While attending the International Academy of Nursing Editors meeting in London, England, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit the Florence Nightingale Museum. A guided tour was provided as part of the pre-conference festivities. I have been told by friends who visited the Nightingale Museum that I should not miss it. I am so happy that I did not!

Like most nurses, I had studied the life of Florence Nightingale and the Nightingale Model of Nursing during my nursing education. It always seemed that the persons teaching the courses were as old as I imagined Florence Nightingale carrying her lamp in the Crimean War. I joked with fellow students about her rumored syphilis. My visit to the museum squelched all of those unkind thoughts and brought about a new admiration for Florence Nightingale.

Florence Nightingale was born into a very wealthy English family. Her family homes were large manor houses in Derbyshire (in summer) and Hampshire (in winter) that boasted as many as 15 bedrooms. She was a shy and serious child preferring solitary pursuits. Under her father’s guidance, Florence developed the ability to grasp and analyze matters of immense complexity and to present her findings in a succinct and lucid style. Along with her family, Florence made a 2-year “grand tour” through France, Italy, and Switzerland. She made notes on the scenery, art, and architecture as well as the laws and social conditions of countries they visited. She later spent 2 years in Rome and another 2 years traveling throughout Egypt, Greece, and Germany.

The Call to Serve

Despite the privileges of growing up in a wealthy family, Florence heeded the call to serve others. After many arguments, discussions, and the reluctant consent of her family, she spent 3 months training in the nurses’ school in Kaiserswerth, Germany. She eventually convinced her father to give her an indepen-

dent allowance so that she could embark on her nursing career. During the Crimean War, she became known as the “ministering angel.” Her fame was also noted for her reforms of the military hospital system, as well as public sanitation and many other environmental factors. These reforms resulted in her invitation to Windsor Castle for meetings with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Florence refused the Queen’s invitation to live in an apartment provided for her at Kensington Palace because it would require her to live too far from where she could do the most good. Instead she lived at No. 10 South Street from 1865 until her death over 45 years later. Many of those years were spent fighting for public policy reform related to health, illness, the environment, and quality of life of all persons.

Florence also established the Nightingale Training School for Nurses. Her book, Notes on Nursing was published in 1860. The model of her school was used to establish other schools in London, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Sydney, and Philadelphia. She noted that hospitals were places where the sick poor could be nursed but that the ultimate object was to nurse all sick at home — the first community nursing! She was also instrumental in establishing a training school for midwives in King’s College Hospital. Miss Nightingale was a prolific writer. She published over 200 articles and books. She also wrote over 13,000 letters as she asked for funds to support her schools and reforms.

I was surprised at how moved I was to see the photographs of her large childhood homes, her fine jewelry and elegant clothing, her furniture, and her honors and awards. I viewed her handwritten correspondence and notes from her travels as a child, her time in the Crimea, the Nightingale Training School, and hospital reform. I walked silently through the museum absorbing the exhibits and reading about various events in her life. Afterward, I talked with

continued on page 262
Editorial
continued from page 214

my colleagues about how much we enjoyed visiting the museum and could have spent more time there. My colleagues and I were impressed with the comfortable lifestyle she gave up in order to heed her call to serve. Although she is probably best known for her model of nursing and her schools of nursing, Florence Nightingale was more of an advocate for public policy reform regarding the health and environment of all people. She may never get the credit she deserves for her sacrifices, but I now hold her with utmost respect and admiration. Against all odds, she fought for what she believed in and knew to be necessary to improve the quality of life for others. I’d love to hear from you about your past, present, or future efforts for public policy reform regarding the health and environment for all people. As nurses we can carry on with that fine tradition!

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Editor