

PLAYING THE NATIVE AMERICAN FLUTE IN HOSPICE AND HOSPITAL SETTINGS: by Randy Granger. © Randy Granger, Please cite the author when using. www.randygranger.net

Using the Native American flute in Hospice and Hospital settings is a natural, complimentary pairing. The soothing, peaceful nature of the NA flute can immediately set a tone conducive to healing. The flute's similarity to the human voice both in tone and expressiveness is one of the reasons it resonates with listeners.

Getting Started

- Work up a repertoire between 30-60 minutes of music you feel comfortable playing in public.
- Contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Chaplin, Activities Director etc. Follow the established chain already in place.
- Be prepared to give a sample recording of your playing and a short biography of your experience.
- Decided how often you can volunteer your music. Consistency is comforting in these situations.
- Be prepared to take a TB test or other infectious disease test.
- Finally, examine your own feelings about end of life issues.

WHEN YOU PLAY - DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL RITUAL

- Take a moment to be aware of your breathing, mental and emotional state.
- Keep in mind your music is affecting the staff, visitors, family members as well as the patients.
- Don't take it personally if someone closes the door when you play. You have no idea what is going on inside that room.
- If it helps—begin and end with the same song. Beginning with the same song every time allows you to check in with yourself.
- Play with your entire body. Yes playing from the heart is good, but why limit it? Your body is one lovely resonance chamber.
- It can be a little lonely when you've just played your heart out and no one seems to have noticed. They are listening! Say "Thank You" anyway, under your breath preferably. Imagine your music reaching every corner, wall, window and person bathing them in healing sound. (Or whatever you like)
- Ask if it is okay to play when entering client's room. I find it helpful to ask if I may play "one" song. This seems to not cause anxiousness that you might stay too long and gives you the freedom to leave after one song to share with other rooms.

WHAT TO PLAY

- This really is a personal taste decision. Play what you can play well and you feel is soothing. Sometimes things can get hectic or very emotional in Hospice/Hospital settings so it can help to rehearse a bit so you can stay focused when something unexpected happens.

- Standard songs (list is on another page) are good and are comforting because they are familiar. However, don't deviate too much from the original. Often people hum along or even sing which can throw you off.
- Feel free to improvise on the spot. It may help to think of songs as paragraphs with a beginning, theme, middle and end.
- Songs around 60-90 beats per minute are a little more soothing than faster chirpy songs. Take your pulse, which should be around 70 bpm unless you get really nervous of course. The second hand of a watch is 60 bpm of course.
- Be prepared for requests. It can be helpful to say you'll see what you can do. I get the occasional request for "Stairway to Heaven" parts of which are beautiful but I can't get over the lyric "And she's buying the stairway to Heaven" so I just say I don't know it, or I'll see what I can do to work it up.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Enjoy yourself. People will be grateful you are there and are usually not music critics. Relax and know people are hearing you even when they won't applaud.
- Bone up on your flute knowledge. People want to learn about what you are playing. Some have never heard a Native Flute.
- Music Therapists and Thanatologists must be board certified and earn advance degrees.
- Not everyone shares your religious and spiritual beliefs. Don't project.
- Sometimes it is hard to know what to say to people when they compliment you. A simple "Thank You" is the best response. Try to avoid questions like "So who are you here with?" Or, "Is your mom/dad etc. getting any better?" This doesn't work in Hospice of course. I once had a woman tell me her mother was just hanging on from stubbornness and that some people just don't get the message to just die already." I had absolutely no idea what to say so I said I'm sure her mother was glad she was here.
- Don't bring guests or friends with you. There are privacy and confidentiality issues as well as contagious illness. Patients on chemo/radiation therapy etc. have compromised immune systems already. Call in sick if you are battling anything. You will need a TB test and possibly some other tests.

MARKETING YOURSELF

- Print up several cards or brochures about yourself for the desk staff etc. Have your contact info (if you want), bio, a few CD's and a price list of what you charge to play at funerals, memorials etc. This may seem crass, but I get calls from families and loved ones after the patient have passed on, asking if I'll provide music for services. It helps to be prepared and know what you'll charge.
- Make yourself available for fundraisers and staff/volunteer parties. Hospices are usually having fundraisers and holiday parties.
- Suggest your music for a commercial, ad campaign.
- Give your cards to the Chaplain and funeral home directors. Whether or not you charge is up to you, however, there is a need.

SONG SUGESSTIONS (A START)

AMAZING GRACE
WAYFARING STRANGER
OH SHENENDOAH
GREENSLEEVES
SCARBOUROGH FAIR
LONDENDERRY AIR (OH DANNY BOY)
ZUNI SUNRISE
SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW
JESU JOY OF MAN'S DESIRE
SCOTLAND THE BRAVE
SUO GAN
MOST OF THE HOLIDAY SONGS
WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD
YOU RAISE ME UP (Very similar fingering to Oh Danny Boy)
TODAY WHILE THE BLOSSOMS STILL CLING TO THE VINE
BEATLE SONGS
YOUR OWN BEAUTIFUL MUSIC

WEB RESOURCES

www.flutetree.com – lots of NAF sheet music using Nikkei Tab, tailored for different flute makers.
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nativeamericanflutemusicsheet/> -- members exchange sheet music, includes a database.
www.healingmusic.org
www.hospicefoundation.org