

Born in Alcobaça, the land of apples, pears, the monastery, conventual sweets (I am the biggest fan of cornucopias), the chicken stew known as “frango na púcara”, ceramics, chita fabric and the eternal resting place of King Pedro and Inês de Castro.

These influences shaped my upbringing: agriculture, history, good food, and good company.

I grew up in a family with strong foundations in hard work and entrepreneurship.

At thirteen, I began my first paid job, embroidering ajour for my parents' customers. My parents owned a shop specialising in household appliances, particularly sewing machines and needlework.

At sixteen, in my teenage years, I experienced the characteristic desire to explore beyond the nest. I received my first cheque for working with a renowned fused glass artist, a period that brings back fond memories.

Between babysitting, fruit picking, cleaning, and working at the reception of a well-known guesthouse in Nazaré during summer, work became my main focus during summer holidays until I turned 21.

In September 2006, I embarked on the first of many flights, which took me to Angra do Heroísmo on Terceira Island in our magnificent Azorean archipelago. It was there that I began my nursing degree.

The simplicity, respect, and deep connection to nature, intrinsic to all who are born there, further cemented my bond with the natural world.

As for nursing... During the first year of the course, I felt I was exactly where I was meant to be.

The course colours were white and yellow, with yellow being my favourite colour since childhood. The school's anniversary coincided with my birthday. I was surrounded by “locals” with a wealth of knowledge to share.

I joined the training sessions of Lusitânia’s hockey team, a sport that had been part of my adolescence. I became a member of a tuna (student music group), and as a freshman, I was invited to participate in the student association, joining the elected board every year of my course

I lived in the beautiful student residence, where I was often called upon to assist international students, under the management of the late Mrs Fernanda.

I fondly remember Mr David (the “phone man”), Mrs Ana from the photocopy room, and the friendly couple at the school office.

In 2010/2011, due to some personal changes, I began working during the summer months as a nursing assistant at the Casa de Saúde N^a Senhora da Conceição das Irmãs Hospitaleiras, a psychiatric hospital for women. I also worked at a well-known bar on the island.

It was during these years that I discovered my passion for psychiatry and geriatrics.

From a young age, being one of the youngest in the family, I always felt naturally comfortable and at ease among older people. The laughter, humour, wisdom, and life stories of the elderly always brightened my days.

During my course, I undertook internships in Community Health, guided by the remarkable Nurse Saavedra, as well as in obstetrics, paediatrics, surgery, internal medicine, and palliative care. I became, as someone once called me, a true urban nomad.

I spent time in Lisbon, where I interned at a Local Health Unit (ULS), the Hospital da Luz, and later, the Hospital de Santa Maria. I travelled to Viana do Castelo, where I interned in general surgery and met one of my greatest nursing role models, Nurse Cachulo

In 2013, during my final year of study, I travelled to Lithuania, where I interned in surgery and psychiatry. It was fascinating to observe the cultural differences in healthcare in various aspects.

Ultimately, I returned to Lisbon for my final internship at the Hospital de Santa Maria, specialising in acute psychiatry. It was a deeply impactful experience in many ways.

At the end of my studies, during the traditional queima das fitas celebration, I connected with colleagues who had been living in the UK for several years. With a deeply ingrained “nomadic” spirit and a strong desire to explore and discover more, I decided to apply to live and work in England.

My father himself had been an emigrant in Germany, and growing up around his former colleagues who returned to Portugal each summer, combined with my fluency in English from a young age, made the decision to emigrate feel very natural.

I attended an interview and tests in Porto and was immediately accepted. After a long bureaucratic process and technical English training focused on healthcare, I moved to Surrey in November that year, accompanied by a group of 12 other nurses I had never met.

I vividly remember my arrival in Chertsey, a quintessentially English town southwest of London, just as school was letting out, with the streets full of “Harry Potters” — students in their uniforms.

I was introduced to St Peter’s Hospital of the Ashford & St Peter’s NHS Foundation Trust, where I began my professional activity in an endocrinology and palliative care ward – Maple Ward.

After numerous trials and adaptations during the first year, I transitioned to an acute respiratory and haematology unit, where I expanded my skills and CV.

Over time, I entered a prolonged period of self-reflection. This was the beginning of my activity as a freelance nurse, a concept I pioneered in Portugal. I knew I wanted to explore new paths in nursing, though I had yet to define which directions intrigued me the most.

I worked as a Bank Nurse — a sort of reserve nurse covering various hospital services as needed. Demand for nurses was always high, and I was eager to learn and experience more, so work was never in short supply.

