

The Volunteer

Sharing God's love through acts of service

SOUNDTRACK FOR THE SOUL



In this issue:

- **A Soundtrack of Music**
By Saudah Nassanga, Unit #327
- **The Sounds of My Heritage**
By Grace Elliott, Unit #331
- **Time Capsule**
By Franka Evers, Unit #331
- **A Sixth Love Language**
By Erika Clary, Unit #329
- **A Night at the Opera**
By Charles Johnson, Unit #43

Upcoming Orientations:

- **Summer Unit #333**
July 31 - August 8, 2023
Location: Inspiration Hills Camp, Burbank, Ohio
- **Fall Unit #334**
September 26 - October 4, 2023
Location: Camp Kononia, Cle Elum, Washington

By the Numbers:

- **Active volunteers – 26**
19 in United States
3 in Europe
1 in Latin America
2 in Asia
1 in Africa
- **Active Projects – 54**
37 in the United States
6 in Europe
5 in Latin America
2 in Asia
4 in Africa



Saudah Nassanga, Unit #327

A Soundtrack of Music

By Saudah Nassanga

My first year in school was all about singing and dancing. When I was asked about what I studied, I would reply, "We did not study today, we were only singing." Nowadays, when I listen to kids singing the same songs I sang, I am reminded of my kindergarten. I was actually learning through music because no one taught me numbers, colours, alphabets, etc. by word or notice; it was all about singing them in a song.

Music has the ability to deeply affect our mental states right from the womb and raise our mood. Music gives us energy, courage, inspiration, and motivation. The teachers in kindergarten find it easier to teach through music rather than talking because a song can be sung in a classroom, on the playground, on the way home, and maybe in the bathroom.

As a BVSer living with people with intellectual disabilities, I find music as a way to connect with and include others. Music empowers ways of working with individuals as they journey towards healing and improving social interaction. When I sing, every person joins in. We all come together to sing, be it for praise and worship, laughter, good information. We might be different, but music binds us regardless of where you come from, which language you speak, or your status.

As I am serving my time at L'Arche Kilkenny, it just happens that I get sad, motivated, inspired, and sometimes very hopeful and courageous for the decision I made. My life here is just like a soundtrack of music. 🌿



Saudah at the Rock of Cashel. Photo by Saudah Nassanga.



Customs House in Dublin, Ireland. Photo by Saudah Nassanga.

The following contributions come from current and former BVS volunteers. Get a glimpse into their experiences as they share about the influence of music in their BVS service and journeys of faith.

The Sounds of My Heritage

By Grace Elliott



Grace Elliott, Unit #331

It has been often said that the music we listen to has great influence and power in our lives. Is that true? I want to speak today about the influence of music in my life and as I serve with BVS.

Growing up as a young Brethren girl, I remember going to our small country church and hearing the strains of hymns wafting into the open air as our family made our way to the church. We would sometimes visit the local Mennonite church, the place where

many of my friends attended. I enjoyed hearing the sounds of majestic acapella four-part harmony in my ears. It is the sound of peace and stability in my life, the sound of my heritage.

I am currently serving a term with BVS in Rwanda, Africa. Rwanda is a tiny country nestled in the heart of the African continent. It is sometimes called the Land of Eternal Spring or Land of a Thousand Hills. Those are accurate descriptions as Rwanda is a lush, green, mountainous country.

There, a growing, active Church of the Brethren is springing up in Rwanda and in the surrounding East Africa region. In February of 2022, the Gisenyi Church of the Brethren started a nursery school for three- to five-year-olds. I was here then to help with that, and to instruct as an English language teacher. I liked it so much that I came back, through BVS, for the next two years!

Living here has taught me about a very different style of worship and music than what I was accustomed to as a young girl. I was taught that dancing or showing a lot of emotion while singing was improper. It was frowned upon to clap or raise your hands in church.

In the African context, it is the complete opposite. When Africans sing, they never stand still. The joy is evident on their faces. I have come to love dancing in church. The pounding of the drum is a sound of my heritage.

The sounds of my heritage fill my soul with peace, joy, stability, and contentment in the place God has planted me. 🌿



Worship Team.



Worship Team. Photo by Grace Elliott.

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Time Capsule

By Franka Evers



When I think of the ways music has influenced my life, there are several things that come to my mind. The most obvious would be that songs impact my mood easily. Every time I feel happy I have a tendency to listen to upbeat songs, and when I feel sad, I prefer slower tunes. I usually start my days by putting on my headphones and listening to playlists while I get ready or on my way to work. I choose catchy songs to set my mood for the day and motivate myself.

