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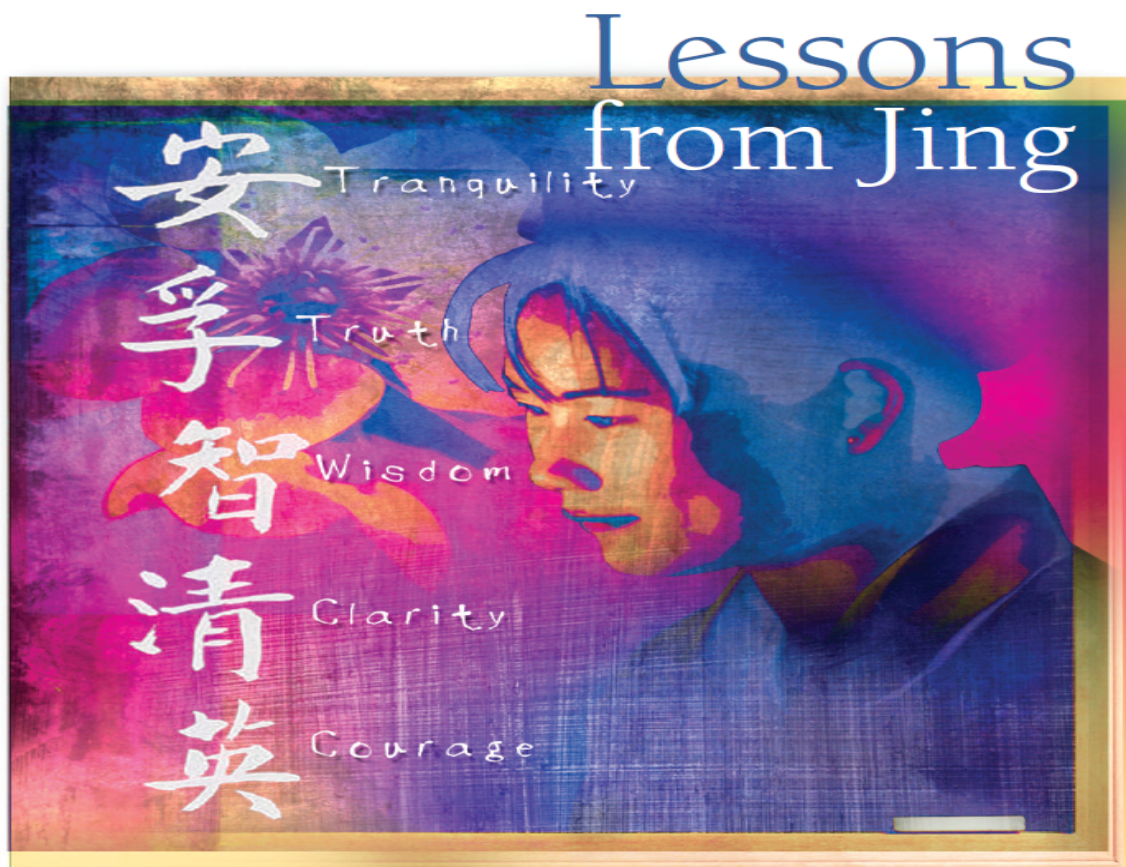


Lessons From Jing

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No Abstract

Johanson, Linda (2004) "Lessons From Jing" *Nursing* 34(11) pp. 52-53 Version of record available from Lippincott, Williams, & Wilkins. [ISSN: 0029-6457].



**My nursing student had been a surgeon in her native China.
Why did she fail her clinical rotation in nursing, I wondered?**

I APPROACHED the associate dean's office apprehensively, not knowing the reason for her summons. I was filled with dread: Was my teaching position being cut?

"We've got a problem with a clinical student," the dean announced. With those simple words, she relieved my worries about my job and introduced me to the story of Jing, a student who'd deeply touch my heart and mind during the next semester. Although I became Jing's instructor in the formal sense, it was Jing who taught me lessons about nursing that would enrich my practice for years to come.

The problem with Jing was that she'd failed her first adult health nursing clinical rotation. Jing was a native

of China, and the instructor had cited communication difficulties as one of her major shortcomings. The dean was reassigning Jing to my clinical group to repeat the course.

