

Valparaiso woman spreads joy through singing

By Brian Williams Times Correspondent | Posted: Sunday, May 29, 2011
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VALPARAISO | Judy Bornstein leaned in close over the bed, took Ruth Dommer's hand and, in a soft soprano voice, sang the hymn "Precious Lord, Take My Hand."

"I love this lady," said Dommer, 93, a resident at Life Care Center of Valparaiso, whom Bornstein has visited two to three times a week for the past three years.

Dommer is one of hundreds of nursing home or hospice patients Bornstein has sung to over the past several years in her effort to spread the joy she finds in life.

In the shade of an alcove on a recent warm spring day, Bornstein sang hymns for a dozen residents of The Willows nursing home. Between songs from a hymnal sprouting sticky notes marking her patients' favorites, she shared stories of her childhood and her spiritual journeys in life.

"The residents in nursing homes are so forgotten," she said, "and if you can make them smile, it may be the only time they smile all day."

"She's an amazing lady," the Rev. Craig Fowler, hospice chaplain for the Visiting Nurse Association of Porter County, said of Bornstein. "She recognized she has a gift from God and chose to share it. She has used that gift to better the world."

In addition to regular visits around the city, Bornstein sings in the VNA hospice choir, is on call to sing for dying patients and volunteers in 11 ministries at her church.

Bornstein is a resident of Meridian Woods, the Campbell Street satellite campus of Pines Village Retirement Communities. She is up at 4:30 a.m. each day.

After an hour of devotional gratitude, she is off to the common area at Campbell Street Café for breakfast, socializing and her exercise regimen. When she can fit them in, she takes art lessons and rides her bike. She has a TV, which she dusts but doesn't have time to watch.



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Bornstein describes herself as "74 going on 7, because I have so much fun in life. It's like I'm at recess all the time." Joy, she said, is her favorite word.

But it wasn't always that way.

After two marriages ended in divorce, Bornstein felt she'd never been her own person, but she made a new beginning.

"My life began at 68. I was 68 years old when I first began to live, and the joy I have had in those years has been amazing," she said.

"As I began to sing, I really began to blossom."

With her singing, Bornstein now sees endless opportunities in life.

"You can see the glass as half empty or half full, and in my case I'm glad to see the glass," she said. "All the possibilities are there. I've got the glass and I can do whatever I want to do with that glass."



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