More importantly, music means community for me. A lot of fun memories I have with other people revolve around the music we were listening to. When I think about my time at orientation for example, one of the first things that comes to my mind is the song "Sweet Pea" by Tommy Roe. It is a song that I did not know before spending eight days at Camp Stover in Idaho. However, once we started listening to it for fun, there was not a single person who didn't have it stuck in their head. Now, whenever the word "pea" comes up in a conversation, the pleasant memories of singing that song with the other volunteers surface.

Music has also been a part of my time here in Fremont, where I volunteer at the Sunrise Village Emergency Shelter. Some of my favorite memories with my two housemates, Lena and Marvin, who are also BVS volunteers, are the times we spend in our car listening to music blasting out of the speakers. No matter if it's classic Taylor Swift songs, Christmas music, or German songs we know from our childhood, I always enjoy our car rides a lot.

Music has united me and other people in the past. Moreover, I know that certain songs or music genres will always take me back to amazing times I spent with friends and family. It is basically like a little time capsule for me.



Daytrip to San Francisco. (Left to right: Marvin, Lena, Franka)



Last night at orientation at Camp Stover. (Left to right: Franka, Lena) Photo by Virginia Rendler.

A Night at the Opera

By Charles Johnson

I joined BVS in June 1959 as the only non-Brethren member of the 43rd group. How did I know about BVS? I was a graduate student in California but was interested in volunteer work. While on a bus to Los Angeles, a small magazine on the next seat had an article about BVS. Interested, I sent an application to Elgin, and a few months later I was on my way to New Windsor, Maryland.

After a two-month orientation, four of us boarded a ship headed for France, then a train to Kassel, Germany, where we spent an orientation month. Eugene Lantz and I were assigned to Vienna, Austria to help rebuild The Evangelical School, a four-story brick schoolhouse that had been blown up in World War II.

Sixteen volunteers lived in two large classrooms and worked as bricklayers, plasterers, and carpenters. The school on Karlsplatz was just a few blocks from the Vienna Opera House. Tickets to stand for the opera were just fifteen cents. Bruce Dickey, a fellow BVSer, introduced me to the opera house. We put on a suit and tie after work, stood in line to get our tickets, and then hurried to the upper levels to stand for a three-hour opera.



Nancy (left) and Charles (right) at Mont San Michel, France in July 1960.



Karlschule in Vienna in 1959. Charles is in the back row, right, with a white hat. Bruce Dickey is next to Charles.

A Sixth Love Language

By Erika Clary



I have been fascinated by love languages for quite some time. If you are not familiar with the concept, our love language is the way we like to receive love from others. There are five love languages: quality time, acts of service, gifts, physical touch, and words of affirmation. While I was in BVS, I seemed to develop a new love language: music. Sending someone a song that reminds me of them or having someone else do the same fills my heart with great joy. I get the same feeling of wholeness when singing with others.

Sharing music as a love language enhanced my BVS year in many ways. My BVS unit (329) LOVED music. On the last night of orientation, we had a karaoke night. I was able to sing a song with each person in my unit, and it seemed like each of those songs expressed my friendship with that person. I am forever bonded with my fellow volunteers because of those songs. Even though most of my unit has concluded our time in BVS, we continue to send one another songs that remind us of each other, and I think that is an expression of love. I was also able to continue connecting with loved ones at home the same way during my BVS year.

On a larger scale, for my BVS placement, I served as the Church of the Brethren National Youth Conference (NYC) Coordinator. Church of the Brethren members, like other denominations, carry a wide range of beliefs. No matter how different each NYC participant was, we still raised our voices together in song. Music is the tie that knits us together in love, especially in BVS when we interact with people who can be extremely different from us, and that is a beautiful thing.



Erika (left) and Malachi (right) singing the BVS song together at orientation. Photo by LeRae Wilson.



Erika singing the NYC theme song with the National Youth Cabinet at NYC. Photo by Tara Riddle.

One evening we were waiting to watch "Madam Butterfly." Two young American women stood in the row ahead of us. They were on their junior year abroad from Brown University. During the first intermission, we talked. During the second intermission, I made a date with one of the women, Nancy, to meet at the Volksoper, the light opera house. I didn't have her address, and neither of us had phones. I just hoped she would show up and I would recognize her.

We did meet and continued to meet at music events. We got to know each other on other dates, until I moved to Paris a few months later, working for the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service. I was the only BVSer in France.

We continued to write all the next year, and I returned to the U.S. for Nancy's university graduation. I moved to Washington D.C. for graduate work, and she joined me after our December wedding. We will have our 61st anniversary in December 2022. And the romance that began at the opera house in Vienna continues!

