

# The Miracle of Teamwork

If it wasn't for the collaboration between physicians at Columbia Memorial, Ellyn Polay might not be walking today.

**E**llyn Polay says she is a “card carrying hipster,” but not in the way you might normally use the term. When she walks through airport screening devices, she pulls out a laminated card that shows that her hips are titanium. If it wasn't for the collaboration between Columbia Memorial doctors Tomasz Andrejuk, Catherine Shin and Louis DiGiovanni, Polay would not be walking anywhere.

Polay grew up in Manhattan and, for years, worked as a real estate professional in Florida. She has a home in Spencertown, New York where she paints and illustrates children's books.

“Fate brought me up here to meet Dr. DiGiovanni and have hip surgery.”

About two years ago, while in Florida, Polay started feeling significant pain that she thought was in her back.

“It was excruciating just getting in and out of my car. It was so bad that I could only do one thing a day. I never trusted doctors, especially the ones in Florida,” said Polay. “Moving back here was the road to my new life in more ways than one,” she said.

Polay, who got her first degree black belt in Tae Kwan Do at the age of 50, thought that her back problem was the result of all the kicking and athletic moves of the self defense sport.

## From Pain Management to Bone & Joint

Polay turned to Columbia Memorial's Pain Management Program to get relief. She figured that a cortisone shot would do the trick. However, when Dr. Andrejuk looked at her workups, he saw something more serious. He sent the x-rays on to Dr. Shin at the hospital's Bone & Joint Center.

“Dr. Shin came in after examining me and the x-rays and said ‘I've got some good news and some bad news,’” said Polay. ‘You do not have a back problem, but both of your hips are degenerating.’”

It was then that Polay knew she had to start trusting doctors and do something about the pain.

“I was introduced to Dr. DiGiovanni and I learned that both his dad and my dad were dentists in Columbia County back in the '60s. Dr. DiGiovanni was enthusiastic, full of life, comforting and obviously passionate about his work. That made my decision easier. He is just a nice guy, intelligent,” said Polay.

When Dr. DiGiovanni asked me, “‘Which hip do you want to do first?’, I said, both!”

“I asked Dr. DiGiovanni what I might expect after the surgery,” said Polay. “He told me I wouldn't jump up and be walking. I would be nine days in the hospital followed by weeks of physical therapy. Dr. DiGiovanni visited me in the hospital and again during rehab.” “It took at least eight weeks before I could drive



Ellyn Polay



Dr. DiGiovanni



Dr. Shin



Dr. Andrejuk

and I almost had to learn to walk again. But my life has improved enormously. I call it a miracle. It is truly amazing what they can do to knees, hips, and shoulders to restore a person's functionality.”

“My stay at Columbia Memorial was a great experience. The nurses were so pleasant. I like the hospital's size – you are not a number, you are a patient with needs.”

“My daughter Samantha calls me the bionic woman. I do feel strong, thanks to Dr. DiGiovanni.”

Ms. Polay was so grateful for the experience that she had a painting from famed Abstract Expressionist Gino Hollander donated to the hospital. It now hangs in the lobby of the Medical Office Building.

