

Emily Dunning Barringer



Barringer, Emily Dunning. *Bowery to Bellevue*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1950.

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...AFTER SUPPER WE MADE THE EVENING ROUNDS, the staff telling me from time to time of my various duties as they presented themselves in the course of our trip through the wards. Finally we were standing in a group in the hall when the house surgeon turned to me and said casually, "Dr. Dunning, you are on duty tonight for the routine catheterizations in the male surgical ward." I could not quite believe my ears and looked first at him then at the other members of the staff. There must be some mistake. Could it be possible that the first night they would assign me to this duty in the male ward? I felt as though a stick of dynamite with a burning, sputtering fuse had been placed in my hands. The situation had all the essence of a complete world revolution in it. Since the beginning of time men, and men alone, had dealt with the afflictions and diseases, instrumentation and surgery of the male sex organs. The earliest and most urgent service has been the relieving of a full bladder by catheterization. Difficulty of urination or total inability to void is peculiarly an affliction of males. This condition is painful and serious, and requires besides delicate instrumentation a complete confidence on the part of the patient in his physician. It is one of the most intimate of all medical ministrations....

...The blood pounded through my head, as I asked myself, "but how can I accomplish it, this first night when everything is new and strange and I do not know the patients, or the equipment with which I must work?" Suddenly, every nerve in my body began to tingle and a second conviction equally strong came to me. "Of course I can do it, I have been trained, I know how." ...I began

to regain my self control..."Very well, Sir." I remember turning to the orderly who had been assigned to me, and sizing him up carefully-instinctively I felt I could rely on him-I asked, "Martin, have you the catheters, the rubber gloves, and everything that we shall need in good condition?" He assured me that we had, and we proceeded down the hall to the male ward, and I could well imagine, to the utter amazement of those young doctors left standing sheepishly together....

...With my new-found mental calm, I amazed myself and Martin, I am sure. We went from bed to bed with a portable screen and rolling instrument table. I ordered these placed and asked for instruments as casually as if I had been doing this work for years. Agility and skill seemed to flow into my fingers that night. Swiftly one after another, the men were made comfortable, and I passed on to the next patient with only one thought on my mind: "Would I get through, could I keep up this tremendous pace?" ...Martin and I had finished our last case, and the patients had maintained a profound and respectful silence! The lights were turned down and the weary men left to rest. I had learned one great lesson that night, and that is that sex does not matter when one is sick and in pain; the one who can bring the greatest help and skill is the one who is wanted the most. The problem of the male patients was solved for me that night.

One of the greatest problems had been solved, ...but as I finally tucked into bed, a big question permeated my mind, "What is the staff going to do to me tomorrow?" (115-118)

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Activities

Writing/ Problem Solving, Reasoning and Creative Thinking

- Write a paragraph describing something you were very nervous about doing. What was it? What made the task difficult?

Reading/ Speaking, Listening, Viewing

- Read the passage from Dr. Barringer's autobiography, *Bowery to Bellevue*. Describe Dr. Barringer's first night in the hospital. What was the most difficult part of the experience for her? What were her biggest concerns? How was she feeling by the end of her shift?
- Look carefully at the photograph of Dr. Barringer. Describe how she looks. What is she wearing? What do you think she was feeling/thinking about when the photograph was taken?

Quantifying/Working Independently and Collaboratively/Learning Resources/IT

- Individually or in a group, research the medical profession over the past 50 years. Ask how many doctors were female fifty years ago – how many forty years ago, and so on to the present day. Create a graph to show the results.