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A Mission to Heal

A nursing alumna's desire to help children with heart disease knows no boundaries.

By SYLVIA ZUKOWSKI '11

When an opportunity arose in the summer of 2010 to travel to northern Iraq and train health professionals at a local hospital, Molly King '03, an alumna of Illinois Wesleyan School of Nursing, jumped at the chance.

In June 2010 Molly traveled to northern Iraq as part of a team of pediatric cardiac specialists through the not-for-profit organizations For Heart and Souls (FHAS) and Samaritan's Purse.



Molly King (above) has traveled to Iraq and Mongolia to share her nursing knowledge. (Photo by Ryan Smith)

probably had the hardest time with this because within the context of pediatric heart surgery, I could not respect that tradition when patients, especially children, were being harmed. Also, I was raised believing that question-asking is fundamental to understanding." Ultimately, Molly overcame these challenges by gaining the respect of the hospital staff through her persistence in teaching.

Molly first traveled with FHAS in 2007 when she worked with pediatric cardiac patients in Mongolia. She returns there every September for two weeks. "One of the weeks is a surgical week, and the other is a searching week, where we go out into the Mongolian wilderness looking for kids with congenital heart disease. The two weeks are vastly different but equally wonderful."

According to Molly, the most rewarding part of these trips is giving children suffering from congenital heart disease "a chance at a full and productive life."

In Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, she spent 10 weeks helping to train nurses specializing in post-operative nursing management of congenital heart disease repairs at the Sulaymaniyah Center for Heart Diseases. During her time there, Molly focused on developing a curriculum addressing the postoperative care needs of cardiac patients and implementing it through bedside teaching and lectures. At first, this proved to be a difficult task.

"Of course language was a barrier," says Molly. "A lot of the medical staff understood some English, but many did not, which is quite interesting considering that nursing education is done in English because there is no technical or scientific vocabulary in the Kurdish language."

In addition to the language barrier, Molly found that asking questions was viewed as challenging authority and, therefore, culturally inappropriate. "I

FHAS has also hosted a nursing conference every year since 2007 as a way “to really highlight the role of nursing and to empower the Mongolian nurses to play a more active role in patient care. This year I gave a lecture on postoperative pain assessment and management in children,” she says.

Molly also spent time abroad with Mercy Ships, which operates the largest nongovernmental hospital ship in the world.

Upon graduating from Illinois Wesleyan, Molly accepted a job offer at a St. Louis hospital, where she served as a pediatric intensive care unit nurse. She recently completed a dual master’s degree in public health and nursing from Emory University and works as a part-time nurse at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta. She still looks for opportunities to travel internationally and to help children in need.

When asked why she is attracted to international work, Molly responds, “I do this work because I have been called to it. God has gifted me to do this. My life has been building to this since I was 10 years old. One of the cover stories on *Time* or *Newsweek* in 1990 was about Romanian orphans who were abandoned by their parents because they were born with birth defects. The cover shot shows rows and rows of infants and children in cribs with cleft lips and other birth defects.

“I was born with a facial birth defect and have had many surgeries to correct it over my lifetime,” Molly continues. “As a 10-year-old I knew I was about to have my biggest surgeries. When I looked at those photographs, I was overwhelmed thinking about these children whose parents decided they were disposable because of their deformity and I was fortunate enough to be born to parents who never thought of me as disposable. It upset me that many of these children would grow up not knowing their value. I decided then that I didn’t want any child to grow up feeling disposable or unworthy of love.”

Molly’s parents are alumni Jack ’70 and Ellen (Hancock) King ’71.

Although Molly is unsure of exactly what the future holds for her, she is certain of one thing. “I definitely plan to continue to do this kind of work. Now that I have finished graduate school, I am looking for ways to do international work more full time.” In her fight for the betterment of children’s lives, she has traveled from California to Pennsylvania, and across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Molly’s passion for nursing and desire to help children have no boundaries.



Molly King in Mongolia with a child recovering from surgery. (Photo by Michael Anderson)