



Publisher's Note: Continuing our "Women to Watch" series, we introduce you to Barbara Nagle, who learned that retirement was not the end of her teaching career.

Woman to Watch: Barbara Nagle, Charting a Life

by Katie O'Sullivan

The retired teacher wasn't sure why she signed up to take that particular community education class. She only knew that she was "supposed" to be there.

Barbara Nagle retired from teaching in elementary schools in 2001. A 1961 graduate of Bridgewater College, she'd spent the better part of her career as a full-time special needs tutor, working one-on-one with young children.

In 2005, the Bourne resident signed up at the Sandwich Community School to take a class with Cynthia Robotham on becoming a Beacon Hospice volunteer.

"I knew I didn't want to be visiting hospice patients," Barbara remembers. "I'd done all that already when my father died." She assumed that the class would help her figure out why she felt she needed to sign up.

By the end of the session, she knew.

Barbara's epiphany turned into the Chart-A-Life program that she created for Beacon Hospice. The program started small here on Cape Cod, in Yarmouthport, and was officially adopted into Beacon's Deep Harbors program in 2007. It has since been rolled out to over 20 Beacon Hospice locations throughout New England.

Last year, Barbara was awarded the Dr. Adrian Rondileau Award from the Bridgewater Alumni Association. This prestigious annual award is for professional achievement and community service.

She has also been nominated to receive a Daily Point of Light Award, a national award for individuals who make a difference in the lives of others. The Point of Light Institute will honor Barbara later this year.

"When I was at Bridgewater College, they encouraged not only academic achievement but also the ability to help others," Barbara explains. And that's what she's still striving to do.

The end result is a visual representation of a patient's life, using words and pictures to tell stories about who the person is and what was important to them throughout his or her life.

Using her teaching background, Barbara created an easy-to-follow system for gathering and displaying pictures and information about patients.

Forms are given to family members to fill out, who then send back their answers with copies of photographs, clippings and quotes. The resulting posters are displayed in the patients' rooms.

"The Chart-A-Life posters help caregivers connect and relate to their patients," explains Barbara. "It also creates a format for conversation with this person that they will be more apt to respond to – details from their past, their hobbies, family tree, nicknames..." The list goes on.

The display allows those caring for patients to see them as whole people, not just an Alzheimer's patient. Not just as "the woman in Room 234."

Nurses and visitors will know, for example, that "that woman" played the guitar with a folk band, or taught art classes in Chatham, or raised four kids, or illustrated children's books. Little details that make a big difference in how we view others as individuals.

Through Chart-A-Life, "we bring patients to life for caregivers and other family members. We help make those connections," Barbara explains. "We help people see their loved ones in new and inspiring ways."

She feels strongly that the program helps both the patients and their families remember who the person in the bed really is, and start conversations that make everyone happy.

While still retired, Barbara once again spends her time teaching. She's stepped back from the actual making of the posters to focus on teaching volunteers and spreading the idea. "It's a nice connection back to teaching," she agrees.

She holds in-service lessons for volunteers and caregivers, teaching them how to gather information and put the Chart-A-Life together.



Barbara Nagle (right) and the daughter of a Beacon Hospice patient display a "Chart-A-Life" poster. Photo is courtesy of Beacon Hospice, Inc.

Barbara tells the story of how a Beacon's volunteer coordinator from New Hampshire, Liz Wolzco, attended one of her teaching sessions. She was so impressed she decided to expand the program, returning to the Granite State to teach the Chart-A-Life idea to others so it could grow even further.

"In New Hampshire, they have a volunteer working with high school volunteers to create the Chart-A-Life posters as well," says Barbara, a note of pride in her voice.

Even in retirement there is still work to be done, making Barbara Nagle a Woman to Watch.

If you know of a Cape Woman who is making her mark on her community and would like to share her story, please email the publisher:

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Her second book, **Perfect Strangers**, was released in November 2010, by Moongypsy Press.

When she's not writing, editing, or playing "Mom's Taxi," you can find her curled up with a good book or blogging about the antics of her new Puppy.

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