Grandma and Granddaughter Celebrate Graduation 60 years apart

When Jessica Andresen of Norwalk earned her LPN certificate, her grandmother, Barbara Andresen gave her the nursing cap she wore at her own graduation in 1952, and the scissors that she used as a nurse throughout her 54-year career.

Her grandmother completed that gift recently at the St. Vincent’s College commencement ceremony, when she presented Jessica with the nursing pin from her beloved Class of 1952 of St. Vincent’s Hospital School of Nursing.

Grandmother and granddaughter have a very special bond beyond graduating 60 years apart from St. Vincent’s nursing program. “I’m so proud of her and what she has achieved she really persisted in her education and she was determined to complete her schooling. And it’s just great that we’re both going to be alumni of the same school.”

Twenty-six year old Jessica says her grandma has always been an inspiration to her because of her work as a nurse and her great love for the family.

“I knew I wanted a healthcare career, but I struggled at first and thought of giving up. One thing that kept me going was remembering that my grandmother went through the same thing. It made me feel like we were doing it together, and we both knew how hard it was to get there. I know it means a lot to her that I’m following in her footsteps.”

Barbara, who just turned 81, and her husband, a retired SNET employee, moved to New Hampshire seven years ago and their only regret is they don’t see their grandchildren enough. They’ve been married 58 years and look back on a good life in Norwalk, where they were also parishioners at St. Thomas the Apostle Church and later St. Matthew Parish.

Barbara worked as a nurse in Fairfield County until she retired at the age of 75, after serving at St. Vincent’s Medical Center in Bridgeport, St. Joseph Hospital in Stamford, and in group practice settings.

When she and Jessica talk about nursing, they often laugh about the differences in education between 1952 and 2012.

“Grandma was telling me how they worked year round and never had a vacation. They ate and slept and breathed nursing, and the Nuns watched like hawks,” says Jessica, who works with technology and computers that were unthinkable in 1952.

“Medicine is wonderful these days. There are so many cures for everything and hopefully even more to come. But I tell Jessica that with all the technical knowledge, patients still need your compassion.”
After graduation, Jessica would love to go into Emergency Department nursing but, knows she has to earn her stripes by working on a medical-surgical floor for a couple of years and gaining experience. She hopes to find a position at St. Vincent’s.

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