

# MUSIC HAS POWER™

A PUBLICATION OF THE INSTITUTE FOR MUSIC AND NEUROLOGIC FUNCTION

## Now That You're Standing, I Want You to Sing

*After many months of silence, Denise is once again a woman with a song.*

"I have gained my spirit back; I've regained my life. I am working now, and I've reestablished myself. It's all thanks to the music therapy program at Beth Abe," Denise said. "When I got there, I was so discouraged. The tube in my throat had ruined my voice, and the illnesses had ruined my life."

Denise was just in her 20s, but in her own eyes, her life was already over when she came to Beth Abraham. A child singing prodigy with a special gift and a love for Gloria Estefan, Bette Midler and gospel music, she'd had a gastric bypass operation in 2002 to overcome the rapid weight gain that followed treatment for asthma. Complications during and after the surgery left her with organ failure, breathing problems and dehydration. After recovery from her

second coma, she was left unable to walk, and became a patient at Beth Abraham.

"I shut myself in my room, my self esteem at the very bottom, talking as little as possible, very depressed, and barely able to move," she said. "I felt my throat was damaged. I couldn't sing and I didn't want to talk. I became dependent on Beth Abe. But then I met Luci." Music therapist Luci Butler had a different idea. "Denise,"

*(continued on page 2)*



# In The News

## NEO-INTENSIVE CARE

The IMNF is working with a team from Montefiore's Children's Hospital to develop a therapeutic music program for fragile newborns at Weiler's neo-intensive care unit. This program will provide parent and staff training in how music can be used therapeutically to stimulate as well as relax newborns. CDs will be produced to provide appropriate music programs that the nursing staff can use throughout the day.

## MINI-STUDY

In collaboration with Beth Abraham's Comprehensive Care Management (CCM)

program, the music therapy department has begun group music therapy sessions. Over the course of several months the CCM Wallerstein staff will monitor the potential benefit of this program on the overall care needs of their participants.

## PARKINSON'S TRAINING

The National Parkinson's Foundation has asked Dr. Tomaino to be part of its national Allied Team Training for Parkinson's faculty. She will be co-developing a curriculum for training health care professionals on the benefit of music therapy in care of treatment of persons with Parkinson's.

## Now That You're Standing

*continued from page 1*

she told me, 'you're a beautiful girl and you say singing is your life. So let's hear you!'

"Singing was a simple task Denise knew well," said Luci. "When we first began working together she said her voice didn't sound like she remembered it. But over the span of several months her voice became stronger and stronger."

Luci brought in sheet music for Denise's favorite songs, and she accompanied her on keyboard. "I'll never forget her holding up a mirror in front of my face," said Denise, "and telling me to look at myself while I sang."

Singing was a powerful tonic for Denise. It reinforced not only her vocal skills but also her motivation, her mentality, and her own self-healing.

"We measured her progress both musically, by how her vocal range increased (how high she could sing from one day to the next), and physiologically, by how healthy she felt from day to day, how often she attended physical therapy, and how frequently she would accomplish



Denise Seda and Luci Butler at the 2005 MHP Awards, where Denise's performance of *Wind Beneath My Wings* received a standing ovation.

activities of daily living on her own," Luci said. "Through our relationship and the auditory reinforcement of her singing she began to reclaim her voice, her independence, her life."

According to Dr. Concetta Tomaino, director of the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function, issues related to illness are worked on and many times resolved over months of music therapy. The result of this process is often a stronger self image for the patient and the motivation needed to go on with life – despite the challenges still to be faced.

In time, Denise ventured down in her wheelchair to the recording studio with Luci. Then, one day back in her room at Beth Abraham, she pulled herself up to stand for the first time. Immediately, she phoned Luci and asked the therapist to come up and see her. "Luci took one look at me," said Denise, "and with tears in her eyes said, 'Now that you're standing, I want you to sing.'"

And sing she has. Denise is now living back home and employed, working with deaf people. She also sings at weddings and Sweet Sixteens. She's sung at Knicks Games and at the U.N. Most recently, she and Luci performed at the Music Has Power gala in November to thunderous applause and a standing ovation. Her dream? To sing the National Anthem at Yankee Stadium.

"Along with my mother, who's stood by me all along, I owe it all to Luci. That woman gave me back my hope, my spirits, my identity. Because of Beth Abe, music therapy and Luci, I have my life."