

To See *and* To Be Heard

Her eyes were closed as she listened to the thudding beat of the visiting drum circle. This behavior was nothing new; the staff members usually kept a watchful

eye as she walked down the hallways of Maryhill Manor with her eyes closed. No one really understood why, but this was how Margaret chose to experience her life these days.

Nancy noticed Margaret sitting outside of the drum circle and wondered if she wanted to take part. As the director of Maryhill Manor in Enderlin, North Dakota, and a former music therapist, Nancy felt compelled to walk over to her.

In her calm and soothing voice, Nancy asked if Margaret wanted to join the drum circle. Margaret's eyes popped open and she said, "Let's do it!" with more enthusiasm than was usual. Nancy says she'll never forget that interaction—a moment that reminds her how art has the invaluable ability to reach people in many different ways.

As a music therapist, Nancy Farnham seeks to better understand the healing power of sound. More recently, as the director of a long-term care facility, Nancy has witnessed how all types of art can help to heal both the mind and body.



Maryhill Manor has involved its residents in drum circles as part of their activities.

(Image courtesy of Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts.)

Through the *Art for Life Program*, developed by the North Dakota Council on the Arts, Maryhill Manor, in close partnership with the Enderlin Fine Arts Association, has been able to host a variety of local artists. The residents have worked with clay

artisans, theatre groups, cowboy poets, a mural painter, a fish decoy carver, and many others. And they have plans to work with a hand chime group.

“There are all kinds of art and so many ways to bring people into it,” explains Nancy. “If they’re kind of shy or aren’t sure of their abilities in art, they can participate by watching. A lot of times [residents] get drawn into it because they’re interested in what they see. Art can do that. It can be something they do on their own, or they could do in a group. It’s good for socializing, and gives you an avenue to talk about different things.”

This unifying ability of art has given Nancy, her staff, and the participating artists themselves broader perspectives of the elder residents. One resident, who they knew was a singer, turned out to also be a very talented painter. Another woman, who had been upset about family members who were experiencing serious illnesses, painted for hours a day while a mural artist visited. It was readily apparent to everyone that this helped her to feel both calmer and happier.

Not only do the residents learn new things about each other with each new medium, but the variety of art projects allows for



*Mural created by artists Mark and Mary Zimmerman and Maryhill Manor residents, Enderlin, ND, 2013.
(Image provided by Enderlin Fine Arts Association, Enderlin, ND.)*

different people to get involved. For instance, Nancy noticed that molding the soft clay was easier for people with arthritic hands.

“It’s been a really wonderful program for us,” explains Nancy. “Every activity that we did was so well-received and touched different people at our nursing home. We feel really blessed that we were allowed to take part in the program, and happy that we can do it again.

We have so many ideas of things that we want to bring in! We’re having a lot of fun with it, and it’s just enhancing life for everyone here.”

And while her busy schedule doesn’t really allow for her to provide music therapy much anymore, Nancy does get her guitar out and lead the residents in song every now and then. “Music is such a wonderful gift to bring people together,” affirms Nancy.

Nancy has also witnessed how music can reach someone on a level that can’t be found in conversation alone:

“We have a resident who has advanced Alzheimer’s. We know that music has been a really important part of his life always. He loved to sing and dance, but he doesn’t do much of that anymore. As soon as he’s around music, his feet start going

and his hands start moving like he's playing a piano. He'll smile. Even if you're just walking down the hall and you sing a song with him, his step gets lighter, he bounces along, and he has a cheeriness in his gait that wasn't there before."

One commonality among all the *Art for Life Program* activities, whether the focus is storytelling or something else, is that personal stories emerge and people have a chance to feel like they are being heard. Whether a drum circle compels a staff member to ask a veteran about Army bands in World War II or a songwriting class reminds one resident to tell another that she used to be a singer, art is a catalyst for telling our stories. The stories that we collect over a lifetime make us who we are, and an opportunity to hear them is a privilege. The *Art for Life Program* makes that storytelling possible.

The poems at right were written by two residents at Maryhill Manor in Enderlin, ND, in 2014, with guidance from Cowboy Poets Mark Kerr and Jarle Kvale. Mark is the Administrator at Presentation Medical Center, Rolla, ND, and Jarle is a rancher from Dunseith, ND. They have worked together in the Art for Life Program.

MY FAVORITE COLOR

*My favorite color is blue,
The one I miss the most,
My eyesight's not the best,
At least nothing you can boast.
Reading is getting harder,
The letters just aren't there,
But I think what I miss the most,
Is seeing faces that care.*

OUR RACCOON

*Our raccoon played in the tree house,
While he slept in the barn.
He was trickier than a mouse,
And he just didn't give a darn!
His name was Snoopy,
Always snooping for food,
Opening cupboard doors,
Cause he was always in a hungry mood.
One day he came home late,
He must've found a date!*

AUTHOR • LAUREN FISCHER BEEK

Lauren is a writer and storyteller who earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from St. Olaf College. She is currently working as a communications consultant for SURVIVEiT, a nonprofit that provides online resources to cancer patients. She also mentors elementary children in an after-school program for New Americans. In her free time, she enjoys volunteering as a writer and copy editor for the *High Plains Reader* and teaching creative writing at the YWCA in Fargo, North Dakota. She lives in Moorhead, Minnesota, with her husband, Jamison, Kingsley the black lab, and LeBron the cat.

