

One Step at a Time

Dandridge Woman Walks Again After “Miracle” Operation

Last summer, Yvonne Sims thought she would never walk again. The crippling stiffness in her arms and legs and her sore joints was overwhelming. It was July on the farm, and her condition went from bad to worse: Yvonne had trouble gripping her walker, and when she couldn’t get out of bed, she knew she needed to seek medical care.

By the time she saw an orthopedic doctor, her rigid hands were immobile and her feet turned inward, making each step almost unbearable. She was referred to Luke Madigan, MD, who immediately knew she needed surgery on her spine.

Dr. Madigan is a surgeon at Parkwest Medical Center who focuses on cervical myelopathy, spinal cord injury and degenerative conditions of the cervical and lumbar spines.

Yvonne feared surgery, but it was clear the procedure would save her life.

“The first time I met her she was in a wheelchair,” says Dr. Madigan. “She couldn’t walk unassisted and even then, her balance was severely impaired. She had minimal use of her hands and couldn’t even open a jar.”

An MRI revealed a large disc herniation and some overgrowth of posterior soft tissue pushing on her spinal cord from the back. The slipped discs were like a garden hose with kinks in it. Without correction, Yvonne was facing paralysis.

In August 2019 she underwent an anterior cervical discectomy and fusion at C6-7, located at the base of the neck. Dr. Madigan then performed a C6-T1 decompression and fusion at the top of the thoracic section of the spine to reach the posterior soft tissue that was pinching on her cord.

The surgery took four and half hours. When Yvonne returned to her hospital room after surgery, her hands, which had previously been drawn up toward her body in tight fists, and her turned-in feet with curled toes had already visibly relaxed, before she



Luke Madigan, MD

even became fully awake. “She did well throughout the surgery and even the next day was starting to get hand function back,” Dr. Madigan says. “Her recovery has been nothing short of miraculous compared to her condition when I first saw her in the office.”

The Road to Recovery

Yvonne went from Parkwest to Patricia Neal Rehabilitation Center at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center, another Covenant Health hospital, where patients with brain or spine injuries can receive intense rehabilitation. Her husband Tom never left her side.

“She was told she might be there three months; she was discharged after three weeks,” says Tom.

Yvonne’s husband fondly recalls one of the physical therapists at Patricia Neal Rehabilitation Center who he says single-handedly taught Yvonne how to walk again. “He would take her just far enough to make her wonder if she could, then a little bit more to prove that she could, indeed.”

“I felt strong, really strong. It was a challenge, but it was a good challenge,” Yvonne recalled. She continued her therapy at home for several weeks, praying all the time. “Everything had worked, everything Dr. Madigan did was the right thing. I tell you, he is a godsend.”

Yvonne underwent physical and occupation-



Tom Sims never left his wife Yvonne’s side during her hospital stay and intense rehabilitation.

al therapy. Her therapists showed her how to use resistance bands to strengthen her legs, and to work with modeling clay to strengthen her hands. Yvonne transitioned from a walker to a walking stick, and she is now able to walk without assistance.

“Dr. Madigan was wonderful,” she emphasizes. About her care at Parkwest, she says, “The people were there every second that I needed them. The entire staff was amazing to both of us.”

A Joyful Noise

“My husband Tom has been my rock,” she says. “I got stronger; it got easier. I had my husband with me, and he helped me get around. I didn’t have the fear of falling.”

A God-fearing woman, Yvonne is devoted to her church. She remembers the day she climbed 13 steps at the front of the church unassisted. Fellow church members burst into applause, shouting and dancing with praise.

Knowing her faith community was praying for her recovery and over her doctors and nurses removed some of her fear.

She feels that her healing, with the help of the physicians and staff at Parkwest, was an act of God. “I was immediately taken care of—and I couldn’t ask for more efficient people.”

Yvonne is back home on her 100-acre farm in Dandridge. “I get around pretty good; I take my time. I don’t run and jump like I used to. But I’m here.”

How are her hands and feet doing now? “Lord, they feel more natural, like they are supposed to,” she says. “I can stretch them out – no tingling, stiffness, soreness.” She is also back to driving her five-speed MINI Cooper. “I was burning the roads up, having a ball! So when I couldn’t get around, it knocked me down a little bit.”

To anyone considering spine surgery to alleviate pain or problems, Yvonne cannot say enough about Dr. Madigan. “If you need to have surgery, his is the first name I say. He is so professional, and he has helped me so much.”

For more information about spine surgery at Parkwest, please visit TreatedWell.com/orthopedics.

What is minimally invasive spine surgery?

- Minimally invasive spine surgery (MISS) is a type of surgery on the bones of your spine. This type of surgery uses smaller incisions than standard surgery, often with less impact on nearby muscles and other tissues. It can lead to less pain and faster recovery after surgery.
- During MISS, the healthcare provider makes one or more smaller incisions. He or she then inserts a device called a tubular retractor. This is a stiff, tube-shaped tool. It creates a tunnel to the problem area of the spine and gently pushes aside the muscle and soft tissue around the area. The surgeon can then put small tools through the tunnel to work on the spine. The surgeon also uses a special operating microscope, high-resolution cameras, computer images, and real-time X-rays of the spine.
- Surgeons can use MISS for some types of spine surgery. These include lumbar or cervical discectomy, laminectomy, and spinal fusion.

Why might I need minimally invasive spine surgery?

Most people with neck and back pain do not need surgery. Your healthcare provider may recommend surgery if your pain hasn’t gotten better with conservative treatments like physical therapy or medication. If you still have a lot of pain, surgery on your spine might provide relief. Your healthcare provider may also recommend spine surgery if you have a type of problem that surgery may help, such as:

- Herniated disk
- Spinal stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal)
- Spinal deformities (like scoliosis)
- Spinal instability
- Spondylolysis (a defect in part of a lower vertebrae)
- Fractured vertebra
- Removal of a tumor in the spine
- Infection in the spine

If you are thinking about spine surgery, ask your healthcare provider if minimally invasive spine surgery at Parkwest Medical Center is a choice for you.

Parkwest: A Leader in Orthopedics

Parkwest Orthopedics is a leader in hip and knee joint replacement for pain relief, mobility and activity. Our **Joint Replacement Center** was one of the first of its kind in East Tennessee.

The Orthopedic & Neurosurgery Unit, located in the new Dogwood Tower, is dedicated to providing excellent care for our patients. Our mission is to give exceptional care in an atmosphere where you can feel comfortable and achieve the best possible results.

Parkwest specializes in the following minimally invasive orthopedic techniques:

- Joint replacement
- Spine surgery
- Robotic-assisted surgery
- Fracture repair