

Sacrificing for Others during the Pandemic*

A Nurse Tells her Story

Bethie Jean Merci

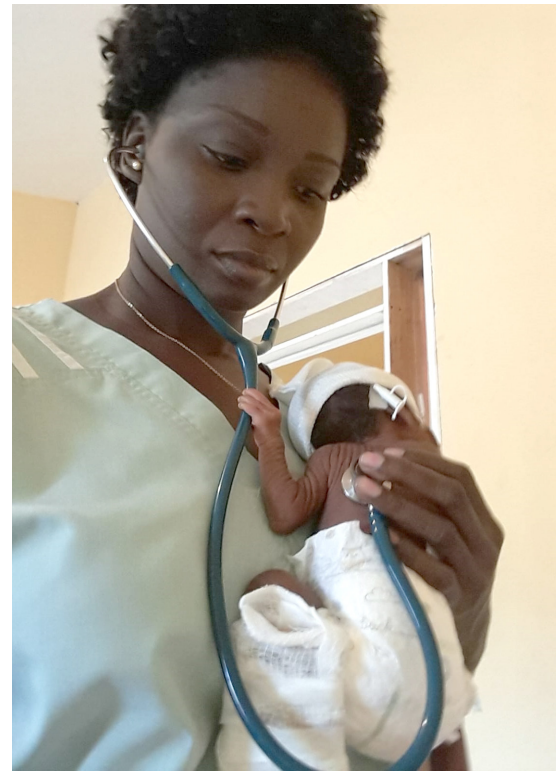
BEFORE YOU READ: Think about the words *pre-mature* and *malnutrition*. What do the roots and the prefixes mean? Have you heard of Plumpy’Nut? If not, look it up.

I am from Haiti. In my county, I was a nurse. Before the pandemic, I worked in a clinic where we treated cases of *malnutrition* and cared for *premature* babies. The children we treated were in critical condition. A family can have 12 children, the majority of whom are malnourished. In the nutritional program, we gave milk, rice, and Plumpy’Nut, depending on the age and the level of malnutrition. We also gave medical care to the children.

When the Covid-19 pandemic came to Haiti, the head of the clinic sent a message to the staff.



These are some of the little babies I cared for who were premature and malnourished.



I am listening to the baby’s lungs. She was premature and her lungs were not fully developed yet.

“Sorry to announce that because of the Covid-19, you cannot wear your own clothes. Therefore, we will be deducting 15% of your pay to buy new nursing clothes for the staff.”

The message continued: “Unfortunately, some of our funders have died. We have to find other funders. We don’t know when you can have your pay. If you want to stay with us, it is okay, but if you want to leave, no problem.”

All of us on the staff remained because it was hard to find a job, and the community really needed us at the clinic. I remember once when the entire staff went on vacation, we had to close the clinic for two weeks. Several children in the nutritional program died during that time. Remembering this, we decided to stay.

However, it was difficult for the staff and families because we had to deal with drug and food shortages. In addition, the number of children increased because other clinics and hospitals

* Two versions of this article are available: advanced intermediate (pp. 4-5) and beginner (p. 6).



In this picture, I am taking the baby's temperature because he was sick.

closed due to the pandemic. The majority of the children were in critical condition. I could not leave them with their parents.

Our schedules changed as well. We often worked 24-hour shifts. We were all exhausted. When I had to eat, I asked another nurse to watch my patients. Sometimes, it was difficult to take a break. The emergencies came at any time, and I could not delay the treatment, especially for those who needed oxygen. Sometimes, I took a nap on a chair in the room, other times, it was not possible. When I got home after a long shift, the only thing I could do was sleep. I did not have enough energy to take a shower or to eat.

Nevertheless, I loved my job. The well-being of the children was my priority. However, due to the long hours spent in the clinic, I had to find someone to help me with my two school-age children, who were in remote school because of the pandemic. Fortunately, I found a wonderful adolescent who needed help. I opened our home

to her. I taught her how to cook, to take care of the children and the house. When I had to come to the U.S., she was the trusted person, who stayed behind to care for my family.

This has been a difficult time, but we were able to continue helping these children at the clinic. We did it! The clinic is still open and helping children to this day.

Bethie Jean Merci is from Haiti where she worked as a nurse with Doctors Without Borders. She is a student at the Center for New Americans in Northampton, MA. She came to the United States in the middle of the pandemic, and she plans to continue her studies to become a registered nurse in the U.S.



AFTER YOU READ:

1. What are some of the ways the author made sacrifices during the pandemic? Be specific.
2. Who helped her so that she could help others?
3. Read more articles about nursing and explore career pathways in healthcare. See the box below.

Explore a Career in Nursing

We put these materials into **one packet** to help you explore a career in nursing.

- Sidonie Gbazale, a student from Rhode Island, describes how she got her nursing degree in the U.S.: "From Impossible Journey to Successful Career."
- Hoai Do, a student in Arkansas, worked as a nurse in her home country: "My Beautiful White Blouse."

Plus: sample career pathways in the field of health care.

Find more career exploration activities under "Extras" for **Issue #53**.