

## Catherine Coverston

*A.S. in Nursing – Brigham Young University -- 1969*

*B.S. in Nursing -- Excelsior College -- 1987*

*M.S. in Nursing – Medical College of Georgia – 1989*

*Ph. D. in Nursing – University of Utah -- 2001*

Catherine Coverston knew her brother was a genius way before the car fell on him. Everybody said he was. Irwin was five years younger than she was, but he was a *bona fide* genius, with an IQ in the high 180s. They grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, in the 1950s, and their dad was an auto mechanic who ran a service station. Catherine's mom was a secretary who had gone to college during one of the years that her dad had fought overseas in World War II, but he had never been to college at all. They were hard workers, and they expected the same of their kids: Catherine started keeping the books for her dad's business when she was 12, going to the service station directly from junior high and learning quickly by making a lot of mistakes. Irwin started working there when he was 12, too, learning to fix cars.

When Catherine was a senior in high school, she had decided she wanted to be an English teacher. That was one of the three professions for women that had her parents' seal of approval – teacher, nurse, or secretary, like her mom. Irwin, on the other hand, being a genius, already had their okay to attend any college for anything. That was simply reality in Catherine's family. But one afternoon in June, 1966, when school was almost done for the year, a car whose brakes had failed rammed into the service station, hit the lift, and dislodged the car that Irwin was working under.

Irwin spent most of that summer in an intensive care unit, where only his parents could see him. Finally, near the end of August, they moved him to a regular hospital room and Catherine got to visit. As she walked down the hallway toward his room, she had what she terms a spiritual confirmation. Being a nurse had never even occurred to Catherine before, but the certainty that it would be her life arrived for her in that moment. After her visit, she

went immediately over to Phoenix College, where she was enrolled for that Fall, and switched her Associate's degree track to nursing.

Catherine transferred to Brigham Young University the next year to finish her A.S. in Nursing, and she met her husband there, too. He enlisted in the military right after college, and they were sent to Germany. In the next ten years, Catherine had four children, and they started moving – Germany to Utah to California to Arizona to Germany to Georgia – and she was never in one place long enough to finish another degree. Between raising her kids and picking up nursing shifts and taking a course here and there, there never seemed to be enough time for everything, and her education always got shoved to the back burner.

In 1985, when they ended up in Georgia, it seemed like the perfect chance for her: there was a university with a baccalaureate nursing program right there. Unfortunately, the university wouldn't accept Catherine's science courses from other schools. She almost gave up. "The idea of having to repeat four or five classes of sciences before I could even start my nursing program was overwhelming," Catherine explains. "I remembered somebody had talked to me about this program at Excelsior College, so I went to the post to find out about it. I quickly became convinced that it was something I could do in the time frame that I had. But I had not been in school for a long time, and I had a lot of insecurities. I grew up with this genius brother and I just didn't know if I had the intellectual ability to do it. I spent a lot of time wondering whether I would be able to pass the exams or not."

So Catherine went into high gear. She was working in Labor and Delivery at the Medical College of Georgia Hospital, and for a few months her patients got the most thorough exams of their lives. When she didn't have patients, Catherine practiced on colleagues. "I studied for the exams for about a year, and I was just so chicken to go and take them that I kept putting it off. Finally, I gathered my courage and said, *You're just going to go take the exams – the worst thing that can happen is that you'll fail them and you'll have to take them*

*again*. So that's what I did, and I passed them all." Her employer even reimbursed her for the tuition payments. After that, Catherine was off and running – her B.S from Excelsior in 1987, then her Master's in Nursing from there two years later as well, and finally her Ph. D. from the University of Utah in 2001.

Early in her nursing career, Catherine was told that her nursing skills would bless people throughout the world, and she wondered at various times how that could come true. Was it when she taught pre-natal classes to military wives in Germany, or when she cared for international patients after she returned to the States, or when she taught foreign students as an Associate Professor in Nursing at BYU? None of them seemed to fit the blessing she had in mind.

Then, early in 2000, the nursing program at BYU received a call from a hospital in Argentina, asking if someone could bring student nurses to help train nurses in poverty-stricken Tucuman Province. Now that was more like it -- Catherine knew a blessing when she heard one. Since then, she has brought students to Argentina almost every year, starting early in May, and staying for six weeks to not only help train nurses in a public hospital there that delivers 14,000 infants a year, but also to conduct cooperative research and implement new natal programs. "They have med students to do the deliveries, but the women essentially get no nursing care while they're in labor," Catherine reveals. "One of the things about which I am most proud is that they have now decided to hire nurses for their labor area, and that's based on the experiences they've had when we're there."

Catherine believes none of this would have happened without Excelsior. "It really did change my life and the lives of many other people. You know, I still have the vision in my mind of walking into that testing center in Georgia to take those first tests – yes, I was frightened – but I see walking through that door to take those exams as the doorway to my future, and just an amazing, amazing moment in my life."