



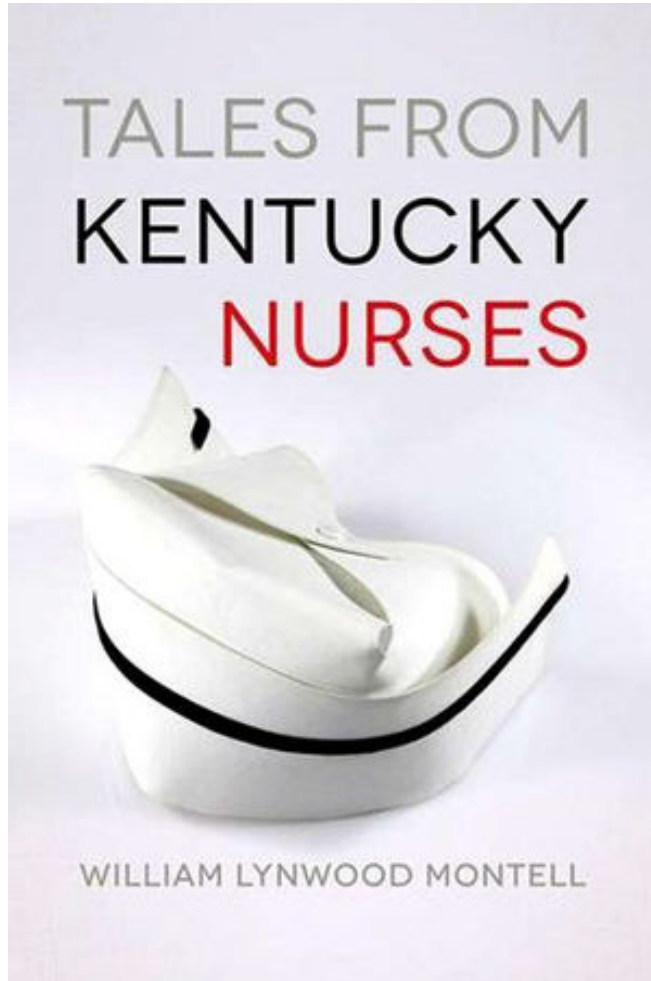
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# DAILY NEWS

## 'Kentucky Nurses' a great read

Posted: Sunday, March 22, 2015 2:00 am

*"Tales from Kentucky Nurses" by William Lynwood Montell. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015. 296 pages, \$24.95.*



“During midafternoon I made my rounds and went to a very ill gentleman with terminal cancer who was being cared for by a private duty nurse,” Evelyn Pearl Anderson, a retired nurse who lives in London, explains in “Cancer Patient’s Baptism,” one of the many inspirational vignettes in “Tales from Kentucky Nurses,” the latest offering from prolific Western Kentucky University historian and folklorist William Lynwood Montell.

“She told me that he had just accepted the Lord as savior and wanted to be baptized,” Anderson continues. “A pastor had been called to come, and the question was raised as to where this man wanted to be baptized. I went downstairs to the first floor behind the administrator’s office, where the only full bathroom in the hospital was located. ... I then took off my shoes and climbed into the tub. The three of us carefully lifted the patient into the tub, sitting him down on the step stool. It was from this position that the pastor was able to gently lower the patient into the baptismal waters.”

Having been raised in rural west Tennessee, where my family regularly worshipped at a small country Church of Christ, I could instantly identify with the significance of the story Anderson was describing to Montell. The book is filled with moving accounts of the experiences of dedicated health care providers from throughout this region. Like his other forays into the various occupations indigenous to this part of the country, “Tales from Kentucky Nurses” has a mesmerizing quality.

Montell is a master of this form of storytelling. His prose is focused intently on conveying meaning on multiple levels, and his literary style is ideally suited for a wide audience. Those who call Kentucky home will no doubt relate to these stories in a more familiar sense, while those less versed in our way of life will achieve a glimpse into what it means to be from this area. Certainly, future generations will appreciate the time and effort the author has taken to accentuate and preserve the cultural nuances defining a particular era and its inhabitants.

“Tales from Kentucky Nurses” consists of 11 chapters sandwiched between an Introduction and Conclusion. In this gracefully captivating volume, Montell brings together 48 storytellers who provide a wide array of intuitively appealing narratives all built around his central premise. Moreover, I found the brief biographies of the various contributors included at the end of the main text to be an especially useful and endearing feature. Several times as I was reading the anecdotes I would flip to the back of the book to find out more about the person who was describing his or her personal adventures.

It was difficult to decide which chapters I most enjoyed simply because I found the entire primer so exhilarating. And although there is a definite historical flow to the tales as they cascade from beginning to end, each section of the narrative is organized more thematically than chronologically. Conceptually, the subject matter covered runs the entire gauntlet from heartbreaking to the bizarre; from the deadly serious to the sublimely hilarious. For instance, consider “Weird Happenings,” a short contribution from Chesa Montgomery, a Western Kentucky University graduate who served as a nurse at The Medical Center as well as at TriStar Greenview Regional Hospital.

“A patient claiming to be Elvis’ sister came to the emergency room about 2 a.m. with her tape recorder, attempting to sing, dance, rolling on the floor and making animal screeching noises,” Montgomery writes. “We placed her in a room near the nurses’ station to observe her next show while trying to diagnose an ‘emergency’ illness, to no avail. She promptly was assisted and discharged.”

“It definitely was a full-moon night when the next call came in due to a head and neck injury,” she continues. “A dancer/stripper was brought in from a local nightclub after falling off her pole on her head, claiming that the pole had been sabotaged. Actually, her pole had been greased!”

Montell is a professor emeritus of folk studies at WKU, where he taught from 1969 to 1999. He has published more than 20 books, including “Haunted Houses and Family Ghosts of Kentucky,” “Killings: Folk Justice in the Upper South,” “Singing the Glory Down: Amateur Gospel Music in South Central Kentucky,” “Tales from Kentucky Lawyers,” “Tales from Kentucky Sheriffs” and “Reminiscences and Reflections: African Americans in the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland Since the Civil War,” which he wrote with Wali Kharif.

“My central purpose with this book is to provide personal memories of nurses, who willingly shared their feelings about the importance of nurses and doctors in the minds and hearts of people throughout the commonwealth of Kentucky,” Montell reflects nears the conclusion of the digest. “The bountiful stories in this book describe what life, times, medications and medical services were all about in early times and today. Nurses also expressed the importance of family and community wellness across the years.”

It is obvious Montell derives a great deal of satisfaction from his work; you can almost feel the authenticity and passion permeating each page of this labor of love. As was the case with “Haunted Houses and Family Ghosts of Kentucky,” the last book I reviewed by this immensely talented and creative writer, I had difficulty putting it aside when it was way past my normal bedtime. Several times I would tell myself “just one more story” only to realize later an hour had passed since I made that commitment.

Needless to say, I am a huge fan of Montell’s work in general and this release in particular. Everyone should rush out and pick up a copy, this afternoon if possible. I can’t think of a better way to spend a Sunday night.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.