

Reflection #33  
By Eugene Dufour

### **Celebrating Nurses: Open Heart – Engaged Compassion – Soft Hands**

During my first week of being on call at St. Joseph's Health Centre, I was called in on four separate occasions for deaths on the palliative care floor. All four deaths happened after midnight and it was the same nurse that was working those shifts. After the family left the ward, this nurse would go to the window, open it and stand there for a few minutes. I asked her what she was doing. The nurse explained that for many of these patients she had witnessed their suffering and listened to their painful stories of saying goodbye to loved ones. After the death of her patients, she explained, that she would open the window and take a few deep breaths and say the following four things to herself:

1. I am thankful for all that you taught me.
2. I am appreciative if I helped you in any way.
3. Your life story has empowered me to be a better care giver.
4. I now set you free.

I knew right then that if I were to survive and thrive in the sacred work of hospice palliative, I would need to surround myself with caring and compassionate nurses. They have been some of my greatest teachers.

The essence of being a nurse is:

**Open Heart:** the gift to witness suffering and open yourself to the life story of your patients.

**Engaged Compassion:** the presence of feeling your patient's suffering and then being called to do something to ease that suffering.

**Soft Hands:** the act of service to provide excellent, compassionate and nonjudgmental care as you "attend" to your patients.

Thank you to all nurses who serve and teach us to be healers. Physical and emotional suffering makes us feel broken. Open Heart, Engaged Compassion and Soft Hands gives us the gift of feeling and being whole again.