

A Mentor for Life.

Advancing
cardiovascular
research

BY LEAH J. NERO '08



Marge and Cathy circa 1980 and above, in 2006.



Among its faculty, YSN is lucky to claim many whose dynamic research and teaching strengths result in lasting bonds with their students. Such is the case with Marge Funk '84, PhD, RN, FAAN and doctoral student Cathy Winkler, whose professional relationship began in 1979 and has evolved into a lasting friendship. This partnership, which has meandered through the better part of three decades, continues to flourish at YSN today, as Marge and Cathy pursue similar research on cardiac arrhythmias.

As a new BSN graduate in 1979, Cathy's first position was in the Coronary Care Unit (CCU) at Yale-New Haven Hospital. As a 4-year veteran in the CCU, Marge oriented Cathy on the evening shift. Marge recalls, "She was great, she was very smart. She was so good for being so new."

Cathy grew tremendously as a result of her experience in the CCU. "Marge was with me through many important clinical events, such as the first time I was involved in the resuscitation of a patient who had a cardiac arrest, and the first time a patient died. These are challenging events for a new nurse and with Marge's guidance, I was able to gain perspective and learn about the

events themselves, as well as the best way to support the loved ones of the patient. Marge was clinically astute, empathetic, and had a sense of humor. I believe that I have become a strong clinical nurse because of my early orientation to the profession by Marge." During the two years that Marge and Cathy worked together, Cathy remained eager to learn and Marge eager to teach. These defining years brought them closer. Cathy even lived in the guest room of Marge's condo for a brief period before getting married, and Marge came to the wedding.

The 1980s and 1990s brought change in Marge and Cathy's work venues and academic pursuits, such that an amicable distance formed between them. It was after years of Christmas cards and now-and-then contact that Marge and Cathy first "published" together. In 2001, Cathy submitted a recipe to her church cookbook for "Maine Party Chicken," a signature dish of Marge's, and gave her the credit. This put them in touch again. They discussed doctoral study and Marge encouraged Cathy to "take one course and try it out." This course, *Conceptual Basis for Nursing Science*, convinced Cathy that she was in just the right place, and—after



Training leaders in critical care nursing

Deborah Wiegand came to YSN after graduating in August of 2003 from the University of Pennsylvania with a master's degree in bioethics and a PhD in nursing. She started her two-year postdoctoral fellowship at YSN in September of 2003 with the NIH-funded Research Training Program in Self and Family Management, co-directed by Dean Margaret Grey and Dr. Ruth McCorkle. During her postdoctoral fellowship, Dr. Wiegand also sought external learning opportunities related to end of life care. Her research addresses an important societal issue, the provision of quality care to those dying in an environment filled with medical technology. While at YSN she was able to continue to build her program of research.

Dr. Wiegand's doctoral dissertation was focused on the experience of families participating in the process of withdrawal of life-sustaining therapy from a family member with an unexpected, life threatening illness or injury. As a postdoctoral fellow, she conducted a follow-up investigation. She also completed a preliminary study that assessed situations that caused critical care nurses to experience moral distress. "YSN is an excellent environment for a novice researcher," says Dr. Wiegand. She speaks with great admiration of her YSN mentors, including Dr. Marge Funk, whose "expertise in critical care nursing was extremely valuable" as Dr. Wiegand initially studied families of patients with acute life-threatening illness or injury. "Dr. Funk's expertise in the safe and humane use of technology in the ICU was also helpful as decisions are frequently made at the end of life related to the use or withdrawal of this technology," she adds.

In September 2005, Dr. Wiegand started her new position as an Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland School of Nursing in Baltimore. Her current research contributes to the understanding of families faced with difficult end-of-life decisions and will aid in the development of effective strategies for nurses, physicians and bioethicists to guide families through this process.

Dr. Wiegand's recent book, *AACN Procedure Manual for Critical Care* received the American Journal of Nursing Book of the Year Award for Critical Care Nursing. Also in 2005, the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses appointed her Chairperson of its Ethics Task Force.

briefly considering law school—she officially entered the doctoral program at YSN in the fall of 2003. Marge noted that she could say to the admissions committee that "Cathy and I have already published together thanks to the Maine Party Chicken recipe."

Cathy's key interests coming into the doctoral program were heart disease and technology. "We have both always been interested in technology," says Marge. Cathy elaborates, "With each class at Yale, I gained new knowledge and perspectives. And even though Marge was supposed to be on sabbatical my first year, she always checked to see how I was doing."

Over the course of their careers, Cathy and Marge have lived through major changes in the care of patients with heart disease. During Cathy's second year, Marge had just co-authored new practice standards for ECG monitoring with Barbara Drew at the University of California, San Francisco. In the process of this work, Marge realized that "we really don't know what kind of arrhythmias patients now have. Back in the 1980s, we couldn't prevent or limit the size of the infarct, just provide supportive care. Now, early thrombolytics, angioplasty, and stents mean that arrhythmias may not be as significant. Patients are either avoiding myocardial infarctions or having less myocardial damage—because of early interventions." With Marge as her Dissertation Chair, Cathy is conducting a secondary analysis of data from a study by Barbara Drew to examine arrhythmias in patients with acute coronary syndromes. Cathy's work on arrhythmias informs Marge's work, and the two continue

to support each other, and laugh together, just like old times. Marge and Cathy have truly reconnected professionally and socially. Cathy says, "Marge has given me several opportunities to further my skills in research. I did a secondary analysis of some of her data looking at women and cardiac surgery, coordinated computer-based ECG education for nurses at Danbury Hospital as part of Marge's pilot study, and co-authored a chapter with her on heart failure."

If there is one thing Marge and Cathy disagree on, it is who is the luckier. Cathy says, "There are certain people that really make a difference in one's life, and she's made a difference several times." For her part, Marge contends that serving as a mentor to Cathy has been her distinct pleasure. In the future, Cathy sees herself involved in cardiac nursing, perhaps in education and research, and hopes to be "still helping, still contributing to the profession and to our patients"—much like her mentor, Marge. The thread that holds them together is the care of patients with heart disease. They are united with an understanding of an era in the not-so-distant past, and the stories they share from those days. In her final reflections on their many years of friendship and their mostly parallel professional work, Cathy summarizes, "Nursing is a demanding profession, and it has been invaluable to have a person like Marge serving as a role model. She truly integrates knowledge, professionalism and caring." These days these two bright women and serious researchers seem to be still growing and learning, as well as laughing quite a bit.



Marge and Cathy with Deborah Wiegand (see story in left column).