From surgeon to nurse

On the surface, this wasn't an unusual situation. What was unusual was that Jing was a physician who'd been a practicing surgeon in China. When her husband's career brought her to the United States, however, she couldn't obtain a license to practice medicine and various obstacles prevented her from entering an American medical school. So she opted to pursue

nursing instead and was accepted into our baccalaureate program.

I was astonished by Jing's refusal to give up. Despite language barriers, racial bias, and cultural hurdles, she was determined to continue her pursuit of a nursing degree. I couldn't wait to meet her.

First impressions

Jing came to my office before the clinical orientation to introduce herself. Standing demurely in the doorway, with her hands clasped together and eyes cast down, she appeared almost frail, like a porcelain doll. I invited her in and asked her to sit down. She was silent until I began to question her. Then she took her time to answer with careful, thoughtful responses.

As I'd soon discover, she approached every task with the same deliberation. I once asked her if she'd write my name in Chinese characters, expecting her to dash it off on the spot. I was surprised when she promised to have it for me in a few days. When she later produced the carefully drawn characters representing my name, she explained that the translation of a name requires careful consideration of the individual's personality.

Jing's personal style taught me the first of several lessons I'd learn from her.

• **Lesson 1: Don't rush. Think carefully before embarking on a task and keep silent unless you have something to say.** I suspected that Jing's style of careful deliberation was what her previous instructor perceived as a communication problem, because Jing's command of the English language was excellent. Her clinical paperwork was always detailed, precise, and carefully referenced. I wondered too if the instructor had misinterpreted Jing's thorough contemplation of questions as dullness or a lack of understanding. Thoughtful deliberation is a desirable characteristic, in my estimation. A hasty, inconsiderate response can never be retrieved.

• **Lesson 2: Question standard practices and always individualize your care.** One morning midway through the semester, I reminded all of my students to fill their patients' ice-water pitchers before leaving the unit at the end of their shift. Jing pulled me aside and quietly asked to speak with me. She said she'd been pondering something since the beginning of the school year: *Why do all patients get ice water, no matter what their condition?*

It was a great question that none of my students had ever asked before. Of course, to me providing ice water was standard practice. But Jing, educated in Eastern medicine, was accustomed to prescribing warm or cold fluids depending on the patient's condition. To her, treating everyone alike seemed strange.

I realized then that in the interest of efficiency or perhaps simply out of routine, we do tend to treat all

our patients alike. Many facets of our health care system, from standardized care plans to procedural protocols, encourage uniformity. But is that always in the patient's best interest?

Jing possessed the type of inquiring spirit that's at the heart of evidence-based practice. Just because something has always been done one way doesn't mean that's the best way. Jing always regarded each patient as unique and based her care on her assessment of that person's needs.

• **Lesson 3: Be humble and appreciate what you can learn from every situation.** When Jing was scheduled to rotate to the operating room (OR) for an observational experience, I felt almost apologetic. Most of the other students had never even seen an OR suite and eagerly anticipated this rotation. But Jing was already a skilled surgeon and the OR was very familiar to her. I wondered what she could learn and, more importantly, how she'd feel.

I needn't have worried. During our class discussion after her first OR session, Jing was the most animated I'd ever seen her. She was excited about seeing laparoscopic techniques that were new to her. When she shared her impressions of surgery in the United States compared with that in China, she had the attention of every student in the group.

I would have understood if Jing had been bitter about her situation. Contrary to my expectations, though, she was never ostentatious, bored, or complacent. She was determined to learn all she could from every situation.

• **Lesson 4: Respect others and they'll respect you, no matter how different you may seem.** Jing didn't look or act like a typical university student. Her straight cotton skirts and thick, white bobby socks gave her an old-fashioned air. She kept her straight jet-black hair cut in a short, no-nonsense bob. She had no interest in the contemporary music or TV programs that the other students discussed.

But they all respected her. No one could help being impressed by her attitude. She always welcomed advice and even criticism. She was one of the hardest working students I've ever encountered.

Yes, Jing passed my clinical course. She also passed the NCLEX exam and became a successful RN. For a few years, I received Christmas cards from her. The last time I heard from her, she was practicing nursing in Texas.

Timeless lessons

Jing, I don't think I ever told you how much you meant to me, but the lessons you taught me that semester when I was your clinical instructor are timeless and still influence me today. 📖