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### [Iowa Newsletter Special](#)

Dear Piping Enthusiast,

In these tough times for the Piping World in general, we have received an excellent field report from Martha Moore Davis, in Des Moines, Iowa, USA. Her articulate and encapsulating view of how we should all be thinking and acting is most inspiring and we thank Martha for taking the time and trouble to share her thoughts with us.

Yours aye,  
James C. Begg  
Piping Perfection

[www.beggbagpipes.com](http://www.beggbagpipes.com)

### A Piping Heart

by Martha Moore Davis

We are taking care of ourselves during the pandemic. We wear a mask, keep distance, wash hands, but there's more to the physical: take heart, for example—your piping heart. Why do you play the bagpipes? Everyone has a story, and mine is easily explained until I run out of the logic.

I learned to play while a member of the University of Iowa Scottish Highlanders in Iowa City, Iowa. Founded in the 1930s as an all-male pipe band and part of the Reserved Officers Training Corps, its ranks were depleted by the draft of WW II. Coeds were invited to join, and they never gave it back to the men. It continued until 2008.



(Pic on right: Tamia O'Rourke and Martha Moore Davis, 1973)

I joined the group during its heyday boasting 70 pipers, drummers, and dancers. Women were not allowed to be members of the university's marching band, so as a 19 year-old, I put down the trombone and picked up a new instrument, the pipes. There was the opportunity to travel to Scotland where the Highlanders would perform and then travel on the continent for six weeks. A university brochure stated, "Join the Highlanders and you'll personalize the experience of the large university." These are the logical reasons but not the entire "why."

I first heard the pipes when I was five. My family lived near Iowa City, and we attended the university's annual homecoming parade. The marching band smartly strutted the fight song, but then I heard something else. I stood as close as I could to the edge of the sidewalk to see. The drums buzzed and rumbled above me as I looked up at them. But the pipers glided by me—surrounded me—with a sound that went from my head to my toes like a lightning strike. Maybe I felt a sense of mystery, magic, or enchantment. The unison of the pipes and the drums

vibrated through my whole five-year-old self.

(Pic on right: Jack Ironsides and Martha Moore Davis at Alma Highland Games, 1973)



How are we nurturing the heart-felt beginnings that are surely why we continue to pursue the Great Highland Bagpipe?

I miss my Kansas City St. Andrews Pipes and Drums band mates (pictured) and long to play our competition sets together. Our plans were to compete at Maxville—canceled—along with in-person practice.



I took inspiration from James Begg in the newsletter. He said, “Positivity goes a long way and my glass is of the half-full variety.” I decided not to “mark time” and wait, getting nowhere. I decided to “forward march” and take action:

#### 1. Stay Involved in the Band

I am inspired by our pipe major Iain McKee who said, “This is a time that our instructors can send new music out. We can work on new tunes, make it fresh, keep our members.” He sends the recordings out to all of us and offers follow up Zoom sessions. It gives us concrete targets even though there are no upcoming performances. I stay involved in the larger goals of our band. In addition, I am fortunate to have weekly lessons with Iain. I send 3 sets of recordings of various idioms, we independently critique them, then compare notes on Zoom. Having feedback from a professional who helps me set goals is making me a better player in small increments.

#### 2. Feel Connected to Piping: Join an Online Group

I joined Dojo University founded and led by Andrew Douglas. A membership gives access to daily live classes as well as endless hours of archived ones along with entire courses. I can join a live forum and find out answers to the perplexing questions of piping. The regular faculty and guest instructors are all world-class pipers. Light music, Piobaireachd, information for soloists, bands, all levels—I build my week of practice around Dojo and how it supports the goals I set with my regular instructor, Iain McKee. I have learned to be independent and self-sufficient, yet I learn what pipers all over the world are doing every day. I know I am not a lone piper.

#### 3. Improve by Competing in Online Events or Do it Yourself (DIY)

Create your own performance group as a no-cost way to stay in the game. Invite 4 pipers you know and everyone commits to sending in one recorded tune on a deadline. Before the deadline, on Zoom, develop your own score sheet criteria collaboratively. Keep it simple, constructive, and encouraging. Then, on the deadline, everyone records, sends their tune to everyone, and each critiques each recording and sends the critiques to the players. Everyone can debrief in a Zoom party and enjoy camaraderie.



(Pic on right: Martha Moore Davis, Cindy Thornton, Kathy Burke-Thomas at Walt Disney Festival, Marcelline, Missouri, 2019)

#### 4. Try the Out of the Ordinary DIY

A fellow piper from Ontario, Canada, Lou Lonaro, organized a “Meet Famous Pipers in their Home Tour” with a friend. They meet with a well-known piper or judge in the outdoors with distancing. Lou said, “We pay for an hour lesson and treat it like a competition. They give us feedback. We’ll be ready when in-person competitions start again.” Bob Worrall was their first stop and Gail Brown will be their next. We may not all have famous pipers nearby, but we all know excellent pipers we could contact.

Another way to promote improvement is again, to do it yourself but at no cost. Create a performance, even a small one. When I recently had friends over for an outdoor picnic, I surprised them by piping them from their car to the garden. Intentionally planning to do this prompted me to choose appropriate tunes, to practice, and to be prepared even though it wasn't high stakes. It still mattered to play my best.

5. Stay in touch. It doesn't cost you anything.

I have been emailing pipers I have met in past competitions and piping schools. They seem genuinely glad to renew our friendships and compare how we are coping. It's a great way to exchange tunes, maybe a new jig or slow air I hadn't considered. Email used to be a chore, but now I relish checking my messages to see who has responded.

I take care of myself by diligently wearing a mask, distancing from people, washing my hands. But I also take care of my piper's heart. I try to stay connected to my band mates, to pipers in the larger bagpipe community, and find new ways to pursue the art of piping.



Why are you a piper? What is at the heart of your playing? How are you taking care of your piping heart?

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## YouReport

If you would like to report on any aspect of the Piping World from wherever you live, or if you would like to comment on any articles or issues, we'd be pleased to hear from you. Email to [bill@beggbagpipes.com](mailto:bill@beggbagpipes.com)

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