

PATIENT: **Ruth Bagnall**

Age 76, Pittsfield, NH

FAMILY: 5 grown children, 12 grandchildren,
3 great-grandchildren

SURGERY: Double valve repair and Pacemaker insertion,
May 22, 2008



Ruth Bagnall has endured two major bedside challenges in her 76 years — her own premature birth in a 1933 blizzard and complex cardiac surgery in 2008. She overcame the first in a heated dresser drawer in her family's home and the second in a modern surgical suite at Concord Hospital. Ruth still refers to these events as “the two miracles in my life.”

Now retired, Ruth's career as a Navy medical corpsman and jobs in nursing homes and doctors' offices gave her unique, critical insights into her latest experience. The compassionate environment at Concord Hospital is what stands out. “I've seen the caring spirit in every department at Concord Hospital,” Ruth shares, “That is not something I've seen anywhere else where I've worked in medicine.”

After moving many years ago from San Diego to New Hampshire, Ruth started retaining fluids and constantly felt short of breath, eventually meeting with Concord Hospital cardiologist Dr. Carl Levick. When an echocardiogram exposed malfunctioning valves, Dr. Levick referred Ruth to Dr. Gerald Sardella, head of the cardiothoracic surgery program at Concord Hospital, for surgery.

What would normally have been a 3-4 hour surgery turned into an 8-hour, double-valve repair. “I woke up after the surgery and Dr. Sardella was sitting there by my bed,” Ruth recalls, “I whispered that he was my hero.” Ruth went on to explain to him that, “Since I was seven years old, John Wayne was my hero, but now it's you, Dr. Sardella.” When Ruth was getting ready to leave, Dr. Sardella signed her heart pillow ‘The Duke.’

Ruth's post-surgery experience was not without more challenges. “The first three months after the surgery I felt like a rubber doll,” she wistfully recounts, “after I went home, the VNA came daily to check on my recovery and one day watery, bubbling sounds were detected.” Ruth was building a fluid sack around her lungs and so she returned to Concord Hospital to have the fluid drained, not uncommon after cardiac surgery but a bit unusual once a patient is home and on the mend. Dr. Darby Pope, the Concord Hospital thoracic surgeon, performed the procedure. Ruth worked through 18 weeks of initial cardiac rehabilitation and continues her regimen on a maintenance program. “Now I can breathe and walk so much better.” Ruth has enjoyed a very positive experience with the rehab team, giving them highest marks for their services, “They care about their work, they have a caring spirit, and you can feel it.”

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Her regular cardiologist, Dr. Levick has helped Ruth ensure her continued cardiac health. Other support for Ruth's continued health come from her primary care physician Dr. Wendy Angelo. Dr. Levick and his team monitors her pacemaker, often undergoing remote pacemaker check-ups at home. "I can attach a device to my phone, place a magnet across my pacemaker, and they can take a reading," Ruth shares. "I can't believe there are no charges for this service, but they told me, if you need this, you'll get it."

"I haven't found anyone at Concord Hospital who brings their baggage to work," Ruth stated. "They care so much and if you have questions they won't push you away." She considers 'the patience factor' a genuine difference from experiences she has had over her lifetime. "People ask me why I didn't go to Boston for my surgery," Ruth said, "and I tell them that Concord Hospital is the only place to go because caring is more important in the healing process than anything else."

As part of her personal mission to bring joy to others, Ruth passes out smiley face pins and hearts to those who do something that brings her a smile...or to those who look like they are in need of one. From her very first miracle to her most recent one, Ruth knows that caring is fundamental to overcoming any challenge. And she knows that there will be more miracles ahead. With a now-healthy heart, 5 children, 12 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren Ruth has a lot of caring and loving to do.

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