

Our Artistic Selves

It was 1986 or 87, perhaps. I was the organist at St John's Episcopal Church in Gloucester, and had a funeral to play for. An article about the death had been in the newspaper a few days earlier: a teenage boy had driven his motorcycle at high speed into the rock wall at the end of the main road in the Cape Ann Industrial Park, the sort of news that makes you sick to your stomach to think about.

I took a nap that day to get ready for the service, overslept a little and had to hurry down to the church. I was still in plenty of time for the prelude, but people had come unusually early and the church was full by the time I arrived: heavy grief, the sound of quiet crying, and palpable pain in the room.

I made my way to the organ console and began to play. I sensed the music beginning to soothe the room, surrounding people, covering the sounds of grieving and providing a little bit of privacy as well as distraction from painful thoughts. It was the first time I really experienced the necessity of music, not for its entertainment value, but as a balm to the spirit. It was an honor to be able to provide it.

Music is a necessity of life. It's such a direct spiritual connection for so many people, though we may not be able to say what we are connecting to, or how.