

Medium

Crossing Over with Songs of Love

The Bellingham Threshold Singers Give Music and Love to the Dying

By: Rachel Carruth November 2, 2019

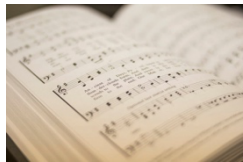
Link: ["Crossing Over On Songs Of Love" by Rachel Carruth](#)

Death is a natural part of life, and for some music shows a loving path as they peacefully pass on. Solemn music used to be reserved only for funerals. But today, the options for end-of-life care have grown to include hospice, palliative and other avenues that recognize the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of those who are terminally ill.

The Threshold Singers are a volunteer choir group of loving friends, mothers, grandmothers, wives, and daughters who softly sing at the bedside of the dying.

Donna Inglis, who has been singing with the Bellingham Chapter for four years, was able to spend some special time with her mother who recently passed away by singing with her choir 'sisters' at her mom's bedside.

"It's extraordinary," Inglis said. "That together this incredible group of women are able to provide such soothing comfort at the most profound part of someone's life."



"Words are good for many things, but they don't seem sufficient when it comes to death. The feelings are just too deeply intense, and words are too inadequate, but music can reach those places where words alone can't go," - Ellen Synakowski, a Washington D.C Threshold Singer.

A Tender Beginning

In 2000, Kate Munger, founder of the Threshold Choir - who was inspired by her friend that died of AIDS - created the idea of soothing music sung at the threshold of life which, gave rise to the first ever group of Threshold Singers. Today, the Threshold Singers have 160 chapters in the United States and several in Canada, Europe, Australia, and Southeast Asia.

The Bellingham Chapter which, rehearses twice a month, began in late fall of 2007, and was originally called the Bellingham Threshold Choir. In 2011, they changed their name to the Bellingham Threshold Singers. And, in 2010 they decided to pursue becoming their own 501(c)3 nonprofit, with the process being finalized in 2012.

Love is Always at the Center

The women go out in groups of two to four and sing to one person at a time. Their lyrics are usually short and repetitive, sometimes only humming a single note of love. Each song that is sung at a bedside is initiated by a designated lead the anchor, with the other singers the sails, following along with their soft voices.

“We are more than just a group of singers who sing at hospices and private homes, we are a sisterhood,” Inglis said. “We rely on each other for support while singing at the bedside, and trust each other to be truly present on these beautiful occasions.”

Community Support

This kind of service during palliative care is a growing trend and a well-received concept by hospitals, hospices and private homes alike. At St. Joseph’s Palliative Care Services, a team of specialists address the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of every patient while at the same time, facilitating autonomy, access to information, and individual choice.

“While much of our society has a tendency to avoid the subject of death, the Bellingham Threshold Singers embrace it just as natural as birth,” said six-year Threshold Singer member, Janis Walworth.

According to www.dyingmatters.org hearing is the last sense to go in the dying process. And because music can play such an important part of our celebrations in our lives, then it makes sense that the power of music can equally provide peace and comfort at the end of it.

A Phenomenal Impact

As music and spirituality intertwine, their boundaries become increasingly fluid to the point that distinguishing between one or the other becomes trivial. At such a juncture, spirituality can be a critical resource for patients and families who are simultaneously managing in the moment, and preparing for a future without their loved ones.

“There is something about making connections with people at those very intimate moments that I feel privileged to be a part of,” Walworth said.

Marie Eaton, Community Champion of the Palliative Care Institute in Fairhaven, spoke about the focused effort to transform local palliative care and support the human responses to living and dying.

“Eventually it ends for all of us,” Eaton said. “What the institute is all about is helping people understand that as the end comes, regardless of the situation or the illness involved, you don’t have to be cured to be healed.”

The Bellingham Choir’s ministry of song and love has re-imagined what true end-of-life services can be. They can provide a sense of healing for the giver while simultaneously offering comfort, and tender care for those who are crossing over.

“I do this in honor of my mom,” Inglis said. “If I can help someone pass on with grace, then I have done something right in my life.”