During this time, I began accepting regular shifts in Interventional Radiology, where I discovered a growing interest and eventually accepted a job offer. This marked the start of an incredibly enriching experience. In that mini operating theatre, I assisted and instrumented procedures I had never seen before. With a lively team of highly skilled professionals, I encountered cutting-edge technology, pioneering procedures, and excellent working conditions.

I implemented a pre-procedure consultation to prepare patients in advance. Many would arrive with inadequate coagulation levels, on anticoagulants, or insufficient fasting, leading to last-minute cancellations that disrupted the patients, their families, the team, and the hospital.

Once this consultation was implemented, such cancellations ceased, and satisfaction surveys achieved a 100% success rate. This is one of my proudest professional achievements. This experience taught me a great deal about the working conditions I need to perform at my best. Later, back in Portugal, I learned to create those conditions myself.

In 2017, I underwent a significant professional change. My priority shifted from building a broad CV to focusing on greater personal fulfilment, honing my skills to deliver my best to my patients.

I longed to establish closer, more lasting relationships with my patients. I missed the bond with the elderly, something that had always fulfilled me, and the work in mental health. In the hospital setting, patient interactions were brief, and building deeper relationships was not possible.

I decided to resign and accepted a role in a care home that was opening a floor dedicated to people diagnosed with dementia. This change meant losing some professional and personal benefits, but it marked the beginning of an incredibly gratifying period. I faced many challenges, which I overcame with satisfaction.

I still remember some patients by name, their quirks, how they liked to be treated in certain situations, their life stories, and their daily routines. These memories are deeply enriching and rewarding to me.

Working in a care home was a vastly different reality from the hospital setting. And in England, there are also challenges. They are different, of course, but share much in common with the organisational issues typical of care homes worldwide.

Eventually, I had the opportunity to work in a high-end luxury care home, an experience I look back on with great fondness and nostalgia. I witnessed living conditions for residents that I dream of seeing one day in my country. I quickly became responsible for a floor and shifts. Being ambitious and driven, as soon as I felt comfortable, even more internal questions arose.

Seeking further growth, unsure of my next steps, I entered a whirlwind of personal and professional challenges. Consecutive difficulties without time for recovery led to burnout. This was a period I could detail further on another occasion, sharing the objectives I now understand.

After a true rollercoaster of highs and lows, leaving me with many stories to tell, I returned to Portugal in March 2020 with no set return date to the UK. By then, I had heard about a disease spreading in the East, but it was not yet given much importance. In the UK, the pandemic was initially underestimated.

When I arrived in Portugal, I realised the reality was completely different. It was like crossing a portal between two worlds. Only a few days later, we entered lockdown, with airspaces and borders closing.

At a fragile point in my life, this transition, combined with returning to my hometown after 15 years of a nomadic life, caused my mental state to deteriorate drastically. The emotional rollercoaster was not over yet.

There followed a long period of revolt, rest, healing, and extensive inner work, in that exact order. I questioned and redefined everything nursing meant to me. I returned to work just in time to be on the frontlines, with a new mindset.

I returned to practising my profession under the premise of being an active agent of change. I believe that if more "little ants" act with the same determination and do not give up, we will see significant changes in how healthcare is delivered in Portugal in the coming years. Returning to the profession was a victory I am deeply proud of and for which I am grateful every day.

Since then, I have found fulfilment working as a self-employed nurse. I find employment contracts precarious, and at this stage of my life, I do not believe any contract could meet my expectations.

For the past four years, I have worked consistently in inpatient care and nursing consultations. I also assisted in the opening of a clinic for addicts and provide home-based nursing services.

Home nursing care holds a special place in my heart. It has allowed me to support patients in a familiar environment, which I believe aligns with what I have always championed as a professional: a holistic and personalised approach where patients feel truly cared for.

In this type of care, I believe the key lies in person-centred treatment and functional recovery. I view the patient as a whole, respecting their life story, values, and expectations. My role often bridges the gap between hospital treatment and full recovery at home.

With the experience I have accumulated, I am certain that nursing care can be offered in a more humane, effective, and innovative way. Each patient is unique, and the focus should be on their specific needs, not just the illness or condition that brought them to us.

Throughout my career, my purpose has always been the same: to give the best of myself, not only as a professional but also as a human being. I work daily to be a healthcare professional who makes a difference. This is my mission.

Today, as a freelance nurse, I have the privilege of managing my time and choosing the projects I believe in. I am passionate about what I do and feel deeply fulfilled working for the health and well-being of my patients, always with a close eye on quality and professional ethics.

This is me, Nurse Ana Roxo.