



Quad-City
Times

May 9, 2021

NURSES

*the **heart** of health care*

AN ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT TO THE QUAD-CITY TIMES

POWER OF *healing*

UnityPoint Health - Trinity celebrates our nurses who show an unwavering commitment, every day, to improving the health of the Quad Cities and Muscatine community. No matter the situation, and through a pandemic, they step up to every challenge, for all of us.

congratulations ON A JOB WELL DONE.



UnityPoint Health

Know how much *You* matter to this world.

Thank you for desire to make a difference

Today we celebrate nurses by introducing you to 10 people making their mark on the Quad-Cities. Their chosen profession demands extraordinary skill and dedication. They all exhibit abundant drive and determination, but first and foremost, a desire to make a difference. And as we got to know each of our honorees, we found they share something else in common: They exemplify what it means to put others before yourself.



This year's honorees will tell you that they are just doing their jobs. But those who know them well have shared examples of how each has gone beyond the call of duty in bringing compassion, respect, and empathy to their care. Watching them in action this past year, we are more aware than ever of the heroic work done by nurses. They worked long hours, navigating an ever-changing environment brought on by the pandemic to keep our community safe. Nurses were the ones by patients' sides, holding their hands, making sure they weren't alone and scared. They were there to celebrate patients' birthdays and comfort them through loss. Their care encompassed patients and families alike.

These truly are remarkable times and we are proud to share these remarkable stories. A special thanks to Genesis Health System and UnityPoint Health for partnering with us to recognize and honor these nurses. And to all the nurses across the Quad Cities, we thank you. You are the heart of health care.

DEBBIE ANSELM
Publisher

**Quad-City
Times**



GENESIS HEALTH SYSTEM

Compassionate Nurses Have Always Run Toward Crises



Theresa Main

THERESA MAIN, RN, MSN, MHA
President, Genesis Medical
Center-Silvis, Nursing Service
Administrator

Not everything has been new or historically uncharted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The virus itself was new. Several of the COVID-19 virus symptoms have also been new and peculiar, like loss of taste and smell.

The anxiety and fear experienced by millions of Americans who stayed close to home, away from family and friends, was unexpected. Our reactions to the fear of the virus – self-quarantine, remote work, and learning – will be studied and will become part of history.

And then there has been the known and expected.

Nurses. We knew from history how nurses would handle a pandemic. They would be skilled, compassionate, tireless, dedicated, resilient, and would run toward the disaster, even when fearful about the risk to their health.

For generations, nurses have run to serve during wars, pandemics, and disasters. They are the strong, brave, ever-enduring shining lights in the darkness.

There were thousands of volunteer nurses in the Civil War. One of them was “Mother” Mary Ann Bickerdyke of Galesburg, Ill. She was remembered as a determined nurse who did not let anyone stand in the way of her duties. She worked on 19 battlefields, establishing 300 field hospitals, apparently ignoring officers who attempted to stand between her and the injured. She was known for her caring nature.

That all sounds familiar these days.

Nurses stepped forward to provide care during cholera

outbreaks and the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918.

There were 59,000 American nurses in the Army Nurse Corps of World War II. Nurses responded again during the wars in Korea and Vietnam. Nurses are still stepping forward to serve dangerous military assignments today.

In the worst days of the COVID-19 pandemic, as everything changed around them, nurses again responded. They have been the care providers, the positive forces, the life-savers. They have worked tirelessly, many times short-staffed because of the ever-growing number of patients.

They were sometimes at the bedside offering final calming words to a dying patient through their tears. They helped connect patients and family members, whose ability to visit their loved ones was limited by restrictions to stop the spread of the virus. Often those connections were made with the nurse’s own phone or computer. Nurses lined the halls to celebrate as their patients beamed when they were discharged.

But maybe most importantly, nurses have been adaptable. Especially at the start of the outbreak, when treatment options were limited and guidance changed daily, nurses adjusted for the benefit of their patients. And they did their work in hot, cumbersome personal protective equipment (PPE), which itself was sometimes in very short supply.

In her nomination of Genesis Intensive Care Unit supervisor Stacy Wille, RN, MSN for a Quad-City Times Heart of Healthcare recognition, Lisa Rogalski cited Wille for leading by example. She didn’t avoid the fray herself.

“She was working side-by-side with her staff in an ICU capacity with critically ill patients,” Rogalski said. “She did this with respect, compassion, and kindness, making all feel valued, staff and patients alike.

“Every patient who enters our ICU is fortunate that Stacy Wille has chosen to be a nurse.”

Mary Slusser, RN, MSN, was nominated by her husband, Mark, for Heart of Healthcare recognition. He expressed his pride in Mary as she moved from nursing informatics to hands-on ICU care of very sick patients.

But that is the thing; through the long hours, the drain of emotions, the fatigue, the rapidly changing expectations, the unexpected challenges, nurses saved and have extended lives across the country during the pandemic. No COVID-19 patients are fighting alone.

Nursing professionals have had an incredible year. There are hopeful signs the virus is receding. There are safe, effective vaccines and now it is everyone’s turn to be vaccinated for themselves and those around them.

But count on it; nurses will be called upon again during the crisis and they will respond. They always do.

As a nurse myself, I couldn’t be more proud of the response of the profession I love and respect. It’s a life-long, rewarding career that I hope young people with the gifts of compassion, resiliency, and adaptability will consider.

Thank you to all of the nurses who put their own lives on hold to care for others and congratulations to those nurses being recognized with Heart of Healthcare recognition. You inspire us all.

UNITYPOINT HEALTH - TRINITY

A Year of Incredible Nurses

ROBERT J. ERICKSON

UnityPoint Health - Trinity, President & CEO

MELLISSA WOOD

UnityPoint Health - Trinity, Chief Nursing Executive

The COVID-19 pandemic and the year 2020 were without a doubt the most unique and significant clinical and operational challenges faced by our nurses of this generation.

March of 2020 began with much fear and uncertainty as there was so much uncertainty with what exactly was going to change or how that would impact healthcare and our individual lives. The nursing staff looked at the threat head-on and chose to serve their community no matter what was thrown their way. Looking back now at everything that they have gone through, we as leaders are incredibly humbled and proud of the team we have and the self-sacrifice these nurse heroes demonstrated in the most difficult of circumstances.

In the beginning, we had the benefit of time seeing what was happening in other cities and countries as Covid-19 spread, but there were still many unknowns for the eventual impact on the Quad Cities and Muscatine directly. One thing was clear, the commitment of our nurses in stepping up to the plate when our team needed them the most. These nurses demonstrated their strength in intelligence, intuition, innovation, flexibility, altruism, and accountability while serving in an ever-changing and uncertain environment without losing their core compassion for others, even understanding that they put themselves at risk. It was profound to see the way our nurses interacted with their patients and their families who couldn't come and visit them while taking on any duty as needed with "all hands on deck" to fight for the common good. Their kindness and compassion assured everyone was treated with dignity and respect and took care to the next level.

Daily Incident Command calls were



Mellissa Wood

held to assess the situation and when changes would come, our nurses would answer the call without hesitation or question. In the late fall and early winter, our local healthcare systems were especially strained, forcing nurses to work long shifts, extra shifts, and shift any focus away from themselves to the vulnerable patients who needed them most. They have been our superheroes this past year so it's easy to forget that they are human as well. They are tired, stressed, and unable to truly break



Robert J. Erickson

away to recover from the impact of the pandemic so we ask you to join us in giving our nurses the respect, love, and appreciation they deserve and need as we move into an ever-changing future.

We just simply want to say thank you to all of the nurses in our community who have carried us through this past year. There are no words or accolades that could ever suffice for all you have sacrificed but we offer our gratitude and utmost respect. The toll it has taken is tremendous and we need more

talented and caring people to step into these shoes now more than ever. Answering a call to the nursing vocation and dedicating yourself to this rewarding profession is what will truly make a difference as we look to the future.

