

My Journey with COVID-19

By Tim Sharp

As I work through the stages of my personal processing of this time with COVID-19, I have decided to share my own experience in a desire to bring some degree of encouragement and hopeful inspiration.

One of the most difficult aspects of dealing with this quarantine other than the immediate health threat, has been our loss of control. As choral directors, we are generally “control freaks,” which goes along with our job. Many of us would admit that this control is part of the “secret” in our personal “secret sauce.” We have to meticulously prepare, then plan, then execute rehearsals and performances. We have trained to discover and interpret every detail, and to not let one note go unpolished. Nuance defines all that we bring to the party in terms of score preparation, rehearsal planning, and execution, resulting in a performance that offers the best of that controlled work. And now, we have all lost control.

The stoics would tell us we never really had control. We didn’t choose this time in which we now find ourselves. We never had control over this environment, and to act like we do is the definition of insanity, or at least, the source of our immediate uneasiness and frustration.

Let me first admit that I don’t consider myself a particularly “courageous” person, but neither have I ever backed away from a challenge or a calculated risk. I like control, but there have been pivotal moments in my life that stand out as risky, frightening, or even life-threatening, and which have taught me about control. My earliest recollection of real fear of losing control was as a teenager in a Boy Scout program known as the “Order of the Arrow” when I was left alone to survive in the outdoors in a wilderness portion of West Virginia for three days. Sleeping alone in a cave at night prompts a particular sort of fear that draws on personal strength and mental discipline. My second recollection was an automobile wreck that hospitalized my wife and me for an extended time. My third was financial fear and loss of control, brought on by the collapse of the parent company I was managing, leading to a desperate season of re-invention and pulling myself up by my own bootstraps. These were all frightening events and times in which I felt “out of control”, but in each of those situations, I found the courage that I needed by letting go and resting in the knowledge that I wasn’t alone. I learned to depend on others and to take refuge in my trust and faith in something in addition to myself: my family, my friends, my caregivers, and my faith.

So, with a measure of concern, I will tell you that I have just pushed through my own experience of having the coronavirus, and as I am writing this now, my wife, Jane, is in Mercy Hospital in Oklahoma City with COVID-19. We were both tested last week. She has pneumonia, is on oxygen, and is being given all the antibiotics that might possibly be helpful. My symptoms were headache, body pain, dry cough, and interestingly, the loss of my sense of taste and smell. Jane hasn’t done as well, and last Friday had to be admitted to the hospital. It does not now

look to be life-threatening for her, otherwise, I don't think I would be in any condition to write at this moment.

I cannot say that I am being courageous in this time, although I am trying. What I can tell you is that I have given the control of much of this over to others. Those "others" include the caregivers at Mercy Hospital, my family and friends, my colleagues that make up the ACDA staff in Oklahoma City, and the source of my spiritual faith.

Faith has brought me through this period of time of fear and the unknown. Both Jane and I believe life is a gift, and although the body is significant, it is our spirit and soul that matters most. We have remained confident in the power of faith, hope, and love, and in the source of those beliefs. And if there is any blessing at all in this painful season, this time in our collective experience has affirmed beyond any doubt that we are not in control and whatever we do, and however we live, we do so as a result of the kindness of others.

One of the reasons I continue to go to church, and for that matter, one of the reasons I continue to believe in an association such as ACDA, is that these bodies remain a vivid reminder for me that even when I am not able to be there to pray or contribute, others are there in my absence, and they are there partially for me. The American Choral Directors Association is a body of like-minded believers in the gift of singing that want to be certain that this gift not only survives, but that it thrives.

We need you, and one day, you will need us. I think we all need each other.