

Tyleigh Spiller

South Carolina African American Calendar

2022 Writing Contest

27 February 2022

### Listen to the Heartbeat

A worn, fatigued woman made her way down the cold, gray hallway of the hospital.

Chilling noises fill the air, as countless patients stirred in their rooms, suffering from differing ailments and injuries. Many were the victims of ghastly racial violence, facing the unjust consequence of a different color. Bravely and tirelessly, the young African American nurse ran her dainty, yet weary, fingers across her thick, pulled-back hair, ready to care for her next patient. Anna DeCosta Banks, born in Charleston, South Carolina, on September 2, 1869, was a dedicated nurse who served countless patients in South Carolina for many years and possessed a passion to help African Americans overcome the immense obstacles of racial segregation.

Graduating from Hampton Institute's Training School for Nurses and becoming the first head nurse and later superintendent of nurses at Charleston Hospital, Banks desired to provide African Americans with adequate and superior health care, and to train nurses not only to treat their patients with dignity, but also to advocate for equality in their own hospitals. She worked almost ceaselessly for many years, seldom taking off her nursing uniform. Fittingly, an entire hospital, which remained open for 62 years, was named in her honor, followed by a wing of the Medical University of South Carolina. Advocating for what she believed in with all of her heart, Nurse Banks never gave up, never abandoned her patients, and never yielded to the thunderous lies of segregation.

Just as Mrs. Banks provided care and guidance when and where it was needed the most, I too wish to serve the hurt and downtrodden as a nurse. Her life has furthered my determination to work toward a career of service to humanity. Assuredly, I desire to give back to the field that has affected me so much. A year ago, my father passed away after a difficult battle with a rare disease caused by multiple myeloma. Many doctors and nurses worked hard to provide him with the care that he needed, even bringing him back after his weak heart ceased to beat. Because of every warmhearted doctor and nurse who helped him, I was able to speak with my dad and give him many more hugs before he was called to Heaven. The pioneer work of nurses, such as Banks, provides me with great inspiration for my future career as a nurse, like those who took care of my dad. As an African American woman in an arduous profession, Banks knocked down boundaries and built opportunities. Mrs. Banks completely embodied the powerful, eye-opening words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior, “Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.” Although it was not effortless or painless, Banks advocated for what she believed in, knowing to place the stethoscope on every patient’s heart was to listen to the enduring heartbeat of justice alive in this very nation.

### Works Cited

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