

I am playing Bach, approaching the moment in the first prelude where the low C# makes a dramatic entrance. I shift my left hand up the neck of the cello and turn the bow in my right hand. Suddenly, an alarm begins to blare. Loud, piercing, drowning out the C#. In my peripheral vision, a man is standing, swaying unsteadily, and a lady in a blue nurse's outfit rushes over. I start the next section of the Bach as the nurse directs the man back into his wheelchair. He struggles, confused. I think he is trying to dance. I continue to play, and after another few seconds, the alarm goes off at the pressure of him sitting down. Throughout the incident and the ones before it, I keep playing. I am giving a concert for the Alzheimer's wing of a local nursing home, and I must not stop the performance. I must provide continuity and thus calm.

I finish the Bach and soft clapping fills the room. I prepare to play a lively piece and then hesitate, noticing many have fallen asleep. I change my mind, picking a different piece, a lullaby. My primary purpose is to calm these people; when I first joined the Beverly Pickering Music and Alzheimer's Program, I learned about the phenomenon of "sun-downing," when people affected by the disease become particularly confused and stressed. I have read articles with scientific proof that music helps these people, and so I perform these concerts from three to four o'clock (as the sun is "going down"). I feel relieved when they fall asleep; I hope that I am easing their emotional pain. Who knew that the best kind of audience, the most fulfilling concerts, are not concerned with musical perfection and awards but with inner health and happiness?

The next piece, Arioso, I pick with one patient in mind. When I first arrived, I noticed that this lady was distraught. She was asking for her husband and was convinced that he was coming to visit her. She wondered why he was not yet here. My heart broke as the nurse told me that this lady's husband had passed away a few years earlier. I chose the lyrical Arioso for her because I knew that this lady loved to sing. In previous weeks, she hummed along to the pieces I was playing as if she already knew them. And she did! I learned that she had once been a student at The Juilliard School, the most famous music conservatory in the United States. I am only a few bars into the piece when she begins to sing, and I hope that perhaps she is no longer wondering about her husband. Music is not only a way to alleviate a list of "sun-downing" symptoms found on Google. For patients with a musical past, music provides a bridge to this past--to their identity.

After the concert, a nurse motions me over. She is standing with a man who mumbles something that I do not understand. The nurse explains that he wants to know what my rock stop is--it is a piece of rubber on which the cello rests as I play. I show him the rubber. Although I am not sure that he understands, he seems more relaxed. A second lady in the audience wants to hold my hand. She takes it and pats it for a couple minutes. I ask her how she is doing, if she likes the winter weather. I tell her that I love the snow. She never responds, but she smiles a little bit. I stay for another ten minutes, socializing with the patients. Very few people come into this locked ward, and I feel a bit like royalty as so many want to touch my hands. But while I enjoy the attention, I also feel a bit sad. Alzheimer's disease is largely unspoken of in my

community--it disappears, and these people do not have the opportunity to have contact with many other humans. While these patients do not voice their feelings, I feel a different energy in the room as I leave. I think that human connection is an important part of comforting and helping these people.

The patients themselves are not my only audience. For one thing, the caretakers attend to ensure everyone's safety. Music helps them, too. They have a forty-five minute period when the patients are calm, and when they can take a small break from the stress of their day. Sometimes they will eat a snack or do paperwork on which they were behind. One even told me that he feels as though he may fall asleep when he listens to the music. In my experience, music offers a way for people from the community to help share the responsibility of caring for those with Alzheimer's disease. A third portion of my audience is comprised of the family members of the patients. These people sit with their loved ones and enjoy their company without having to try to talk. Music enables these people to bond with one another through physical proximity. As everyone sits in the room together, music enables those with Alzheimer's disease to become part of a community.

I became involved in the Beverly Pickering Music and Alzheimer's Project as a high school sophomore, and nearly every Friday for the past three years, I have trundled my beaten blue cello case to the activities room to play Bach, Mozart, and Elgar. Other people in the program play jazz and woodwind ensemble music and sing to the residents. But, we are always looking for new players. The program lost its funding early on and so anyone who plays does so as a volunteer--unfortunately, this means that few participate. I myself only became involved because my school mandates that students complete volunteer hours to graduate. This requirement prompted me to search for a way to gain hours that would allow me to have fun--by playing music. I realized only later how valuable music was, how, in a variety of ways, it could help people affected by Alzheimer's disease, and I felt compelled to continue to play far after I surpassed my required twenty hours. I wish that I could share with others the importance of giving just one hour every week or month. Even a single concert can make a difference.

This coming year I will be attending Smith College, a five minute walk from the nursing home where I currently perform. I am so excited to continue to play whenever I have breaks in my schedule. I am also hoping to recruit new musicians! I will explain to these musicians that music offers a way to bring those affected by Alzheimer's disease back into society, that it can help the caretakers, and that it can bring happiness to families. And, I will share with these musicians the fact that I, too, benefit from these concerts. As an aspiring musician, I love sharing music with an appreciative audience. As a person, I have made deep bonds with the residents. I was so delighted when I arrived for a Valentine's Day performance and received a dozen roses. The card accompanying the flowers is now on the desk in my room. It is signed "Your Friends," and it is quite possibly the best Valentine's Day card that I have ever received.