

TEAM MULVEY

AN ENDURING, ENDEARING ALLIANCE

by George Fuller

If the milk of human kindness could be bottled and sold, Trudy and Jerry Mulvey would keep the bottling plant in business.



JERRY AND TRUDY MULVEY

Photography: Cliff McBride

They, of course, would dispute the suggestion until the cows come home. Because that's the effect kindness has on the kindness-givers, right? It conspires with its cousin humility to deflect attention, to immediately deny that there's anything special going on. It's that notion that, aww ... we're just like anybody else. But Trudy and Jerry aren't like anybody else.

One day while Jerry was lying in bed at Moffitt recovering from a stem cell transplant to treat his multiple myeloma (a blood cancer), foggy and feeling mortal, he said something that surprised Trudy. No, it wasn't an off-beat item stolen from pages of "1000 Things To Do Before You Die." Jerry did not want to jump out of bed and hike the Amalfi Coast, to drink fresh-squeezed papaya juice on a beach in Tahiti or engage in any sort of trendy diversion.

Jerry said in selfless fashion, "When I'm feeling better, I want to volunteer here." And whether surprised or not, Trudy's reply was characteristic of the bond they'd super-glued over the course of their long life together: "I'll volunteer with you."

Today, four years since Jerry's transplant, under the auspices of Moffitt's Patient and Family Advisory Program, Team Mulvey (yes, they actually call themselves that) volunteers in the waiting room of the Blood and Marrow Transplant unit at Moffitt "just talking to people." Jerry, a patient himself, speaks a patient's language. Trudy, a caregiver herself, knows what a caregiver needs to hear.

Jerry explains: "I'll walk over to someone and say I'm a volunteer here but I'm also a patient. When I tell them I had a transplant, I'm in. They start asking a million questions. And I just say whatever comes out of my mouth. I don't practice anything."

Trudy follows suit in her own humble style. Although Jerry's a natural, she is a trained professional. "What they don't know," whispers Jerry, "is that she knows how to counsel people because she was a crisis intervention nurse." Not to mention the fact that she has a master's degree in nursing from Yale University.

But she doesn't tell patients or caregivers this because "I don't want the patients to feel like they get special information from me that the other volunteers can't give them."

Trudy continues, "Jerry and I work very well together. If I'm talking to a patient that I know could benefit from talking to him,



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I'll get him and make an introduction. Or he might come over to me and ask: 'Would you talk to Mary or John because they're going to be the caretakers and they have some questions?'"

Together, they coach both patients and caregivers on the ins and outs of whatever the people are going through and especially on the importance of staying positive.

"Just because you have cancer doesn't mean you can't do stuff, I tell them," says Jerry. "The things you did before, there's a good chance you're going to get to do them again. And more. And your attitude is going to have a lot to do with your recovery."

Go, Team Mulvey. The two have been married for 49 years. Before retiring, Jerry was a district manager for the U.S. Postal Service and Trudy was a nurse practitioner. They raised two children, and it was just a few years ago, when at 69, Jerry was diagnosed with stage-three multiple myeloma.

"Fortunately, we were in Sarasota, just down the road from Moffitt" and from renowned medical oncologist Daniel Sullivan, M.D. Immediately, they made their "we're in this together" pact. Jerry would be in charge of optimism and exercise. (He was then, and still is, bicycle riding more miles a week than many of us ride in a year.) Trudy would be his support team in charge of everything else. "I remember you cried once," Jerry said to Trudy. "You said, 'just let me do this one time. And I won't do it anymore.'"

Under Dr. Sullivan's care, Jerry went through chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant at Moffitt Cancer Center. Eleven months later, Jerry biked 180 miles to raise money for charity. Two years later, he rode 100 miles to benefit Moffitt's "Cure on Wheels." Trudy, of course, was his ride support volunteer. Then, two years ago, Team Mulvey began volunteering at Moffitt. And they selflessly make the 120-mile round trip from Sarasota to Tampa about once a week.

In one last attempt to make us believe there's nothing special about Team Mulvey, Jerry says, "All this stuff about us, I hate for you to tell people because it makes us sound like we're some wonderful characters. We're not. It's just our story." 🗣️

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VOLUNTEERING HAS HEALTH BENEFITS

“Volunteer activities can strengthen the social ties that protect individuals from isolation during difficult times, while the experience of helping others leads to a sense of greater self-worth and trust,” according to recent studies.

“Evidence suggests that volunteering has a positive effect on social psychological factors, such as one’s sense of purpose. In turn, positive social psychological factors are correlated with lower risks of poor physical health. Volunteering may enhance a person’s social networks to buffer stress and reduce risk of disease.

“Research also suggests that volunteer activities offer those who serve more than just a social network to provide support and alleviate stress; volunteering also provides individuals with a sense of purpose and life satisfaction.”

The above comments were excerpted from a 2007 article, “The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research,” commissioned by the Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development. The article can be read in its entirety at NationalService.gov.

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