

Good Works: Everyday Ways We Can All Make A Difference

By Krista Meyerhoff
Family Circle, July 2008

Musical influence: A well-known pianist and pop singer in Houston, Anita had been performing at Texas children's Cancer Center for a year. "The concerts gave kids in recovery something to focus on besides chemotherapy," she says.

Tuning in: It was 2004, and Anita was also teaching private piano lessons to local kids. Her husband, Robbie Parrish, had set up a studio in their home and Anita wondered if a similar studio at the hospital could be used to lift kids' spirits through the healing power of music.

Financial hurdle: Anita approached the director of the hospital's arts-in-medicine program, who was excited about the idea but couldn't fund it. "I had to take the lead and follow my instincts," Anita says. She'd previously raised \$880 for the cancer center with a benefit concert and decided to form a nonprofit organization to further spread the word.

Straight from the heart: After choosing the name Purple Songs Can Fly (inspired by her favorite color), Anita solicited donations. In the first year she raised \$10,000 for music equipment, including a keyboard, microphone and computer. "I couldn't wait for kids to share their wisdom and talent," she says.

Jam session: Since then, Anita has helped more than 90 patients record songs. She asks kids in the waiting room if they want to write one, collaborates on the lyrics, plays chords on her piano until the patient hears a likeable melody, then records the child singing his or her own words to background music. Three minutes later a personalized purple CD is ready. "I love seeing a child's face transform at the thought of creating art," Anita says.

"When a child writes a song, it takes on a life of its own. It touches and inspires other people."

Soaring high: In 2006 Anita met with the CEO of Continental Airlines and asked if he'd ever consider adding a "purple" song to the in-flight entertainment system. To her surprise, Continental chose seven tracks to play on the airline's children's music channel.

Across the universe: Soon after, astronaut Scott Parazynski (whose wife is a nurse at Texas Children's Hospital) brought two CDs aboard the Discovery shuttle to the International Space Station. "The kids were so proud," says Anita.