

Chapter History of Port Townsend Threshold Choir

2025

Chapter Origin

In 2009 the Port Townsend Threshold Choir began when Oma Landstra returned from travels in South America with her husband and reflected on how she would spend retirement in Port Townsend. A visit from a friend in Marin introduced her to Threshold Choir. That friend had joined the Marin Threshold Choir founded by Kate Munger, whom Oma knew from early song circles in West Marin. Encouraged by that connection and by memories of shared singing, Oma decided to explore starting a Threshold choir in Port Townsend.

Chapter Beginnings

Oma gathered friends, secured a rehearsal space, and began sharing the Threshold repertoire. The early gatherings were earnest and occasionally a little rusty as singers learned the songs and the practice of bedside singing. After some time rehearsing, Helen Lauritzen heard the group and asked to join. Her musical training and direction quickly became a valuable asset, and her involvement brought renewed confidence and skill to the fledgling choir.

Growth and Membership

From those modest beginnings the choir expanded. Today it numbers 26 singers - all women. Three current members brought experience from other Threshold choirs in Portland, Seattle, and Michigan. Oma remains the only original member currently active. New singers are required to participate for six months and to be members of Threshold, ensuring familiarity with the repertoire and the group's approach to bedside song.

Practice

The choir meets twice monthly, rehearsing on the first and third Thursdays for approximately two hours. Helen and Oma live in the Rosewind co-housing community, and the Rosewind Common House serves as a congenial and practical rehearsal venue for the group.

Community Work and Outreach

Before the global pandemic the choir maintained regular sings at the local hospital, a nearby dementia unit, and for other community connections. Known primarily by word-of-mouth, hospice referrals, and friendships in a town of roughly 11,000 people, the choir typically sings one or two times a month and sometimes offers song baths in public spaces. About 18 members are able to sing at bedside, providing quiet, attentive presence through song.

Challenges, Adaptation, and Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted in-person sings and rehearsals, forcing the choir to adapt. During that period the group used Zoom to stay connected; the remote meetings deepened members' knowledge of each other as they shared personal backgrounds and stories. That time of enforced separation ultimately brought a stronger sense of community and resilience.

Retreats and Recent Events

In 2025 the choir hosted a daylong retreat with Melanie DeMore that drew 86 participants from the surrounding region. The day was marked by enthusiastic singing, abundant joy, and a shared

vegetarian potluck. The retreat reflected the choir's commitment to connection, learning, and spreading Threshold's gentle practice across the region.

Legacy and Continuing Purpose

The Port Townsend Threshold Choir has grown from a small group of friends into a steady community presence dedicated to bedside song and quiet public offerings. Rooted in personal relationships, intentional rehearsal, and service to local needs, the choir continues to nurture singers and listeners alike, carrying forward the Threshold tradition in Port Townsend.

June 2025. Back row: Rose Madrone, Marilyn Sterbick, Ruth Asare, Laura Washington, Laurie Atkari, Cathy Traut-Hessom, Yanna Hanson, Beth Orling, Mea Moore, Barbara Allen, Cindy Brittain, Colleen Johnson, Liz Lindstrom. Front row: Pilar Grau, Susan Levitt, Helen Lauritzen, Oma Landstra, Merilee Clunis. Not pictured: Carrie Andrews, Shelia Hunt-Witte, Kate Kinney, Cecile Kummerer, Jeni Little, Fran Oppenheimer, Tess Taft, Cris Wilson

