

Soothing the elderly with a musical twist

**Dedham resident
Marcia Feldman
provides palliative care
specialized for each patient**

by Scott Heald

[In these days of much news about spiraling medical costs, Marcia Feldman of Dedham is providing frail patients, most of them senior citizens, with the kind of personalized attention that has been known to improve overall health substantially. Recently she described her work in depth in an interview conducted via email. Her responses follow below.]

I am on staff as the Palliative Care Coordinator at Carleton-Willard Village in Bedford, MA. It is a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) that offers independent living, assistance with living and a nursing center. Carleton-Willard has created an innovative end-of-life program that offers several complementary therapies including Music, Massage, Compassionate Touch, Acupuncture and Reiki. In addition, we have a wonderful group of volunteers that will sit vigil with the dying resident so no one has to die alone unless that is their wish. I look at our program as providing compassionate care, walking beside our residents and their loved ones as they face the end-of-life.

In addition to coordinating this program, part of my job is to play soothing music at the bedside of people in their last days. Sometimes they are conscious and able to interact or participate, and other times they are unconscious and unable to communicate. I have observed that even when a person is no longer conscious, music can still have calming effects. Since hearing is one of the last senses to go, music can reach people on subtle levels.

My formal training as a musician is from Berklee College of Music in Boston where I graduated with a degree in Professional Music as a Voice major. After graduating from college, I sang in bands for several years, recorded CD's and taught private voice lessons. Before that I attended the University of Minnesota as



Marcia Feldman playing guitar.

Courtesy photo

a Classical Guitar major and studied guitar privately for several years.

In 1993, I began playing music at the bedside of people in hospice care. I applied for a grant which never materialized, but in the process I was hired to play at the bedside at Sherrill House, a skilled nursing facility in Jamaica Plain. After 17 years of playing for this very unusual purpose, I can only explain it as "a calling".

Before I visit a resident, I try to get a sense of their musical preferences from their family or the staff. Music is not a one size fits all proposition and it is important to adapt to a person's tastes. In general, the population I work with is quite elderly. Many times they prefer classical music, hymns and popular songs from their youth. Whatever styles I play, I attempt to make it soothing and calming.

In order to make this type of music available to resi-

dents between my visits, I recorded two CD's of the music that I play at the bedside. One is called, "Hospice Music" and the other more recent CD is "Between the Worlds". Both are available on CDBaby.com.

My father died fairly suddenly in 1988. After his death I began to search for meaning and explore my own beliefs about what happens after death. I became familiar with the work of Theresa Schroeder-Shecker. She is a brilliant harpist and scholar who's work, which she calls "Music Thanatology" is based on the teachings of an 11th century French monastic tradition of playing prescriptive music for the dying. Her work inspired me to begin on my own path. I knew about the healing powers of music and was drawn to use it in this unique way to help ease people's suffering at the end of life.

One of the more challenging parts of this work is facing one's own sadness and grief. Since the nature of working with people at the end of life entails being in the presence of difficult and heavy emotions, it is necessary to balance the sadness with joy and levity. I go dancing whenever possible to lift my spirits and keep joy in my life.

I find this work to be nourishing to my spirit. It is often deeply moving to witness the caring between families and their loved ones. I feel honored to be a vehicle for music and its mysterious capacity for healing. It is fulfilling to offer people comfort and peace during life's most difficult transition.

Years ago I used to play solo guitar music in restaurants and hotels. Sometimes I'd play for four hours and no one in the room even knew there was a live musician playing. It was like being sonic wallpaper. Conversely, when I play for someone at the end-of-life, it's not unusual for their family members to thank me with tears in their eyes for having soothed their parents last days on this earth. For them to let me be present during such an intimate time in their family's history is a great honor. And it feeds my spirit on a deep level.

[Editor's Note: Marcia and her husband Adam Feldman, also a professional musician who plays keyboards and teaches piano at Boston College, reside on Cedar Street.]

World Cup fever grips Dedham

Soccer, from page 1

they still beat them. In the past they only had one or two good players, but now they have multiple good players and they have nobody that's really hurt. They have a good attitude. It's the sport number one in Holland."

Like Peter Leeflang, John Miller has a fondness for soccer. He will be rooting for the Spanish side in the Cup final, based on his heritage. An employee of East Dedham Pizzeria, he looks like he could be a footballer himself right now - he's young and well-built. When asked if he would watch Sunday's match, he said "Better believe it, absolutely."

