

## **Striking a Chord**

*Music Therapy helps hospice patients at the end of life*

**By Emmanuel Hospice**

Weaving together culture, religion and life experiences, music therapist Miranda Eden helps the families of Emmanuel Hospice compile the soundtrack of their loved one's life.

"Music is in everything that we do – it's universal," said Eden. "It's one of the most natural connections we have as human beings."

From the moment life begins, music is a part of our world. Mothers sing lullabies to their babies as they drift to sleep. Couples describe their first dance. Fathers and daughters recite the lyrics of the song that played while they danced at her wedding.

"Why not have music at death?" Eden asks. Eden has been a certified music therapist for nearly 20 years, helping families use music to cope with the loss of loved ones.

Music therapy is a relatively new field, and the effects can be seen each day in Eden's career. While providing a variety of instruments, she sings with patients and their families. She helps people reflect on their life while creating new memories. While music won't change a diagnosis, she says that it can reduce physical symptoms of pain and agitation.

"I've been in so many moments when a song is being played, and the patient's lips are moving," Eden said. "They might not be singing, but they acknowledge the song. There's a smile – there's a calmness. They are listening."

Emmanuel Hospice provides music therapy as a method to assist patients with stress relief, well-being and even pain management. Eden uses a variety of techniques to connect with patients. For example, she often sings their favorite songs and hymns, or creates the opportunity for song writing and making music choices.

Eden is one of many therapists who work with Emmanuel Hospice to improve the quality of life for many patients during their final days. Emmanuel Hospice also uses other holistic methods, including massage therapy, acupuncture and spiritual counseling.

"We believe it's important to provide patients and their families with options," said Sara Lowe, executive director at Emmanuel Hospice. "Just like people learn in different ways, people cope in different ways."

It's the personalized care that makes music therapy so intimate and powerful.

Eden recalled a man who was nearing the end of his life. The man proudly told Eden he used to sing in a country western band. One of his life dreams was to record an album.

Eden said, "Let's do it!"

The pair rehearsed a song and when he was ready, Eden recorded the song with an app on her iPad.

That evening, Eden made a CD from the recording and returned to the man's home the following day.

"It was a like a CD release party. His entire family was there and waiting to hear the song," Eden said. "He was so proud. His family was tearful, saying it was something he always wanted to do."

For Eden, that is what makes her job so important.

"I feel honored to be in those last moments with so many people," she said. "Music opens the door for those moments in time—for moments of the past and for moments that have yet to be created."