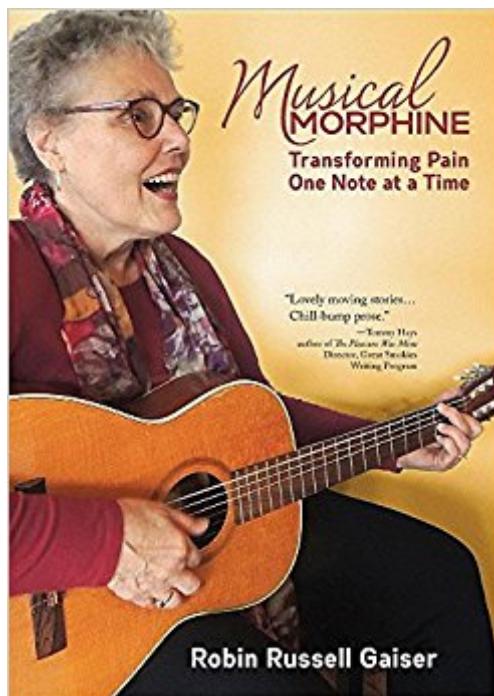


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# Musical Morphine: Transforming Pain One Note At A Time



## **Synopsis**

Robin Russell Gaiser became a Certified Music Practitioner after a career as a performing musician and teacher. As she learned how valuable music could be in easing patients' pain -- both physical and psychological -- she began to share her stories with friends and colleagues in music and medicine. This book is the result.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Musical Morphine takes the reader on a positive and sometimes very emotional journey of dedication, hope, and warmth as Robin Gaiser tells the stories of the lives that she has touched as a musician, healer, and loving human being. She embraces the challenges of her patients' pain and despair and demonstrates how her music nurtures the sick and infirm in beautiful, positive ways on their personal transitional journeys. A must read. -Nick Jacobs, B.S., MEd, MPM, FACHE Chairman, Clinical and Translational Genome Research Institute Fort Myers, Florida Musical Morphine offers insight into healthcare that places care of the soul at its center. A moving, inspiring, and hope-giving book... Laura Hope-Gill Director, Thomas Wolfe Center for Narrative Narrative Medicine Program, Lenoir-Rhyne University This book beautifully captures and reveals the many mysteries and miracles that occur regularly in the work of any therapeutic musician, and how our training through the Music for Healing and Transition Program guides us in navigating the sometimes murky waters of therapeutic music. The story of therapeutic music in America, told in a readable, entertaining, and meaningful way. Earl Fowler, JD, CMP Chief District Court Judge, retired Musical Morphine

intertwines one woman's journey through grief with her ability to move through that same experience with others, assisted by a handful of instruments and her mastery of lyric, melody and rhythm. Music, through its many layers and forms, is intrinsically built to accompany end-of-life experiences and all the emotions that arise on that path. There is such a need. So, come on in, there's plenty of room. And, as you will learn as you turn these pages, results can be simply life-changing. Lara McKinnis, MS, MT-BC Lovely and moving! [Gaiser] writes with reverence and restraint, letting the stories naturally unfold. The writing has a wonderful, quiet rhythm. -Laurel Hunt, pet therapy volunteer, Mission Healthcare author, Pawprints: Reflections on Loving and Losing a Canine Companion As a physician, I often see patients struggle through illness and suffer the limits of medical interventions. The[se] stories reveal the art in healing and sometimes, despite our best efforts, the art in dying. As a healthcare music practitioner, Gaiser offers not only joy to the listener but an anesthetic for the patient. [The author's experiences illustrate the profound effect that music can have in awakening the joy in patients' hearts, healing broken relationships in families, and liberating dying souls with grace. Susan Mims, MD, MPH, FAAP Mission Health Systems [In] Robin Gaiser's powerful narrative about relationships with family, friendship, pain, joy, and love through the gift of music, the reader is privy to sacred moments with people at their most vulnerable... Musical Morphine sings of courage, encounter, and peace. Katharine R. Meacham, PhD Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Mars Hill University Adjunct Professor, Dept. of Social Medicine, UNC SOMS-Asheville Lovely moving stories ... Chill-bump prose. Tommy Hays Director, Great Smokies Writing Program, UNC Asheville I got so emotionally involved, [despite] not knowing much about the people described. But ... providing background on dying folks' need for resolution and the lyrics to those old hymns and songs is really powerful. Dwight Martin, MFA student, Queens University, Charlotte

Robin Russell Gaiser earned her BA in English at The College of William and Mary, where she also sang and played with a folk-rock group, both on campus and in venues in Richmond, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. After graduation she taught writing and literature in Fairfax County, Virginia; then, while raising her family, she gave private lessons in guitar and dulcimer and performed publicly under the auspices of the Fairfax County Council of the Arts. She also sang in classical choirs and joined The Mill Run Dulcimer Band, recording seven albums now included in the Smithsonian collection. With her children grown, Robin earned an M.A. in psychology from Marymount University and worked as a guidance counselor for eight years. Then, after relocating to upstate N.Y. and becoming caregiver-and bedside musician-for her dying father, she enrolled in a certification

program for therapeutic musicians. As a Certified Music Practitioner (CMP), she is trained to provide live, bedside, one-on-one acoustic music to critically and chronically ill, elderly, and dying patients. After forty-three years in northern Virginia and eight years in upstate New York, Robin and her husband relocated to Asheville, N.C., where she has pursued both her music and her writing careers. Currently pursuing a graduate certificate in Narrative Medicine at Lenoir-Rhyne University's Graduate Center, Robin also volunteers as a musician at homeless shelters, for homebound seniors, and for nonprofit fundraisers. She and her husband are the parents of one daughter and two sons, and grandparents of three.

