

Music, Prayer and Mr. Bobbie

by Mary Anne Oglesby, Director – The Veranda Ministries, PAC Certified Independent Consultant and Coach

As a little girl in rural Arkansas, my fondest memories are singing in school plays, church, and especially Christmas programs. Music was always, and still is, the core of who I am. Not just from the fact I was one who liked to entertain, but because music brought joy to my heart. That joy still brings a smile to my face when I hear those songs I sang as a child. It takes me back to a place of pure happiness, a place where I can close my eyes and feel a calm come over me, and a peace that passes all understanding. Good memories are stored for my use today.

Music is the highlight of the day in the respite program I direct. It's amazing how music can be a common thread between fifteen to twenty people of diverse backgrounds. They patiently wait their turn for their song to be front and center.

Mr. Bobbie was one of those who patiently waited. Well, maybe not always patiently, but he did wait. Aphasia had taken control of his speech, and he could barely speak three consecutive words. Teepa's GEMS started crossing my mind. Bobbie came to us as an Amber. Since Bobbie was caught in a particular moment of time, I knew I could reach him, but I had to do so in his world.

To be honest, Bobbie was a handful until his ears heard the first beat of a song, or a scripture being read, or even if I asked him to pray. Many days I would ask him to say the blessing at lunch. His military background would come rushing back. He removed his cap, stood tall, shoulders back, and eyes bright; the frown of despair vanished from his face. He was in charge, and he was speaking with someone he remembered. A calm fell over him. It was an amazing thing to see. Peace came to Bobbie. He found peace in a world that was slipping away.

One day, I wanted to see if he and others could recite the Lord's Prayer. You see Bobbie lead the music at his church many years ago. I gave it a try, and began with "Our Father..." and they recited "Who art in heaven." I continued with "Hallowed be thy name," and they responded "Thy kingdom come." They did it. Tranquility fell across the room. No one moved a muscle, and their faces displayed a freedom from disturbance that had previously controlled their thoughts. They had participated in church—a style of a church service that accepted them for who they were. Our Veranda Church was up and running.

Yes, beginning this fall, we are holding a church service dedicated for those living with dementia. Is it different? Yes, of course, but different doesn't mean wrong or even bad. It means we do what we have to do to give those living with dementia an opportunity to retrieve those memories that bring peace to their hearts. A chance for them to feel whole again at least for a little while.