



# CHAPTER FIVE

## *NURSING HOME CHOIR*



**“I WILL SING UNTO THE  
LORD A NEW SONG.”**

### **PSALM 104: 33**

*“Generally, bird songs become richer and more varied as a bird ages and gets more experienced.” (Birds & Blooms, 2014)*

Imagine all the sweet old folks that as mere children, while deeply engaged in their own thoughts, rambled into a copse of trees and were suddenly awakened by the enchanting sound of birds singing as a choir in rich perfect harmony. Unmindful of the strangers below, the notes from these feathered friends were vibrating the air under the direction of their Creator; warbling because they simply had a song to sing; a gift bestowed on them as a part of the Master’s plan that included man.

Without realizing it, this strange but enchanting rhapsody was serving as a beautiful backdrop for these children, now elderly people, to sit and listen to their own thoughts; a process that would form the foundation on which they built as they journeyed through life. Yet, when all was said and done, the most beautiful and mysterious development was the song that was playing at this moment inside their young minds that would live within their souls for all

eternity; music that would always be present and ready to give expression and allow them to articulate thoughts and feelings when all else failed during the winter season of life.

Given the above quote from “Birds & Blooms”, what do you think life might be like for the residents in nursing homes if society viewed them in the same light; meaning the belief that human beings lives became richer as each year passed? Can you visualize the value society would place on their importance as a resource in making decisions for the good of all? Certainly, the hallways in healthcare facilities would loudly echo from the sounds of community members’ busy feet moving from room to room as they sought the company of residents living there.

Thus, due to the impact of the aging process upon the body; a time when most elderly individual’s lives don’t seem large enough for their souls, it is music that will bring forth within them feelings that are longing to surface; especially in an environment that has become closed in and deficient due to physical deterioration.

Therefore, music engagement will allow the sweet old folks to trust in the sorrowful times as much as the joyful ones stored in their treasure chest of memories. Creating ways for music to resurface in their lives through opportunities to participate, instead of being one dimensional only, the result will be that of both receiving and giving as they did when living on their own out in the world.

Consequently, as the study on music engagement unfolded, creative ways to encourage audience participation rapidly became the focal point. Not only did each resident keep time with his/her own instrument, but the result of the brainstorming sessions regarding such was the birth of **“A NURSING HOME CHOIR!”**

### NURSING HOME CHOIR

As the Schweitzer Senior Saints & Joy Pickers from Springfield, Missouri were performing during the opening day of the study on how to engage the residents in music, the first thought of forming a Glendale Gardens Nursing Home choir became a potential program. The thinking was that it could be used as another mechanism for deeper engagement, as well as a way to provide an opportunity for a small group of people to be on the “giving” end with the possibility of traveling to other sites within the community. If the latter became a reality, the community could be offered a different view of nursing home residents when observing them in the atmosphere where they used to function before needing assistance with daily care.

Therefore, it took only a brief time of scanning the group of residents gathered to see who was truly singing with gusto and totally into the renditions being performed. Then, by simply moving closer to potential candidates so the voice could be heard, the dream of a nursing home choir became a reality. When Activity Directors Tim Trafford and Melody Childers heard about



the concept of a choir, they became a part of the team and began soliciting interested residents. After obtaining 7 individuals that willingly volunteered to take part in this one of a kind opportunity, plans were ready to be developed.



**Driscoll**



**Don**



**Bessie**



**Lela**



**Ann**



**Viola**



**Jeramy**

**PLAN OF ACTION**

- 1) First, a volunteer from the Schweitzer Chancel Choir was contacted to be the music director. (Volunteer: Carla)

- 2) The director then located an individual to play the piano for practices. (Myrna & Brad )
- 3) Once a week, a practice was scheduled by the Activity Director that would complement his calendar. (This was done so the choir members would not miss anything.) It was decided that practice would last one hour each time.
- 4) The nursing home volunteer now in charge of the choir then contacted the Schweitzer Senior Saints & Joy Pickers director to see if her small group could sing 2 songs and be backed up by them when they performed the next time at the facility.
- 5) The two songs selected were chosen because they were already familiar to the residents and had a simple tune to assure comfort. These were songs the residents would have sung in their early twenties.
- 6) The Schweitzer Senior Saints & Joy Pickers director provided CDs and printed copies of the renditions chosen so the nursing home choir could practice it exactly right to assure that everyone would be on the same page the big day of the performance. In the event an accompanist had a conflict in scheduling, the CD could be used as a substitute with great ease. Instead of a piano, a keyboard was used to offer flexibility in the selection of a small private area where practice would occur.
- 7) Lyrics for the songs were typed in large print and given to each resident to avoid memory issues. The copies were retained at the conclusion of each practice for use the next time. Since a few residents wanted to practice in their rooms, extra copies were always available. (Lyrics included at end of this chapter for your use.)

