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### An Artist's Gift

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AN ARTIST'S

# Gift

ANITA BURROUGHS-PRICE USES HER MUSICAL TALENT TO PROVIDE COMFORT, SOLACE AND HOPE.

*She* pulls a small Celtic harp from the back of her station wagon, safely snug inside a black canvas case, tucks it under her arm, then walks up to the townhouse door with a smile on her face.

Inside, her friend in a pink robe and short white hair is waiting in the dim hallway, a little tired and unsteady on her feet the day after her latest round of chemotherapy.

"Hi! It's so good to see you," Anita Burroughs-Price says loudly, and hugs the woman.

"It's good to see you, too," Kelly Lewis says, fixing her deep, dark eyes on the harpist before leading her down the hall into the den. "Thank you for coming."

Burroughs-Price keeps the conversation going as she unpacks the harp, made for her by an English luthier who has also built harps for the Irish group The Chieftains. It is a little more than waist-high when she sets it on the carpet, an ornate swirl of blond wood painted with spiritual scenes.

"What do you want to hear today?"

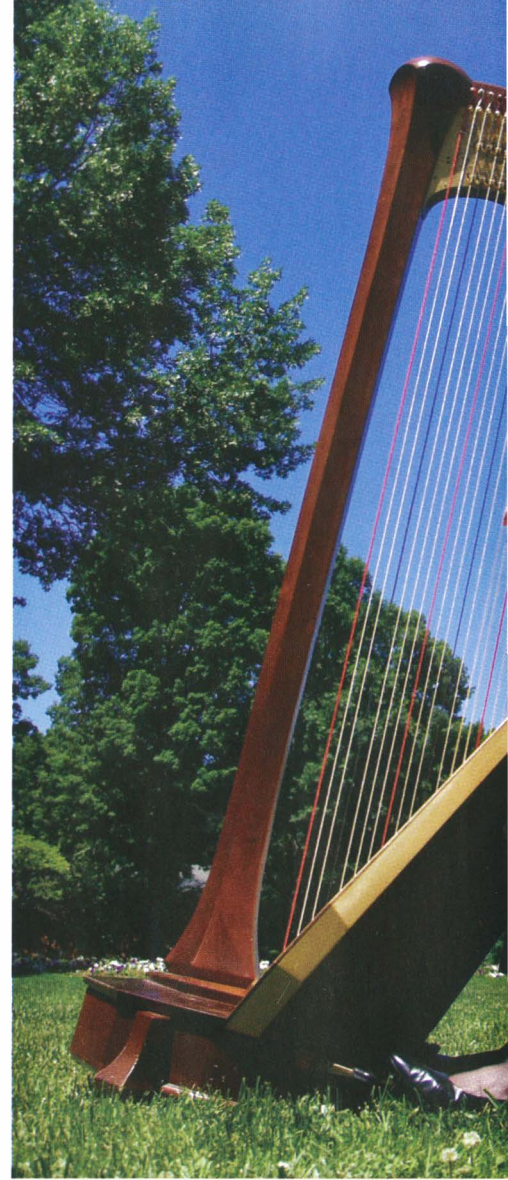
She has played for her friend many

times since the breast cancer returned last year. Lewis settles into a plush green chair and covers her lap with a quilt.

The harpist sets up right next to the chair, so you can feel the vibrations, she says. Burroughs-Price adjusts a few levers, then runs her fingers over the 34 strings as she plays "O Mio Babbino Caro" by Puccini.

It reminds the two women of the time they first met, about two and a half years ago in Italy, when Burroughs-Price was playing on a cruise ship tour that Lewis attended with her husband, retired appellate court judge John "Jack" Lewis, Jr.

It turned out that they had a connection: Kelly Lewis was the governor's appointment to the board of the North Carolina Symphony, where Burroughs-Price has been a member since 1986. The two women got to know each other on that trip, and Lewis began encouraging the harpist to finish a CD project she had started — a compilation of music often requested by the people she plays for in shelters, in hospitals and at bedsides.



