

Play the Music for Parkinson's



Emily Luther sings at the event.

In 2009, a seventeen-year-old named Emily Luther from Woonsocket, Rhode Island entered the Miss Rhode Island Outstanding Teen contest. Little did she know that when she signed up for this contest, she would end up inspiring an entire community to take a stand against Parkinson's disease.

As a participant, she chose Parkinson's disease as her platform because she had watched her grandfather, whom she called *Pepéré* (French), slowly decline from the disease. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2000 and he passed away nine years later, at the age of eighty-one, before she was crowned Miss Rhode Island Outstanding Teen that spring.

After Emily's victory, she decided to further her commitment to Parkinson's disease by creating an event that would honor her grandfather, as well as raise funds and awareness of the disease. Emily had been singing professionally since she was twelve, so the obvious choice was to establish a musical celebration. She gathered together a few close friends—including one with a business degree and a graphic designer—and coined the event, "Play the Music for Parkinson's." They helped her design a logo for the event posters, tickets, and stationary.



The celebration was held on Valentine's Day eve of this year, the one-year anniversary of her grandfather's funeral. Emily sent letters to local businesses asking them to make a donation for the silent auction and eventually accumulated over thirty items, one of which was valued over one-thousand dollars. The sold-out event was held at a local restaurant and attracted nearly 200 people, including the mayor of Woonsocket and Congressman Jim Langevin. The evening incorporated a live five-piece band, featuring Nick King, a Broadway

star in New York. Emily wrote a special song for her grandfather and performed it for the guests.

Lyrics from a song that Emily wrote and sang at the event:

*"So many things I wish you could see
I truly hope you are proud of me
And when I sing I hope you know it's for you
You inspire everything I do."*

"Play the Music for Parkinson's" raised close to \$4,500 which Emily donated to the National Parkinson Foundation's Team Hope community fundraising program.

At NPF, we are tremendously inspired by Emily's creative approach to raising funds and awareness to support the Parkinson's community. "Play the Music for Parkinson's" galvanized support from an entire town and provides a great example of what Team Hope is all about.

After the event, Emily's grandmother said, "I'm so glad we did this. This was therapy for me." Emily hopes to make this an annual event in her community.



Emily and her grandmother Anita.

Emily will be attending the Berklee College of Music in the fall 2010, specializing in vocal performance. She would like to pursue music therapy in order to help people with Parkinson's disease.

For more information about starting your own community fundraiser, visit www.parkinson.org/teamhope.