### **CHOIR PRACTICE BEGINS**

**\*\*\*\*GATHERING:** Since most choir members were in wheelchairs, it was important to arrive 15 minutes ahead of the time allotted for the practice session to push the sweet old folks to the determined room where practice would occur.

### **WE ARE OFF ON OUR GREAT ADVENTURE!**

- 1) Allow time for bonding by sharing back and forth fun remarks. Then, be sure to outline the goals and objectives to the new choir members. In this group, we chose to establish the fact that we were always singing as a praise to God and would send first fruits up to him each time. The second principle was to stress that this little group of 7 people would be showing the world that individuals residing in healthcare facilities could still

sing in a choir setting. At this point, an outline as to how the practice sessions would unfold was shared.

- 2) A calendar was then shown so the group could see how many sessions would be held prior to singing with the Schweitzer Senior Saints & Joy Pickers.
- 3) In the event the choir had more than one song to practice, it was critical to not begin another song until every individual was holding the correct lyrics in his/her hands.
- 4) Since the lyric pages contained both verses and chorus, it was crucial to have the choir members know the difference. (When verse 1 was called out, it was important to request that each resident point to it. Have fun with this exercise by inviting them to touch the verse you call out. This gives their eyes practice in moving from verse to verse.) Above all, cut up and have fun.
- 5) Volume: Since the members tend to sing too soft, it was important to get them accustomed to projecting their voice to those listening. A volunteer would tease them by letting them know she was going all the way down the hallway to see if she could hear them. When coming back, much laughter occurred when they were told, "I heard your beautiful voices when standing in front of room 212." This gave them motivation for singing even louder!

**\*\*\*\*It is critical to realize the changes that may occur when dealing with individuals living in residential care facilities. Since they are in the winter season of life, turnover of choir members will be a common characteristic brought on by the aging process. During the launch of the first choir, new members had to be obtained due to some of these old saints departing for their heavenly home. In fact, unlike church choirs, the complexion of the choir will change dramatically due to some of them passing on even within one session. However, keep the faith by simply being willing to start from the beginning a multitude of times. It is much like teaching a new group of children in elementary school each year; you just start from the beginning with great gusto repeatedly. Offering this type of opportunity to nursing home residents will give them purpose during their final hours on their earthly journey.**

- 6) Dress: In order for the audience to view the group as a choir, it was decided that white tops and black slacks would be their uniform each time. Since everyone in the group always had these as a part of their wardrobe, there was no expenditure necessary, and availability was always assured. (The ladies chose to wear pretty ribbons in their hair all on their own.)



# **PRACTICING LIKE CRAZY!**

*THEY EVEN CHOSE A  
NAME FOR THE GROUP!*



# **BIG DAY ARRIVES!**



**Schweitzer Senior Saints & Joy Pickers kick off the big day with gusto! The air is filled with excitement! The activity director and his assistant go into action and are moving among the residents to assure each one is focused and reacting to the much-anticipated guest performers.**





## PICKING & SINGING!



**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT  
IS A PLEASURE TO  
INTRODUCE**

**“THE SILVER SENIORS!”**



*ALL EYES ON DIRECTOR  
CARLA!*





**LOOK AT THOSE SILVER**  
**HATS!**







## SO, WHY SING?

The following article written by Julia Layton focuses on the question, "Does Singing Make You Happy" with amazing results.

### Physical Effects of Singing

Singing has some of the same health benefits as exercise.

All types of singing have positive psychological effects. The act of singing releases endorphins, the brain's "feel good" chemicals. Singing in front of a crowd, a la karaoke, naturally builds confidence, which has broad and long-lasting effects on general well-being. But of all types of singing, it's choral singing that seems to have the most dramatic effects on people's lives.