Burroughs-Price, a 1982 Furman graduate and harp instructor at her alma mater, fell easily into this role, playing the most angelic of instruments for souls in need of soothing. A religious woman whose father was a pastor and mother a church organist, she began playing the harp at age 12.

About a decade ago she learned of an organization of harpists who play for the dying, and she began doing so herself. At first she played for friends. Then she began volunteering at shelters. Now she plays mostly referrals from ministers.

Over the last year she has played at the Hurricane Katrina evacuation shelter in Raleigh and helped several people she met there, including husband and wife musicians from the Louisiana Philharmonic who lost their home and most of their instruments.

Burroughs-Price found that playing



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BY CRAIG JARVIS

husband of 21 years, Dennis Price, and that of Kelly Lewis.

"Do you know 'The Spirit Song?'" Kelly Lewis asks. It is a hymn that was played at her father's funeral.

Burroughs-Price plays the piece and follows it with "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." Lewis reaches over and places her hand on the harp's spruce soundboard as she plays.

A big blond cat, Lord, wanders through the room and jumps on Lewis' lap.

Burroughs-Price and Lewis traveled together again on a tour, to the United Kingdom in 2004, and Lewis urged her to finish the CD, which had been plagued with technical hurdles. The disc, "Healing Touch," was released that December. Proceeds are shared with Interact, the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, and with New Orleans musicians who have come to the North Carolina Triangle. Lewis bought nine or 10 copies.

Last summer Burroughs-Price learned for the first time that Lewis, who had confided to her on the last tour that she had once fought off cancer, had suffered a serious setback. She began bringing her harp to the couple's West Raleigh townhouse, where they stay when they are not in their home in the Pitt County community of Farmville. She chooses music based on Lewis' mood each day.

"He likes music, too," Lewis says of the cat in her lap. "He doesn't want to miss the concert."

"I once played for a friend who told the cats to run away because he'd been told harp strings were made out of cat guts," Burroughs-Price says, and both women laugh.

Lewis rests her head and closes her eyes, while the harp carries her from "Fly Me to the Moon" to Bach to Pachelbel.

"What's my favorite Easter hymn?" she asks her husband, who has been listening nearby.

## Hallmark moment

**Anita Burroughs-Price's** willingness to share her musical talent with those facing challenging circumstances was recognized nationally August 1 when the Hallmark Channel featured her on its "New Morning" show. The program spotlights "ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

In 1999 Burroughs-Price, who holds a master's degree from Yale University, received the Raleigh Medal of Arts, the North Carolina city's highest award, for "outstanding artistry and humanitarian service." She has donated more than \$6,000 from the sales of her CD, "Healing Touch," to various charities.

"Healing Touch" is available from the Furman bookstore at (864) 294-2164 or by e-mail, [47strings@bellsouth.net](mailto:47strings@bellsouth.net).

for the terminally ill and for people in dire circumstances was uplifting, even though she might be sad to see someone go. It has given her entry into some of life's most precious moments — family reconciliations, for instance.

"I don't want to sound like a Hallmark card," she says. "But you think how blessed every single day is. If you love somebody, don't wait six months to tell them."

She doesn't charge to play. It's her way of sharing a musical gift. It is also, she eventually confides, a way of healing past wounds in her own life.

Often people ask her to stay just a little longer and play another piece, or to make a tape for them. That's why she decided to record a CD of some of those most-requested songs. It took a long time to finish, and Burroughs-Price credits the patience and encouragement of her

"'Christ the Lord is Risen Today,'" he says without hesitation.

"Yes, you can't get any more beautiful than that," Lewis says.

The harpist concludes with "Simple Gifts," a Shaker hymn that is a familiar tune in Copland's "Appalachian Spring." When she is done she wishes her friend a happy Easter and hugs her.

"Thanks for being my friend," Lewis says.

Jack Lewis packs up the harp and carries it to the car, but the harpist lingers in the hallway with her friend for several long minutes. They speak quietly, and they hug one more time. ●

*This article is reprinted with permission from the April 11, 2006, issue of The News & Observer newspaper of Raleigh, N.C.*

*Kelly Lewis died July 20.*