

North Sound Life

Bringing Soothing Sounds of Song to the Dying

Threshold Singers

Written and Photographed By: Kate Galambos January 16, 2018

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As Seen In



"While much of our society has a tendency to avoid the subject of death, the Bellingham Threshold Singers embrace it as just as natural as birth."

Since 2007, the Bellingham Threshold Singers have been providing soothing sounds for people who are seriously ill or dying. These 40 or so women are committed to providing comfort for their clients as they labor through death with the help of song. Last year, the dedicated group performed more than 500 "sings" for clients in Whatcom County, six-year member Janis Walworth said.

Each "sing" lasts about 15-20 minutes and usually only consists of two to four singers in order to keep the event intimate and relaxing. Singers have no agenda before they arrive, no set list, or expectations about the effects of their songs, two-year member Donna Inglis said. Clients' conditions can change very quickly, meaning the singers adapt to each sing with different rhythm and sound. Sings do not consist of recognizable songs, rather the women concentrate on calming tones and rhythm and sing in a lullaby-like manner. "We sing songs people won't recognize so that they can concentrate on relaxing and not the lyrics," Inglis said. Special requests can be made, however, the group stresses that they are not performers and do not know just any song. Friends and family of sick loved ones can request a visit from the Bellingham Threshold Singers at no cost.

While most of the singers have a strong passion for song, they do not come from a professional background. The group rehearses twice a month, and each sing is led by a designated leader with hand signals to keep the talking to a minimum. Sometimes clients' environments can be

chaotic. “It can be a challenge to create a sacred space with all the distractions. We try to create a bubble for our clients, but like life, death is fluid,” Walworth said.

For singers Walworth and Inglis, the experience is powerful. Each sing is different and drives them to live life to the fullest. While much of our society has a tendency to avoid the subject of death, the Bellingham Threshold Singers embrace it as just as natural as birth. “There is something about making connections with people at those very intimate moments. I feel privileged to be a part of that,” Walworth said. Beyond each client connection, the group gives singers a sense of sisterhood. With such powerful shared experiences, the ladies are brought together and depend on each for support, Inglis said.

Bellingham Threshold Singers are part of the national nonprofit organization, Threshold Choir, which has more than 150 chapters worldwide. The Bellingham chapter makes up one the largest groups, with about 40 members.