

Love's Special Touch

By Jane T. Massey

She dances with all of them, even the ones in wheelchairs.

Reluctant at first, the patients are won over by her enthusiasm and charm. They sing. They dance. They laugh as she does her version of the "hootchy-kootchy."

The smiles remain long after the sing-a-long is over. Beverly Glaser has that kind of gift.

PHOTO PLACEHOLDER

Six years ago, Beverly was a nursing home patient. Although she had physically recovered from the stroke she suffered in early 1981, she was withdrawn and in poor emotional health. Beverly wouldn't talk or respond to anyone in any way. At the slightest touch, she would recoil in fear and anger.

But this isn't a story about a stroke victim's recovery. It's about a woman who overcame the odds to help patients at St. Francis Nursing Home in Memphis, Tennessee. On any given day, you will find Beverly helping with activities such as the sing-a-long described. Beverly is one of the many

volunteers in Tennessee nursing homes, but her story is unique. As a volunteer, she works an average of 45 hours a week.

"When I see patients who are down, I tell them I know how they feel; I've been through it."

— Beverly Glaser

That translates into 2,000 hours a year, the average time spent at work for most paid employees.

Because of her dedication to the patients of St. Francis, Beverly is THCA's Volunteer of the Year.

The award is presented annually to an individual who demonstrates outstanding service to nursing home patients in the state.

Beverly began her volunteer work while still a patient in the Memphis nursing home. At the age of 53, she was left partially paralyzed by a major stroke. Her physical problems were accompanied by severe emotional ones, and the combination made her family realize (reluctantly) that they could no longer care for her at home. Beverly was admitted to St. Francis.

At first, she didn't respond to the therapy and treatment planned for

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her by the staff. One person who worked closely with Beverly at this stage was the facility's activity coordinator, Elizabeth Tippens.

"We would take her to ceramics classes and set tools in front of her, but she wouldn't respond," says Tippens. "She even fell from her chair to the floor several times. She was that inert and disinterested. We kept taking her to class and let her sit there among others."

Eventually Beverly began reaching out to help patients seated next to her.

"She would never do a thing for herself, but she would help others," Tippens recalls.

At her own initiative, Beverly soon began arriving early for ceramics and other activities to help the staff prepare for the classes and set out tools. She would go about this work without saying a word. Sometimes, Beverly would bring other patients to the activities.

"From that point on, we discovered that the best therapy and medicine for Beverly was helping others," the activity director says.

Within four months, Beverly's physical and emotional condition had improved so much that she was discharged from the facility.

"She cried and cried and cried because she didn't want to leave," Tippens says. "We arranged for her to continue coming to the facility as a volunteer for discharge therapy. She simply needed to feel needed. It's gone beyond that now. She loves the patients and wants to give them her all."

Beverly's husband, Floyd, drives her to St. Francis each day. Some might consider the 30-mile roundtrip drive as inconvenient. Not Beverly or Floyd.

"What she does here, in her way of thinking, is more important than herself," says Lucille Place, St. Francis' assistant administrator.

Beverly's day begins at 8 am when she calls the facility's beauty shop to find out who's scheduled for appointments throughout the day. During the rest of the day, she'll transport patients to and from the beauty shop and activities. During activities, she makes sure each patient gets individualized attention.

She finishes her day by delivering mail to patients, reading to them or taking them for walks. Whatever the task, Beverly does it with dedication and a special touch that endears her to patients and their families.

Mildred Galloway, sister of a patient, agrees.

"My sister has been a patient of St. Francis for four years," she says. "At first it was hard for us to accept nursing home placement, but Beverly has helped tremendously. She's turned my sister's attitude around. We consider Beverly a part of our family."

Ask any one of the patients, and they're quick to sing Beverly's praises.

"Beverly is an angel," Flora Rawls says. "She gives an awful lot of time to us. I don't know many people who would come and do what she does all day."

Beverly recognizes she's an inspiration to the patients at St. Francis. When asked what she likes best about being a volunteer, this unassuming woman quietly says, "Everything."

"When I see patients that are down, I tell them I know how they feel; I've been through it," Beverly explains. "But I tell them they've got to want to help themselves. That's what helped me."

When the staff of St. Francis planned a small ceremony to announce Beverly's Volunteer of the Year award, they had a hard time getting the guest of honor to attend the party!

"She was more concerned about the patients," one of the nurses says. "We had to assure her they'd be taken care of in her absence."

Although the recognition of the award has boosted Beverly's self-confidence, it takes second place to her friends, the patients of St. Francis.

"She's humble and doesn't like to toot her own horn," Tippens says. "But we can tell she's proud, and she should be."

Recognition doesn't drive Beverly to volunteer 2,000 hours to the facility. Love does. "Patients tell her she'll get a crown in heaven," Place says. "But she tells them, 'That's nice, but I like what I'm getting now.' That's pure Beverly!"