



CHAPTER FOUR

*IN
ROOM
SINGING*

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live...

Psalm 104:33



IN

ROOM

SINGING



*Speaking to one another with psalms,
hymns, and songs from the Spirit.
Sing and make music from your
heart to the Lord....*

Ephesians 5:19 New International Version (NIV)

Occasionally, as the cold winter winds continue to howl through the branches of the tall oak trees, the beautiful season of winter that is an essential stage of rest and restoration for nature, seems to last a bit too long, prompting your mind to go on a journey of remembrance; recalling a time when the landscape was covered by a myriad of soft flower petals as far as the eye could see; accompanied by the sound of the buzzing bees as they enjoyed the sweet nectar of life.

Then, when old man winter serves another blast of frigid air as a reminder that his grip is still firm, your desire for the change of seasons has to be revamped into being satisfied with a mere sample of spring's arrival. Instead of the big picture of spring in full bloom, you may have softly muttered, "Oh, how wonderful it would be to spot among the dead leaves, the fresh green daffodil shoots, or to witness a flash of blue feathers and an orange breast sitting on a branch right outside the window in full song."

Patience my heart! Spring will soon arrive in all its splendor; a time when the air will be filled with the promise of new beginnings; when the birds will call to you tweeting the message, "Enjoy the sweetness of the land, but remember always that you own it not! Savor the cherished glimpses that herald its approach, but wait patiently for the Almighty's timing, trusting in His wisdom; and.... then the Great Creator will bless you one morning with a royal gift softly nestled in a snowy white blanket outside your window."



Ladies and gentlemen, at this point, the writer will use the above analogy in order to relate a personal experience that helped her get through a very painful time in life; that of saying a long goodbye to a loving father stricken with Alzheimer's Disease.

Just like the example above that described the desire for the arrival of a beautiful spring season that had been permanently committed to memory, as a daughter, she found herself recalling a former image of a loving parent that had been fun loving, humorous, compassionate, and rock solid in every situation.

However, peering into the shiny blue eyes that had once looked back at his child with adoration and love, it was obvious that something had gone horribly wrong. Certainly, the statement, "The eyes are the windows to the mind," could be perfectly applied. Their focus was gone, and had been replaced by a dull empty stare; one void of all emotions and feelings.

Thus, as the clock ticked at a snail's pace for 9 years, the realization that the full measure of the person he had once been to the family would not resurface, had been replaced with the search for small glimpses of his former personality. And...so it was. Simply by adjusting expectations, an appreciation for each fleeting moment where obvious coherence appeared was savored just like the first signs of spring.

Folks, it was during one of these moments of time spent beside him that a discovery was made regarding music and the brain. One evening as the family was watching a program on the history of the old hymn, "Amazing Grace", (his favorite), soft giggling could be heard from the recliner where he sat. His brain that had been adversely impacted by Alzheimer's Disease, suddenly came to life. Tears streamed from his moon-shaped eyes, accompanied by an enormous smile, as he followed right along with the performer; remembering the words to every verse. When my mother witnessed this happening, her comment was, "He is just happy"; a common behavior she recognized when he was being moved by the Spirit throughout his years as a minister.

Just like the reaction to the fragile crocus peeping its head through the snow, music allowed his family to enjoy a precious glimpse into the heart of a loving father once again. It had acted like a can opener to the brain for a soul that was being held prisoner by an ugly disease; a grand moment in time that felt serene, immortal, and infinitely encouraging for the entire family.

Dear readers, it is with great joy that this writer can announce to you that at the close of the 9th year, a miraculous spring arrived in all its glory for my family on December 26th with splendor that could only be compared to that of a landscape adorned with the fragrance of thousands of blossoms; a gift from the Creator that will be at home in our hearts for all eternity.

Instead of the time of his passing being one of sadness, our Lord chose to bless the family with a gift of remembrance that would demonstrate an example of His love for all children on earth; one that could be labeled, "The Lord; He is truly my Shepherd."

In contrast to the empty, emotionless eyes that had been a part of his countenance throughout those traumatic years, my earthly father suddenly came to himself with such clarity that he tried to pronounce each family member's first name, followed by the word, "LOVE." The familiar commonplace blank stare that had been ever present, had been replaced with shiny blue eyes that hungrily soaked in every feature of the faces that surrounded his bed. Then, bowing his own head, his spirit was carried to his heavenly home on the wings of glory to the tune of "Amazing Grace" that was sung by his loved ones.

Believe with all your hearts, folks, that no spring will ever equal the one supplied by God on that cold dark day in December when He chose to demonstrate how much he loved this writer and her family. Truly, the zest for life and hope for rejuvenation that lives within the soul had been rewarded with a brief, but astounding glimpse of the eternal spring waiting for all those that choose it.