This is a year that we will never forget as our world and lives changed daily, but we will always remember the heroic, calm, and caring women and men who showed up each and every day to care for others and we are honored to walk amongst these giants.

MICHELE CULLEN

RN, BS

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

Michele Cullen is a soft-spoken, dedicated leader who was overwhelmed by the surprise announcement that she was picked as a 2021 Heart of Health Care Honoree.

Cullen is the manager of Community Health Services for Genesis VNA (Visiting Nurse Association) but that title doesn't begin to tell the story of what Cullen does in that position.

Tera Weets, Cullen's supervisor, nominated her for the Heart of Health Care honor, and wrote glowingly about Cullen's dedication to her craft and the public's health.

"Michele also serves as Public Health Administrator for Clinton County. In this role, she is responsible for educating the community about COVID-19, organizing the vaccine clinics and distribution to partnering agencies, coordinating response efforts with other organizations, working with the schools for re-integration, responding to the pandemic within our community, and a variety of other tasks. PH Administrator is only one of Michele's job responsibilities. She manages many Community Health Programs that benefit Scott, Clinton, and Jackson Counties and plays an active role in each of them. Since the start of the pandemic, Michele works seven days per week and is often working up to 14-hour days to stay on top of this ever-changing environment. Her workload is massive, but she never complains, always has a positive attitude and is quick to respond to the needs of everyone around her."

"My hours vary from day to day, depending on the needs of each county," Cullen explained. "During Covid, myself and my team have put in long hours – seven days a week since last March. Hours have gotten better over the last month."

Cullen made the decision to become a nurse more than 35 years ago. She worked in a nursing home as a part-time nurses aid during

the summer and said, "I fell in love with taking care of the elderly and working with people."

Her first job was in Des Moines, Iowa, working at a home for children with special needs.

"I loved that job, but wanted to get into the hospital," Cullen said. "I was able to get a job in the hospital on a med-surgical floor and advance my career to critical care with ICU and Emergency Nursing."

She spent 22 years in the Emergency Department, 12 of those at Genesis West.

"I loved the Emergency Department, but knew it was time to slow down the pace 12 years ago when I was finishing my Bachelor's Degree and I developed an interest in public health," she said. "My current position has allowed me to focus on the health of our community and develop many new relationships with community partners."

Cullen said the Covid response for public health in the last year "has certainly been something I did not see coming. This last year with the pandemic has truly been a roller coaster ride with trying to figure out what needed to be done as the public health department. We started out with the case investigation response, public information, working with schools on return to learn plans, and vaccine clinics to name a few."

"The goal is to keep our community safe," she said. "It has truly been a team effort and I could not have done it without my great team."

Even with the "roller coaster" of the pandemic, Cullen admits, "I love being a nurse and serving my community. I have felt that nursing has been what I was called to do."

Cullen and her husband of 35 years live in Clinton, Iowa. They are parents to two grown children, and Cullen said, "Faith and family are an important part of my life. We enjoy boating in the summer and football games in the fall."



Michele Cullen

RETURNING THE GIFT OF LIFE

Oncology nurse receives COVID-19 vaccine from her nurse daughter

HEIDI STEVENS | Chicago Tribune

As soon as the COVID-19 vaccine became available to her department, Lynn Griesmaier, nurse coordinator for breast medical oncology at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, jumped at the opportunity.

"I took the first available spot," Griesmaier said. "I said, 'I'll go anywhere, at any time.'"

As soon as administering the COVID-19 vaccine became an option, nurse Lizzy Murphy, education coordinator at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, jumped at the opportunity.

"We're just so excited to have a vaccine," Murphy said. "I was like, 'As many hands as they need. Let's get this in people's arms.'"

Griesmaier signed up to receive her first dose of the vaccine at 9 a.m. on Dec. 18. Murphy signed up to work one of Northwestern's vaccine tables all day on Dec. 18.

Griesmaier is Murphy's mom. The two have leaned on each other and drawn strength from each other and shared tears and the occasional lunch (when there's time) and rides to work (masked, with the car windows down) as the novel coronavirus crashed through our lives, infecting more than 1 million Illinoisans.

"At the beginning I was keeping a log, 'How many patient exposures do you think you had today?'" Griesmaier said. "And then I was checking it against the statistics on TV. I mean, it was nuts. I was really so worried about how things were going for her."

Griesmaier was in awe, she said, of her daughter's calm, and her lightning-fast mastery of COVID-19 protocols and personal protective equipment needs and severe respiratory illnesses.

"I've been a nurse for a very long time," Griesmaier said. (Forty years, to be exact.) "I just kept thinking, 'How does she know all of this? How is she doing all of this?'"

Working at the same hospital was a tremendous relief, Griesmaier said.

"Not only because I had such confidence in her," she said. "But because I still felt like I could make sure she's OK."

Murphy was supposed to get married on May 30. She and her mom had been planning the big wedding for more than a year.

"At the beginning it was like, 'It's going to be fine by May,'" Murphy said. "And then the realization of it all finally hit us. So that emotional side of canceling your wedding, my mom was there for all of it."

And then, as the year like no other drew to a close, a vaccine arrived.

And Griesmaier was scheduled to receive it on the day her daughter was scheduled to administer it.

"I knew my mom was coming that day, but there were 18 stations," Murphy said. "The chances of all of it happening just right ..."

Murphy had received her first dose Dec. 17, the day before her mom was scheduled to receive hers. Murphy knew the drill, and she also knew the emotions. Griesmaier felt them all, the moment she walked into the hospital to receive her shot.

"It felt so reverent," Griesmaier said. "I'm just so grateful we're getting to do this. I was in awe of the moment."

Then Murphy's table had an opening. And it was Griesmaier's turn.

"I thought, 'I gave birth to her. And she's going to keep me alive,'" Griesmaier said.

Murphy administered the shot, which Griesmaier says she barely felt. On Friday, three weeks after that first shot, Murphy administered her mom's second dose.

"It feels sort of full circle," Murphy said. "I wouldn't be a nurse without my mom. I owe my work ethic and everything and the opportunity to go to nursing school and have a great education to my parents."

"I always feel like I can never repay her for everything she's done for me," Murphy continued. "This I feel like is the greatest

gift I could give her."

"I'm just so proud of her," Griesmaier said. "She's done such beautiful work. Her heart is just — she's a nurse, true and true. And it's just amazing. Here's your child. Here's your daughter. How this all came together, it's just amazing."

Griesmaier helps patients who've been diagnosed with breast cancer. She sees fear and hope every workday, pre- and midpandemic.

"I'm just amazed at the resilience," she

said. "The strength and courage that my patients have and their families have, I'm always just amazed."

The arrival of this vaccine, she said, gives her hope for their futures, for their ability to ward off a dangerous virus while their immune systems are already severely taxed.

"It's a good powerful moment between us," Murphy said. "And it's also a sense of hope that we're all moving in the right direction."



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ALYSSA VANMELKEBEKE

RN, MSN

“I am lucky to work with the best of the best”

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

When COVID-19 hit, Alyssa VanMelkebeke was balancing working at UnityPoint Trinity Rock Island and pursuing her Master's Degree.

“It was challenging to have that extra workload, but I was able to finish my degree and graduate this spring,” she said. “That was a great end to the hard year.”

VanMelkebeke is the assistant nurse manager at UnityPoint Rock Island Surgical-Orthopedic Department.

She said working through Covid “was incredibly challenging. Our typical workflows were thrown out the door. We had multiple COVID-19 surges locally and it more than taxed our healthcare system.”

“We went through so much mentally, emotionally, and physically trying to care for as many as we could,” she said. “We faced countless difficulties with the influx of patients and not enough medical staff. Supplies and equipment were taxed, but we had to adapt constantly moving forward.”

One of the bright spots over the last year was the out pouring of community support.

