

## *Three Strings . . .*

On November 18, 1995, Itzhak Perlman, the violinist, came on stage to give a concert at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City. Getting on stage is no small achievement for him. He was stricken with polio as a child, and so he has braces on both legs and walks with the aid of two crutches. For him to move across the stage one step at a time, painfully and slowly, is, within itself, an accomplishment of note.

He reaches his chair. Then he sits down, slowly, puts his crutches on the floor, undoes the clasps on his legs, tucks one foot back and extends the other foot forward. Then he bends down and picks up the violin, puts it under his chin, nods to the conductor and proceeds to play.

Then something went wrong. Just as he finished the first few bars, one of the strings on his violin broke. You could hear it snap – it went off like gunfire across the room. There was no mistaking what that sound meant. There was no mistaking what he had to do. The audience figured that he would have to get up, put on the clasps again, pick up the crutches and limp his way off stage – to either find another violin or else find another string for this one. But he didn't.

Instead, he waited a moment, closed his eyes and then signaled the conductor to begin again.

The orchestra began, and Perlman played from where he had left off. And he played with such passion and such power and such purity as they had never heard before. Of course, anyone knows that it is impossible to play a symphonic work with just three strings – right? But that night Itzhak Perlman refused to accept that notion. He was modulating, changing, recomposing the piece in his head. At one point, it sounded like he was de-tuning the strings to get new sounds from them that they had never made before.

When he finished, there was an awesome silence in the room. And then people rose and cheered. There was an extraordinary outburst of applause from every corner of the auditorium. Members of the audience were all on their feet, screaming and cheering, doing everything they could to show how much they appreciated what he had done. He smiled, wiped the sweat from his brow, raised his bow to quiet everyone, and then he said – not boastfully, but in a quiet, pensive, reverent tone – “You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.”

What a powerful truth that is, and not just for artists but for all of us. Here is a man who has prepared all his life to make music on a violin of four strings, when,

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all of a sudden, in the middle of a concert, he finds himself with only three strings. So he makes music with three strings, and the music he made that night with just three strings was more beautiful and more memorable than any that he had ever made before, when he had four strings.

I am grateful to Criss F. Rosenlof, LPN, resident care manager at Garden Terrace in Salt Lake City for sharing the Perlman story.

Perhaps it provides for you – as it has for me – fresh motivation to deal with the challenges that come our way, to reach deep within and to find new energy or resources for accomplishing the tasks before us.

--Beecher Hunter