

StringsforaCURE battles cancer with a boost from guitarists

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When Angela Cordisco and Elisa Guida were young girls together, endlessly playing "Yesterday," "Twist and Shout," and other cherished Beatles 45s in the basement of Guida's Drexel Hill home, their lives stretched before them.

Cordisco didn't know she would marry a guitarplaying doctor, raise three music-loving children, and make a home in Moorestown.

Guida, always an artist, might have been surprised to learn that she would settle in Erie, start a jewelry business, and marry happily at 39.

She didn't suspect she would battle breast cancer not once, but twice, and live to rock on.

"In so many ways, music has bonded us for over 50 years," Cordisco said of the women's enduring friendship.



Elisa Guida and Joe Bonamassa at the Academy of Music. "I'm happy to help..." (ASHLEE ESPINAL / Staff Photographer)

Through that bond, and with a lot in their lives to be thankful for, they've teamed up to make a difference for others.

Guida, 57, is founder of the StringsforaCURE Foundation, and Cordisco, 55, an honorary board member, helps get out the word to further the group's cause - helping cancer patients.

Guida, who started her La Petite Jewelers in Erie more than 30 years ago, makes jewelry from guitar strings that have been played by professional musicians - Jon Bon Jovi and blues guitarist Joe Bonamassa, to name two.

She sells the pieces - mostly online - and uses the money to supply patients with gas, grocery, or pharmacy gift cards; comfort baskets; wig vouchers; and educational materials.

She has received the strings of about 100 musicians in the last three years, Guida said. Since she began making the items and distributing the proceeds last year, the group has given about \$8,000 to 85 individuals and has a good deal more to go, she said. The foundation's application for status as a taxexempt charity is pending.

Her earrings, pendants, rings, and bracelets - which sell for about \$25 to \$500 - have brought in more than \$24,000, Guida said.

"The joy is helping - me being able to give back, because I know how much it means," said Guida, whose cancer has been in remission for six years.

But back when they were "Paul girls," swooning over the Fab Four and others, and weighting a record player arm with pennies so it wouldn't skip, who knew?

"We were born across the street from each other," said Cordisco, who came to think of Guida as more of a cousin than a friend.

Though Cordisco moved to Upper Darby when she was young, their families remained close.

"We did the seven fishes dinner together on Christmas Eve," she said. And, as Eric Clapton might have said years later, they had rock-and-roll hearts. Cordisco remembers high schooler Guida winning a radio contest for a ticket to George Harrison's 1971 Concert for Bangladesh benefit at Madison Square Garden. The women are still avid concertgoers.

In 2008, when Guida began thinking about celebrities recycling guitar strings to do good, Cordisco was one of the people she decided to reconnect with. Guida also has board members helping her.

In the early days, Cordisco, through her own connections, helped get Guida a donation by Bonamassa, a guitarist with a large and enthusiastic following. Just a few weeks ago, the two women met Bonamassa, who said he had heard of the group through fans, before his performance at the Academy of Music. He gave them more strings. "I'm happy to help the cause," Bonamassa said later. Cancer, he said, "is a terrible disease, and it affects a lot of people. Every dollar helps."



Cordisco said one of her siblings has a connection with homeless advocate Sister Mary Scullion, which helped lead to a string donation from Jon Bon Jovi.

StringsforaCURE isn't the only group that uses guitar strings for fund-raising, and Guida said string jewelry has been around for decades, at least. But friends and music aficionados have helped the foundation connect with artists, their managers, crew members, representatives, and family members.

The manager for British blues artist Oli Brown and Carl Latz - father of Tallan Noble Latz, a 12-year-old blues and rock guitarist - confirmed in e-mails that they had donated.

Ravinder Pilson, wife of Foreigner's Jeff Pilson, wrote that he and other band members had given strings.

Karen Francone of California said she and her husband had gotten to know Paul Rodgers of Bad Company fame and that he and his wife donated strings from a tour he did with Queen.

Slide guitarist Sonny Landreth wrote in an e-mail that the donated strings would otherwise have been thrown away. Now they go on to help people.

"I will never think of a broken string the same way and I will urge my musician friends to do the same," he wrote.

The strings are not all donated directly by the artists. For example, musician Matthew Heulitt said in an e-mail that he had donated strings from his guitar, which had been played by Carlos Santana. Heulitt and a Santana spokesman said the donation was not authorized by Santana's management. Guida tries to authenticate the provenance of all the strings, she said. She now requires the signature of the artist, a manager, or a crew member who sanctioned the donation.

A month ago, she said, she was at a concert featuring the band Train, a Grammy Award winner for its performance of "Hey, Soul Sister." She got strings belonging to three of the group's members: Pat Monahan, who is from Erie; Hector Maldonado, who has spent time in Philly, and Jimmy Stafford.

"We were happy to do it," tour manager Thomas O'Keefe said in an interview.

StringsforaCURE is still a small operation. Guida makes the jewelry, her husband mans the website, and they both have day jobs.

And there's the future. Guida said it would be wonderful to get strings from Bruce Springsteen. Cordisco would like to get strings from cancer survivors Sheryl Crow, Melissa Etheridge, and Carly Simon. And both say they would *love* to get strings from Paul McCartney.

"His true love, Linda, died of breast cancer," Cordisco said.

And besides, in their rock-and-roll heart of hearts, they're still Paul girls.



To learn more, go to www.stringsforcure.com.

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