What is Nurse's Week and the Nightingale Moment REALLY about?
Editorial, by Rebecca Cohen, RN, EdD, HN-BC; Editor

On May 12 of each year, at precisely noon your local time, every nurse around the world is asked to pause, observe a moment of silence, or create a healing ceremony or ritual in celebration and dedication of the heart and spirit of nursing. During this 24-hour period, nurses honor Florence Nightingale and her legacy to modern nursing in a "Nightingale Moment." We honor the strength and wisdom of our nursing mission and we carry the vision of caring and healing into the new millennium.

National Nurses Week begins on May 6 and ends on May 12, Florence Nightingale's birthday. The history of Nurses Week began in 1953 when Dorothy Sutherland of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare sent the proposal to President Eisenhower. In 1974, President Nixon proclaimed a "National Nurse Week."

As everyone can see, these two celebrations are about Florence Nightingale. But what do we know about her? We know that she is considered the founder of modern nursing. She is one of the three people cited by history books as doing the most to alleviate human suffering in the nineteenth century. She was a social activist who did not believe in women's liberation, but neither did she believe that a woman's place was in the home. She believed that we should forget about gender when it comes to the use of human talent and let every man and woman contribute what is in them to achieve. But what is often not discussed about her is her emphasis on the psychological aspects of sickness which were far ahead of her time. Her writings on the effect of the emotions and spirit on illness ARE what holistic nursing is all about. In her writings she says,

"little things can aid in the patient's recovery; being able to see out of a window; keeping small pets such as a caged bird; a visit from a baby or small child; a piece of good news." (Huxley, E. Florence Nightingale. G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1975, pp. 188-189)

She goes on to say,
"...how little do healthy people, who can walk about, take exercise, eat with others, know about how confinement to a sick room intensifies a patient's worries. Remember, he is face to face with his enemy all the time, internally wrestling with him, having long imaginary conversations with him." (Huxley, E. Florence Nightingale. G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1975, pp. 188-189)

She was attuned to the smallest details of providing patient care including noise levels, "messes in the room," making light of a person's situation or giving false hope, smells, and lack of sympathy. She even encourages nurses to warm a patient's night-dress before putting it on after his bath.
This is the nursing that Florence Nightingale worked to create. As Holistic Nurses we honor her in these two celebrations not just because she was the founder of modern nursing, but because she was truly the founder of Holistic Nursing.

She strongly believed in healing not only the body, but also the mind and spirit. She believed that healing could only take place when the mind and spirit were included in the process of care. Imagine how revolutionary these concepts were in her time! This year I think we need to ask ourselves if we are truly fulfilling this vision of Florence Nightingale's. Do we, as holistic nurses, act as role models, speak out, and educate consumers and other nurses about holistic nursing and caring for the whole person? If you have found yourself, in past years, celebrating her role as the founder of nursing, let this year be different. Celebrate her life as a visionary, a spokesperson, a role model, and a change agent who took enormous risks to fulfill her dream. As Holistic Nurses, we must remind each other, and ourselves, that, above all else, Florence Nightingale's legacy IS holistic nursing.

On a personal note: writing this editorial has reminded me of how much my mother, Rosanne Krcek Frank, was like a Florence Nightingale of her time. She graduated from Cook County Hospital, Chicago, in 1935, started her career as a Visiting Nurse, was certified as a school nurse, and later became a professor of nursing at Northern Illinois University. She passed away in 1995. As I worked on this editorial, I found two vintage books written about Florence Nightingale that my mother had given me years ago when I became a nurse: *Florence Nightingale* (1975) by Elspeth Huxley, and *The Letters of Florence Nightingale* (1974) edited by Lois A. Monteiro. My mom was a nursing instructor who encouraged her students to think critically, provide holistic care, and be activists within nursing and health care. She led by example, continuing her education throughout her life, speaking out for those who could not, and helping to create national and global changes in health care. She wanted to make sure that nurses' voices were heard, and made a part of the process of creating change in health care. She was the first nurse ever admitted to both the International College of Psychosomatic Medicine and the American Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine, and she helped nurses gain admission to the American Association for Social Psychiatry. She presented numerous international workshops, such as the changing patterns of nursing education in the USA (given in Yugoslavia); nursing involvement in social psychiatry (given in Greece); and psychosomatic problems in the People's Republic of China (the result of her work in China, given at the Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine). She was a prolific author who was outspoken about the problems in health care, including the topic of needing new collegial relationships between professionals (an article she wrote in 1975). She was a role model to many, and I dedicate this editorial to her and her belief that nursing is a powerful profession. The inscription from my mother in my Florence Nightingale book reads: "I hope you will feel as do I-proud to be able to say that I was a member of a profession that Nightingale made truly professional."

This year, let us remember the vision of what nursing could, and should, be that drove Florence Nightingale forward. Let us remember, too, how incredibly difficult it must have been for all of our mentors in the early years of nursing. If you have a role model who helped you grow as a nurse, thank them for their work, their dedication, their strength, and the role they played in your life. And, BE a mentor to other nurses. This is another great way to thank Florence Nightingale as you celebrate and reach out to others during Nurses Week and the annual Nightingale Moment.