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On March 13, 2020, so many things changed. When Governor Carney shut down schools for two weeks, I wasn't too concerned about the two theatrical productions my Thespian Troupe had on the calendar. They could be rescheduled. It would take some planning, but there was still plenty of time left in the school year. That was a great plan until Governor Carney shut down schools until May 15, 2020. Now, I was in a predicament. These could not be rescheduled after that date, especially with all the lost rehearsal time. I knew my students would be devastated. They were already scared, confused and unsure with all that was happening around them in the world. They didn't feel safe. Frankly, I didn't either. I thought about what I could do to help them get through this crazy time. What could I do to make them feel safe? The auditorium in our school is the "safe zone." The students refer to it as their sanctuary. It's the place they go when they are sad, afraid, need someone to listen, to celebrate milestones, to just "be." I pride myself on having created this "safe haven" for my students, but now, that safe zone is gone. How do I protect them? How do I let them know it's going to be all right?

While I was thinking about all this, my wife was surfing social media and found a short video of the cast of the television series "The Nanny" doing a table read of the first episode of the series via Zoom Conferencing. The actors had all aged and changed, but their enthusiasm for bringing this to their fans - those all experiencing what my students and I were experiencing - just to brighten their day, to give them hope and joy through the arts - was uplifting.

My wife shared the video with me and I got an idea. I wondered if it would be possible to do this with the two shows we still had left to do this year. How would it work? Because I spend a great deal of my time

teaching my students the importance of copyright and compensating artists for their work, I knew the first step would be to reach out to the publishers. I did just that.

Within an hour, I had received emails from both publishers stating they would contact the playwrights regarding my request. I waited. Within four hours, both playwrights had contacted me, personally, granting permission not only to perform and record their plays at table read Zoom conferences but also to broadcast the recording via streaming for a limited time, so our community could enjoy our work.

Today, we are currently holding virtual rehearsals. The smiles are back. Our safe haven has returned, although it is not the same. Our sanctuary is our temporary digital space where we laugh, we listen to each other, we take care of each other - just like we did in our school auditorium.

We are hopeful that, at some point in May, we will share our "art" with our community. To my students and I, theatre is about spreading joy, entertaining, and educating our community. I think our community will see the joy. I think they will be entertained. Most importantly, they will learn that when bad things happen, when it seems like all hope is lost, there is a light.

The Arts are a major part of that light. Since this crazy pandemic started, I have seen my friends and family sharing virtual experiences through theatre on TV (generously distributed without fee for the masses to enjoy), picking up a musical instrument they have always wanted to learn to play, sharing their Spotify playlists on social media. Everyone is immersing him/herself in the Arts. Isn't that an amazing and wonderful thing? My students are going to be a part of that. They are going to help bring the smiles back to a world that is scared. Today, with all the uncertainty, I am even more proud to be an educator - to help my students see that what they do has an impact on the lives of others. So, you call me innovative. I call it doing my job. My job is to inspire.