

Cherry Ames: A Part of Nursing History

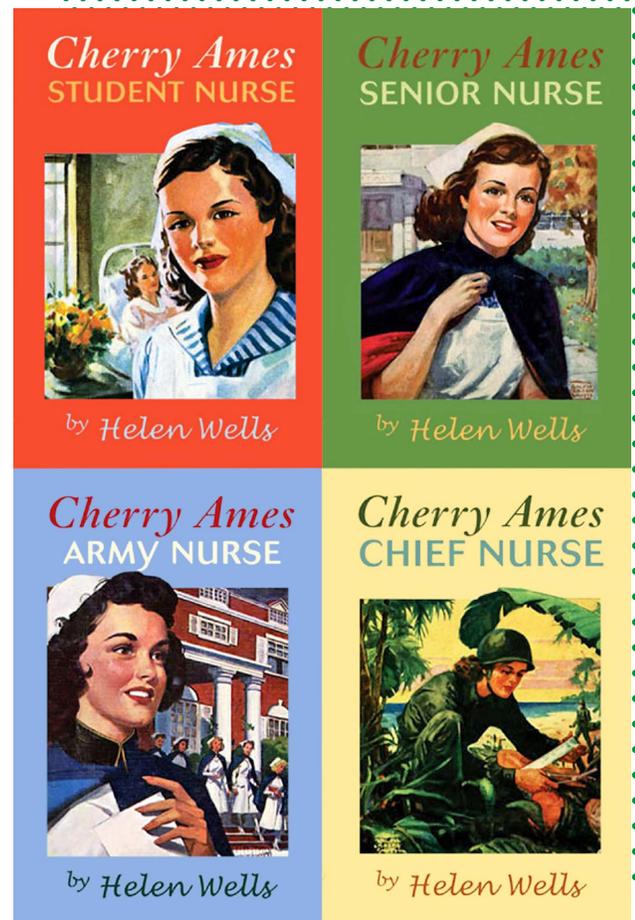
Dr. Lyn Losty

For many of us growing up, the stories of Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys kept us entertained for hours! The Hardy Boys revolves around the teenagers, Frank and Joe Hardy, who as amateur sleuths, solved cases that stumped their adult counterparts. The characters were created by American writer, Edward Stratemeyer, with the books themselves being written by several ghostwriters under the collective pseudonym, Franklin W. Dixon. Stratemeyer created Nancy Drew's character as the female counterpart to the Hardy Boys series. These books were ghostwritten by a number of authors and published under the collective pseudonym, Carolyn Keene.

Interestingly, nursing has its own "Nancy Drew" of sorts, a heroine named Cherry Ames. The Cherry Ames Nurse Stories were written by Helen Wells and Julie Tatham and published by Grosset & Dunlap between 1943 and 1968. The story begins with the book, *Cherry Ames: Student Nurse*, and tells the story of 18-year Charity (Cherry) Ames and her family who lived in Hilton, Illinois, a fictitious town, which is based on the author's hometown of Danville, Illinois. Cherry is interested in a career in nursing and her neighbor, Dr. Joe Fortune, encouraged her to pursue her dreams of becoming a nurse. Much like Florence Nightingale, Cherry's wealthy parents are resistant to her career choice, but her twin brother, Charlie desired to become a pilot in World War II and equally so, Cherry was adamant about her decision to serve others. Cherry chose the nursing profession because she valued being a professional and doing work that was urgently needed. She cared about people and dreamt about making a difference on a grand scale (Phillips, 1999). Throughout the first book, Cherry attends the Spencer Hospital School of Nursing and is challenged by what it takes to earn her nursing cap and become a fully-fledged nurse.

The first four books in the "Cherry Ames" series are set during the WWII and follow Cherry through her training, her senior years, graduation and Army life. Early on, it is easily seen that Cherry Ames is a symbol of dedication to nursing, selflessness, patriotism, and sacrifice by joining WWII as an Army nurse (Finlay, 2010). A watered-down version of WWII is presented in the books, but Cherry Ames' passion about helping her country as a nurse was relentless and aimed at drawing young women readers into military nursing. After being a nurse in WWII, Cherry Ames moved on to working as a nurse in the civilian world. Women after the WWII were still interested in working and Cherry Ames represented that sentiment (Finlay, 2010). In a time when women were seen as little more than housewives, Cherry Ames provided an aspiration of being an independent, career-driven woman who could travel instead of marrying. In fact, it is believed that Cherry Ames paved the way for the many other pieces of literature written during and after WWII in order to empower women into nursing (Finlay, 2010).

