

## Have a ducky day

The first time I met Marty Geraghty, he handed me a rubber duck. The “Rock ‘n’ Roll duck,” as he called it, had long black hair, sunglasses, a tank top with a matching black wrist band, and a lime green guitar. As I curiously studied the gift, he showed me a bag full of toy ducks. There were pirate ducks, wrestler ducks, polka-dotted ducks, and even band-mates for the Rock ‘n Roll duck in my hand.

Perhaps he had done it on purpose, but the duck quickly led to a discussion about music and his favorite bands. Marty said it was easy for him to pick a favorite: The band was called Rococo, and they were the reason he started dating his wife, Wanda.

Wanda and Marty Geraghty met in the 1980s, when Wanda was the lead singer for a band called Heartbreaker. While things initially didn’t work out, the pair reunited a decade later when Marty ran the lights and soundboard for the band Rococo. Wanda was the lead singer. To send a message, Wanda left a single rose in an empty bottle at a bar where Marty worked. The pair were engaged a year later.

Fast forward to 2016, and the couple was living in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Rococo had broken up, but Wanda still sang – Marty’s favorite was her rendition of “The Rose” by Bette Midler. Wanda, then 56, first noticed a small lump on her neck. She thought she had swollen glands, but eventually went to the hospital. She was diagnosed with stage 4 oropharynx squamous cell cancer (throat cancer).

Wanda initially received treatment at a hospital close to their home. However, in 2018 the Geraghtys began coming to Dana-Farber to see Glenn Hanna, MD, an oncologist at the Institute’s Head and Neck Center.

“The news was absolutely devastating,” recalls Marty, who generally speaks for Wanda – she has trouble talking since undergoing surgery. “But the people here have been absolutely unbelievable.”

Marty was not only impressed with the care, but also with the warm, welcoming environment. In particular, he enjoyed the rubber ducks that once occupied every space of Yawkey 2, 6, and 7. Seeking a little cheer on his rides to and from Dana-Farber, he began playing a crane game at a rest stop, in which the prize was a rubber duck. \$5 up and \$5 back, he would win a half dozen ducks each trip and distribute them to people at the Institute.

“It was just something silly to make people smile,” he explains. “I enjoy giving them out and seeing people’s reactions. In a place like this, we all need to smile.”

Marty eventually bypassed the machine and started buying the ducks in bulk. Now, each week he packs a bag and offers them to doctors and patients – many going to people on Yawkey 11 where



When Wanda Geraghty began treatment at Dana-Farber, her husband Marty wanted to bring cheer to patients and staff. He found rubber ducks to be the perfect tool.



Glenn Hanna poses with his collection of ducks.

Wanda receives care. “Have a ducky day,” he says.

Hanna, Wanda’s doctor, displays his growing collection on his office windowsill. While the first duck caught him off-guard, he notes the small gesture reflects Marty’s character.

“Getting these ducks is extremely powerful,” Hanna explains. “It takes a special person to still think of others when your wife is going through intense therapy.”

Wanda’s treatments have been temporarily halted in order to address nutrition concerns. However, soon she’ll return to her weekly chemotherapy. Hanna says there are still several therapy options available to her.

“She’s as tough as nails, and always has a great attitude,” he adds.

As for the growing flock in Hanna’s office, Marty says as long as they come to Dana-Farber, he will continue to bring his ducks.

“Wanda is my everything, and she’s the reason I keep doing this,” says Marty. “It’s my small way of taking care of the people here. I mean who doesn’t love a silly duck?”

— by Austin Fontanella