

## A Look Back at the Tulip Girls of Misericordia Health Centre

Between 1958 and 1961, Christine (Keegan) Butterill proudly served as a Tulip Girl at Misericordia Health Centre, an initiative that saw high school volunteers from surrounding schools lend a hand in the hospital. Tulip Girls, named for the unique three-tulip petal-shaped caps they wore with white aprons and chartreuse coloured uniforms, were Grades 9–12 volunteers who dedicated countless hours to supporting the hospital staff. Christine, who was recognized on television twice for completing the most volunteer hours, remembers the experience fondly.



*Christine (Keegan) Butterill*

The program started with simple tasks, like delivering flower arrangements to patient rooms, but the volunteers soon realized they could do more. Under nursing supervision, they assisted with a variety of tasks that would typically have been done by nurses. These jobs included bathing and caring for newborns, dressing wounds, and changing patients. Although Tulip Girls were not permitted to administer injections, insert catheters, or distribute medication, they contributed in meaningful ways, becoming an invaluable resource to the healthcare team.

Christine said, “The idea was, every time we volunteered, the province of Manitoba would reimburse the hospital for volunteer hours, which helped get things done and raise money for Misericordia.” The program also offered an opportunity for paid summer work after volunteering during the school year, providing a much-needed break for full-time staff during the busy summer months.

Before stepping into their roles, volunteers received training from the Misericordia Sisters. The training period was two weeks long and eight hours per day, followed by a probation period. Once completed, they were officially full-fledged Tulip Girls.

Reflecting on her time as a Tulip Girl, Christine said, “It was so rewarding because it gave you so many skills, and you knew you were helping.” The program also gave several future nurses a taste of what the nursing profession was all about. For her, it was more than just volunteering; it was a great introduction to the world of service and a chance to make a real difference in the lives of others.

The legacy of the Tulip Girls lives on as a testament to the dedication and compassion of young volunteers who made their mark at Misericordia Health Centre.