“It was truly amazing, with donated masks, hand sanitizer, face shields, food, cards, and many other thoughtful donations meant the world to all of us working in healthcare. That was a highlight of 2020, seeing people come out to support each other. Our teamwork was better than ever during Covid, we simply did not have a choice but to pull together and push forward. We were forced to think outside the box and support each other. It was challenging to lead a group of amazing and talented people through Covid when we have never experienced a situation like this before. I will never be able to credit my team enough for all the amazing work they did and are still doing.”

“There was a huge emotional toll for healthcare staff that came with Covid,” VanMelkebeke said. “I am thankful that my family was able to stay healthy while we were in the thick of it. It was a huge relief to go home and just be a ‘mom.’ There



Alyssa VanMelkebeke

was an added sense of worry about bringing Covid home, so we took extra precautions.”

VanMelkebeke's path to nursing began with her interest in science and biology and anatomy courses, she said.

“I had family members experience medical issues growing up and the nurses and doctors who helped always intrigued me,” she said. “I remember the show ‘ER’ as a child, and I loved it.”

She describes herself as a “natural caretaker and a mother hen of sorts.”

“I wanted a career that was in demand and had multiple options and that drew

me to nursing,” she added, and pursued a career in nursing right out of high school.

When she entered the nursing clinical portion of her education, VanMelkebeke said, “I was hooked the second I got to begin working in the acute care hospital setting. It is exciting, challenging, and ever-changing. Nursing allows you to meet people from so many different cultures and life experiences. Being there for complete strangers during the most delicate part of life is a privilege. I greatly enjoy the challenge that being a nurse brings.”

She earned her Associate of Science in

Nursing Degree from Trinity College of Nursing and Health Sciences in 2012, and then pursued a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Western Governors University in 2013, and obtained her Master of Science in Nursing with a specialty in Leadership and Management from Western Governors University in April of 2021.

Her healthcare career began as a Certified Nurses Assistant (CNA) at Hammond-Henry Hospital in Geneseo. After graduating from nursing school with her Associate Degree, she began working at Trinity in Rock Island as an inpatient registered nurse in Cardiac Step-down.

She pursued additional education and ventured into other areas of work such as clinic nursing, but was drawn back to acute bedside nursing in the hospital setting.

“I spent years as a bedside nurse in a medical-oncology department and I learned an incredible amount about nursing, healthcare, life, and people in this position,” she said. “I was blessed to work with an incredible team.”

VanMelkebeke also pursued leadership opportunities as they became available in the department and was moved into a case management role at one point.

After spending two years as a case manager for oncology patients she took a management role for acute care services, which is where she is today. Her hours are flexible due to staff and patient needs and she said, “Typically I work day shift hours, but there are times when I need to come in during off-hours for staff support. There are a lot of early mornings and a lot of late evenings in the mix. On occasion, there is a night shift thrown in.”

“I am lucky to work with the best of the best, it makes coming to work enjoyable despite endless challenges,” she shared.

She added, “I come to work every day just trying to do my best. Healthcare is such a challenging profession, but it is worth it to see positive outcomes in your patients. I have the chance to touch the lives of many employees as well, and I take that very seriously. It is such a great feeling to see employee grow their confidence and skill set. Overall, I am very happy being a nurse and greatly enjoy the opportunities both personally and professionally a nursing career offers me.”

VanMelkebeke lives in Geneseo with her husband, Ryan, and two daughters, Brynleigh, 5, and Brooklynn, 2.

MARY SLUSSER

MSHI, RN

Born to be a nurse

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

Mary Slusser believes she was “born to be a nurse.”

Since she was five years old, Slusser said she knew she was going to be a nurse... “I can’t pinpoint exactly why I wanted to be a nurse, but the idea that I can make a difference in a person’s life, either large or small, it’s what I enjoy most.”

Slusser’s primary role is in the Nursing Informatics Department for all Genesis Health campuses. She also holds an “as needed” position on a medical-surgical floor.

In mid-March and during the entire month of April of last year, she left her informatics role and worked between 40 and 60 hours a week in the ICU.

“I worked a variety of shifts at various times, primarily from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., but I tried to work as often as they needed help,” she said.

She returned to her primary informatics position in May of last year but continued to pick up “as needed” a couple of days a week from 3 to 7 a.m. when needed.

“For our second surge (of COVID-19), I returned to the ICU for the entire month of November, working up to 60 hours a week,” she explained.

Her normal hours are from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., but Slusser often volunteers to come in early at 3 p.m. when she is needed.

When asked about working amid the pandemic, Slusser said, “Covid has been such a trying time for all of us. As a nurse, a student, and a Mom, trying to balance all of those things has been difficult. As a nurse, you feel obligated to work whenever you are needed. As a student, you are trying to find the time to stay focused and grow as much as you can through your education. As a Mom, you want to be there for your kids and your family and not miss the day-to-day activities.”

“During Covid, I have battled with an overwhelming feeling of guilt...Guilt that I was not available for my family as I should have been and missed seeing them daily. When I was home with my family, there was a tremendous amount of guilt that I was not at the bedside fighting the battle with both my co-workers and the patients. However, through all of that, I feel so blessed to be in a position where I could make a difference,”



Mary Slusser

she added.

“As a healthcare worker, it does not matter if you are a nurse, a provider, a respiratory therapist, a certified nursing assistant, a radiology or lab person, pharmacy, the dietary department or environmental services, or the many others behind the scenes, we all have a part in caring for our community,” she said. “We all work together to overcome situations we never thought we would face, while still providing the quality compassionate care we always provide.”

Slusser admits caring for patients during the pandemic “was hard, they were unable to have visitors, they were alone in a room where the door had to be shut 100 percent

of the time, but looking back, I hope I was able to provide them and their families with a sense of comfort that they were safe.”

“Honestly, my favorite part of the job is sitting down with patients, talking and learning about their lives if they are awake, or listening to the families, and just holding the patient’s hand who is not awake, even if just for a short time,” she said.

Her secondary education began at Eastern Iowa Community College where she earned her Associate’s Degree in May of 2015. In December of 2016, Slusser graduated from St. Ambrose University with a Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing. In December of 2018, she completed her Master’s Degree in Healthcare Informatics.

She is currently enrolled in a dual-program and will receive her Doctorate of Nursing Practice and Master’s of Business Administration in May of 2022.

“I am proud to work for Genesis and the commitment that they continue to provide to our community,” Slusser said. “From ensuring we had the personal protective equipment that we needed, to implementing technology that helps us care for patients or technology that allows them to continue being in contact with their families when they can’t have visitors. They (Genesis) collaborated with local businesses to provide our staff with care packages, snacks, and food to keep us going through the hard times.”

Although Slusser has returned to her informatics role, she continues to support nursing and patients by ensuring their workflows and technology can support them in providing the best care possible.

“As healthcare professionals, we signed up for this. We signed up to care for patients under any type of circumstances. We may have never envisioned what the last year has looked like, but I am honored to have been in a position where I could make a difference,” Slusser said.

Her career at Genesis began in 2007 as a certified nursing assistant on the surgical specialty unit. After graduating and completing her boards, she continued to work in the surgical specialty unit.

“I was engaged in several committees, including collaborative documentation group led by the nursing informatics department where my interest in informatics began,” she said. “Three years ago, I took a part-time position in nursing informatics and continued working part-time for surgical specialty. Two years ago, I transitioned to a full-time position in nursing informatics, but continue to hold a PRN position (on-call) Surgical Specialty as I just can’t seem to walk away from bedside nursing.”

Slusser lives in Milan with her husband, Mark, and two daughters, Brook (12), AND Kaitlyn (11), “who make me proud every day,” she said.

“I am also grateful to have the most amazing Mom, Elaine, who pretty much stepped in and took my place in the family while I was working 60 hours a week. To my Dad, Gary, who has always been proud and has encouraged me to keep pushing, they are the true heroes, who sacrificed the most over the last year.”

STACY WILLE

BSN, RN, CCRN

Pandemic took an emotional toll on ICU leader and her team

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

Stacy Wille leads by example in her position as supervisor of the ICU at Genesis Davenport – East Campus.

