

Surprise “Pinning” by Grandmother at St. Luke’s Nursing Graduation

By Sam Kennedy

BETHLEHEM - Rachael Martin’s graduation from St. Luke’s School of Nursing (SON) took a surprising and heartwarming turn when the 23-year-old’s grandmother — herself a 1958 SON graduate — rose to her feet to join in the traditional “pinning” ceremony.

Pinning is the symbolic ceremony of welcoming graduating nurses to the caring profession, which has been deemed the most trusted in the world. St. Luke’s SON held graduation on the evening of December 14.

Unknown to Rachael, a 2018 Palisades High School graduate who lives in Riegelsville, her mother, Becky Martin, and grandmother, Peggy Hoffman, were planning to surprise Rachael when she received her School of Nursing pin.

Her grandmother, Peggy Hoffman, is a 1958 graduate of St. Luke’s School of Nursing. For several years before starting a family, she had worked and taught nursing students at the St. Luke’s Bethlehem hospital and at Northampton Community College.

Rachael considers her grandmother her role model. “She’s has always been very important to me and influenced me to become a nurse,” said Rachael, who has worked as a patient care assistant in the emergency department at St. Luke’s Anderson Campus and plans to start in the nurse internship program there in January.

“I had mentioned to my family how neat it would be if my grandmother could pin me, considering she is an alumna of the School of Nursing,” recalls Rachael, “but I didn’t think further into the idea.” This wish set into motion a scheme hatched by her mother and grandmother.

As the pinning got underway at Nitschmann Middle School in Bethlehem, each of the 52 graduating nurses climbed up the steps to the center of the stage to be pinned by Alyssa Villegas, MSN, one of their instructors. All eyes were on each student on the most important day of their educational journey.

When it was Rachael’s turn to have her St. Luke’s School of Nursing pin attached to the collar of her uniform, Villegas surprised her.

“She told me ‘You’re going to give this pin to the woman standing down there,’ pointing to Rachael’s grandmother, who was standing at the bottom of the stage. So focused on the ceremony, Rachael hadn’t seen her family in front of the auditorium.

There, at the foot of the stage, were her mother, grandmother and Rachael’s Aunt Janine Harris, a nurse anesthetist who came to the ceremony from her home in Colorado, waiting for Rachael with big smiles.

“It was such as surprise!” she recalls.

When Rachael realized what was about to take place, “I was hysterical!”

Hoffman pinned her granddaughter, gave her a hug and kiss, and the audience erupted in applause.

“I cried,” said Rachael. “My grandmother cried, and I think the entire audience cried!”

The surprise pinning was the emotional high point for Rachael and her family--and quite possibly for everyone there. In that memorable moment, the nursing history in that family was extended to another generation who got her start at St. Luke’s School of Nursing, the longest continuously operating nursing school in the country.



Photo caption: Rachael Martin (right) is pinned by her grandmother, Peggy Hoffman (left), 1958 St. Luke’s School of Nursing grad, with help from Rachael’s aunt, Janine Harris, also a nurse.

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