Miller singled out several players he especially admires on the squad many pundits predicted would capture this year's Cup. They include David Villa, who has scored five times in this tournament to tie Wesley Sneijder of the Netherlands for the tournament lead, as well as striker Fernando Torres, who has been slowed by injury but has still competed in South Africa. "Hopefully he starts next game," Miller said.

Other soccer fanatics in town include a convenience store worker in Oakdale Square, a local coach who played the sport himself, and a familiar face at the Dedham Public Library.

Sulab Khatiwada, a clerk at Oakdale Convenience Store, grew up in Nepal and mostly played cricket, but has a deep knowledge of soccer. He hopes the Dutch win on Sunday, because it will be their third final and they haven't been World Cup champions yet. "They are a small country, and they play beautiful football," he said. He added that they made this year's tournament more engaging by defeat-

ing the Brazilians, five-time victors and perennial powerhouse, thereby increasing the chances of the remaining teams to claim the title.

Although he wants the Netherlands to win, Khatiwada expects the Spaniards to prevail. "They are better than Holland as a team, but on a given day anything can happen. "Both are looking good, but Spain does keep the ball, they never give away the ball. If they are not sure of going forward, they keep on playing on their side. They just want to keep that ball and make the opponent do some mistake." He said his favorite players in this tournament have been Sneijder and Villa, as well as Diego Forlan of Uruguay.

Enzo Ballarano, formerly of Salem Foods who is now working at KH and H Liquors near Costco, has roots in Italy. Four years ago he had more occasion to be festive, as the Italian side conquered France on penalty kicks to win the Cup for the fourth time in their history. But with the Azzurri having been eliminated from the competition earlier than usual this year, he has found other teams to cheer on.

"I liked Argentina, but they got beat," Ballarano said, referring to their loss in the quarterfinals to the Germans, who in turn were defeated by Spain in the semifinals. He has coached several local squads, including at the Under 16 and Under 18 levels, and also played the game for many years when he was growing up. "I love the sport, and that's why I coached those young kids," he said.

John Flynn, a custodian at the Dedham Public Library who is a native of Ireland, could not cheer on the Irish side for the past month because they did not qualify for South Africa, court-

sey of a disputed goal by France in the qualifying round. But he still followed the matches at the World Cup, and offered his prediction for the final as well as a vivid memory indicating how intense Europeans often become over the sport.

"I'd like to see Holland take it, but I think Spain will, they're more experienced," he said, but he acknowledged that a match's result can be difficult to forecast. He added that during a trip overseas about eight years ago, he and his son Rory watched a notable game between Ireland and the U.S. in Dublin.

About a month ago at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Flynn spoke with Joe-Max Moore, a former member of the American national team who played in three World Cups, including in 1994 when it was held in this country. "He was signing autographs, and I was talking to him. I said, 'Do you remember that game in Dublin?' He said, 'How can I forget that game? That was a downpour, and we were just slidin' away.'"

Flynn also recalled that one of the Americans on the pitch that day, Claudio Reyna, was decidedly not the crowd favorite. "I turned to Rory and said, 'What's wrong? Why are they booing him?' (It was because) he played for the Rangers, against the Celtics in the Scottish League. The Celtics are more Catholic, and the Rangers are more Protestant. It was so funny, it was a laugh."

Flynn realizes that in this country more so than in most others, a multitude of sports vie for fans' affections. But he said that every quadrennium, he and all those with his passion for soccer share a special bond, even if they root for opposing squads. "We take over the world every four years," he said.

Author talk at the Dedham Public Library

Contributed to The Dedham Times

Join author Hallie Durand as she introduces her second book featuring Dessert Schneider, Just Desserts on Friday, July 30 at 6 p.m. at the Main Library. The event is for ages 6 through adult.

Last summer, we met Hallie and her mischievous heroine in Dessert First. One can only imagine what Dessert is up to in the sequel! This program is coordinated with The Blue Bunny; copies of Just Desserts will be available for purchase through The Blue Bunny.

Registration for the author talk is required - stop by the Main Library Children's Room or call 781-751-9283 to sign up.

After the author talk, we are offering a cupcake decorating workshop for children six and up. The cupcake decorating workshop is full, but interested patrons may be added to the waiting list by calling 781-751-9283.

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