

## Music with Elly

On the second Sunday of each month, the event calendar at The Waters Senior Living Community in Oakdale indicates residents can enjoy Music with Elly in the main gathering space. At 11:00, you can find a group of seniors gathered to listen to me play an hour set of music. With my acoustic guitar in hand and my amp and microphone turned on, I usually begin with a peppy, "Happy Birthday" song for those who have their special day that month. Many join in the singing with smiles across their faces and toes tapping. I have been visiting The Waters since the summer of 2022, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to share my gift of music with this community of senior citizens. During my Sunday visits, the residents have made lasting impacts on my life and I have learned many lessons from them, and, in turn, I hope I have made a positive impact on them as well.

Some crowd favorites on my Sunday mornings include, "You Are My Sunshine," "Sentimental Journey" "This Little Light Of Mine" and "Ob-La-Di" by the Beatles. I enjoy when residents join in the singing, especially from the balcony where many sit who don't want to make the longer journey down to the first floor gathering space. But, what I enjoy most about these mornings are the conversations that take place before and after the hour of music. Quite often, songs ignite memories, and memories often like to be shared. I've heard an archive of stories - about babies being born, wars being fought, romantic European trips, found love and lost love. I've heard stories about life without technology, growing up on farms, opening up a town's first grocery store and about making social change. With a life full of experiences, there is a lot to learn from older adults. I have learned about the value of hard work, the importance of chasing dreams and being persistent. I have learned about the importance of seeing the world, being patient when looking for love and how life was like in a world without technology. Most importantly, I have learned senior citizens have a lot to offer. Unfortunately, our society's obsession with youth perpetuates a fear of aging and devalues our older generations. Aging

shouldn't be feared, but revered. A person should be respected for their wisdom gained by their journey.

Grandma Arline was a resident of The Waters that made an impact on my life. Most knew her as Spike, and she loved to sit front and center during Music with Elly. Her body and memory were failing her, but when I sang, "Sentimental Journey," she found the words to sing and her fingers would keep rhythm by gently, subtly brushing her pant leg. She was 97 years old and enjoyed telling me what she could about her family. She was a daughter, a wife, a mother of three, a grandma of five and a great grandmother of twelve. I saw plenty of pictures to prove it! Her father gave her that nickname of Spike, and she enjoyed working with her dad at their family owned nightclub in Cannon City as a teenager and young adult. She met her husband, Ray, when they were in elementary school. In marriage, they loved to dance, host family gatherings and garden. Their garden, based on her description, was vast and breathtaking and must have taken a lot of work to maintain. In their retirement, Arline and her husband started a vineyard in Minnesota - one of the first ever in Minnesota. Even with her health challenges, she'd have a smile on her face and something positive to say about my performance. She'd lovingly recall stories about her family month after month until she wasn't there in August. She passed away peacefully on August 10th, 2023. Spike showed me how important family always will be - from birth to death. She modeled how to be grateful even when things weren't the greatest. She has made me more grateful for a body and mind that are able to do what they want to do. She has inspired me to commit to having a glass half full mentality into old age. The Waters hasn't seemed the same since August. I miss my friend in the first row.

I've learned lessons and been inspired by the residents of The Waters, and I hope they have been positively impacted by me too. In sixth grade, I started to discover my love of music, and shortly after, when covid hit, I found myself with a lot of time to explore this area. During this time, I bought a second hand ukulele and started teaching myself via YouTube. I eventually was

able to take lessons and transitioned to the acoustic guitar. Music can have so many positive impacts on people of all ages. I try to select positive, motivating music that can improve mood and bring back older, happier memories. Research shows music holds the power to increase dopamine levels (these are the “happy” hormones) and decrease symptoms of depression and pain. For those with memory issues, music has the ability to bring back memories, improve cognitive processing speeds and slow age related cognitive decline. Simply put, music is a powerful medicine. I hope the residents experience some of these health benefits after spending an hour with me. Judging from the smiles I see, I think they are.

Music with Elly will remain on the event calendar at The Waters Senior Living Community in Oakdale until I leave for college in the summer of 2025. I’m looking forward to Christmas in July where I play carols once again. I’m looking forward to getting song requests and learning old favorites of the residents. Mostly, however, I am looking forward to the life stories that span decades, countries, wars and romance. These tales of the past teach and inspire me. And with every smile I see or wink of an eye I get, I know that I too am making a difference every second Sunday of the month.