

Mayo Clinic 150th Collection of Stories

O05 WW II Skier Battles Heart Disease

Intro: This is a story about courage, strength and love. The man you’re about to meet is a veteran of World War II. He was in the 10th Mountain Division and survived intense fighting during his tour of duty in the war that he helped to win. Decades later, he faced another battle. This time it was a serious heart problem that took him to Mayo Clinic for a highly specialized heart operation.

Video

Audio

TRT 3:25 George Nelson WWII veteran	“New fallen snow that hasn’t been drifted.”
Voice of Vivien Williams	To 88-year-old George Nelson...
George Nelson	“Deep and steep, I just love that. Love to have it curl up in front of you.”
Voice of Vivien Williams	Skiing is not only a passion...
George Nelson	“It’s just a wonderful sport.”
Voice of Vivien Williams	It’s a way of life.
George Nelson World War II veteran	“We were infantry soldiers trained at high altitude. Cold weather. Mountains. Snowy.”
Voice of Vivien Williams	In World War II George was part of the 10 th mountain division. An elite group that endured intense fighting against German forces.
George Nelson	“I was in a foxhole right up front. We had huge casualties. I had many friends that I lost.”
Voice of Vivien Williams	But George made it through the war, he says, without so much as a scratch.
George Nelson	“I’ve learned to seriously pray. I know that I’ve been praying ever since. My prayers have been answered one way or another.”
Voice of Vivien Williams	His prayers continued to be answered after the war when he, like many of his fellow soldiers, took their mountain skills and developed ski resorts in the U.S.

	Resorts such as Vail in the Rockies. George developed Lutsen in Minnesota.
George Nelson	"A pure love of skiing I guess."
Voice of Vivien Williams	Time and life and family went on, and then recently George's prayers were answered once again, in the form of life-saving treatment for a serious heart problem.
Bernard Gersh, M.D. Mayo Clinic cardiologist	"He had aortic stenosis which is a severe narrowing to the aortic valve."
Voice of Vivien Williams	Mayo Clinic cardiologist Dr. Bernard Gersh, coincidentally, also a skier, was part of the team that took care of George.
Bernard Gersh, M.D. Mayo Clinic cardiologist	"We thought he just wasn't suitable for an open surgical repair. That the risk would be just too high"
Voice of Vivien Williams	George had had two previous bypass surgeries, and they wanted to avoid open-heart surgery again. So instead of an open operation, the surgical team, led by cardiac surgeon Dr. Rakesh Suri, performed a much less invasive procedure called a trans catheter aortic valve replacement. Also called the T.A.V.R. or "TAVR" procedure for short.
Rakesh Suri, M.D., D. Phil. Mayo Clinic cardiac surgeon	"We were able to offer a cutting edge solution to be able to treat the blocked heart valve without opening his chest for a third time."
	The aortic valves opens to let blood flow out of the left pumping chamber of the heart to the rest of your body. Aortic stenosis means that the valve becomes stiff and doesn't work properly.
	During some procedures, Dr. Suri and his Interventional Cardiology Colleagues guide a catheter through the femoral artery up to the aortic valve. But because George's femoral artery was not wide enough, they accessed the valve through a very small incision in the chest wall and then through the apex of the heart. Once the guide catheter was in place, the heart team deployed the new valve within the old one, restoring proper blood flow.
Voice of Vivien Williams	Dr. Suri says he and his colleagues were pleased to be able to offer this procedure to George, and...
Rakesh Suri, M.D., D. Phil. Mayo Clinic cardiac surgeon	"With our broad deep bench of our heart team, be able to improve his quality of life. It was a solution that was uniquely

	Mayo.”
Voice of Vivien Williams	Dr. Suri, too, is a skier. He and Dr. Gersh know how important getting back on the slopes is to George. A man who survived intense fighting with the elite 10 th Mountain Division in World War II, who then went on to build a life full of family and his love of skiing, and a man who is now winning a battle for better heart health.
George Nelson	“I’m very, very lucky.”

Anchor tag: Right now the TAVR procedure is not meant to replace open-heart surgery, as that remains the standard of care. It is considered an option for people who are not good candidates for the open procedure. However, studies are underway to see if it also works for those at less risk.

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