



Director's Statement

I had a great nurse who got me through chemotherapy.

I had breast cancer, and when I was going through that crummy experience, I arrived at a point where I didn't have one single hair on my body. I just didn't feel like me anymore. Losing my eyebrows and eyelashes was the last straw. The only place I felt normal was with the nurse giving me chemotherapy. Something happens when you look really sick - people treat you differently and it makes you feel even weirder than you already do. But not Joanne, she was funny and irreverent. She talked about hair color and boyfriends and dinner dates. She got me through it.

I've always been fascinated by people who know what to do in really difficult situations.

When I started to dig into the world of nurses, I recognized a few things right away. They are different. They see the human being first. They are trained, conditioned, born to find the avenue into understanding others so that they can do their work. That work is to heal and make someone feel better - no matter who they are, what their ethnic background is, what political party they belong to, what crime they have committed. This gives them a special set of tools - they are full of tolerance and understanding, compassion and love. And it's beautiful.

I've now met and interviewed 110 of some of the best nurses in this country. Nurses dealing with issues that affect us all: poverty, war, end of life, a health care system that is more of a disease management system, drug abuse, family abuse, life and death. I feel almost embarrassed to have a small minded thought when in the company of nurses. Nurses understand humanity in a way that no one else does.

We live in a time that is highly polarized. There is a chasm between us in this country as we grow ever more extreme in our beliefs. I think we have forgotten about the cycle of life and how precious our time here on earth is. We are so focused on youth - we don't know how to die - and we certainly aren't interested in aging gracefully. I met a nurse who said it right - "Americans think that death is optional."

It's true—we are all going to die. It's so important to leave a mark here. I don't want to get to the end and think, "damn, I didn't do enough." So I'm always searching for that. Nurses make a difference every single day. Mother Teresa's quotes about casting a stone across the water to create many ripples and doing small things with great love—that's what nurses are all about.

A CAROLYN JONES DOCUMENTARY

THE AMERICAN NURSE

HEALING AMERICA

Diving into the world of nurses has made my life brighter. I got a glimpse of the world through their eyes and it actually changed the way I think about things. I thought I knew how I felt about war, religion, coal mining, end of life. This journey into the world of nurses has been hugely transformative for me, kind of like having someone take me by my ankles and shake me upside down to change my perspective and show me how much I don't know. And that's a lot.

At the end of each of our lives, we will think about how we lived. Were we kind? How did we make others feel? These are the things that will matter.

I hope this film takes the viewer on that path, through the lens of a nurse, and opens a door to understanding not only those around us, but ourselves, and what wonders we are capable of.

Carolyn Jones
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