

Wednesday, June 25, 2003

Last modified at 2:56 p.m. on Tuesday, June 24, 2003

This room service heals souls

Music program ventures into hospitals

By Maggie FitzRoy
Staff writer

It was Friday the 13th and, for Mary Sutton, not a great day. She was lying in a hospital bed undergoing dialysis, hooked up to twisting tubes and a machine that went *beep, beep, beep*. But things got a little better when Susan Calfee and Catie Wallace walked into the room and got her singing *Amazing Grace, Jesus Loves Me* and *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*.

"Feel better?" Calfee asked.

"Oh yes, very much so," Sutton said, smiling. "I love music."

Calfee, of Ponte Vedra Beach, is an auxiliary volunteer at Baptist Medical Center in downtown Jacksonville; Wallace, a keyboardist and vocalist, was her musician for the day. Calfee brings patients and strolling minstrels together each Friday afternoon for "Room Service," a program offered through Body and Soul, a non-profit Jacksonville organization dedicated to healing through the arts.

Body and Soul serves hospitals, retirement communities, psychiatric facilities and hospices through programs that offer such attractions as live musical performances, drawing and painting projects and art displays. Room Service, one of the most popular programs, serves bed-ridden patients in facilities throughout Jacksonville. Plans are under way to bring the program to Baptist Medical Center-Beaches.

Calfee sings in the Jacksonville Symphony Chorus, where she met James Jenkins, principal tuba player for the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra and founder of Body and Soul. In February she was looking for an opportunity to volunteer for his organization.



Baptist Medical Center auxiliary volunteer Susan Calfee of Ponte Vedra Beach sings for patient Stewart Haug. Calfee is an escort for the Room Service program sponsored by the non-profit organization Body and Soul.
--Maggie FitzRoy/staff



Baptist Medical Center patient Mary Sutton sings and plays the tambourine as she undergoes dialysis during a visit from Body and Soul volunteer musician Catie Wallace.
--Maggie FitzRoy/staff

"I had some time and had some passion," Calfee said. When she learned Baptist needed a Room Service escort, she jumped at the chance.

"It was a perfect round peg-round hole fit," she said. "This is truly a gift of service through art. I've found it doesn't matter who the musician is, what the instrument is, or who the patient is -- something magic always happens."

Each Friday, Calfee escorts volunteer musicians around the hospital. Room Service performers include folk guitarists, choral groups, hand bell choirs, barbershop groups and musicians from Jacksonville's symphony and local bands.

One week, Calfee watched a Celtic fiddler charm wheelchair-bound patients who were waiting in the hallway to go home. Another time, she watched a flutist's performance inspire a woman to sing. The woman, on feeding tubes, hadn't spoken in a week. In March, when U.S. troops invaded Iraq, Calfee asked a violinist to play *The Star-Spangled Banner* for patients in the psychiatric unit.

"All got up and held hands, including the guy with the meal cart, nurses, patients," Calfee said. "It just happened; the music made it happen."

On June 13, she met Wallace in the hospital lobby. They got a cart for Wallace's keyboard, wheeled it onto the elevator and headed for the fifth-floor psychiatric unit, where they began their hourlong tour. A nurse came to the door, unlocked it, and let them in.

Patients sat in a waiting area filled with paperback books and games. One woman cradled a teddy bear, another younger woman paced the room, a gray-haired man stared straight ahead. Wallace parked her cart in front of them and began to play and sing, "*Swing low, sweet chariot ... coming for to carry me home ...* "

Another patient who shuffled into the room said she had just woke up.

"You have a beautiful voice," she told Wallace.



Catie Wallace (from right) and Susan Calfee sing for a patient at Baptist Medical Center in Jacksonville as Jane Beal and the patient's wife, Gerri Haug, listen.
-- Maggie FitzRoy/staff

"I want to hear you sing along too now," Wallace said as she played song after song: *Danny Boy; Amazing Grace; Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. Calfee and a few of the patients sang, too. After 10 minutes, it was time to go.

"One more," a patient called.

"Well, sweetie, we need to go on to the next floor, but maybe we'll come back," Wallace said.

Wallace, a teacher at Wolfson High School, has been volunteering for Body and Soul for about 18 months. She said she usually visits from 10 to 12 rooms in an hour, but that day it seemed many patients were too sick to have visitors.

On the sixth floor, some were in isolation, others were just out of surgery, many were asleep. One patient named Ray probably would enjoy the music, a nurse said, but he was in isolation. Could Wallace stand outside his room and play from there? She said she could.

"Hi, Ray," Wallace called from the hallway as nurses scurried past her on their way from room to room. She sang and played for a patient she couldn't see, and when she was finished, he clapped. On their way to the elevator, Calfee and Wallace passed an orderly pushing a wheelchair.

"You're doing a great job, ma'am," he called. "A great job."

On the seventh floor, a nurse directed Calfee and Wallace to Stewart Haug's room. Haug, of Middleburg, lay still in his bed, recovering from heart surgery. He told Wallace he'd like to hear *Angels Watching Over Me*.

Wallace played that and a few more of his favorite songs as Calfee stood by his bed and sang. Haug's wife, Gerri, and a friend, Jane Beal, stood near the door and listened.

"That was nice, really nice," Haug said when they finished. "When you're watching TV all day, it's very boring. This is a break."

When Calfee and Wallace left Haug and the seventh floor, they headed to the dialysis unit. That's where they found Sutton. She beamed when the music began.

"*Yes, Jesus loves me; yes, Jesus loves me ...*" Sutton sang. She said she loves gospel music. Her eyes closed, she rocked her head from side to side on her pillow. Then she asked if she could hold Wallace's tambourine.

As a dialysis machine pumped blood in and out of her body, Sutton sang along with the musician and her escort. *Beep, beep, beep* went the machine. *Chink, chink, chink* went the tambourine. The wheels on the dialysis machine turned round and round.

*"Camptown ladies sing this song, doo da, doo da. Camptown racetrack's five miles long
... ah doo da day ... "*

When it was time to go, Sutton waved goodbye.

"Bye-bye everybody," Calfee called as they left.

A man in a bed near Sutton's opened his eyes halfway. The whole time they were there, he seemed to be asleep.

"Bye-bye," he whispered. "Thank you."