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Shenandoah Memorial Hospital Intensive Care Unit Registered Nurse Ann Richman, left, looks at one of the 101 stories in the book, "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Inspiration for Nurses," that Wardensville, West Virginia, resident Jill Burns, right, wrote about her ICU experience in 2012. Burns gave Richman a copy of the book in thanks for helping dispel her fear of the hospital ICU.

'Inspiration for Nurses'

Patient recalls hospital experience worth writing about

By Josette Keelor

WOODSTOCK — Jill Burns' husband knows hospitals where he felt he had to protect his loved ones from in-patient staff. So three years ago, when Woodstock Memorial Hospital wanted to admit his wife to the intensive care unit, the Wardensville, West Virginia, resident was nervous. He and his wife expected the worst — instead, they received the best.

"[There's] a lot of love going on," David Burns said. "And that's what you want to see when you have a loved one and [they are] scared to death. You feel

like people give a hoot."

Jill Burns, 59, wrote of the experience for the recently published "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Inspiration for Nurses," by Amy Newmark and LeAnn Thieman. Then she brought copies to the nurses she called "angels" in a short story titled "Not ICU!"

"Who would ever have thought I'd be teary-eyed leaving the ICU?" she recalled in the book, published in paperback July 21.

The story began nearly 25 years ago, before she and her husband moved to West Virginia and she had

her first ICU visit.

"[It] was horrible. It was a dark, depressing place," she said. "It was very cold."

Worse, a nurse told her at the time the hospital kept the unit that way to help preserve the sanity of those who work there. It helped numb them from all the sadness and pain.

"That terrified me," Jill Burns recalled. So in October 2013, when she awakened at night with extreme chest pains and her husband drove her to Woodstock, she fought the idea of staying in another ICU.

But this time was

different.

"The nurses were talking to me like I was a person," she said.

Her husband called the experience "party time." His wife recalled looking at photographs of the pets one of her nurses had adopted.

For the couple, it was a breath of fresh air, but for April McClain, director of inpatient nursing, it was business as usual.

"It's what we do, so it feels great that it makes a difference," she said.

Approaching 18 years with the hospital, she said, "It's always been this way here."

Registered Nurse Ann Richman, who worked the night Jill Burns was admitted, has been there 15 years now and said many other staff members have been there just as long or longer.

It makes a work environment when the staff stick around awhile, she said. "It's almost like family."

Richman said she's never felt the way the nurses Jill Burns encountered in 1992 said they felt about their work.

"I can't imagine working in that type of environment," she said.

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Nursing requires caring and concern for patients and their loved ones, and explanations of conditions, hospital procedure and expectations for life after an illness or injury.

McClain said it's important for staff to be understanding and comforting to patients who might be scared, lonely, confused or in extreme pain.

"You're completely vulnerable when you're in the hospital, and particularly in the ICU," she said.

Jill Burns was admitted so her doctor could monitor her reaction to heart medication. Others in the 25-

bed acute inpatient units might have been very sick or there for observation. But instead of a dark, depressing place, she said, "It was a cheerful, warm place."

"You did it," she told McClain and Richman, who each held three signed books from Jill Burns for all the angels she met that night. "You guys did it. That's why there was a story to write."

Look for "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Inspiration for Nurses" online at <http://www.amazon.com>, or anywhere else books are sold.

*Contact staff writer
Josette Keelor at 540-465-
5137 ext. 176, or
jkeelor@nvdaily.com*