

# The Healing Power of Music and Memories, Cancer and Spirituality

Music and memories go together. Music fills the whole body with joy. Music heals. [Studies show that music is a powerful treatment for mental health](#), Alzheimers, and even cancer. What music do you turn to for comfort? Here is the latest research about how music impacts health, spirituality and story.

## **1. There is a science behind music and memories.**

Science has also weighed in. The website, [music and memory](#) explains the research behind it. Scientists have discovered a link between music and dementia patients that triggers their memories. Music and Memory is a non-profit organization that collects [ipod](#) and downloads personalized playlists for Alzheimer and dementia patients around the world.



Marie Coz with one of her favorite Music and Memory patients at Mary, Queen of Angels Assisted Living Community in Nashville, Tennessee.

They have found when the patients listen to the personalized playlists it catapults them into that place and time associated with the memory of the music. "Persons with dementia, Parkinson's and other diseases that damage brain chemistry also reconnect to the world and gain improved quality of life from listening to personal music favorites," the site says. An [article](#) in *Psychology Today* also addresses how interconnected our brainwaves are to our memories when music is introduced. Two studies identified a wide range of neural networks that are engaged when listening to music, especially music that is familiar. In a 2009 study from the University of California, experts mapped the brain while people listened to music and found specific brain regions linked to autobiographical memories and emotions are activated by familiar music. This also adds to the idea that Alzheimer's patient memories are stirred with music.

Marie Coz, a registered nurse and volunteer at Mary, Queen of Angels Assisted Living Community has seen the impact it has had in the memory unit of the assisted living community and has worked to get ipods with playlists in the ears of all 18 in the unit. She has particularly loved the impact it has had on 95-year-old Jo. When songs by Eddy Arnold, Hank Williams, Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson come on, she seems to be transported to another place. "She closes her eyes and just rocks," Coz said.

Coz likes to ask Jo where she goes when she hears the music. Jo responds, "Well, mostly looking for my husband," the

love of her life. And at the end of every MUSIC & MEMORY session, she'll say, "Thank you *so much* for the music. It's like *I get to be me.*" I love the idea of using an [ipod](#), Spotify or [inexpensive MP3](#) to create an playlist of great "soundtracks" to different parts of our lives. I have a very long list of Spotify playlists for just that. The idea of setting one up for my parents, seems brilliant.

## 2. Music can heal the body and mind:

New research from Emory University also links cancer healing to spiritual music, especially in the African American Community. [Check out this fascinating article here.](#) "Many people memorize songs when growing up but forget about them until something happens that shakes them," says [Jill Hamilton](#), who was a Georgia Cancer Coalition Distinguished Scholar during her first tenure at [Emory](#). "When you're growing up, you're happy, and everything is fine. Then later on in adulthood, someone tells you, 'you've got cancer.' And you think, 'Cancer means I'm going to die.' Cancer patients have told me, 'Once I got myself together, I remembered this song my grandmamma or granddaddy sang to me.' "



## Does music heal emotional suffering? An article in Psychology Today says,

*"We now know through controlled treatment outcome studies that listening to and playing music is a potent treatment for mental health issues. Research demonstrates that adding music [therapy](#) to treatment improves symptoms and social functioning among [schizophrenics](#). Further, music therapy has demonstrated efficacy as an independent treatment for reducing [depression](#), [anxiety](#) and [chronic pain](#)."*

## **3. Music can speak spiritual truths.**

This really speaks to me, because so many of the stories of my life are linked to music. Some of my very best, spiritual,

emotional moments are directly tied to songs. I think I have felt spiritual promptings through the tune of music more than any other thing. I developed my testimony of my faith through song. I have felt answers solid answers to prayer through song. I have felt prompted to act on a feeling through song. I love this scripture in Psalms about music: "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving."

– *Psalm 69:30*

I think this is something that we all do so well, no matter what religion (or non-religion) we believe. Everything is better, more clear or more beautiful with music in the background and it more clearly attaches to a memory.

Just last week my son was participating in a religious ceremony linked to high school graduation. As a tradition, students who are graduating sing a song medley that is closely related to kids serving LDS missions. (This same son just got his mission call two weeks ago.) I knew the song was coming, because my two older kids sang it, but when it started I was overcome not only with emotion, but with deep spiritual feelings. I made eye contact with my son and he too, felt the emotion. As soon as the song was over and the ceremony was complete he bee-lined for me, threw his arms around me and told me he loved me. It was a sweet connection that I won't soon forget – a memory was made that will forever tie me to the song.

This is true for many others. Right now at Evalogue.Life we are working to complete a memoir for a client. At first, she wanted to name the book after a song closely related to her and her husband's relationship. Her husband passed away a few years ago and she often plays the song and dances around the room holding the picture. She feels him near when she hears it. It touched us deeply to hear this.

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### 4. Music itself tells a story and can tell your story.

So this begs the question. What is the soundtrack for your life? What music memories are triggered by certain songs?



What is the mix tape of your life?

Here is one for me. Just before I got married I was given a blessing that told me music would fill my home and that I would always consider it a priceless treasure. I decided I would make this happen. I of course have signed up all my kids for piano lessons over the years, encouraged my kids to take band or sing in school and community choirs. I don't have any concert pianists or professional saxophone musicians. Some of my children have performed in high school musicals and still sing in choirs or perform when they can. But when I ask them about the music in our home, I don't think that's the music they think of. Their music memories are tied up with us cooking, dancing and listening to music all simultaneously each night when preparing dinner. As a matter of fact, my missionary daughter just sent me a letter telling me how much she misses dancing to Duran Duran and John Mayer with me.

Proud mom moment right there. Do you know how many years she complained about my mom music when she was a teen? That was payoff for me! Two morals to this story: You never know when you are making memories. It's the little things, folks. Those are the stories of our life.

If you're like me a certain song can make you stop in your tracks and take you to a specific moment in time – perhaps an era of your life or a memory with a dear friend or loved one. Do you have different “music soundtracks” for different parts of your life? Even different categories of your life? I know I do. Just hearing the first note of “When a Man Loves a Woman” takes me back to a college dance when my then-boyfriend-now-husband told me the words were how he felt about me. I can feel the warm fireplace at the ski lodge where the dance was held then the cold blast when we ran outside to escape the crowd after the song ended. There's also the song, “Bring Him Home” from the ever-popular Les Miserables musical. I had the chance to hear the iconic Alfie Boe sing the song live just months before my oldest son left for his LDS mission. Now whenever I hear the song it takes me back to that moment, at Christmastime when I heard that song with my son sitting beside me and realizing I would be uttering the same prayer daily that the song rings out so beautifully. Even now when I hear the melody begin, I often have to escape to a place by myself because the waterworks start because that emotion is still raw for me, even though he has now been home for almost two years.



At the concert of my favorite band, Duran Duran. I've raised my kids on their music.

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Now I'm not saying that the ability to sing or play instruments is lost on me. I still make my kids practice the piano and try to squeeze in some classical and spiritual music as often as I can (all day Sundays for sure) but memories are made when life is speeding by and you are listening to Spotify on your iPhone in the kitchen.

And these music memories can elicit countless stories. Steve Rockwood, CEO of FamilySearch said it best when he said that specific questions yield specific answers in your family's story narrative. This is true whether it be for food, music, sports or anything else that ties your family together.

## [Related: What's your fave recipe? Family Interview Questions that Stick.](#)

What is your family music soundtrack? This is a [question we love to ask](#) clients when we interview them, and we encourage



you to ask your family members. Write it down and while you do it, listen to those songs while you write. Your story will be filled with colorful notes.



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