JANE KENNEDY, MD
by Georgette Frazer and Eileen Kelz

Many of those people who have contributed their lives and talents to make a difference in Marshfield have been members of the medical community. Jane Kennedy Krawisz's story is one we should know, because of the dedicated way she has served our community.

The community in western Minnesota in which she was raised had no public library, and the high school had no honors classes. Jane graduated as valedictorian of her class, was editor of the school yearbook and had a National Merit Letter of Commendation. She was accepted with a full scholarship at Macalester College in St. Paul. She studied hard in college and along the way, developed an interest in biology. She made the decision to go into medicine.

After three years at Macalester, to her surprise she was accepted to Mayo Medical School. She started medical school at age twenty, skipped her last year of college and never acquired a bachelor's degree.

Although it was exciting to be in the second graduating class at Mayo Medical School, it also was an introduction to the patriarchy in medicine. There were only a handful of female staff physicians at Mayo out of five hundred physicians in total. A female in medicine was looked at as an oddity then. There were some who speculated that she and the other young women in her class were there because of affirmative action, discounting their well-earned grades and test scores. It was tiring to her to constantly feel that she was looked at, not as an individual, but as a representative of her gender. In the internal medicine program at Mayo there were forty residents accepted each year. In her year only three out of the forty were women.

She and her husband moved to St Louis where he started a pathology fellowship. She practiced internal medicine for one year at Lutheran Hospital where she was the first female physician on staff. Before accepting her, they had a special board meeting to discuss whether it would be advisable to take a chance on a woman. They weren't sure whether patients would want to see a female doctor.

Gastroenterology was a field that appealed to her as a subspecialty. The physiology was fascinating, and the specialty presented the opportunity to perform procedures as well as see patients in the office. She was the first woman admitted to the clinical fellowship in GI at Washington University in St. Louis and was one of the first 100 women in GI in the United States. Even now, fewer than 20 percent of gastroenterologists in the US are women.



Jane Kennedy

Looking back, she feels proud to have helped crack this "glass ceiling."

After five years in Vermont, she practiced gastroenterology at Marshfield Clinic, from 1989 until retirement in 2010. She helped with teaching the second year GI course to medical students at UW-Madison. She performed endoscopies and colonoscopies and saw patients with a wide variety of gastrointestinal disorders. She also participated in teaching surgical residents to perform endoscopic procedures.

She was delighted that the community seemed to look very favorably on a female gastroenterologist. Her schedule was packed by both male and female patients. She loved her patients and enjoyed a long and gratifying career.

Looking back on her medical career Jane says, "Overall, and despite any obstacles, my career was extremely rewarding in terms of my care for and relationship with my patients and the satisfaction that I really did my best and met the challenges that were presented. I feel great knowing that, in some small way, I made the path easier for other women who have come after me. It is a great joy to me to see my daughter sailing through her training in cardiology, a confident young woman who has experienced support and encouragement and mentorship the whole way. I appreciate very much how welcomed I have felt here in Marshfield by patients and community members."

Jane feels that her greatest gift to the Marshfield community was through her work, trying to deliver knowledgeable and compassionate care to each patient. In wider city life she also helped with Habitat for Humanity projects, Madrigal dinners, and sewed costumes for some of the school theater productions. Jane was on the founding committee for the Marshfield Cultural Fair and worked with Lois Greehling for many years obtaining and overseeing over a hundred volunteers for the Fair. After she retired, she joined the Literary Council, obtained an online certification in teaching English as a Second Language, and tutored a young woman who had moved to our community from Bolivia and needed help learning English. She currently serves as Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Personal Development Center, Inc, a shelter for victims of domestic abuse.

Jane concludes, "There are still marginalized groups of people who, I am sure, are experiencing some of what I went through or even greater obstacles. I offer them my most heartfelt encouragement and empathy. I hope they will persist in their goals. In my lifetime I have seen significant improvements, yet I would recommend vigilance against erosion of those gains and constant forward movement toward full equality for all people."

Our community has benefited greatly from Jane's talent, courage, and perseverance in her work as a physician. Those of us who know her as friends are grateful for her compassion and support. We know her story will be an inspiration for anyone who is overcoming obstacles to be who they most want to be.