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**CONSTANT VIGILANCE**

**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERING A HOSPITALISED  
CHILD**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree  
of Master of Philosophy in Nursing  
at Massey University

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**DEDICATION**

For

**SARAH MARY SPEIGHT RUSTON**

born 25-4-84 died 10-2-93

and

**LUCY ROSE GASQUOINE MCMASTER**

born 2-8-94

You have taught me more than I ever expected there was to know about caring for and caring about children and their families.

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study describes the lived experience of mothering a child hospitalised with acute illness or injury. Seven mothers who had experienced this crisis within twelve months of our first interview agreed to share their stories with me. The resulting data were analysed and interpreted using van Manen's interpretation of Heideggerian phenomenology.

Four phenomenological themes emerged from this study. Mothers have a **special kind of knowing**. They have a **need to do** with and for their child. **Handing over** to or **leaving** their child in the care of strangers and **waiting** for their child to be returned to their care are very difficult things for mothers to do. Their **constant vigilance** is enabled by their **special kind of knowing** and their **need to do**. The difficulty of **handing over**, **leaving** and **waiting** is emphasised by mothers' **constant vigilance**.

Personal experiences during the course of my study presented significant challenges to my ability to offer an effective phenomenological description of the phenomenon under study. Continuous reflection aided by dialogue with fellow phenomenological researchers has resulted in a meaningful narrative.

This description of mothering in a context of crisis is useful in the potential contribution it makes to nurses' understanding of mothers' experience of the hospitalisation of their children. It supports the philosophy of family-centered care and highlights the ability of individual nurses to make a positive difference to a very stressful experience.

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## KEY TO TRANSCRIPTS

In the presentation of research findings, and particularly in relation to excerpts from research interviews and field notes, the following abbreviations and conventions have been used:

*italics*            the words used by the study participants themselves

names              all study participants and their children are  
identified by the use of pseudonyms

*I*                    Interview

*p*                    page

*(parentheses)*    researcher questions or comments made during  
interviews

[square brackets]

are used when a clarifying or explanatory comment  
has been added by the researcher

...                    pause contained in original material

..//..                material edited out of interview