a glimpse into what Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern-day nursing meant when she called nursing the finest of fine arts.

Nurses hold lives literally in their hands. With each small decision and clinical judgment, they make, they are affecting someone's life for better or worse. A good nurse must be competent. That's not all though; nurses interact with just about every sector of society, all with one thing in common; they are ill, and they need our help.

Patients more often than not are being faced by one of the most challenging times of their lives and they are vulnerable. That is when compassion and empathy kicks in. Caring is an art; and nurses should be masters of it.

During my time as a student nurse I have worked alongside many nurses; I have learned about the kind of nurse I want to become, and (unfortunately) the kind I don't. It has been a privilege to watch great nurses, masters at their trade, and to learn from them. Say what you will but a nurse like this is a true artist of human emotion equal to any of the great names of fine art.

Denise Blough is a third-year nursing student at Kings College, London

1. Nightingale F. *Notes on Nursing: What It Is, and What It Is Not*. New York: Dover Publications Inc.; New impression edition (2 Jan. 2000)