

## Rubber Ducky Races

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A rubber ducky is often one of the very first toys a baby owns, and many a childhood bath is shared with this colorful friend. Years ago, an operating room nurse sterilized a rubber ducky in the pan where we removed the powder from our surgical gloves—a symbolic concession to the fact that as pediatric surgeons, we would do whatever it took to put our patients at ease, even if it meant playing with their toys and acting goofy. Thus, this symbol of childhood also became symbolic of my division of pediatric surgery for many years to come. The team donned custom ordered scrub suits decorated with yellow duckies (much to my surprise, they were readily available via a medical clothing supply catalogue), and we had rubber-ducky-shaped lapel pins for our white coats. All residents and medical students who rotated on our service received a small rubber ducky at the end of their time with us. During our last meeting before they rotated off the service, I would write the dates of their rotation on the bottom of the ducky with a permanent felt-tip pen. It became a tradition and an expectation—even if it was late and we were all tired, the trainees would not allow me to skip that last meeting (and I am quite certain it was not because they wanted to get feedback from me yet again!). I know some of my trainees still have their “autographed” ducky, many years later. A pair of rubber duckies even appeared in a fountain on the campus of the medical school. I had no role in placing them there (honest!), but many still suspected a connection to our divisional rubber duckies. I understand that these fountain ornaments have survived winters under a plastic cover and have intermittently disappeared and reappeared, even long after my departure from that institution.

And so it was that years later I discovered that a fund-raising Rubber Ducky Race was to take place in a stream near my home. This was an annual event, signaling the arrival of spring and the thawing of iced streams and rivers. I grabbed my trusty camera and captured the tumbling toys as they moved down the stream to the cheers of the onlookers and the delight of the many children who crowded the sides of the “racecourse.” As this picture suggests, it was a photo finish, but I never found out who won!