Lisa Rogalski, a colleague of Wille's who nominated her for the Heart of Healthcare honor said, "Our Genesis team, as well as every patient that enters our ICU, is fortunate that Stacy Wille has chosen to be a nurse."

When asked why she chose to be a nurse, Wille said, "My Mom is an amazing nurse and I used to love dressing up in her scrubs and listening to her work stories. As I grew up, I knew that nursing was what I was meant to do. I can't imagine any other career as rewarding and exciting."

Wille earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology from Bradley University, Peoria, and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Trinity College of Nursing.

She first worked as a CNA at Mercy in Clinton, Iowa, on an Alzheimer's unit. After graduating from nursing school in 2011, Wille worked on the med-surg unit at Mercy in Clinton for about six months and on the medical floor at CGH in Sterling for about three years.

"In March of 2014, I was given the opportunity to start my dream job in the ICU at Genesis," she said. "I was nervous to care for a much higher acuity of patients than I was used to but excited and ready for the challenge. In October of 2019, I made the transition from charge nurse to nurse supervisor of the ICU."

"Over the past seven years I have had the pleasure of working with some of the most brilliant, compassionate, and collaborative men and women," she said.

Difficulties most often come with pleasures and Wille shared the unknowns and the emotional toll of the pandemic.

She said, "How many patients will we get? Will we get sick and take it home to our families? What kind of PPE should



Stacy Wille

we be using? Will we have enough? What kind of symptoms should we expect and how severe will they be? How will we find enough nurses if/when we surge? How will we keep up with all the constant

changes? How should we communicate all the changes? How do I help the staff deal with the stress of this pandemic?"

"I don't think any of us could have ever imagined a world where we would

be face-timing family members as they said goodbye to their loved ones," she said. "Being able to hold the hand of your loved one as they pass feels like a basic human right that we had to deny people in order to ensure the safety of the community and our staff."

She continued, "The nurses in our ICU have faced more tragedy in this past year than anyone should ever have to experience in a lifetime. When families weren't allowed in the hospital, nurses were the ones by the patients' sides, holding their hands and making sure they didn't feel alone and scared. We celebrated patients' birthdays and comforted them when they couldn't be present for holidays, celebrations, or even their spouses' funerals."

"The most satisfying part of this pandemic has been witnessing the support and resiliency – support from our leaders, medical directors, other units, and the community," she said. "I am truly blessed to have such supportive senior leadership and medical directors who helped me navigate these uncharted waters. They spent countless hours helping me develop surge plans and address all of my concerns. That being said, the real heroes of this pandemic have been the resilient nurses, respiratory therapists, physicians, nurse practitioners, and other support staff. We've been there for each other to celebrate the victories, like the patient who was discharged after 990+ days in our ICU and for the losses, like the day we had seven patients pass in less than 24 hours. The community also supported us in so many ways by sending us food, monetary donations, masks, caps, thank-you cards, and so much more. Words cannot even begin to describe how grateful I am to be a part of our amazing ICU family."

Wille's colleague Rogalski shared, "As a supply chain leader, I also experienced Stacy to be an invaluable team member – assisting supply chain with finding alternative options to supplies that Covid was constantly making a challenge to find. At one point during the pandemic, blood tubing became very scarce and was on a national backorder. Stacy worked with our team and developed an innovative option that even the suppliers were amazed by."

Wille and her husband, Ryan Wille, have two children, Easton (4) and Grace (3-months).

QC NURSES IN ACTION



MEG MCLAUGHLIN

Qiana Wells, RN, prepares to administer the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to a patient during a mass vaccine clinic on January 19th, in Milan.



MEG MCLAUGHLIN

Sharon Widick, CNO, prepares a Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at the Rock Island Health Department Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2020, in Rock Island.



MEG MCLAUGHLIN

Laura Esch, RN, laughs with Hope Creek Nursing and Rehabilitation Center resident Harold Ott, 84, of Milan, after giving him a Moderna COVID-19 vaccine during a mass vaccination clinic of long-term-care staff and residents the center Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2021, in East Moline.



MEG MCLAUGHLIN

Edna Sowards, RN, injects Arno Paniucci, of Moline, with the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine during a mass vaccination clinic at the Greater Quad City Auto Auction Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021, in Milan.



JESSICA GALLAGHER

Renee Feldpausch, the ICU charge nurse at UnityPoint Health Trinity- Rock Island, takes a moment to herself after caring for COVID-19 patients Wednesday, December 9, 2020.



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MAKEDA EASTER
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — “COVID Fatigue” is how surgeon Dr. Frank Candela titled his painting — a weary blue face enveloped in a cloud of black. During the winter COVID-19 surge in L.A., Candela sent the painting to Times health reporter Soumya Karlamangla, who tweeted: “When I asked him what inspired the image, he said, ‘my colleagues faces.’”

As the pandemic stretched toward the one-year mark, with about half a million deaths in the U.S. alone, health care workers were increasingly burned out and traumatized.

For some, staying creative is a form of escape, a way to cope with stress or a strategy for sharing a message of hope with their community. The Times spoke to five health care workers — who are also a painter, a choreographer, a photographer or an illustrator — to learn more about how the pandemic has affected their artistry.

C. Michael Gibson: interventional cardiologist, researcher, educator, painter

In Dr. C. Michael Gibson’s oil painting “The Last Shift,” a line of dark, floating silhouettes drifts off into a hazy light. Gibson shared the painting, which was auctioned for \$25,000 to support health care workers, on Twitter last March, adding: “Welcome home to all of our courageous #CoronaHeroes who made the ultimate sacrifice.”

The isolation of the pandemic has meant more time to look inward. For Gibson, “The Last Shift” is a meditation on spirituality and vulnerability, “not afraid to talk about

it, knowing that so many other people were probably facing the same concerns about where’s everyone going after this. Are they going to be OK? All those issues we all struggle with.”

As a practicing physician, Gibson spends one day each week doing procedures, opening up people’s arteries. It’s a visual job, he said. “You’re looking at a screen and finding these blockages and making them better, so we’re kind of visual athletes. And being a painter has always made me a better visual athlete.”

In addition to his work as a cardiologist, researcher and educator, he paints most nights and weekends at his studio in Natick, Massachusetts. Art is his way to communicate nonverbally and “allow a lot of all those feelings, emotions and right sided things that are all pent up in there to come out.”

During the pandemic, Gibson has created about 10 paintings. About half are directly related to the pandemic. He was particularly inspired by a nurse in a Dove commercial, struck by her exhaustion and the marks the mask left on her face. He said it captured “not just the outward appearance but the inward appearance of so many health care workers who’ve been traumatized by the violence.”

Other paintings have been more abstract, but still the pandemic showed up in subtle ways — like the increased use of grays, red and blues. “They’re not very happy paintings,” he said.

A recent ray of light: He helped to administer vaccines one weekend in Central Falls, Rhode Island. “It reminded me why I was a doctor. It was a really good experience.”

G. Sofia Nelson: pulmonologist and choreographer

As a physician who specializes in the respiratory system, Dr. G. Sofia Nelson splits her time between clinic and hospital settings in Oxnard and Camarillo, California. When making hospital rounds before the pandemic, Nelson typically saw about 15 patients each day. But during the recent COVID-19 surge in Southern California, Nelson saw between 50 and 60 patients every day.

Nelson, 33, would often return home from work, not because she had treated every patient, but because she was exhausted. There was also triaging, she said, deciding which patients could benefit from continued treatment.

Flow arts, a form of dance that involves prop manipulation, such as hoops, or juggling, was one way Nelson coped with the stress.

“It’s been long days, but it’s very powerful having something to come home to, for which I can pretty much shut off my brain. I can just really focus on my body,” Nelson said. “The more I’m working my mind and the more I’m thinking, the harder my job becomes, the more I actually have to dance to maintain that balance.”

