

Continued from Page 9

could “dissect things without throwing up and was good at math,” she earned a nursing diploma from Methodist-Kahler School of Nursing in Rochester, Minn. She then received bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Washington, where she met Gary, a nuclear physicist.

Melodie worked as a nurse for several years as she followed her husband’s career. In 1982, she was asked to create a nursing program at Clatsop Community College. It was during that year she decided her love of the Pacific Ocean was real, and she vowed to return to the North Coast.

Her love for writing also was real, so Melodie eventually pursued a master’s degree in journalism and began writing books for nurses who wanted more from their careers. Her books segued into speaking engagements throughout the U.S. and in several countries.

Throughout her travels, Melodie always found time to scour antique stores, flea markets and garage sales, searching for mementos that depicted nurses and encouraged pride and productivity in nursing.

After she and Gary decided to make Cannon Beach their permanent home five years ago, she started the museum. It’s open 1 to 4 p.m. Saturdays during the summer and by appointment during the rest of the year (Contact information is on the website, pronurse.com). Admission is free.

‘A joy-filled, magical journey’

The South Hemlock Street house, once owned and operated as a gift shop by Cannon Beach resident Marlene Laws, was already in a commercial zone. Melodie, in her often contrary way of thinking, decided that since those interested in tourism were always trying to put “heads in beds,” she might have something unusual to attract tourists.

“Nurses are always trying to get heads out of beds,” she said, laughing.

Museum visitors include current nurses, retired nurses relatives or friends of nurses and those who never considered being a nurse. She has had as many as 25 people come through on a Saturday and as many during midweek; they stay from 10 minutes to three hours, sharing memories, glancing at the nursing kitsch, browsing the nursing books, or buying specially made nursing stickers and necklaces.

Comments in the guest book include the words “amazing,” “awesome” and “fascinating.” One visitor called the museum a “joy-filled, magical journey through nursing.”

Eventually, Melodie wants to share her museum with a larger community, by housing it in a university or even creating



LEFT: Melodie Chenevert points to a photo of Irene English Countryman, who directed the Methodist-Kahler School of Nursing in Rochester, Minn. from 1923-1938. Countryman eventually moved to Arch Cape. Chenevert, who also received her nursing diploma from Methodist-Kahler, displays Countryman’s nursing cape and caps. RIGHT: A painting showing a compassionate nurse bandaging a dog also involved in medical services is among the abundant artwork found in the Lost Art of Nursing Museum on South Hemlock Street.



a national nursing museum, possibly in Portland. “I would like to see the collection stay in the Northwest,” she said.


She worries that people will forget the time when nurses, like those in the historic posters and magazine covers, were celebrated and considered bold, noble and patriotic. She also worries that the mementos she has rescued over the years will once again be discarded.

Nursing arts

Most of all, Melodie, whose first

In addition to writing books for nurses seeking to further their careers, Melodie Chenevert also created coloring books for students interested in being nurses. The book has Spanish and French translations.

class in nursing school was called “nursing arts,” is concerned that the emphasis on nursing as an art as well as a science has been overlooked. That’s why a nursing museum is important, she added.

“I think there’s not much interest in history in general in this country,” she said. “With nurses, they’re so consumed by the here and now, they don’t think about their history or their future. They’re just trying to get through their shift.” 



PHOTOS BY NANCY MCCARTHY



A summer uniform for nursing cadets hangs in the Lost Art of Nursing. The U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps was established by Congress in 1943 to train women between the ages of 17 and 35 to be nurses and to ensure there were enough nurses in the nation during World War II. The program ended in 1948.