

PATIENT: **Harold Waterhouse**

Age 65, Hillsboro, NH

FAMILY: 4 children (3 girls), 8 grandchildren, 1 great grandchild and wife Averill

DIAGNOSIS: Coronary artery disease, dilated ascending aorta, aortic stenosis

SURGERY: Triple bypass surgery and ascending aorta replacement, October 1, 2008

Harry Waterhouse and his wife, Averill, consider themselves simple people. They live in Hillsboro, New Hampshire, on a fixed income. Harry spent 20 days in a deep sedation which he calls "coma" at Concord Hospital in the fall of 2008 following a complicated heart surgery – an experience that changed their lives only after it nearly ended his. Harry's heart trouble started as a child, when he tried to join Boy Scouts at age seven and a local doctor found what he thought was a heart murmur. The alleged murmur was detected again and again for years, but was never treated.

"About four years ago heart pains hit me vertically, right between the breast bone and left breast," remembers Harry. "They were sharp and regular but I foolishly didn't go to the doctor." After enduring the chest discomfort until mid-2008 he went to see Dr. Doug Dreffer of the Concord Hospital Family Health Center, who detected the age-old defect in Harry's heart and took action with a simple X-Ray. This began Harry's journey with Concord Hospital and its elite cardiology practice.

"They ordered a battery of tests before I went home," recalls Harry. Specifically, Harry underwent a nuclear stress test but he could not complete it due to chest discomfort and shortness of breath. Then an echocardiogram confirmed severe aortic stenosis, a critical narrowing of the valve leading out of his heart. Dr. Richard Boss of Concord Hospital Cardiac Associates, saw Harry next and scheduled a cardiac catheterization at Concord Hospital. "As I left the Hospital, the entire staff told me that if I felt uncomfortable in any way, I was to stop the world and get to Concord Hospital." Unfortunately, the world would stop sooner than Harry expected.

Dr. Gerald Sardella, head of the cardiothoracic surgery program at Concord Hospital reviewed the results which revealed a dilated aorta and blockages in all three of Harry's major coronary arteries. He also found something new that had previously gone undetected. "I never really had a heart murmur," Harry learned, "I had a progressively weakening valve and needed an aortic valve replacement." Dr. Sardella and his team didn't wait to celebrate the discovery, scheduling the aortic valve and triple bypass surgery for the following week.

"I was pleased that Dr. Sardella and my cardiologists at Concord Hospital really took the time to look for a cause of my pain. He was extremely cautious – getting all the information he needed to make the best recommendation for me. And then he acted on it immediately."

On the day of his surgery Harry drove to the Hospital and actually experienced a heart attack in the Hospital's parking lot. Concord Hospital staff stabilized him and then rushed him into a prolonged 16-hour surgery with Dr. Sardella during which the distorted aorta that had kept Harry out of Boy Scouts more than half a decade earlier finally tore open. Harry's surgery proved to be a difficult one requiring 37 units of blood and pushed Harry's strength to the limit. He spent the next 20 days in a medically induced "coma" in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) fighting for his life with less than ideal chances for survival.

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“Dr. Sardella was always with us,” Harry’s wife Averill remembers, “Harry was on Dr. Sardella’s mind round the clock; our family was in his thoughts every day.” When Harry reached his lowest point, his heart struggling to recover and his vital signs precariously dropping, Averill came into his room to say, “Goodbye.” She emotionally remembers the tranquility and the soothing guitar music provided by the Hospital’s music therapy program. Most of all, though, she recalled Dr. Sardella’s words at the time: “We have a 20 percent chance to work with,” he said. “I will not lose this man.”

He didn’t.

Throughout Harry’s stay, Averill and her family received constant help and support from Addie Camelio, a Concord Hospital Social Worker, who answered questions about finances, helped fill out insurance forms, and addressed other anxieties. Averill said, “The nurses were wonderful—they took care of me with such affection and regularly explained what was going on with Harry.” Even Harry remembers the staff, noting, “Anything I needed, I got. Whatever the family needed, we got.”

This included a medical staff and Hospital culture that treated him in a comprehensive whole-person manner not often found in today’s medical environment. Harry’s long-standing bipolar disorder, now un-medicated for weeks, caused confusing withdrawal symptoms that Dr. Sardella and his staff closely monitored. “He put my heart in the forefront, of course, but he didn’t forget the rest of me,” said Harry, “I was more than a heart — he treated anything that was part of me or my family. He even paid attention to the room temperature.”

Harry admits that he grew to rely on the level of care Dr. Sardella provided, even after his stay at Concord Hospital ended. “I even cried once when he couldn’t see me during a follow-up exam with Dr. Boss, and so Dr. Sardella changed his schedule and came right over to see me.” Dr. Sardella admits that this is one reason he came to Concord Hospital, to perform fewer surgeries than what he was accustomed to at a large medical center and spend more time with his patients.

Harry’s wealth of family support helped speed his recovery. Averill was there from the beginning. “She is my sole reason for being,” said Harry. “Every breath I breathe is for her.” Another source of inspiration was his 13-year grandson, Travis, a throat cancer survivor often at Harry’s bedside to talk to him in his ‘coma.’ “I can’t let him down,” Harry said he thought to himself, “He was my deepest inspiration at my deepest point of despair. I had no choice but to live for him.”

Harry claims that his ordeal drew the family closer and made it different, better. “The love, affection, and care they gave me during my surgery and in recovery meant everything to me, and I meant everything to them. I’m literally, physically, emotionally, and mentally a different man. My love has come out of the shadows.”

Harry and Averill send their thanks to a Concord Hospital medical community full of skill, caring, and compassion. “The faith that Concord Hospital has in its staff is wonderful. They should get a pat on the back, a big ‘thank you’ for the technology they let through the doors, and for way they let their staff treat patients. They save lives.” Harry feels that the patience, respect, dedication, and pure willingness to help from the heart shown by the entire Concord Hospital staff far surpasses any positive life experience he has previously encountered.

Today, Harry reports that while he and his family physician are still working on the proper medications to help him manage his bipolar disease more effectively, he knows that Dr. Sardella, their surgical team, and the great facilities of Concord Hospital took him from a deathbed and placed him into the strongest heart condition he has ever been in. “I feel stronger than ever – I am stronger than ever,” Harry says with new confidence. “I have a deep desire to enjoy each and every day and my heart and my mind are resurrected thanks to everyday caring people that I previously took for granted.

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