She’s also the director of Lumia Dance Company, which she launched in 2019 as a way to give back to the arts community. In December the company premiered its debut show virtually, “Light Through Darkness,” featuring dance, aerial arts and fire spinning — all filmed in an empty North Hollywood theater.

Nelson choreographed three dances in the show over several months, typically rehearsing on Zoom during evenings and weekends. One dance was a post-apocalyptic hoop piece about the pandemic experience, another was inspired by what she described as the government’s increased militarization and fascism, and a duet explored the pitfalls of social media.

Now that the show is over, Nelson mainly dances at home as a form of movement meditation, reaching the same type of head space many surgeons use in their practice, she said. “It’s really important that we create a culture where physicians are encouraged to have creative outlets like this. We create a society in which not just physicians, but anybody, really has that kind of opportunity.”

Chip Thomas: family physician and photographer

For the last 33 years, Dr. Chip Thomas has worked on the Navajo Nation, the largest

reservation in the U.S., spanning parts of New Mexico, Arizona and Utah, and also among the hardest hit by COVID-19. As a family practice physician, Thomas, 63, has treated generations of families in the area. Also a street photographer who goes by “jet-sonorama,” Thomas says art and medicine go hand in hand.

“When I see people in the clinic, I’m attempting to create an environment of wellness within the individual. And when I am putting art up in the community, (I’m) reflecting the beauty of the community back to people.”

In 2009, Thomas began creating public installations of his photography, using spaces throughout the Navajo Nation as a way to share messages. Some of Thomas’ prior work focused on public health awareness, including commentary on people’s food choices.

During the pandemic, he created large-scale public service announcements posted on abandoned buildings and billboards encouraging residents to wear a mask and stay positive despite the tough times.

Last November, Thomas published a 115-page multimedia zine called “Pandemic Chronicles, Volume 1,” inviting visual artists and poets to respond to how the pandemic disproportionately affected their communities. Thomas shot much of the photography in the zine during weekends and his time off work.

One image, of an older woman and child in a masked embrace, is a family Thomas has worked with since 1987.

The young girl in the photo is about 9. “I started photographing her when she was 6 months old,” Thomas said. “One of the things I love about that image, other than the fact that they’re both wearing masks, is they’re touching. ... With social distancing and the emphasis on mitigation measures, a lot of people don’t have an opportunity to touch and embrace like that.”

Thomas was recently invited to create a project funded by the United Nations, working with activists to create an art-based response on the Navajo Nation to the mental health challenges caused by the pandemic. The project’s title, “Pandemic as Portal,” is based on an essay of the same name by Indian author Arundhati Roy.

Tessa Moeller: nurse and painter

Working as a nurse in a Miami trauma burn unit during the early days of the pandemic, when personal protective equipment ran low and there were many unknowns about COVID-19, was terrifying for Tessa Moeller.

Painting was an outlet to handle the high stress of the hospital, where she typically worked three days a week. “Sometimes I would come home, especially after a particularly scary day, and I would shower (and) go

right to painting.”

When Moeller, 29, wasn't working in the hospital, she juggled commissions and created art to express how she felt in the moment.

Last March, she began a COVID-19 series of paintings of nurses she knew, including one of a colleague who works in ICUs inserting catheters and another who became infected with COVID-19 while studying to become a nurse anesthesiologist.

Last May, Moeller moved to Portland, Oregon, and began working in an oncology unit.

In the early days of the pandemic, the fear and confusion of last spring emerged through her use of bright reds and expressive brushstrokes. After moving, Moeller's paintings became more detailed and controlled with “a lot of neurotic brushstrokes,” she said.

“That really sort of portrays how I was feeling, and I think a lot of nurses were feeling, from the frantic beginning to them just becoming very careful and controlled and anxious and making sure that everything is very — trying to exert control, when you don't have control on your situation.”

Now based in Boston, Moeller has completed about 20 paintings in her COVID-19



JAY L. CLENDENIN, LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Dr. G. Sofia Nelson, a pulmonologist who sees dance as a way to keep balance in her life, uses dance hoops in her Newbury Park, California, backyard.

series and is preparing to enter an MFA studio art program at Syracuse University.

Bing Li: medical resident and illustrator

Drawing was part of Dr. Bing Li's life before she considered studying medicine. Last year,

as a medical resident who works in a Brooklyn emergency room, Bing turned to art as a way of managing the grueling hours and pervading feeling of helplessness while New York was the epicenter of COVID-19.

Drawing landscape pieces and comics is a relaxing escape, a way to “feel like I have control and creating something that feels

productive that's also fun,” Li said.

Maintaining an art practice is crucial for the 32-year-old. “We all see a lot of suffering that doesn't necessarily have a meaning,” Li said. “But then the desire to make art is kind of like a desire to put a meaning into something.”

Although most of Li's art practice doesn't intersect with her work in health care, she made a comic last November based on a conversation between medical residents working through COVID-19. “I'd like to maybe eventually make more stuff that's related to what we're experiencing in health care, but it also feels like you're kind of reliving the moment, and you may not feel necessarily ready for that.”

Since the pandemic began, Li has made close to 30 pages of a lighthearted web comic described as being “about adventure, friendship and a weird squishy creature.”

Although the pandemic doesn't show up directly in the work, experiences of the last year are often prioritized in the storytelling — themes of working collectively for the greater good, Li said, and “having a society that will care for each other, rather than a selfish society where people care just about their individual comforts.”

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JILL MARLIER

LPN

'I have always felt that nursing was my true calling'

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

Compassion is at the core of Jill Marlier, the Director of Residential Care at Amber Ridge Assisted Living in Moline.

Compassion for the residents and their families is the biggest reason why her close friend Kishanna Butler nominated Marlier for the Heart of Health Care honor.

"She (Jill) works hard to get to know our residents and their families and welcome them to our community. During Covid challenges, her compassionate care, communication and knowledge was limitless. When a resident's family was out of state and unable to be there during his final hours, Jill never left his side. She held his hand until his last breath. She is the hardest working, most caring nurse that I have ever met. She goes above and beyond every day of what being a nurse is."

Marlier's response was, "My nomination for this award was a story that really has stuck with me and I still emotional about the situation. We had a resident passing away in hospice and his family could not be present. I stayed and held his hand as he passed. I did video calls with family so they could all say their goodbyes."

In her position at Amber Ridge, Marlier is in charge of all the residents' care and oversees the staff.

"I work any shift I am needed, but typically work Monday through Friday and weekends when needed," she said. "I am on call 24-hours a day."

Marlier chose a career in nursing after starting her first job at Trinity Hospital as a CNA, in 1998, when she was 15 years old.

"I have always felt that nursing was my true calling," she said. "I went to school for nursing as I worked as a CNA, and completed my nursing degree at Black Hawk College."

She has experience in a variety of hospital departments—medical/surgical/orthopedics, as well as hospice.

When asked about COVID-19, Marlier said the pandemic did bring "many challenges. I spent a lot of time filling in the



Jill Marlier

roles that family usually plays during the lockdown process. I would try to do multiple rounds a day just so the residents would have a visit when they were in lock down in their rooms."

She also filled the gap with primary care and helped with all Intel visits so residents

could remain in active status with their primary care providers. She stepped in for all staffing needs, whether it was as a CNA, floor nurse or housekeeping.

"The hardest part of Covid was losing residents because of Covid," she said. "I spent many nights just sitting with them

and helping the families through this difficult time."

"I love working as a nurse," she said.

Marlier lives in Rock Island and is engaged to be married. She has a son who plays football for Western Iowa and said, "I enjoy going to his games."

HOPE DOUGLAS

RN, BSN

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

Hope Douglas chose to pursue a career in nursing after her children were born, and 35 years later she has never looked back.

"I had a midwife and thought I wanted to be a nurse-midwife," she said.

When her family moved from Seattle, Wash., back to the Midwest and Douglas enrolled at Scott Community College.

