

## Love in the Time of COVID-19

By Sheehan Connors-Steffey

So here we are, many of us still at home making the most of a very difficult situation. COVID-19 has upended our lives in ways even six months ago we could have never predicted. Spring is here and flowers are in bloom. It's almost as if God realized we needed beauty in our lives. From the moment I met Chad, I knew that there was a special place in Chad's heart for St. Peter's. It didn't take me long to realize for myself what a special place it is and now that we are not able to be together, how much I miss being there. From the beginning, I was welcomed with open arms and over the years your prayers and well wishes as well as counsel and friendship have meant the world to me. My heart has ached for those couples who planned spring and summer weddings only to have their plans cancelled. It has made me smile (and cry a little) to see those couples who decided to get married anyway, even if it was on a Zoom call. Without all of the other trappings of the day, they decided that before God, the most important thing was to still get married. The party and the celebration could be held later. All of this got me thinking about love, our own love story and St. Peter's in the Woods. In "Love in the Time of Cholera" Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote, "... that casual glance was the beginning of a cataclysm of love that still has not ended half a century later," and so with a glance, our story began.

As I write this I am sitting in the memorial garden. The very same garden where almost four years ago, in front of deeply loved friends and family, I married Chad Steffey. I have so many memories of that day, but what I remember the most is the love I felt for Chad and for those gathered around us. My heart was so full of joy and gratitude. Our guests were so happy for us. We had found one another and were ready to spend the rest of our lives together.

I have never felt alone in this garden. I felt the presence of Peter, Carole, Mary and all of the others as Chad and I decided to have the wedding in the garden and in the weeks leading up to May 7th as we prepared the garden and tried to figure out seating, always respectful of those there before us. We felt their presence that day, that they were also there to bear witness to the celebration and blessing of our marriage.

I remember getting ready the morning of our wedding and when I went to put on my wedding dress, I realized what a challenge it was going to be to actually get into the dress. Of all of the photos from that day, one of my favorites, is one where I am actually standing on a table and my attendants are looking up at me. We worked together and laughed that I actually had to stand on a table to get into my dress. Don't tell Chad I almost fell off the table. My dress seemed to me a metaphor, that you never do anything alone and always need love and support from others.

I remember when I arrived at the church. I looked up and saw Betsy Marcelin and even though we really didn't know each other at the time, she looked so happy for me. I've never forgotten her kindness. I walked into Rev. De-De's office to get my bouquet and saw Maggie and Ellie (my twin flower girls) and their sister Sasha (who helped me with my very long veil) and

immediately burst into tears. The emotion of the day along with seeing those girls who I loved so much in their dresses with crowns of flowers in their hair had gotten to me and I was finally

ready to meet Chad and get married. Our friend Adam piped all of us in to “Highland Cathedral” and before I knew it, I was beside Chad in the garden. There are decisions in your life that you waver over. Those you weigh pros and cons. I never did that with Chad. I knew I loved him and so when almost a year before, he asked me to marry him at the Empire State Building, I was speechless, but eventually I did say yes. The wedding was beautiful and of course the music and singing were lovely. Even before the end of the reception, which by the way was held at an Irish pub, and so much fun, I knew I wanted to save the flowers. I didn't know why, but I made Chad promise me that he would make sure that the flowers made it back to the house. By next afternoon, I had figured it out. I would take a few of the arrangements and place them on my father and my Aunt Mary Virginia's graves. I would consolidate the rest of the arrangements and put them back in the garden. A simple thank you to all who rested there as an acknowledgement of their contributions to our special day.

In the almost four years since the wedding, much has changed, and I have changed. Drawn closer to God and our church family and though I never expected this new normal, I look forward to that Sunday when we will finally all be together again. I miss the smiles, the hugs, the stories, the music, singing and the laughter. I do not miss the coffee. Just don't be surprised if you see me sneaking through the kitchen to grab my seat at the last minute. Some things, no matter what, will never change. Chad always shakes his head when he sees me and smiles. But that smile tells me everything I need to know. That I made the right decision at the Empire State Building that warm spring evening and that together with God's grace and counsel, and a never-ending sense of humor, we can weather anything thrown our way. There is much strength in that. A deepening of our love and an opening of both of our hearts. There is much hope and promise in love.

At the end of our Sunday service, Rev. Susan sometimes reads a benediction written by Henri-Frederic Amiel which I love and has always held a special place in my heart. Chances are very good that if I am there, you will see me look over at Chad and tear up. It means that much to me.

*Life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who journey with us. So be swift to love and make haste to be kind and may the blessings of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you now and forever.*

Until we meet again, (and we will) stay strong. Spread peace. Speak the truth and choose only love. I'd like to take the credit for those words, however I cannot. Melissa Etheridge says them at the end of her daily concerts on Facebook Live.

But it does sound like something I would say. Peace and much love,

Sheehan