

# Learning to Heal

Reflections on Nursing School in Poetry and Prose

Jeanne Bryner and Cortney Davis

Foreword by Judy Schaefer

Fifty nurses share their poignant and inspirational stories

What is it like to be a student nurse? What are the joys, the stresses, the transcendent moments, the fall-off-your-bed-laughing moments, and the terrors that have to be faced and stared down? And how might nurses, looking back, relate these experiences in ways that bring these memories to life again and provide historical context for how nursing education has changed and yet remained the same?

In brave, revealing, and often humorous poetry and prose, *Learning to Heal* explores these questions with contributions by nurses from a variety of social, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds. Readers meet a black nursing student who is surrounded by white teachers and patients in 1940, a mother who rises every morning at 5 a.m. to help her family ready for their day before she herself heads to anatomy class, and an itinerant Jewish teenager who is asked, "What will you become?" These individuals, and many other women and men, share personal stories of finding their way to nursing school, where they begin a long, often wonderful, and sometimes daunting, journey.

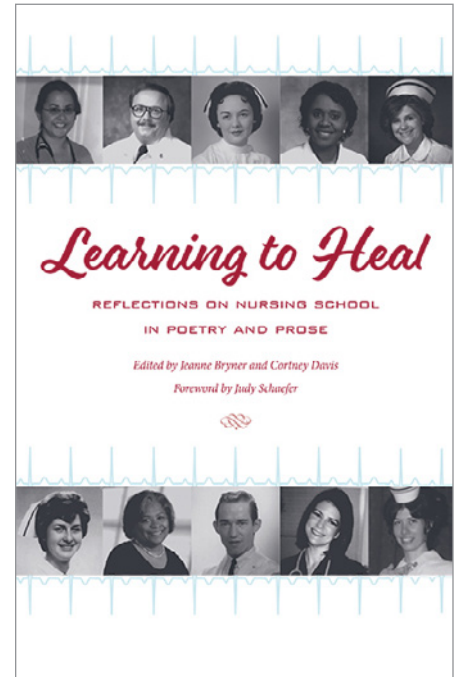
Many of the nurse-authors are experienced, well-published writers; others are academics, widely known in their fields; but each offers a unique perspective on nursing education. Notably, an essay by Minnie Brown Carter and an interview with Helen L. Albert provide valuable ethnographies of underrepresented voices.

Through strong, moving essays and poems that explore various aspects of student nursing and provide historical perspective on nursing and nursing education, all have stories to tell. *Learning to Heal* tells them in ways that will appeal to many readers, both in and out of the nursing and medical professions, and to educators in the medical humanities.

**Jeanne Bryner** is the author of several collections of poetry, one book of short stories, and a play. Her poetry collection *Smoke* received an *American Journal of Nursing* Book of the Year Award, and *No Matter How Many Windows* won the Working Class Studies Association Tillie Olsen Award. Bryner has received writing fellowships from Bucknell University, the Ohio Arts Council, and the Vermont Studio Center.

**Cortney Davis** is the author of five poetry collections, most recently *Taking Care of Time*, winner of the Wheelbarrow Poetry Prize. Her nonfiction publications include *The Heart's Truth: Essays on the Art of Nursing* and *When the Nurse Becomes a Patient: A Story in Words and Images* (Kent State University Press, 2009 and 2015). With Judy Schaefer, she is coeditor of the award-winning *Between the Heartbeats* and *Intensive Care*. Davis's honors include an NEA Poetry Fellowship and four Book of the Year awards from the *American Journal of Nursing*.

**Judy Schaefer, R.N.C., M.A.**, is a part-time lecturer for Penn State. She coedited *Between the Heartbeats* (1995) and *Intensive Care* (2003), anthologies of creative writing by nurses.



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