Thus, having experienced this agonizing, but enlightening situation, the number of moments spent recounting the mystery of the happenings that unfolded have been numerous; especially regarding my own father's reaction when his brain was on music. Then, after reading an article titled, "*Music and*



Dementia: Does Music Therapy Help Reverse the Effects of Dementia in the Elderly” found on the website, “Assisted Living Today”, many questions were answered. All things considered, the following paragraph from that article described the journey experienced by a loving father and his family when having to deal with the ugliness of Alzheimer’s Disease:

“Beyond the physical aspects of aging lies the impact on the mental state of a person suffering from dementia. Due to the decrease in short term memory, struggles to communicate and reason lead many to become depressed and easily agitated. These men and women become like children. They feel trapped in a mind and body that is not capable of expressing itself or being independent. This leads to a frustration that manifests itself in childlike acting out. It is often these symptoms of dementia that are the hardest for caregivers to handle. The combination of music and dementia has been shown to calm this agitation and increase social interaction. The realization that their minds are still holding on to memories of the life they had, also helps ease depression. Music helps them to grasp at something that makes them feel whole again, even if for a short time. A person with a strong mental state is able to respond to other therapies and lessens the weight of their care for their doctors, facilities and family.”

Ladies and gentlemen, it is impossible to have gone on a 9-year journey like that of my family without experiencing a need to reach out to others treading the same painful, rocky pathways. Therefore, when it was decided that a collection would be offered on Devotional Embers regarding music engagement and the elderly, a desire to include bedridden residents was so strong that the “In Room Singing Program”, was born.

Although not every member of a large performing group feels comfortable in singing to residents in this type of situation, you will find that it just takes a few to start the ball rolling. Thus, after the Schweitzer Senior Saints & Joy Pickers had concluded their program one day, some courageous members of the group felt up to the task. Therefore, it was decided to start with just a few rooms and allow the program to take wings.

Consequently, at the conclusion of the Schweitzer choir’s performance, three residents were assigned to each singer, to be accompanied by a staff member of the health care facility. The odds for a successful outcome will increase two-fold if the bedridden individual identifies a familiar face when the singers enter the room. Additionally, it will demonstrate appreciation and importance to those participating. If an activity director leaves the group performing (large or small) on their own, the potential for a positive outcome is lessened. The formula for success is as follows: (Engagement occurs when all hands are on deck; meaning staff members encourage the participants to clap and sing through example.) Don’t be shy! Clap loudly! Sing, even if not in tune! **“ROCK THE HOUSE!”**

In order for you to internalize how the residents received the in-room music program, photographs have been supplied for your enjoyment. My friends, the experience was so powerful for the writer that she frequently had to step outside the room and wipe tears. Having walked down the rugged path with a father suffering the same illness, to witness the joy and clarity the residents demonstrated when singing occurred was truly overwhelming. As you study the following photographs, please note the comments made by each resident.



Lynette & Alice singing to Connie

Look at Connie's face! Does it get any better than this? It brought the Scripture she reads everyday to life. Do you think the saints & angels joined them in praise to the Lord? Oh, joy!

Garry was next!



As they sang, Lynette touched him with a blessing. Since the older we get, the less we are touched, how precious! What was his reaction?



He sat in the doorway & listened as they sang to someone else, calling out, "How beautiful!"

Dennis sang!



**These two residents broke into
song through words and
harmonica! She knew every
word to each song!**



"How beautiful! Thank you! So lovely!"

In closing, the words of a resident that was suffering from dementia accompanied by anger offered a perfect ending for this chapter. Upon entering her room, the agitated way she rocked her entire body, gave all present fair warning as to what to expect. Under no circumstance was she in the mood to be pleasant! Enter at your own risk was the missive received.

However, as the musician began strumming her instrument, accompanied by the words to a beautiful hymn, the face of the troubled resident went through a transformation like never witnessed before. Her anger appeared to literally melt away as an ethereal brilliance took its place. The hostile eyes became as bright as the morning sun, followed by these words, "Oh, thank you so much. My prayers have been answered today. I longed for angels to descend from above with a song of thanksgiving. And...it has happened. Truly beautiful! The Lord has sent me a blessing today."

Ladies and gentlemen, the soul of an individual that was being held prisoner by a horrible disease had been given relief... if only for a few moments. The iron bars had been broken for the heart of a person that had once operated from a sound mind.

Let us always remember that gifts that seem too small to those on the outside, differ depending on the eyes of the beholder.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

(Ephesians 2: 10)

