

## Meet Mary Sue!

*Founder of Singing Heart to Heart and the author of  
“Songs You Know by Heart: A Simple Guide for Using  
Music in Dementia Care” (with contributions by Teepa  
Snow)*

*by Rosanne Burke, PAC Certified Independent  
Trainer*

Mary Sue Wilkinson is a musician, author and regular contributor to the Online Dementia Journal. This month we sat down with Mary Sue to learn more about her background and how she became involved in dementia care.

### ***How long have you been singing and playing music?***

I grew up in a family that loved to sing and dance. I sang in school and church choirs and my mom bought me my first guitar with green stamps when I was 12 years old. (Green stamps were a little bit like bonus points that you got from the grocery store. You saved them up and glued them into little books that you could turn in to “buy” things.) I’ve been singing with folk and country bands ever since college. Music is such a big part of my life.

### ***How did you become interested in music and dementia care?***

My father-in-law lived with dementia for several years and lost all language. He had been a Church of the Brethren minister and loved to sing the old southern gospel hymns. I started taking my guitar and singing with him – thinking that at least I could entertain him. He showed me the power of music by singing every word with perfect pitch. He even added harmony. I didn’t understand it at first – I just knew something amazing had happened. After that, my work as an educator and professional musician came together when I created Singing Heart to Heart and the Young at Heart Music program. I started learning from Teepa and others. And of course I’m still learning. There has been an explosion of research in this field which is so exciting.

### ***How did Songs You Know by Heart come to be?***

I first recorded a CD of 18 sing along favorites and called it *Songs You Know by Heart*. From my own product research, I felt that there was a need for high quality music, with simple arrangements, pitched low enough for older adults, and sung at a tempo that facilitated singing along. I thought people would just know how to use the CD. I was wrong. I quickly learned that they needed some guidance so I decided to write a simple guide to help people use the CD. The book grew from there as I learned more from Teepa and from my own experience leading close to 400 singalongs each year. It’s still a simple guide – but it goes well beyond just telling people how to use the CD.

***How can the book be used to make a difference for people who care for persons living with dementia?***

The book teaches the family member, care partner, or activity professional simple ways to use music to connect, to awaken memories, and to bring joy. It helps care partners and professionals take music from entertainment to engagement with simple strategies. In addition, when you learn to use music as a tool, you can help relieve boredom and restlessness, provide cues for activities of daily living, and truly create a meaningful activity that can be shared by everyone.

**Thank you Mary Sue for sharing your special talents to bring happiness and connection to people living with dementia and their care partners!**

**Watch this short [video](#) where Mary Sue shares her favorite tips for using music in care.**

*Special Offer: Save \$10 on your order when you purchase Songs You Know by Heart and spend a total of \$60 or more. Use coupon code – **Songs1017**  
Coupon will expire: December 15, 2017*