Roughly ten years after graduating from Florida Keys Community College’s nursing program, Penni Wise was enjoying a rewarding career as a pediatric and maternity nurse at Lower Keys Medical Center. Then one day, she paid a random visit to her alma mater and learned that there just happened to be a need for a nursing instructor. She unhesitatingly jumped at the opportunity—making a fortune told years ago when she was a student, a reality.

“I had a very special instructor, my mentor Anna Mae Scarlet, who said, ‘Penni, you’re going to have my job; you’ll teach here one day,’” recalled Wise. “I really believe a higher being brought me to the college that day.”

Fast-forward another ten years and Wise, who also has a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in Nursing, claims emphatically to have the best job and teaches the best class on campus. “I get to do two things I really love: teaching and nursing.”

Wise teaches Maternal Child, the last course in the rigorous, two-year Associate in Science program that prepares students to become Registered Nurses. The course includes real practice in the hospital maternity ward to refine students’ bedside techniques and build confidence to handle a range of variables in the delivery room setting.

“They get to see a baby born; they see life! It’s such a privilege,” beamed Wise. “Patients love our nursing students. They feel like they have a whole team of nurses. The ones that don’t have the nursing students sometimes feel left out.”

But not all students easily pass this real-life performance test of the skills and theory they have learned.

“I have students who are unsuccessful, but it’s okay. I give them more time to develop confidence in their skills and knowledge.”

Wise helps those students with all the compassion and spirit of a true nurse. “We give custom care to our students. We find out what their needs are. They aren’t numbers. They are people—each is a nurse who we are putting into our community.”

Much like running into former patients and seeing them alive and healthy, Wise’s most rewarding moments as an educator come when she sees graduates practicing as healthcare professionals.

“When I go over to the hospital and I see my former students with ‘RN’ on their name tags and they’re happy and love what they are doing—it’s so gratifying.”

Two of Wise’s former students have even followed in her footsteps and joined the faculty at FKCC—thus continuing the cycle of today’s nurses training tomorrow’s nurses.

When not in the classroom or clinic, Wise proudly contributes to the advancement of women as a member of the Zonta Club of Key West. To relax, she enjoys boating with her husband Judd, a Key West High School teacher and coach, and spending time with their two daughters Katie and Trish. Wise, a twin with a total of five siblings, also likes to travel worldwide to visit family.