



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
School of Nursing

Legacy Performance
as "Dramatic Reading,"
April 13, 2011



In April of this year the University Of Southern Maine School Of Nursing, the Southern Maine Chapter of Critical Care Nurses and the Simmons-UNE Alumni were proud sponsors of Elliott Cherry's production of A Finished Heart. This dramatic reading with music, presented a conversation between a dying man and his caregiver/spouse. The nursing groups who sponsored this event used it as a launch for a broader conversation on end of life choices and as a way to integrate the Arts into nursing curricula at multiple levels. Attended by graduate and undergraduate students, the narrative and musical performance was integrated into such diverse course topics as death and dying, communication, caring, patient and family centered care and the role of the Arts in teaching nursing.

Elliott Cherry's journal of the dialogues he shared with his husband provided students entry into the private life of a couple at the threshold of death. Elliott stayed for a brief discussion immediately after the piece with the whole audience and after a break, a facilitated discussion with a smaller group of students and faculty.

Students and faculty who attended the event remarked afterward how the piece continued to resonate with them for many weeks. Faculty described their use of some of the emotions raised in the piece in subsequent discussions over the semester. Faculty and nurses from the community who attended remarked on the importance of providing students with insights into the art of nursing through the medium of the Arts. A colleague from another department remarked that stretching the boundaries of education and engaging students from across degree programs and nurses in practice sent a message of the need for all of us to be committed to continue our learning. This powerful piece allowed us to learn from a narrative of experience, gave us insights that we might not otherwise uncover and opened important dialogues between a caregiver and the students and professionals who will work with and support the caregiver/spouse in future. I would recommend this performance to peers in practice and in education, to nurses and to others engaged in caregiving and to students both at the beginning of their program and for seasoned graduate students as they consider new roles in practice and education. The piece is transformative and quietly powerful.

Working with Elliott was a wonderful experience—he was a consummate professional and cared deeply about every aspect of the event. I cannot say enough about his devotion to his art and to this piece. I recommend both the art and the man behind it with the warmest regard and appreciation.

Respectfully,

Susan B. Sepples RN, CCRN, PhD
Associate Professor of Nursing