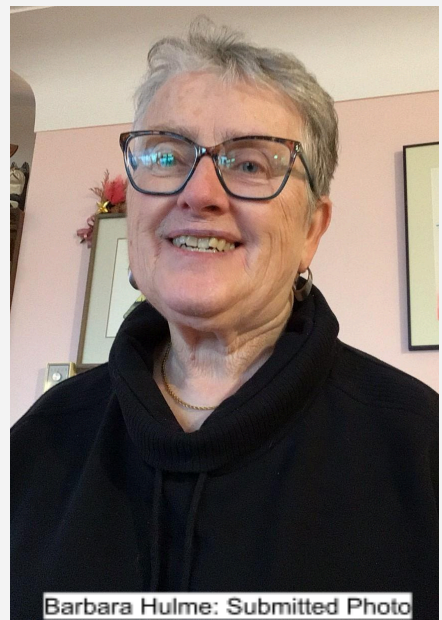


2024

Indigenous Nurses Day

Barbara Hulme: A Métis military nurse

Written By: Eagle Andersen



Barbara Hulme: Submitted Photo

On April 10th, 2024 we recognize all Indigenous Nurses who have accomplished significant feats in their field. Following a decorated career as a military nurse, Barb Hulme has dedicated much of her retirement to the Metis community.

Barbara Hulme, now an elder representing several Métis organizations across British Columbia, had an accomplished career as a military nurse in numerous provinces, earning several awards along the way while maintaining a focus on mental health and teamwork.

Hulme grew up in the quiet Manitoban community of Selkirk, along the banks of the historic Red River.

“Selkirk... was a community that was very much full of what you could identify as, primarily, I’d say Scottish Métis,” Hulme recalled. “It didn’t matter where in the street you might go, you were gonna meet a relative.”

As a young girl, she was extremely close with her cousins and credited her grandmother and familial support for the success of her and her cousins.

“My Métis grandmother... wanted to ensure that her children and grandchildren were able to do better than the circumstances that she and her age grew up in.”

She became the first in her family to receive post-secondary education, and eventually earn a university degree. Her younger cousins would soon follow suit.

Her aunt, a military nurse, and her father both served in World War II. The nursing career, combined with her father’s frequent hospital visits due to shell shock from the war made her comfortable in a healthcare setting. At 17 years old, Hulme decided to try nursing.

While in nursing school, she formed bonds and learned lessons that would last a lifetime.

“The way our school of nursing worked, was a very close-knit team environment,” Hulme said.

Over half a century has passed since graduation, but she and her classmates make sure they meet up every five years to visit each other.

“Sometimes they come out here [to B.C.], we’ve gone to Saskatchewan, we’ve gone to Alberta, we’ve gone to Ontario... It’s like a sister network,” Hulme said, explaining that this helped cement teamwork as a core principle for the rest of her life. “The concept of working within a team is something that I could almost say I grew up in.”

A military nurse

Just like her aunt, she eventually took the military route.

“I graduated from nursing in 1968 from the Victoria General Hospital in Winnipeg,” Hulme said. “My first job was as a general duty nurse at Deer Lodge, it was a military hospital ... for veterans of the Second World War and members of the Canadian [Armed] Forces. After working at that job, I joined the military in 1969.”

This career took her all over the country serving in New Brunswick, Manitoba, Ontario and eventually British Columbia.

“I ended up on the cover of the Canadian Nurse magazine. All dressed up in safety gear.”

Hulme was photographed as the magazine publisher was highlighting a dedicated tropical medicine room at the Ontario-based National Defence Medical Centre.

“Because we sent military members around the world... [we had] a space in case any member came back with a tropical disease of some kind, that might’ve been quite infectious.”

“Only if you knew me, would you know it was me. Because all you see is somebody hooded up in an interesting piece of gear,” Hulme recalled with a chuckle. “You were really only seeing my eyes and my glasses.”

In addition to gracing the cover of a magazine, Hulme earned numerous awards throughout her life. These include a Queen’s Jubilee Medal and a BC Achievement Award. One of her biggest honours professionally was reaching the rank of Major which is rare for a nurse.

“I certainly did not know it was coming,” Hulme said on becoming a Major. “To reach the rank of major within the nurse field in the military was an accomplishment.”

This promotion was warranted as she served effectively throughout her career. Her professional success was once again attributed to her willingness to work together.

“It didn’t matter who you were, the best way to accomplish something with the best outcomes was always to work as a team.”

Along with valuing teamwork and cooperative leadership, Hulme said that “recognizing mental health and its role in maintaining wellness” has been a core value for her professionally and personally.

“[My father] came home shell shocked, which today we identify as PTSD,” Hulme said. “The importance of mental health has always been something high on my list.”

Life after nursing

Throughout the last few decades, Hulme has spent time advocating for representing the Métis community where she has noticed changes.

“During my time in military... the identification of Indigenous service persons was not recognized at all.”

It took until 1994 for the Defence Indigenous Advisory Group (DIAG) to be created which was near the end of Hulme’s tenure in the armed forces.

“Some of their cultural ways of being and traditions were being looked at. Prior to that, there was nothing of that sort.” Hulme said on what the DIAG’s purpose was. “I retired in 1996.”

Hulme has always been an avid supporter and participant in Indigenous Veterans Day, and she says that Indigenous Nurses Day also has an important role to play.

“In the Second World War and the like, some of our Indigenous military members were needed by the war effort for their skill, their expertise, [and] their knowledge... it’s worthwhile to recognize that. And in the same way, if we’re talking about Indigenous nurses, to now recognize all of the hard work that these nurses are doing to support people within their communities.”

She does feel as though Indigenous healthcare will need to continue to grow.

“We’ve got a lot of work to do... you have to crawl, you take one step forward, you fall down, you pick yourself up and you carry on.”

Now on Vancouver Island, Hulme’s work within her community has been extensive

On top of helping found the Métis Nation Greater Victoria, she is also a member of the Métis Veterans of British Columbia, the Métis Nation of British Columbia, the Elders Council for School District 61, and the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society. In addition to all of this, she serves as an elder at the University of Victoria in a variety of roles.

“The only way that Métis voices are going to be heard [is] if we step up to the table when we’re asked.”

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