"Once I completed my ASN (Associate of Science in Nursing) at Scott Community College (1986) and procured a position at what was then Mercy Hospital in Davenport, I decided I enjoyed taking care of all sorts of people, with a large variety of illnesses and/or conditions," she said. "I worked on a medical/oncology floor. We also cared for overflow stroke, orthopedic, and rehab patients. I learned so much in the 12 years I worked on that floor. I worked all three shifts at different times, including scheduled 12-hour shifts."

In 2012 she completed her BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) at St. Ambrose University.

When Douglas decided she needed a change in hours, she moved to the outpatient surgery area at Genesis East, where she worked for about 20 years.

"In that department, I learned to be very flexible, as one never knows when the day will be over," she said. "In the evening it was when the last person met criteria to be able to be discharged and during the day, it was whenever one could comfortably turn over patient care to a nurse that came in later in the day. Shifts are staggered and every day can be a different start and end time."

She said that it is often a challenge to prepare patients for surgery, sometimes more than one at a time, and ensure everything is in order and on time, while at the same time, recovering and caring for postoperative patients.

"I like to take as much time as necessary to prepare both patients and family members about expectations or surgery and recovery, and to ensure all questions are answered and hopefully, fears alleviated," Douglas said. "As the unit grew and we became much busier, I didn't feel I had the time or energy to care for patients, as well as I, prefer to do, so I applied for, and was hired for, my current position."

It was three years ago when she began working as an office nurse at Genesis Cardiothoracic Surgery and she currently is in charge of the back office and ensures ev-



Hope Douglas

everything is in order before patient visits, testing, surgery, etc.

"I check patients in at their office visit and ask pertinent questions so that the provider has an idea of someone's current issues when they enter the room to see a patient," she explained. "I also inform patients of any testing before office ap-

pointments and /or surgery. I explain the rationale for what we need, as well as answer any questions they may have, or ask a provider, if I don't know something, and call them back. "

Douglas stressed the importance of people knowing what to expect and the reasoning behind what is asked of them.

"Most of the people we deal with are faced with very serious health issues and need to know we are taking excellent care of them," she said. "Showing people that I care and will do everything in my power to ensure they, and the providers, have everything needed to make informed decisions in their care, is a large part of each day. I am very fortunate and thankful to work with others with the same mindset. Each person I work with is compassionate about what we do and the care we give others."

When asked about COVID-19, Douglas said, "Covid has altered the way we all communicate with each other and live our lives."

When they began testing for COVID-19, she was asked to assist in the testing tents at Genesis.

"As we had to minimize surgeries and other operations in our office, this was a prime opportunity to continue to care for others and to assist community efforts in the detection and battle against this disease," she said. "I met so many healthcare workers who are passionate about caring for others. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting them and working closely with them."

When working in the office, Douglas spends much time reassuring patients about the safety measures employed at the various testing sites, in the office, and the hospital.

"As with any business/facility, we have had to rearrange schedules, how many people can come in at a time, if and /or when we can facilitate testing or surgery, screening questions and the taking of temperatures, frequent cleaning of all areas of our office, and any number of other things all of us has had to learn to take into consideration. It has been fearful, trying, and often sad, time for all, but is hopefully becoming less so, as people get vaccinated and we can lessen some of the restrictions we've learned to live with for the past year or so."

When she is isn't working she likes to spend time with her two daughters, four granddaughters, family, and friends.

"I don't get to be with them as often as I would like, sometimes, but we all enjoy the times when we are together."

"I try to take care of others, as I would like my family members or myself cared for," she said. "By doing so, I hope I show each one the respect, kindness, compassion, and patience each one deserves."

MALINDA KRAUSS

RN, BSN

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

MaLinda Krauss loves telling the story of why she became a nurse.

Krauss is the director of Health Services working at Illini Restorative Care in Silvis, and she admits she never thought of being a nurse growing up.

She entered college after high school with plans to be a social worker but had stop due to the birth of her second child.

"I was working at a factory in Clinton when my grandmother sadly died of cancer at the end of 2000. My grandfather, who had prior CVAs (strokes), had amazing in-home care ladies, but it was not cheap and he did not want to go to a nursing home."

Krauss, who was helping him with his finances, noticed how much her grandfather was paying out of pocket for his care.

"I talked to my husband about wanting to quit my job to take care of him full time so he did not lose everything," Krauss explained. "My grandparents were a huge part of my upbringing and they were like another set of parents for me. I lived with them much of my early childhood and spent lots of time with them when not living with them."

Krauss quit her factory job and began taking care of her grandfather, 15 hours a day, 7 days a week, for the last 15 months of his life.

"With the lack of knowledge I had at the time I cared for him, I'm amazed he didn't have any other health issues," Krauss said.

"I will never forget one day when Dr. O'Shea, who was with Genesis hospice at the time, came into my grandfather's house, since my grandfather was a hospice patient, and told me if I ever became a nurse he would gladly welcome me aboard. So I thought maybe that is the way I should go. I started school not long after that."

Going to school and working full-time was not an easy lift for Krauss and her family. She and her husband had four young children at the time, with two living with them.

She graduated in 2006 with her LPN from Clinton Community College with hopes of working in hospice care.

"I wanted nothing to do with nursing homes at the time. I wanted to work for a local hospice house, but they were only hiring registered nurses at the time."

She then applied at Riverview Manor in Pleasant Valley, Iowa, and within a week she accepted a full-time position as a third shift nurse.

"Riverview is the nursing home I called 'home' for 7.5 years of my nursing career,"



Malinda Krauss

she said. "This is the facility that helped me find my love for geriatric and long-term care nursing. They were all like family. I met many amazing team members there that I still talk with today. Riverview not only gave me my first opportunity to be a nurse but also to grow in my nursing career to eventually be their restorative nurse."

It is also the place where Krauss realized she had a desire to become a Director of Nursing, but explained, "I did not have the degree I needed at that time."

Her next career step was at Kahl Home as a weekend supervisor where she worked her way up to Unit Manager of the Skilled Unit along with the Long Term Care Unit.

"The Kahl Home gave me more knowledge and experience," she said. "I also obtained

my RN at Scott Community College. Thinking I had always worked miles away from home as I live in Camanche, Iowa, I started at Mercy South Long Term Care and Skilled Care in Clinton as a per diem nurse eventually taking a full-time third shift nurse position, working there for only nine months."

A friend encouraged Krauss to apply for the Director of Nursing position at Genesis Illini Restorative Care in Silvis.

"I didn't think I had a chance, I always thought a smaller company would give me a chance to be a Director of Nursing, not a bigger corporation like Genesis, but they did, in October 2016," she said. "During the past 4.5 years of being Director of Nursing for what was then Genesis Illini Restorative Care, and currently is WellSpire Illini Re-

storative Care, I obtained my Bachelor of Nursing from Purdue in 2019."

Working in a senior care facility during the pandemic was a heavy burden from a both professional and personal standpoint.

"Difficulties included being away from my family. They left our home to stay with relatives when we had our first Covid unit open. For almost three months and I was on duty every day. I worked 72 hours a week, however, it was nothing compared to the families of our residents that did not get to see their loved ones for almost a year."

The hardest part of the pandemic for her "was actually the day we were told the regulations changed and we had to shut the door to visitors. I wanted nothing to do with this. I felt it was so unfair to those that lived with us to not be able to see their loved ones. It was hard to tell those that did not fully understand why their family could not come into the building anymore. The saddest part of Covid will always be the ones we lost. We lost numerous residents and guests at Illini Restorative Care. They will all always be missed a lot by our team members."

Despite the hardships of the last year, Krauss can still find a silver lining.

"The satisfaction is that we achieved working together as a team more than we ever had to in the past, between keeping up with the constant changes to working together to solve the next step in the pandemic."

"I love being a Director of Health Services to be part of a team," she added. "I love being able to still work on the floor as a nurse and be a leader. I can tell you my favorite part of my current job is my team that I work with."

