

GREENFIELD RECORDER

‘Life doesn’t come with a printed lesson book’: Retiring Greenfield nurse reflects on 53 years in the field



Margaret Boone, 75, pictured at her Greenfield home, retired Thursday after spending the last 13 years with the Overlook Visiting Nurse Association in Sunderland and a total of 53 years working as a nurse across the country.

By CHRIS LARABEE

Staff Writer

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GREENFIELD — From natural disasters and 9/11 to patients’ living rooms, a local nurse has experienced it all after working in the industry for 53 years across the country.

Margaret Boone, 75, retired from the Overlook Visiting Nurse Association in Sunderland on Thursday, where she spent 13 years tending to patients in their homes. After a lifetime of taking care of others, the Greenfield resident wants to spend more time with her granddaughters and taking on personal sewing, cooking and gardening projects.

It all began at the age of 6 in Seattle. Boone’s mother was a nurse and she decided she wanted to be one, too, a choice she has never regretted.

“Nursing has framed my life. It’s really shaped who I am,” Boone said in an interview in her backyard. “It’s been an incredible job and I’ve really, really loved it.”

Boone spent years with the Red Cross in both its blood and disaster services. She helped people work through hurricanes, earthquakes and tornados, but it was the time spent working in New York City in the aftermath of 9/11 that saw her move away from the front lines.

“I was at 9/11 for six months — I was at our national headquarters — and that did me in for disaster nursing,” Boone explained. “It was the most stress I’ve ever had.”

She had considered working internationally with the Red Cross, but her children persuaded her to remain in the U.S. She moved back to the Pacific Northwest to work with the children of migrant farmworkers before coming to Franklin County, where she became a visiting nurse “to learn the community.”

As a visiting nurse, Boone said it was “remarkable how people invite you into their homes” because it requires so much trust.

Despite not being on the front lines, Boone said visiting nursing can bring just as much stress as being at the scene of a disaster.

“Visiting nursing is a very intense experience,” Boone said. “It’s very different, but they’re still very intense experiences that shape you.”

It’s those intense experiences, like helping people in the aftermath of 9/11 or providing care for terminally ill patients, that Boone said really change how you view life.

“There are some experiences that are so profound, they seep into the marrow of your being and really inform who you are and you live with those,” Boone said. “I’ve worked with a number of hospice patients and you come out changed.”

Part of being a nurse is taking care of yourself as well. Boone called her garden a “sanctuary” where she and her coworkers could go after a difficult day and decompress.

“You have to stay centered. You have to take care of yourself,” Boone said. “I do meditation, which helps me keep my center. Maintaining relationships with people, using your support and being a support is what gets us all through.”

Reflecting on her career, Boone said the life lessons she’s learned came from interacting with the people she cared for, noting that “Life doesn’t come with a printed lesson book.”

“If you treat people with respect, it comes back,” Boone said. “It’s just really coming to value community and how community takes care of its own, or doesn’t.”

The surprise retirement party her coworkers threw her Thursday morning reaffirmed Boone’s value of community when she and her colleagues reflected on their time together.

“We’re a team, and that’s really the wonderful part of nursing,” Boone said. “We were all talking about patient stories. We want to write a book.”

Even though it “just felt like it was time” to retire, Boone said she will dearly miss “working to help make people better.” Beyond the work, she said she’ll miss her patients and the experiences that come with them the most.

“I don’t think patients realize how much they affect us. We are really deeply affected and shaped by the people that we serve,” Boone said. “And we never forget them.”

Chris Larabee can be reached at clarabee@recorder.com or 413-930-4081.