

## Communities for Immunity: Stories about COVID The Peale, Baltimore | 2022

**Tristan (00:05):** Thank you very much. As you mentioned, I am currently a peer ambassador for VALUE Baltimore, so I'm going to speak briefly about that and then we'll get into the story. As an ambassador for VALUE Baltimore, our job is to talk to pretty much anyone in the city of Baltimore and talk to them about the vaccines that are currently available for COVID-19. We're not there to convince anyone, we're not there to pressure anyone. We are there to talk to people and provide them information. With that, I am pleased to say that our goal has been reached and we are continuing to push that goal. But as of right now, we have reached 80% vaccination rate in Baltimore city for first dose or more. I'm really happy to say that. Thank you.

**Tristan (00:50):** Now I'm going to tell you a little bit of a story and we're going to start in about March of 2020. A time that I'm sure many of us remember for a myriad of reasons. At that time in March, I was a freshman here at the Baltimore School for the Arts. I was very excited to be here, I was sick of middle school. I was in the same school for eight years over at Roland Park and I was ready to move on. Here I was a freshman at Baltimore school for the Arts and in March here at the school, we have this big fundraiser called Expressions. It's this huge production where we have pretty much every department collaborate together. We have dancers, singers, actors, musicians, we have the stage design people working behind the scene, and it's all in an effort to raise money for arts funding here.

**Tristan (01:51):** It was around this time, we performed probably around the 7th of March and we had a couple shows. It was a blast, it's probably the most fun I've ever had performing. I got to play things that I had never played we before. It was really fun and we were really happy. Coming off of that last Sunday show, we came into the week feeling exhausted, but with a very, very satisfied feeling in our hearts. It was that Thursday, and I remember this Thursday very well, we were getting ready to go home for the day. I'm a cellist and so I have lessons with a private teacher here. I was scheduled to have a lesson after school because of the fact that there was some scheduling issues and that was the only time we could do it and I was 100% not prepared.

**Tristan (02:43):** If you're any kind of musician or even if you just haven't done an assignment for an academic class, you know what that feels like. It's not a good feeling and so I was almost overjoyed to hear when I think it was our principal at the time, Dr. Chris Ford, came over the loud speaker and said something along the lines of, "At this time, we are going to be closing the building due to the ongoing complications because of the COVID-19 virus," and that was pretty much it. I was very fortunate to take everything out of my locker because I had a feeling we would at least be gone for a couple days. Since it was a Thursday I figured, "Okay, we'll be back in a week or two."

**Tristan (03:29):** They initially told us Baltimore city schools are going to be shut for two weeks. We just said, "Yay, free vacation, or at least spring break." You know how we all felt, we were overjoyed. We went home and we had a blast. I know I slept a lot, I was exhausted and I caught up on some work and maybe practiced a little bit and it was great. Then they said, "We're going to close the schools indefinitely," and that was a little bit of a shock. We were still pretty happy about it because nobody really loves school, as much as there are some things that we love about it. We went on with our lives, maybe had a little fun doing whatever we do in our free time. Then they started saying, "Oh, maybe

we'll have some virtual classes." Some teachers were posting assignments. Others were like, "Okay, we're going to have Google Meet meetings at 8:45." Then another teacher would say, "Oh, I want to have ours at 8:30."

**Tristan (04:39):** There really wasn't a coherent schedule or anything so you were constantly apologizing to teachers. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I had Miss so and so. Oh, I had Mr. this and that." It was chaos, it was really stressful because we were still getting graded. Fortunately, eventually they said that everybody would be at no fault for their grades for that last quarter. That did ease the stress. But I remember just sitting there on Google Meet, trying to learn Spanish and it was not working. So we finished out the year on a not great note and we go into the summer thinking this will all be over by the time we come back, which it wasn't.

**Tristan (05:24):** I had a bunch of plans for the summer. I was originally supposed to go to this chamber music festival that I love, and that I'd been going to for eight years consecutively. I was really bummed to miss out on that. Then I also was planning to visit my grandparents overseas. I was also very excited about that and all of that of course, was canceled. As a person, I really do like to stay involved in politics and the news and whatnot, so I was really involved in election news and then the questions of vaccines started coming up and masking and all this. I was really getting a lot of information and though that can be a good thing, it can also be really stressful when you have nothing other to do than sit there and what's called doom scrolling down the news. It wasn't great for my mental health, but I had a lot of free time, so that's what I was stuck with.

**Tristan (06:19):** By the time about two weeks probably before school starts in August of 2020, they tell us, "Okay, everything's going to be online for now." They send out a Zoom schedule and we get going and it sucks. I was sitting there for an amended schedule of five or six hours a day, with a lunch break and also another lunch break. Because the way the schedule worked, we had a built in lunch break, it made no sense really. I really found myself struggling, not just because it's really hard to focus when you're in your bedroom and trying to do schoolwork, but also because something about this medium, not writing things down, constantly typing and looking at digital worksheets just didn't work for me. I was fine for about the first quarter or so, but then after the second quarter and moving into the third, it just really didn't work for me and my grades were not great. I tend to hold myself to a pretty high standard and that standard dropped by a lot. Yeah, I definitely did struggle.

**Tristan (07:30):** This was around, I don't know, again, February, March of that year, that we started hearing about the vaccines being available finally for teens. That would be 2021. I started looking into it and there was this one day where my dad was like, "Oh, I saw on Facebook you can go get the vaccine in, I don't know, somewhere all the way three hours away in whatever, Maryland, across the Bay Bridge." I was like, "Okay, I'm sure that's not true because they haven't released it yet." What actually happened, were there were surplus doses and so I was able to go and sit in the car for three hours and drive up, stick my arm out the window, get my first shot and come back. Then two weeks later, I got my second shot at the convention center in downtown Baltimore.

**Tristan (08:24):** That had me feeling a lot better because I knew that we were probably going to return to in person schooling and I was really glad to know that I had that layer of protection. Around April of that year, we decided to do an abbreviated virtual version of Expressions, the fundraiser. We came not into the school building, but into the outdoors and also a little bit into the school building. We played in this church playground back there, which was really strange. Then we came in and we recorded and that

was it. That was probably the last time I saw a lot of the graduating seniors in person, which is really sad. Now, I ended the year not on a great note and we've come back.

**Tristan (09:17):** I did some traveling over the summer, safely masked, testing, fully vaccinated, and we've come back and it's been so much better. I never thought I would say this, but I am so happy to be in school right now. It really does shock me how much my opinion of school has changed because as much of a stress as it is at this time in life, it's so much of a blessing too. You miss the social environment, you miss getting to be able to go to school and talk to your friends every day. In a Zoom class you can't turn to your friend and make some snide comment about the teacher because everybody's going to hear it. You really miss those things, as funny as that is.

**Tristan (10:07):** So it really was so great to be back. But the thing that I was really missing was the music classes. Because oh, my God, you cannot do music online. Imagine sitting there with 20 other musicians on a Zoom call and playing one by one. It really does not work. Coming back this year, playing solo recitals, playing chamber music, playing our orchestral concert that we just had last week, it's just so gratifying to be able to be here and also to be able to know that I am and the people around me are being extremely safe. We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the city schools right now and it makes me feel so much better about myself coming to school and being able to be relaxed and around people.

**Tristan (11:00):** I think the moral here is that you should really never take anything for granted. You don't know what you have until it's gone.