*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**The joy and power of singing**

It has been a long while since I picked up my guitar and sang a few songs. There is no excuse at all, especially with the virus still preventing us from going anywhere or doing any socializing. But somehow, there seems to be not enough hours in a day to do anything.

Anytime I get a project complete, I will find a new one waiting. That’s the problem of just sitting around and not doing anything. When one just sits around, one starts to look around; and when one starts to look around, one starts to see things that one normally doesn’t notice.

When the sun shines at the right angle, I can see the cobwebs in the corner; and how about the dust that has been gathering on the shelves? Or the smear marks on the windows and doors left by the grandkids who visited last fall? So, I decided to get up and get something done, and it just got worse, the “to-do list” just keeps on multiplying.

The spices on the spice rack are all out of order; and the canned goods in the pantry are all in the wrong places, stacking on top of each other; so, what to do, what to do? The best cure is to pick up my guitar and sing a few songs. The world will keep on spinning and the cobwebs will still be there tomorrow, patiently waiting for me.

Even though I haven’t played for a while, after strumming a few chords, they all come back. I always love music; and I love to sing along, even when I don’t know the meaning of the lyrics, or the language that they are singing.

After all these years, I still carry my Chinese accent with me, especially when I am nervous or when I am excited. So, that makes me a lousy poker player and a terrible liar. But somehow, when I sing, my Chinese accent doesn’t follow at all.

Have you ever heard a Chinese Elvis before? How about a Chinese singing Hank Williams with a Southern twang? Well, hang around me some time and find out.

After a few songs, I get lost in my own world again. There are so many songs to express oneself — when you are in love, when you are heartbroken, when you are happy or when you are sad; somehow, there is always a song to lift your spirits or to share your pain and hurt. That’s the magic of singing, the power of songs.

My wife and I used to go serenade the elderly at the nursing homes when we were living in Milwaukee. We were quite serious with our gig. We actually invested in a sound system with amplifier, speakers and microphones, so our voices would come out halfway decent.

Well, the investment did pay off, as we were booked months in advance. I played guitar and harmonized her, and would tell a few jokes in between songs. After telling the same jokes over and over, I was getting pretty good at it. Well, I did get a few laughs, and did not have tomatoes thrown at me.

It was heartwarming singing to the elderly folks, as they were so appreciative. A lot of them would clap their hands and sing along with us, while some would just move their lips or wiggle their toes with the rhythm. Most of the nursing homes have really tight schedules. We would have one full hour for our performance and that was it. Usually, we would sing before their nap time.

We would pick songs that were popular in the 1940s or 1950s; songs that most of them knew and could sing along. My wife is a good singer; not only could she carry the tune but she also could relate the message of the song in a very touching way.

I remember that at one of the gatherings, there were two elderly gentlemen who moved all the way to the front from the back as they wanted to be closer to her singing. Then when she started to sing “You Belong to Me” by Patsy Cline, one of the gentlemen started sobbing; he actually started to cry in the middle of the song.

The nurse noticed it and brought over a box of Kleenex for him. It was when he blew his nose loudly that we almost lost it. Thank goodness we didn’t lose our composure and finished the song. My wife went over to the gentleman, held his hand and said a few words. He smiled back and thanked her.

I tried to think just what triggered the outburst of emotions in such a simple song:

“See the pyramids along the Nile

Watch the sunrise on a tropic isle

Just remember darlin’ all the while

You belong to me

See the marketplace in old Algiers

Send me photographs and souvenirs

Just remember, when a dream appears

You belong to me

I’d be so alone without you

Maybe you’d be lonesome too, and blue

Fly the ocean in a silver plane

See the jungle when it’s wet with rain

Just remember ‘til you’re home again

You belong to me”

We’ll never know what set the gentleman off, and it is not important anymore. Whatever it was, the song touched his heart. For a split second, it hit the right chord. And my dear friend, that’s the power and the magic of singing.

I’ll keep singing as long as I live, and I wish you all would join me one day.