

Maddie Never Stops Moving

Monthly Music Moment

by Mary Sue Wilkinson,

Founder – Singing Heart to Heart

Maddie never stops moving. She walks down the narrow hallway, from one end of the memory care home to the other. Occasionally she sits for a few minutes. But while sitting, she is rocking, forward and back, forward and back. When you greet Maddie she will smile. Today, Chris, the housekeeper, who is so full of love, stops her in the hallway to give her a hug and hold her in her arms for a moment.

In our music session today, we are playing “shaky eggs.” As Maddie passes by on her route, I walk next to her and gently place an egg shaker in her hand. She does not join in, so I gently remove the egg on her next pass through.

As Maddie passes by again, we are singing along with a recording of “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad.” I stand face to face with Maddie and offer my hands. She smiles, takes my hands, and for a few moments her movement changes to a side-to-side dance step. The song goes on, and we move together. I am walking backwards holding her hand and singing.

And then I hear it.

Maddie is humming along—well it’s more than a hum. She is making sounds and singing along. Maddie can’t find the words fast enough to sing in time, but her smile grows when we get to “fee fi fiddly I oh...”

When the song ends, I squeeze Maddie’s hands and thank her. Amongst the words I don’t understand I hear Maddie say, “good.”

Then Maddie moves on. As she walks by our music session again, another resident reaches out to her, takes her hand, and tells her “good job.” Maddie smiles and goes on her way.

P.S. If you’d like a free download of my version of “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad,” go to my [website](#) and sign up for my newsletter. You can also find my CD for sale there. It contains 18 well-known sing-along songs that I have recorded.

I’m Mary Sue. I grew up in Iowa in a musical family and I’ve been singing as long as I can remember. I got my first guitar when I was twelve years old. My mom saved up green stamps to buy it for me. (Thanks mom)! That’s me playing it for the Miss Neighborhood Contest in my backyard back in the 60’s.

I’m the founder of [Singing Heart to Heart](#) and the Young at Heart Music Program. My passion for singing with elders started when I sang for my father-in-law who had dementia.

He had lost all language but when I sang the hymns he knew and loved, he could sing every word. Perfect pitch. He even added harmony.

*I quickly learned what research is now documenting. **Music is a powerful tool to help us connect, find joy, and spark memories**, especially for people living with dementia. I've seen this first hand. I lead over 400 singing and music experiences for seniors each year.*

*I'm a career educator, a certified music teacher, an experienced speaker and trainer, and a professional musician. I'm also the author of **Songs You Know by Heart: A Simple Guide for Using Music in Dementia Care**. Teepa Snow endorses my book and my work.*