In 1950, the University of Alabama offered a new educational avenue for future nurses, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing Degree program. I was one of six students in the first class and we were quickly dubbed “Textbook Nurses” by nursing students in hospital managed schools! The University had a curriculum designed to have academic classes at the Tuscaloosa Campus and the beginning clinical classes at the campus in Birmingham. A nursing educator from Columbia University was hired as dean. She was already on campus when we arrived but there was no building, faculty or equipment. This did not impede our class!

After a year of academic studies, we began our first nursing experience at Jefferson-Hillman Hospital in Birmingham. Our UA Nursing Instructor was a Johns Hopkins graduate who taught us skills from a Caring Model with attention to the person's comfort, safety and patient teaching. The clinical experience was held in large wards with drab green walls, often lacking in privacy. Everyday we faced real issues requiring skills in problem solving. As our confidence grew, our communication skills grew. We worked up from simple vital signs and comfort measures, including bed making and massage techniques for sleep, to more advanced classes each year.

Following our summer nursing experience, the class members returned to the Tuscaloosa Campus for more academic classes. The BS Degree program initially fit within the Alabama Board of Nursing Model for a student in a three year hospital R.N. program. Our Curriculum Plan continued with nursing education through four consecutive calendar years.

As Junior nursing students, the clinical experiences were specific specialities in medical and surgical clinical areas – Neurology, Operating Room, Emergency Room, Obstetrics, Pediatrics, Eye Unit, etc.

Throughout the years, we made a difference in the health of our patients by keeping their needs as the focus. As UA students, we received a fantastic array of clinical experiences including tuberculosis nursing, care of pediatric polio patients in Iron Lungs, rural nursing in
Dorothy Ray was admitted to the University of Alabama School of Nursing in 1950 and graduated with the first class in 1954. In 1952, while a student, she married Bill Scarbrough and they have three daughters. She received a MSN in Nursing in 1960. Dot served as a faculty member at the college from 1954 to 1967. In 1969, she accepted a position as Director of a 3-year grant at the VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Tuscaloosa. This required developing and implementing team oriented workshops and weekly reality oriented training for staff who worked in long-term care facilities with a goal of improving the care of institutionalized, confused, disoriented patients. In addition to providing the training program, Dot and the teaching team developed audiovisual materials for distribution to others. These audiovisual aids included training films and manuals for nurses and other patient care providers to improve the care of institutionalized, confused patients at a time when Alzheimer’s Disease was practically an unknown. Reality Orientation combined common methods for maintaining a patient’s dignity with staff-patient interactions each 24 hour period. The process involved consistently reinforcing patients’ awareness of their environment by using props such as clocks, calendars, newspapers, etc.

The ROTP (Reality Orientation Training Program) continued at the VA until 1982. From the beginning, Dot saw the opportunity to share this teaching program with agencies throughout the United States. Through mutually cooperative planning, workshops were conducted in many other VA facilities and also for nursing home staff across the country. After 12 years with ROTP, Dot worked with the VA as Nursing Home Care and Long Term Care Supervisor. At her retirement in May 1994, she was serving as the Associate Chief for Long Term Care Nursing at the VAMC. In her second career now, Dot is a jewelry designer.

We moved wherever we were assigned a clinical experience returning to Druid City Hospital in Tuscaloosa for Leadership and Team Nursing during the Senior year. Our dean often had to redesign clinical studies to fit available facilities. Because Bryce Hospital was unapproved for Psychiatric Nursing, the final three months of our senior year were spent in clinical experiences in Little Rock, Arkansas completing Psychiatric Nursing.

University credit hours were earned for class hours, not the hours within the clinical area. I completed the required Alabama Board of Nursing clinical experience in days, evenings and nights. I received my BS in Nursing in August of 1954, having accumulated 156 credit hours! After that, I successfully passed the State Board of Nursing Exam and received my RN.

It was a special time in nursing history and our class had the honor of being in the first UA BSN class without knowing we were really making history!