Music has the magical ability to transport us to a different time and place, often conjuring thoughts and feelings from our past that may have remained latent if not for the spark of a song. Music evokes emotion. The part of the brain responsible for perceiving emotion, the amygdala, is also the area affected last in the course of Alzheimer’s disease. The amygdala stores memories of events along with emotions, so that an individual may recognize similar events more readily in the future.

Here at Legacy Memory care, one of the ways we engage residents is through a program we call Memories In Tune, which was inspired by the documentary film Alive Inside. The experience is often quite special, not only for residents, but staff as well.

Armed with a library of music and fleet of MP3 players, OceanView staff member, Mike Maddock, meets individually with Legacy residents, interviewing them about their favorite music from the past and present. “Sometimes they can’t recall many song titles or artists, but I can get insights by asking them about their life experiences,” says Mike. “One gentleman I met with told me he was in the Navy during WWII and was stationed on a boat next to Liberty Island, right under the Statue of Liberty, and when he had shore leave, he would go into the city. I tried playing him songs from the 30s and 40s, big band jazz, Sinatra. His eyes lit up and foot started tapping, but it was Wonderful World, by Louie Armstrong, that triggered a story about when he met his wife and went out dancing with her.”

The Alzheimer’s Foundation of America provides information about “music therapy” for Alzheimer’s patients and states: “When used appropriately, music can shift mood, manage stress-induced agitation, stimulate positive interactions, facilitate cognitive function and coordinate motor movements.”

We utilize music in many ways at Legacy Memory Care. Visits from Music Therapists, live performers, and having residents participate in singing and the playing of instruments. With some individuals, we use song and cadence to improve mobility when walking, and make providing personal care a more enjoyable experience.

Music, simply stated, is a therapeutic tool beyond measure!