

Music as Medicine

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The wooden chairs were set out in rows in the home's living room, facing a beautiful baby grand piano. Dan hobbled in on his industrial-strength walker, negotiating the home's outside steps and we seated ourselves among the parents, siblings and video cameras set up on tri-pods. We all waited expectantly for the concert to begin. Dan's piano teacher had invited us and this was her students' annual summer recital.

There was a hush and his teacher, Lisa, came to the front of the room. She introduced the piece she was about to play, sat at the piano and played a melodious song. Besides being a beautiful blond, Lisa is a superb pianist and we lost ourselves in the music. For the next selection, her mentor joined her and they played a duet, transporting us to another world.

At the end of the duet the next performer was announced. It was obvious who the parents were because the video camera began to roll as the child entered from the side of the room. A petite child wearing a party dress, she solemnly took a bow and proceeded to the piano. She sat at the piano, rested her hands on the keys and began to play. She was so serious and so intent on her playing that she didn't realize her mouth was moving as she counted out the notes of the piece. It was charming and we couldn't stop giggling because we loved it so much.

The scene repeated itself several times as each new student was announced, came up to the front of the room, bowed and then sat to play a delightful piece. As each child entered we would see a section of the room light up as the parents beamed with pride for their child. Some children chose to perform a duet with their teacher, Lisa. They were so intense and serious that we couldn't help ourselves and we stifled our giggles throughout the concert. It was just so sweet!!!! That was the way we reacted when our own children performed at concerts and theater performances. We burst with pride.

We have sat through many, many concerts. Three of our four sons chose to play the string bass in third grade and we attended every elementary string concert when they were younger. Have you been to an elementary school string concert? There's a special award for parents of elementary string instrumentalists. As they grew more proficient, two of our sons auditioned for and were accepted into the 125-piece Junior Philharmonic Orchestra of California. That was the start of a six-year commitment of obligatory Wednesday night rehearsals. Sometimes we ran from the soccer field to the rehearsal hall still dressed in cleats and dirty soccer garb because we could not miss a rehearsal. Correction -- I drove from soccer to rehearsals, as we could not find anyone who wanted to carpool with a mother who had two string bass-playing sons. I actually dreaded Wednesday nights even more when my second son got his learner's permit and insisted on driving the minivan to and from rehearsals. His driving

experience did come in handy when he took his driver's test on that very minivan and passed on the first try!

We first met Lisa when we bid and won a performance at our home that she had donated at an Israel Cancer Research Fund silent auction. After that, we hired her and she played for our guests at various events we held at our home. When Dan had his stroke, his occupational therapist suggested that piano lessons would be beneficial for his brain and his motor skills. We asked Lisa if she gave lessons, and she graciously offered to come to our home for half an hour once a week to work with Dan. Dan had never studied music or taken music lessons, but he loved to listen to all types of music. He had very eclectic tastes in music and bought Brazilian, rock, reggae, Arabic and Israeli music for his iPod. This past year he learned to read music, count out notes and play, albeit hesitantly, with both hands under Lisa's tutelage. He is still a beginner, but he loves his music, his teacher and it has been therapeutic.

Summer is approaching and plans are already underway for this year's annual recital. The date has been chosen and this year Dan will be part of the concert. He will wear his suit and tie and will walk unassisted to the center of the room where he will bow to the audience. He has chosen to play a duet with Lisa, "Surfer Girl" by Brian Wilson. My four sons and I will be seated in the audience, beaming with pride and taping it all on our video camera.