In *Musical Morphine*, Robin Gaiser chronicles her physical and spiritual journey to becoming a Certified Music Practitioner (CMP). Each vignette captures the intimacy and therapeutic impact of her music upon individual patients. She calms spirits and eases pain and anxiety for terminally-ill and dying patients, often times helping patients fulfill their secret wishes. In offering peace and consolation to patients through her wide range of musical talents, she shows how she is able to find peace within herself. This is a deeply satisfying read from two perspectives. Personally, I have always felt that music has healing qualities and the ability to capture past memories. I have turned to music during difficult times and solace so I could easily relate to each scenario. Professionally as a health care provider, the response of the patients to her music is profound and believable. Agitated patients are calmed, dying patients recapture a precious memory that brings them joy in their final hours, and families are consoled in observing their loved ones experience peace. Her writing is highly engaging and free flowing with vivid scenic details and believable dialogue. She invited me into each story in a way that made me feel very much a part of the experience. I could see each person, feel their angst, hear her music and see how her songs and instruments soothed them and brought them joy. Robin's words offer a strong message that even in the most desperate situations, music can offer hope, humor and inspiration. Perhaps what is most satisfying about this stunning memoir is to experience how giving of ourselves and our talents to others can lead to our own spiritual growth. I highly recommend this deeply satisfying and heartfelt memoir to anyone who appreciates music's role in one's spiritual journey. It is also an excellent resource for health care providers or anyone interested in end-of-life care.

While reading Robin's wonderful testimony over the course of four days, I was drawn to walking alongside her in my volunteer work of being present with the memory-impaired and elderly in an

assisted living facility, serving differently perhaps but serving with energy and compassion. Music speaks through this musician deep into the spirits of those who can no longer speak and those who are living into death. It is comforting and uplifting, transporting the longing listener to experiences of yesteryear and what has been. I am grateful to Robin for sharing part of her life's story and her gifts which many have enjoyed in other contexts. She encourages the most introverted among us to step forward and outward to make a difference in the lives of others.

Anyone who has tried to help a parent die with dignity will truly appreciate this book. And for those who haven't faced this challenge yet, this is an excellent way to prepare. I was with both my mother and father when they 'crossed over' and wish we had had Robin with us. For my mother's death, it might have helped my sister (who was a little hysterical) and been calmer for my Mom. When my Dad was in a coma, dying in the hospital, I felt his presence and knew that I needed to sing. Those old hymns came back to memory, and helped us both as I sang to him until his last breath. I must admit that I have known Robin since high school, and enjoyed singing with her, first in chorus, and then at folk festivals. She is intelligent and full of wit as well as an excellent musician. Her spirit shines through when she sings, laughs, or shares a story. This book is so beautifully written and engaging, I'm sure anyone would love the experience of reading it. And if the end of life frightens you - all the more. Thank you so much Robin for sharing your heart and your experiences with us.

After meeting Robin at the Ferrum College Dulcimer Festival this year, I know I had to read her book, *Musical Morphine*. I was waiting for a patient to finish his chemo infusion at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute yesterday (I'm a volunteer driver for cancer patients) and I finally had a couple of hours of uninterrupted quiet time to read *Musical Morphine* in their meditation garden. I was moved by the similarities in our life stories from the 1st chapter (I was the primary caregiver for my wife for two years, who died 4 years ago), and couldn't put the book down until I finished it! Wow, how I wish I had read it when my wife got sick. I would have done so much more to help her along on her spiritual journey (although she did amazingly well on her own) and not been so wrapped up in the technical/medical aspects of her treatments and care. Thank you so much for writing *Medical Morphine*! It should be required reading for all caregivers and medical professionals.

I met Robin at a Music for Healing and Transition conference in 2014. At the time, she was working on this book and she invited those of us who were interested to a reading of a few excerpts. I decided to go to the reading, wanting to support my new friend but expecting to hear a

somewhat-amateurish telling of still more CMP anecdotes. As soon as she started reading, I realized I was wrong. This was something special. Robin was not only a very dedicated therapeutic musician, but also a gifted writer. I had heard dozens of healing music stories (many more heartfelt than well-written), but hers held me mesmerized. Musical Morphine chronicles Robin's journey to become a therapeutic musician, and her experiences serving as one, in a manner that is honest, inspiring, sensitive, humorous, and thought-provoking. The book provides insight into the medical, social and spiritual power of music for the the ill and dying and their caregivers, and into the thoughts, fears, frustrations, rewards and love that therapeutic musicians experience as they go about this very special work. Her stories are both personal and universal, and by the end of the book you will feel that you know Robin and the unique human beings that she plays for. I highly recommend this book for caregivers, health care workers, musicians, spiritual counselors and anyone else who is interested in the healing power of music.

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