A study published in Australia in 2008 revealed that on average, choral singers rated their satisfaction with life higher than the public -- even when the actual problems faced by those singers were more substantial than those faced by the general public [source: [MacLean](#)]. A 1998 study found that after nursing-home residents took part in a singing program for a month, there were significant decreases in both anxiety and depression levels [source: [ISPS](#)]. Another study surveying more than 600 British choral singers found that singing plays a central role in their psychological health [source: [ISPS](#)].

Given this bit of information, the testimonials from the Silver Seniors make tremendous sense:

### TESTIMONIALS FROM THE GROUP



*“Choir harmonica player, Driscoll, asked his son to not only bring in his instrument, but had him to purchase another key so he would be prepared to play each selection. He would call out, “What key?” As each performance approached, his joy could be witnessed by the manner in which he played. He not only joined this group but was included in other community groups that came to perform at the nursing home.*



*Don’s behaviour was the aspect that gave away his true feelings regarding the choir. He always had a million-dollar smile, was the first to arrive, and would rare back and sing with great enthusiasm. He was so excited about his involvement that his family members always were extended the opportunity to attend all his performances.*



*Bessie was the shy one in the group and would hide beneath her hat or hold her head down during a performance. Still, her sweet voice could be heard right in tune with the other members.*



*At first, Lela would pretend that she did not have a good enough voice to be in the choir. However, after being involved in a "heart to heart" talk with Tim, the Activity Director, she took hold with her foot on the throttle. In fact, she would request a copy of the music and practice in her room.*



*Ann, the activity director's mother, was a "LET'S GET DOWN TO BUSINESS" type of lady. She had a chance in her earlier life to be a professional musician but loved her children too much to be away from them. She was a solid rock of the group; always in the game.*



*Although a late arrival, Viola eased into the group and sang like an angel. She had been in choirs during her life before moving into the health care facility and was fully equipped with an abundance of experience. Viola remarked that singing in this choir was the most fun she had ever felt. She was known for singing every note to the glory of God.*





*Although the youngest choir member, Jeramy assumed the role of not only caretaker for the others but was Johnny on the spot when the choir director was suffering from allergies. He would get everyone started on the right note displaying great confidence. Not only did he have a fine voice but was created with the kindest heart every imagined.*



*This chapter would not be complete without paying tribute to a choir member, Dottie, that is now singing her heart out in heaven. Although she never had the opportunity of performing in public with the Silver Seniors, the other choir members would sing robustly in her memory every time. We love you sweet lady!*

**BE SURE TO SEE THE SILVER SENIORS IN THEIR GRAND FINALE----→**

# I SAW THE LIGHT

1) I wandered so aimless life filled with sin  
I wouldn't let my dear Savior in  
Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night  
Praise the Lord, I saw the light.

**(Chorus)**

2) Just like a blind man I wandered a long  
Worries and fears I claimed for my own  
Then like the blind man that God gave back his sight  
Praise the Lord, I saw the light.

**(Chorus)**

3) I was a fool to wander and stray.  
Straight is the gate and narrow the way  
Now I have traded the wrong for the right  
Praise the Lord, I saw the light. **(Chorus)**

**CHORUS:** I saw the light. I saw the light  
No more darkness, no more night  
Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight.  
Praise the Lord, I saw the light

# THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

1) This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

2) Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine  
Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine  
Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

3) Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine  
Hide it under a bushel? NO! I'm gonna let it shine  
Hide it under a bushel? NO! I'm gonna let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

4) All around the world, I'm gonna let it shine  
All around the world, I'm gonna let it shine  
All around the world, I'm gonna let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

5) Repeat #1



# WHEN WE ALL GET TO HEAVEN

1) Sing the wondrous love of Jesus  
Sing his mercy and his grace  
In the mansions bright and blessed  
He'll prepare for us a place

**(CHORUS)**

2) While we walk the pilgrim pathway  
Clouds will overspread the sky  
But when travlin' days are over  
Not a shadow, not a sigh

**(CHORUS)**

3) Onward to the prize before us  
Soon his beauty we'll behold  
Soon the pearly gates will open  
We shall tread the streets of gold

**(CHORUS)**

**CHORUS**

**When we all get to heaven**

**What a day of rejoicing that will be**

**When we all see Jesus**

**We'll sing and shout the victory**