She continued, "I could not accomplish everything that has been achieved, including going from a 3-star to a 5-star community without my team by my side. They are my strength, determination, courage, and challenge needed to achieve the best."

Krauss and her husband, Mark, are a blended family with five boys, and one granddaughter.

"My husband Mark has been my push to accomplish my dreams and goals," Krauss said.

"I have a great cheerleading team compiled of my brothers, my mom, stepdad, my dad, two daughters-in-law, aunts, uncles, and many cousins, she said. "I have great friends who always had faith in me and cheered me on to my dreams."

Georgia WWII veteran, NURSE TURNS 100

SHANNON BALLEW
Marietta Daily Journal, Ga.

Inez Long of Marietta, Georgia, one of Cobb County's few surviving World War II veterans, celebrated her 100th birthday in January.

"It's good to be alive," Long said before the approaching milestone.

Born Minnie Inez Scurry on Jan. 30, 1921, in the south Georgia town of McRae, Long said her older sister became a nurse despite their father's insistence that she be a teacher. She followed in her sister's footsteps, and graduated as a registered nurse from Emory's Crawford W. Long Hospital School of Nursing, according to family records. That hospital is now Emory University Hospital Midtown.

She worked a little over a year as an

industrial nurse in a Savannah shipyard, enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1943 during the Second World War.

"The war was on, and that was it," she said of her decision to use her skills in supporting the war effort.

Inez went through basic training in Greensboro, North Carolina, and Santa Ana, California, and spent the rest of her time stationed at the hospital at Numa Army Air Field in Arizona. There, she tended to patients, administered medicines and shots, and worked on the floor, doing whatever the doctors needed her to do. She especially loved helping with surgeries, she said.

It was at the Numa base hospital that she met her husband, Ed "Bud" Long, who served as a B-17 bomber pilot. As the

family story goes, the two lieutenants first met when Ed Long was waking up from a tonsillectomy. He was just as struck by Inez's beauty as he was by the punches she was landing on him, forcing him to breathe.

Edward Long, who died in 2016, would later tell people that he chased the young Inez all over the hospital for the rest of his stay there, according to an article from their church, Maple Avenue United Methodist Church in Marietta.

The couple married in Yuma in 1944 and would be together for 72 years. Inez Long was discharged when she was pregnant with their first child and moved back to McRae. She waited there for about a year, and when the war was over the Longs and their daughter, Georgia, moved to Marietta.

In Marietta, they had a son, Ed Long, Jr., and Inez continued her nursing career at a local doctor's office and later became an assistant at a dentist office, while her husband worked at Delta and Lockheed Martin.

Long Jr. remembers his parents being the hosts to many parties on their front porch and in their backyard, always loving to have

company. His mother was always active in their church, selling baked goods for church fundraisers at the old fairgrounds. One favorite was pecan tarts.

"I told her when she was selling them at the bazaar at church, she was selling them too cheap. They were always gone," he said.

Inez Long could also often be found tending her garden, and she loved to can the vegetables she grew, especially mustard pickles. Her son said she also loved pranking her children, and would often spray water at him or play other jokes.

"They were just good parents. We didn't have much when we were coming up, but they always seemed to provide," Ed Long Jr. said.

Life has been quieter in recent years for Inez Long. She doesn't remember as well since a stroke a few years ago, and she is hard of hearing. But she still enjoys walks and having company, though the pandemic has curtailed visits by family and friends. The one place she and her son go out together is the occasional trip to the beauty parlor for a haircut.

"One of the doctors said she was a tough old bird, and she is," her son said.

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SAMANTHA REMLEY RN

'I get to leave work knowing I made a difference'

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

An innate desire to help others is what led Samantha Remley to a career in nursing.

She said she chose to nurse "because my father had some health issues and I wanted to be able to help others, just like the great healthcare workers helped my dad and our family."

Remley currently works as a phone triage RN at Genesis Health Group – Eldridge Family Practice.

When asked about being a nurse amid the pandemic, she shared how "stressful" the last year has been and said it is "probably the most stressful in my nursing career. There has been a tremendous strain put on our healthcare system and our healthcare workers. With that being said, "I'm not sure I've ever before been so proud to be a nurse. We stepped up to the plate and succeeded, in a year that never seemed to have an end. We dealt with fear, uncertainty, and loss, but kept coming back every day to do it again. We were on the front line during this pandemic and we stood that line daily. I'm proud of all the healthcare workers out there and so honored to be able to be a part of the nursing community."

"Compassion is always really good. Both for nurses to give to people and for our patients to give back to us. We have had a hard time with the pandemic just like everyone else. Compassion is a good thing, and everyone should practice it in (their) everyday living. That's my biggest takeaway from this," Remley said.

Her nomination for the Heart of Health Care honor recounted a harrowing situation during which Remley exemplified the mantras of "going above and beyond", and "cool under pressure."

"Nearing the end of her shift a call came in from a patient who was thinking of harming themselves. Sam, remained calm and focused, reassuring the caller. With no one present to take the caller to the ER, Sam contacted 911 which dispatched police to the scene. This situation is not in Sam's normal day-to-day, which usually



Samantha Remley

consists of fielding patient calls and call-backs. Her actions resulted in the patient getting the care needed."

The young woman on the other end of the phone line told Remley "she didn't

think she wanted to live anymore."

"I asked her if she had any plans and just kind of chatted with her for a few minutes. Then I told her that I need to get her to the hospital. I need to get you to people

who are trained to deal with situations like this. And she just said, 'just please help me'."

"My heart was racing. But of course, you can't really let the patient know that. And thankfully, I've had enough nursing experience to have been in bad situations before like codes at the hospital that you can kind of turn off your emotions until after everything is said and done," Remley said.

"I remember thinking about her all weekend. I just thought about her and if she was getting the help that she needed. Does she have a loved one that she could call to end up with her (at the hospital) because I just felt so bad for her," Remley said.

"I'm always going to try and deal with patients how I would want somebody to deal with myself or my family member. And you know, there's a lot of patients I just wish I could reach through the phone. Of course not during COVID times, but just put my arms around them and give them a big hug. And she was one of them."

Remley earned an Associate's Degree in Nursing from Scott Community College. She started her career with Genesis in 2003 in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and then transitioned to working at Genesis Health Group – Bettendorf Pediatrics in 2008.

She became a Certified Health Coach in 2013 and worked for about a year as a pediatric health coach in the Bettendorf Pediatrics office until the program was discontinued for pediatrics, at which point she returned to work as a staff RN position in the office and then transitioned to her current position in 2017.

"Most days I get to leave work knowing I made a difference in someone else's day, and that brings me so much satisfaction," Remley said. "I thoroughly enjoy being able to be a part of the nursing community."

She and her husband, Aaron, live on a small acreage with "fur and feathered" children – "two dogs, three indoor cats, several "barn cats," four guinea pigs, and somewhere around 40-50 chickens, I may have lost count," she said. "We are getting ready to welcome some Alpacas to our little farm this spring or summer."

Remley is an avid knitter and gardener in her time away from work and she can often be found walking the country roads near her home listening to audiobooks.

Medical setbacks fuel passion for nursing career

CAITLIN HEANEY WEST

The Times-Tribune (Scranton, Pa.)

Madison Jarocha knows her life would look much different if illness had not touched her.

From an autoimmune disease that shook up her world as a teenager to broken bones to a cancer diagnosis in her final year of college, the 21-year-old has faced — and survived — more than some people do in a lifetime.

Madison, of South Abington Twp., Pennsylvania, is studying for a nursing degree from University of Central Florida. In high school, Madison thought she'd one day study mathematics. That, along with much more of her life, changed when she was 16.

A basketball and field hockey player, Madison initially thought she was having issues with asthma when she started getting out of breath and passing out at practice. When her mother, Nicole Jarocha,

saw Madison for the first time in a few weeks, her intuition kicked in.