As Cherry Ames' career progressed, she operated almost like a travel nurse of today. She never stayed in one place very long, but moved on, after having learned new knowledge, skills, and abilities. Her experiences included being a nurse in boarding schools, camp nursing, army and veterans' nursing, private duty and clinic nursing, and even stints at a dude ranch and on a cruise ship. When Cherry Ames was a department store nurse, it was easy to see that this role may have evolved into occupational health or "industrial hygiene" nursing. However, during her time as a "rest home" nurse, there was no hint of Alzheimer's disease or any dementias. The patients in this home were there only for a short stay; they recuperated, and returned home (Cassidy, 2010).

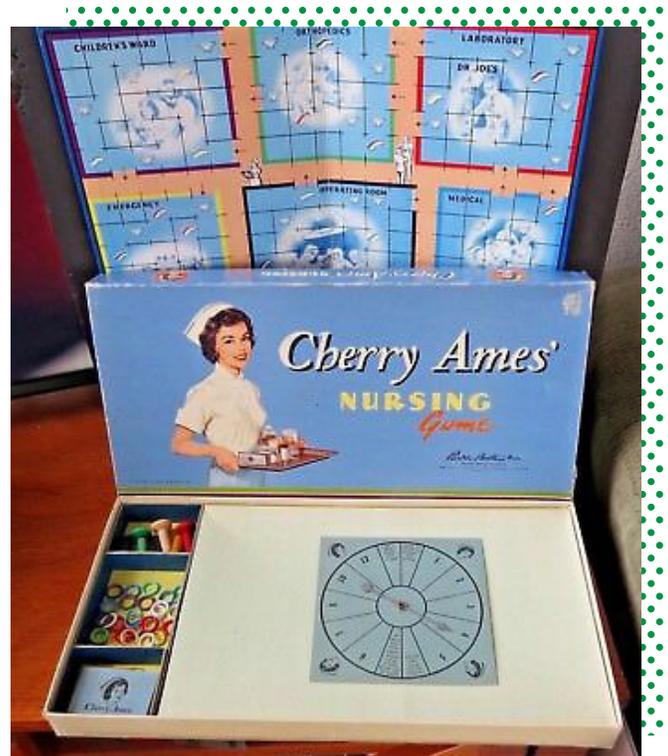


Throughout many of the books, Cherry Ames described what “being a professional” meant to her and repeated the themes of having a deep knowledge base, continuously updating her knowledge and skills, having integrity, being altruistic and civil, and keeping honor and duty in the forefront. Smoyak (2000) described the nursing values Cherry portrayed: commitment, pride, and excellence; learning from errors; confronting problems head on; doing the right thing no matter what; and focusing on the patient.

While the physicians whom Cherry encountered were respectful, it was evident that they had a superior attitude as Cherry would often stand and offer her seat whenever a doctor would come into a patient’s room (Hott, 1977; Quell, 1993). The new order for interdisciplinary teams would have been a challenge for Cherry, given her experience, but her innate assertiveness and high self-esteem would have served her well (Cassidy, 2010). Cherry, as her career continued, definitely would be interested in finances and understanding costs, benefits, and resource allocation. She probably would be a bit overwhelmed by the various insurance plans that exist within today’s healthcare system, but surely would rise above the challenge at hand (Cassidy, 2010).

In 1959, Parker Brothers, makers of the famed Monopoly game, created the Cherry Ames: A Nursing Training Game, a roll-and-move board game for two to six players. The game is based on Cherry Ames books and claims to be one of the few games in American board game history to depict women in a generally positive way.

Laskowski-Jones (2018) theorized that the nursing profession has a powerful marketing and recruiting tool through Cherry as most nursing images in popular media do little to portray the profession in a way that either makes nurses proud or entices young people to the profession. Laskowski-Jones concluded that if we are to survive and thrive going forward, our youth need inspiring stories of excellent nursing role models depicting the breadth of real work that defines our profession as well as the satisfaction it can bring. Until then, there’s still Cherry Ames...



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