

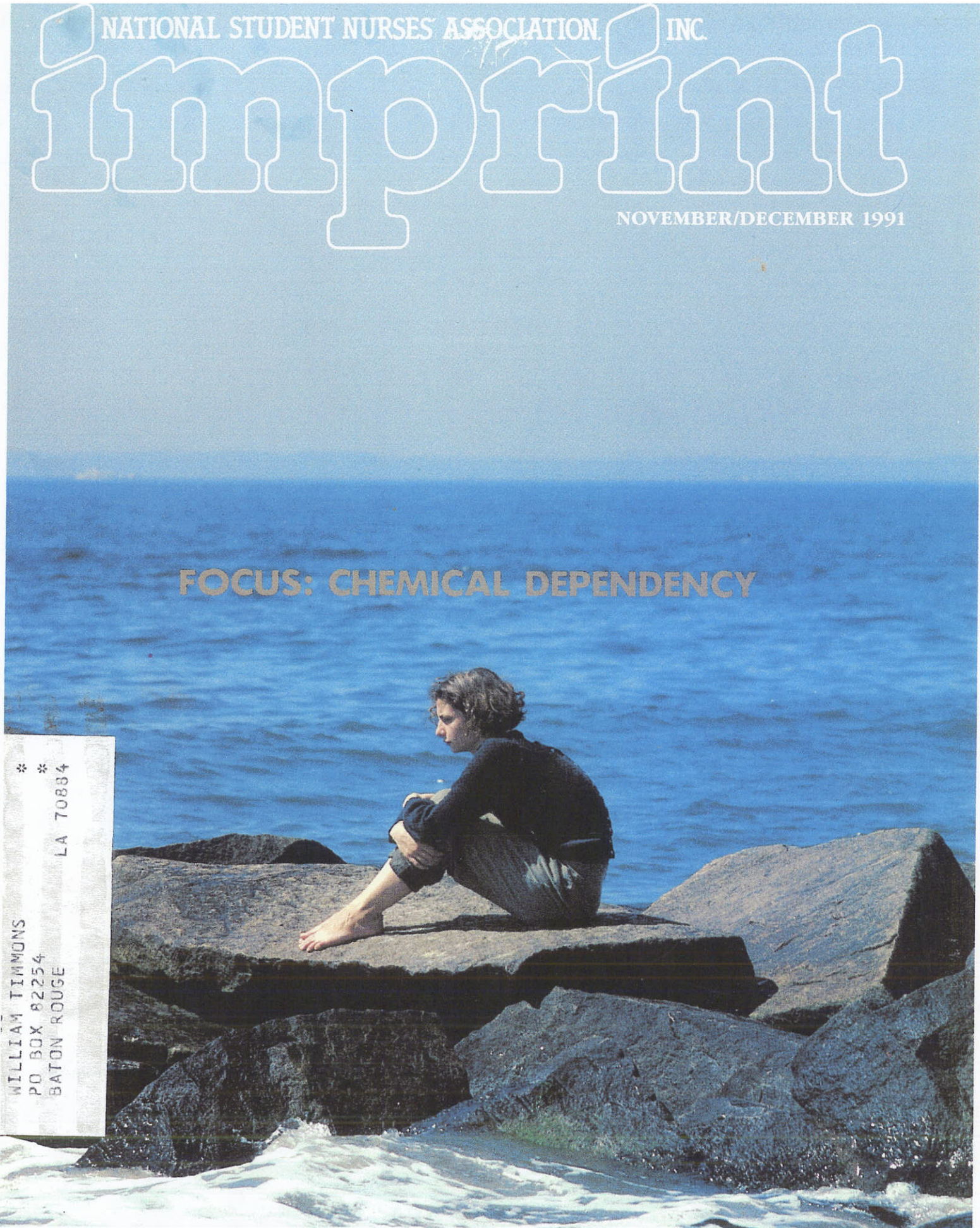
NATIONAL STUDENT NURSES ASSOCIATION, INC.

imprint

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1991

FOCUS: CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY

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“WHY I CHOSE NURSING AS A CAREER”

NSNA/JOHNSON & JOHNSON CONSUMER PRODUCTS ESSAY CONTEST — 2nd PLACE WINNER

by William A. Timmons

The whine of the aircraft's hydraulic system became louder as the cargo doors closed. As the doors shut, the soft German twilight slowly disappeared. I shut off the hydraulic system and quickly engaged the manual locks securing the doors. I made my way forward, scanning the cargo as I went. The huge C-141B “Starlifter” was loaded with ten pallets of ammunition destined for a naval base in the Mediterranean. Climbing out of the crew door, I headed for the rest of the enlisted crew who were sitting underneath the starboard wing of the “Starlifter.”

The two flight engineers were discussing the low intelligence levels of loadmasters when I joined them. Since I was the only loadmaster on the crew, it fell upon me to defend the honor of my crew position. As the debate was escalating, a van pulled up and deposited our copilot. Lieutenant Howard looked down and said, “The K-loaders (used to load/unload cargo pallets on aircraft) are on the way out. We are downloading the cargo and are reconfiguring the aircraft for a med-evac mission to pick up someone from a remote base in Canada and carry him to the states.”

An hour later I watched the last of the K-loaders as it backed away from the aircraft. Waiting to the side was an ambulance containing the equipment to convert the large cargo plane into an airborne hospital. While we were loading, the aircraft commander and a female

officer came to the ramp. The “AC” introduced her as Captain Clark, the flight nurse who would be flying with us. He said, “Engine start will be in ten minutes, just tie everything down, and set up on the way to Canada.”

After takeoff, when Captain Clark made her way down from the flight deck, she found I was standing in the back of the darkened cargo compartment looking out the window set into the troop door. The lights of Germany were spread out under us as we climbed to our assigned altitude. The nurse stood in the other door watching as the lights grew smaller, then became twinkling patches set among the dark German countryside. Thin wisps of clouds started swirling past the windows, giving way to solid clouds, covering up the fairy-tale display. I walked to the control panel and flipped on the lights, then untied the equipment so we could begin our work.

Several hours later, high over the Atlantic, Captain Clark and I surveyed the med-evac equipment over cups of coffee. As we sat there I asked her, “What made you become a nurse? Don't you get tired of being around sick people?” I will never forget the glow that entered her eyes as she began talking. And I will never forget that magic hour I spent listening to her as the aircraft sped through the night, high over the Atlantic.

I listened attentively about the difficulties of getting into nursing

school, and the anxiety of waiting to find out if she had been accepted. Furthermore, once accepted, Captain Clark told me about the number of nights she stayed up past midnight preparing for the next day's clinical assignment and the frustrations and tears brought on by demanding instructors. She even admitted the anguish had almost driven her out. Then Captain Clark shared with me some of the moments which made her realize all of the hard work was worthwhile. Moments like watching a family as it went through the strange mix of grief and relief which accompanies the death of a terminally ill patient. Moments like handing a brand-new mother her infant and seeing the joy and amazement on her face. Moments spent watching a young accident victim as he takes his first determined steps with his new prosthetic leg. Moments like escorting an elderly woman to be discharged, knowing how slim her chances for doing so had been months before. And moments when a young girl holds up her teddy bear to have a bandage put on its “stitches.”

Later in the trip, after he had been secured into the spot we had prepared for him, I watched as Captain Clark took care of her patient. Captain Clark was oblivious to the routine of take-off. She sat down only when I informed her we were beginning the take-off roll down the runway. As she set up her equipment and checked her