

# A Special Kind of Care

Category: Unsung Heroes

written by Diane Pellowe | April 5, 2023

I recently had open heart surgery. A highly skilled surgeon replaced my leaky mitral valve, and I'll be forever indebted to him.

But my surgeon was only one of member of the team that got me through a challenging, frightening, painful experience. Behind him were a legion of unsung heroes, without whom I never could've endured. Uppermost in my mind are the nursing assistants.

There was April, who surprised me the first time she helped me to the bathroom, proclaiming, "You move like a dream!" There was Nat, who respected the vulnerability of my situation by quietly knocking on my door and saying, "I'm Nat, and we have not met before." There was Tiffany, who made me smile by exclaiming about my husband, "I just love the way he loves on you!"

And then there was Maggie, a young nursing assistant who wore green scrubs. It was she who gave me my first sponge bath. With quiet competence, she filled a plastic bag with warm, wet washcloths. One by one, she soaped them up with a gentle cleanser and then asked permission before using them to wash my arms, legs, hands, and feet with tender, caring strokes.

Open heart surgery left me feeling like I'd been hit by a train. My body no longer felt like mine. Everything hurt, and I held myself with constant tension. Yet as Maggie patiently went through the sponge bath routine, I felt a sliver of myself begin to relax.

Maggie continued her task of cleaning me up. She suggested I lean forward so she could wash my back. As I did so, the circular motion of her warm washcloth on my neck and back made me sigh with relief and renewal. Later, Maggie washed my hair with a dry shampoo cap, and the careful way she tended to my scalp was enough to make me cry.

The relief I felt after that sponge bath truly started me on the road to recovery. Maggie probably doesn't know it, but her act of helping me clean up made me believe I wouldn't always feel so awful. She gave me hope and comfort at a time when my whole world was turned upside down and my body no longer felt like mine. She did all of this in a way that offered me control and dignity. For that act of kindness, I am eternally grateful.

*Diane Pellowe  
Middleton, Wisconsin*