Why do we remember Florence Nightingale?

Long ago a war broke out between Britain and France on one side and Russia on the other. The war was fought in a place called the Crimea.

Reports began to come back to Britain of dreadful conditions in the army hospitals. “Something must be done!” the newspapers shouted. They demanded that better care was taken of the soldiers who were wounded while fighting.

Who was Florence Nightingale?

Florence Nightingale was a nurse who travelled to the Crimea to take care of soldiers who were sick or had been wounded in the Crimean War.

Where was Florence Nightingale born?

Florence Nightingale was born in Florence, Italy on 12th May 1820. Can you guess how she got her name?

Where did Florence Nightingale live?

Florence lived in England. When she was young Florence's family lived in Derbyshire in the summer and Hampshire in the winter.

How did she become a nurse?

Florence liked to help people and often visited the sick in the villages where she lived. She wanted to be a nurse but Florence's parents wouldn't let her, in fact they were horrified!

They thought it was wrong for women from wealthy families like hers to work as nurses but there was also another reason. In those days nurses were not like the nurses we have today.

Nurses in those days were often drunks and not too clean! Florence was determined and studied in secret. Finally she went to Germany where she trained to become a nurse.

Who were Florence Nightingale's parents?

Florence's parents were quite rich. For two years after they got married they spent their time travelling around Europe. It was during this time that Florence was born in Italy.

How did she become a nurse?

Florence began work as a nurse in London and became matron at a hospital there.

All Florence’s spare time was spent studying how hospitals were run and writing angry letters and newspaper articles demanding better treatment for patients. She tried to make people understand that the country needed a proper hospital service with properly trained nurses.

She believed that the most important thing for a hospital was that the hospital did not harm the patients!

When people heard about the awful conditions in the Crimea they became very angry, so angry that the government decided they had better do something about it!

The government sent a band of nurses to help. They were led by Florence Nightingale. She was 34 years old.

There were 37 nurses who went with Florence to nurse the soldiers and most of them wore the uniform that Florence had designed for them.

When Florence Nightingale got to the Crimea she was very distressed by what she saw. The hospitals were overcrowded and damp. Most of the 5000 patients were suffering not from wounds but from cold, starvation and disease. The few doctors who were there couldn't cope.

Soldiers were dying of harmless wounds which if they had had a little care could have got better.
Florence set to work. She and her nurses worked hard to sort out all the problems at the hospital.

They began by cleaning the place from top to bottom. They improved the food, the bed clothes, the medicines and most important of all the nursing.

When she had first arrived there were sick soldiers everywhere. Even on the floor. Florence opened another ward so that it wasn't so overcrowded.

It took her a long time but in the end she completely changed how the hospital was run.

None of this was easy for her. She had to fight for what she believed in. She wrote letters, bullied nurses and doctors into doing as she asked but in the end it was worth it.

The soldiers loved her. She soon became known as “the Lady with the Lamp” because she used to tour the wards every night with her lamp in her hands making sure all the soldiers were comfortable.

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What happened to Florence Nightingale?

After the war Florence went home. She was a heroine. Everyone wanted to welcome her and show her how much they thought of her work but she went quietly to the country to her parent’s house. Soon after that she went to live in London and spent the rest of her life arranging the training of nurses, improving army hospitals, studying, writing books and articles about nursing and arguing with politicians.

Although Florence Nightingale was bedridden for many years, she continued trying to improve hospitals and nursing.

Florence Nightingale died at home at the age of 90 on 13th August 1910 and, according to her wishes, she was buried in Hampshire.

So the next time you visit a hospital and see the nurses in their smart uniforms looking after people in the clean, tidy wards, think of who it was that made it all possible.

Florence Nightingale, the Lady of the Lamp.