

PATIENT: **Mike Vanaskie**

Age 62, Concord, NH

FAMILY: 3 grown daughters, and wife Charlotte

SURGERY: Triple bypass surgery June 1999, atrial fibrillation leading to emergency hospitalization in 2004, and cardiac ablation, August 2008



Mike Vanaskie is a Concord psychologist with a lifelong passion for fitness. He once played golf for 36 consecutive months and used to run almost every day. Mike even ran in marathons. Most important, he planned to dance at his daughter's upcoming wedding. Then, ten years ago, Mike learned he had heart disease and his life changed a bit. Fortunately, his passions did not. Mike danced at daughter Michelle's wedding and today still enjoys his favorite pastimes.

Today, after 10 years of managing his disease with the help of Concord Hospital, Mike credits an elite team of physicians and staff, "I trust my heart to Concord Hospital and to all the wonderful doctors, nurses, and specialists that work there."

The experience began with confusion, as Mike struggled to understand his illness. "The last thing on my mind was that I would ever need heart surgery," he wondered, "I even ran the Mount Washington marathon... I ran every day. Mike tried to understand his risk factors, adding "I was in great shape. I ate right, exercised, and I was at a good weight." One consideration was his father, who underwent quadruple bypass surgery six weeks earlier.

"I was mowing the lawn on a hot summer day for my daughter's wedding shower the next afternoon," Mike remembers, "I had the sensation that someone was digging into my throat, choking me, and it was closing up." Mike called his primary care physician but, ultimately, finished his mowing, and his daughter's shower went off without a hitch. But three days later Mike had severe chest pains that led to EKG and stress tests. Concord Hospital's Dr. Carl Levick stopped the stress test quickly and told Mike he needed a procedure called angioplasty to remove a dangerous blockage. "I was shocked," Mike exclaimed, "This shouldn't be happening to me."

Mike entered Concord Hospital in July expecting a straightforward balloon angioplasty, only to hear one of the Hospital's cardiothoracic surgeons, tell him in the middle of his procedure that his left anterior descending (LAD) coronary artery was completely blocked and so calcified that he needed a triple bypass. "I don't know how you're still alive," the surgeon added. Mike and his wife Charlotte were completely unprepared for this news. "We went to Concord Hospital for a simple procedure and by noon I was in emergency surgery."

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“During my stay at Concord Hospital I learned the importance of a calm recovery for a cardiac patient,” Mike recalls, “back then in 1999 Concord Hospital had shared rooms; my roommate and his family were very loud and one of my nurses noticed I was having a hard time. She found a way for me to have more privacy at night so I could get the rest I needed.” Today, Concord Hospital has single rooms, a “quiet” environment, therapeutic music volunteers, and massage and Reiki therapists available – all of which makes the recovery process for cardiac patients much more restful.

While the surgery was unexpected and scary, Mike’s cardiac rehabilitation was a wonderful experience and he really enjoyed the group exercise, education, and support provided by his therapists and fellow participants. Mike was soon asked to join the Cardiac Peer Mentor program which has allowed him to share his experiences with others who will be undergoing heart surgery and to continue the camaraderie of this special team of volunteers.

Unfortunately, Mike began to experience atrial fibrillation about a month after his surgery but determined to dance with his daughter Michelle at her wedding he lived with it. The fibrillation stopped after the wedding and didn’t return until 2004. “I began noticing the atrial fibrillation when I was exercising again. Then just before Thanksgiving dinner, we sat down to eat and the peak of my symptoms made me rush to the Concord Hospital Emergency Department (ED). My daughter came home to just place-settings and the phone book open to the ED number.” Dr Levick was there for Mike and confirmed that his atrial fibrillation could be treated with medication and a short hospital stay. Since you must be in the hospital to get adjusted to this new medication, Mike spent Thanksgiving in Concord Hospital remembering that “the food was really good!”

But it turned out that Mike did not tolerate the medicines used to prevent atrial fibrillation. Eventually, Mike decided to undergo a procedure recommended by Dr. Levick called ablation. During this procedure small tubes called catheters are threaded through the blood vessels and into the heart chambers. High frequency electrical impulses are transmitted through the catheters to create tiny scars in the heart, which interrupt the electrical pathways that cause the atrial fibrillation and putting an end to the arrhythmias. In August 2006, Mike’s healthy heart rhythm was restored by Dr. Paul Steiner of Dartmouth-Hitchcock Concord Cardiology.

At his most recent appointment, Dr. Levick told Mike, “You will always be a man with cardiac disease, so we’ll just watch carefully while you continue to live your life.” That was enough for Mike, who is considering training for the Concord Hospital Rock ‘N Race this year. Work, golf, and an active and loving life with his family will continue... he may even take up scuba diving.

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