"She walked into the house, (and) I turned to my sister and said, 'There's something wrong with her,'" Nicole Jarocha recalled.

Madison, who lost about 20 pounds over two months and felt seriously fatigued, had seen doctors for a few months, but nothing came of the appointments. Her mother pushed for bloodwork and other tests, and Madison ended up getting admitted to Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pennsylvania.

Madison learned she has acute systemic scleroderma. The more common variety causes the skin to produce too much collagen, but in Madison's case, her body produces too much collagen internally, which the body thinks of as foreign and then starts attacking her muscles, tissues and organs.

Overall, the disease led to at least

10 hospitalizations, several surgeries and procedures, numerous trips to Baltimore and the possibility of needing a double lung transplant one day.

"The nurses that I had, I feel like I definitely would not be where I was without them," Madison said. "I kind of want to do for other people what they did with me."

Switching paths

Madison realized going into her senior year at Abington Heights that nursing was the career for her. Ready for a fresh start, she headed to Florida and plans to graduate this May with a nursing degree.

Madison expects to stay in Florida for another year after college before hitting the road to work as a travel nurse. She's considering a career in bone-marrow transplants or oncology, having done clinical work in an adult oncology clinic last year

that showed her how much she enjoys caring for patients in a critical setting. Eventually, she'd like to move into nurse education.

"There's a lot you can do with nursing after school and everything," Madison said. Early in college, while raising money for the Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children through the Knight-Thon, she collapsed and was taken to that very hospital for treatment. She went blind for more than a month, her mother said, as doctors suggested that flareups from Madison's disorder could have affected the connective tissues in the eyes. While Madison regained her eyesight, she is legally blind without her glasses.

Then last year, Madison suffered a concussion and broke several bones in her foot as a result of a serious moped accident.

Still, she pushed forward through her recovery, and then another

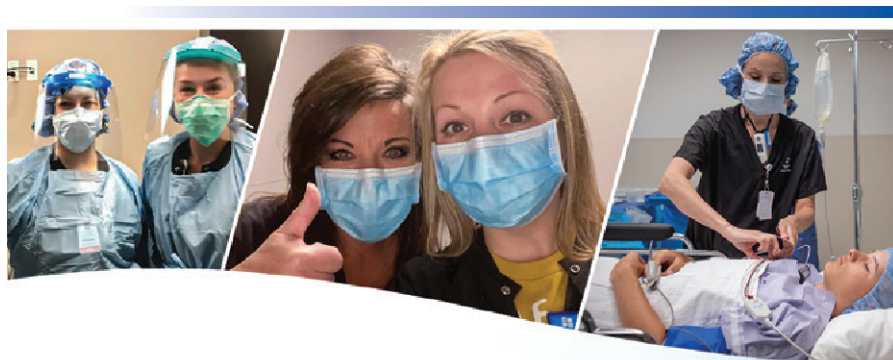
setback came: cancer.

In June, she noticed a lump on top of her rib cage but thought it was just a cyst, which she gets often. By October, however, she realized it had almost doubled or tripled in size. Doctors diagnosed her with leiomyosarcoma, a cancer of the connective tissues and muscles.

Madison underwent surgery on Nov. 30, during which doctors removed the affected area and tissue surrounding it. Subsequent testing showed she was clear of cancer and did not need chemotherapy.

Showing strength

"I know what it's like to be a patient in the hospital," Madison said. "I've had some good nurses and bad nurses. And I kind of know how I want to be treated in a hospital. ... I'll be able to sympathize and also empathize with my patients and know what situation they're in."



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CAITLIN BERG

RN, BSN

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

Caitlin Berg walked out of a patient's room with a shy smile, and a quizzical look on her face. She stopped momentarily to sanitize both her hands while trying to figure out why two strangers with flowers and a gift bag were standing beside a group of her co-workers.

The flowers and gift bag were for Berg, who genuinely seemed surprised to learn she had been named one of the ten 2021 Quad-City Times Heart of Health Care honorees.

Berg, a day shift ICU nurse at UnityPoint Trinity-Bettendorf, still finds time to serve as a substitute nurse at area schools. She was nominated by her friend Shelby Sorensen and is described as a "dedicated, caring, and empathetic ICU nurse...She sees the need for help and delivers wherever she can. Covid has been very trying, but even more rewarding watching her blossom as an ICU nurse."

Berg's manager, Megan Murphy, has nothing but high praise for the ICU nurse.

"Caitlin is an amazing team member. She consistently goes above and beyond and is always there for her patients and teammates. Caitlin is such a wealth of knowledge and is always willing to share her knowledge with others. She is kind, strong, compassionate, dependable, hard-working, and flexible. I always know our unit is in good hands when Caitlin is working. We are so lucky and blessed to have her on our team," Murphy said.

Berg picked a career in nursing because she wanted to be in the healthcare field and said, "I was able to job shadow a nurse and loved what they did."

After earning a Bachelor's Degree from Iowa Wesleyan University, in Mount Pleasant, Berg began working in the same unit she works in today.

She says the experience of dealing with the pandemic has opened her eyes to the impact anxiety has on someone who is acutely ill. "It can make any situation ten times worse. Also, not having family able to visit their loved ones made it even more important to spend that extra time, if able, with your patients to just talk and hold their hand," said Berg.

"Covid also brought everyone in the healthcare field together as it required a lot of teamwork," said Berg.

"We ICU nurses could not have done it without our respiratory therapists, phlebotomists, radiology technicians, case managers, PT/OT/ST, dietary, chaplains, environmental services, nurse practitioners, and physicians.

"We also truly appreciate the nurses from other units including pediatrics, obstetrics, OR, PACU, palliative care, and many others for stepping in to help us take care of our patients. We could not have done it without everyone's help."

Berg and her husband, Cody, are expecting their first child this fall and she said, "We currently have two fur babies, 'Mojo' and 'Red.'"



Caitlin Berg, an ICU nurse at UnityPoint Trinity-Bettendorf, is interviewed by the Quad-City Times after being surprised that she was one of the ten nurses to be named as Heart of Healthcare honorees.

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JESSICA PENISTON RN

CLAUDIA LOUCKS

Visits to the emergency room during her childhood most likely influenced Jessica Peniston's career decision to become a nurse.

Peniston, who currently works the weekend night shift in the emergency room at UnityPoint Health - Trinity Muscatine, said, "When I was very young I was in the ER often with respiratory issues. My aunt was an ER nurse at that time and I think that's where the interest initially sparked."

"Shortly after that, I had a cousin who was diagnosed with Leukemia and I became interested in her care," she added. "I vividly remember helping with her port a device used to draw blood and give treatments and going to appointments with her. Those experiences shaped who I am today and I knew that I wanted to work in healthcare from a young age."

Peniston earned an Associate Degree in Nursing from Scott Community College and worked in the Muscatine ER as a unit clerk while she was in nursing school, and when she finished school she accepted a RN position at UnityPoint Health - Trinity Muscatine.

"I have worked many different shifts in the ER, but moved to weekend package when my oldest daughter was born five years ago," she said.

Peniston doesn't dwell on the negative but prefers to concentrate on the positive from her experience with COVID-19.

"There were many challenges associated with Covid. Things are ever-changing. Initially, it was very scary for all of us, we knew very little about the virus and the effects it would have not only physically, but mentally as well, on patients and ourselves. Nurses have a gift of adapting to difficult situations, so while it was difficult, I feel that we all rose to the challenge and became better nurses and people for the things we have endured during the pandemic."

"Working as an ER nurse means that we are rarely seeing the same patients, but of course there are patients with chronic conditions that we see often and we always form a connection with them," she said.

"I am very satisfied with my profession," she added. "I love working in the ER where every day is an unknown. I get to take care of every type of patient from critically ill to a sick kid in the middle of the night."

Peniston lives in Muscatine, with her husband, Josh, and two children.



Jessica Peniston works as a weekend night shift nurse at UnityPoint Health - Trinity Muscatine.



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