



# June Foster

Former hospital matron, June Foster, has vivid memories of reading the first lesson at the BRF Festival in St Paul's Cathedral on 24 October 1959. The service took place at 6.00 pm in the evening but during the afternoon there was a BRF event in the Royal Festival Hall as well.

At the time June was a student nurse at Mile End Hospital. There was a Nurses Christian Movement group at the hospital and although she didn't belong herself, two of her friends did. They'd been contacted by the NCM head office because they were looking for someone to read the lesson at the festival. They wanted someone to represent people who were short of time and wouldn't have much time to study the Bible. June's friends thought she'd be a good choice. She explains what happened:

'I had to go to matron's office and tell her what was being suggested – I just said that I had to read a lesson in church and she replied, "well everybody reads lessons in church", so then I explained that this was for a special service in St Paul's and she said "Oh!" and was suddenly much more interested. Not only did she give permission for me to do the reading, she arranged for our senior tutor to prepare me for the task: to coach me.'

The lesson was the first of four by people representing the different BRF Bible reading notes. She read a passage from Isaiah: Isaiah 55:6–13. 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.'

'I had to wear "indoor uniform", which was virtually unheard of: you only ever wore indoor uniform inside the hospital but I had special permission to wear my pink and white striped dress, apron and cap, all heavily starched, and my navy blue cloak. Matron ordered a taxi to

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take me to St Paul's and there I was met by a steward who took me to my seat and told me what I had to do. At the appropriate moment I was taken up to the lectern to read the lesson.'

In October 1959 June had taken her final exams but was waiting for the results. She was still officially a student nurse but she'd completed her general training.

'I didn't start training until I was 27, which was very late – most of my friends were 18, straight from school. But I'd left school at 15 in 1944 and worked in the office of a fashion house in Regent Street in London, as a junior shorthand-typist. Eventually a friend at home said, "Are you going to stay in that office all

your life?” and I said, “well there’s nothing else I can do.” I had left school during the war with no qualifications, but she said, “but there are other things you can do! Teaching, for example, or nursing.” I’d always had an interest in looking after people so, spurred on by my friend’s suggestion, I talked to my vicar about it and he encouraged me to apply.’

June applied to Mile End Hospital and went for an interview, where she had to write an essay to prove she was suitable for training. She was accepted and along with 22 other people, started her training in 1956, passed all her exams first time and eventually became a matron in Dover in south east Kent. She did that until 1982, when there was a big re-organisation of the NHS and she was made redundant. Not one to sit doing nothing, she got in involved in voluntary work: ‘I trained as a bereavement counsellor, and I also worked with the International Ecumenical Fellowship and The Children’s Society. After my 70th birthday I did a sponsored walk along part of the Great Wall of China, in support of the Society.’



On a sponsored walk along the Great Wall of China at the age of 70.

June now lives in Chard in Somerset. She has subscribed to *Guidelines* Bible study notes for many years. ‘I try to start the day with Bible reading and most often the BRF notes are helpful in bringing the reading into context with today’s situation. Of course, the day’s needs vary and I am not always in good shape! But I appreciate new ways of interpreting the teaching. I am aware the notes have been prepared a year or more before I am reading them and with world events moving so fast these days it is amazing how the readings relate to what is going on. I guess the Holy Spirit has a hand in it!’

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June remembers a message from Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother being read out during the service at which she read. ‘My parents

always went to church and took me from a very young age and I do have vague memories of an occasion when Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother came to open a new church in Essex. I’m told I asked my mother, “Is that the princess, mummy?” because I was always very interested in princesses. The Queen Mother was Patron of BRF at the time of the Festival in 1959 and a message from her was read out in the course of the service. Today’s Queen was born in 1926, so she’s three years older than me – I’m 92 now so as long as she keeps going, I’ll keep going.’



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