

Pandemic Diary Day 1: Suzanna prepares for rebellion
Written by Suzanna Lynn Moody

5:20 PM 4/6/20

Today has been a very normal, yet very strange day. I believe I am getting used to the changes caused by the pandemic. Neither Chris nor I could sleep last night. He found me in a numb stupor on the couch around 3 AM. But he said I looked happy. We sat in the dark while he packed a bowl and we listened to quiet EDM music from his iPhone. The cough medicine I had swigged when I went to use the bathroom struck me heavily and he, noticing my behavior, put me to bed and joined me shortly afterwards.

I woke up alone. The porch was warm-- almost hot-- the sky was a very clear blue. Frustration rose in me and I vented about uncertainty at work to friends, two of whom had reached out via Facebook Messenger while I was sleeping. Trying to escape the endless relay of screen time between phone and laptop, work and friends, I had resolved to plan a longer outing and abandon my work for the rest of the afternoon.

I was invited to a "backyard bonfire hangout thing" tonight, but I had squarely refused to join even though I was *assured* there would only be four of us in attendance, *and* we would remain six to ten feet apart at all times. I am trying to be a good citizen; do my part for my community. I haven't seen anyone besides Chris in weeks and have barely left my house at all during that time.

Suddenly, a surge of rebellious energy erupted in my chest. I *would* go to the bonfire tonight. I would sit and roast s'mores in my own kingdom of social isolation by that fire. A regal, defiant island among three other regal, defiant islands, evenly spaced on a grassy sea.

The plan was in motion. I got myself dressed and considered changing my shirt to better match my new "edgy" black mask. The cotton face mask hooks behind my ears and covers my nose and mouth. It features the smirk of a bottom-lip-biting vampire, white blood dripping from his exaggerated canines. I was excited and proud to wear it. It was something I had purchased more than a month ago when I first caught wind of this so-called epidemic. I had stayed up late one night doing research on the integration of masks into Japanese street style and American and European rave culture. I was fascinated and immediately placed an order for one that suited my goth slant. I thought I would want to wear it, in order to make a statement about what was happening in other countries.

I hadn't realized the stress I would feel when I wore the odd garment in the supermarket that afternoon. I wasn't able to defend my choice. No one could see my smile and know that I am a trustworthy stranger. I felt oddly overstimulated and deprived of sensation all at once. My glasses kept fogging up.

Frustrated and hot from the walk to the store, I searched the aisles for s'mores stuff hoping it would all be together in the seasonal section, poised for summertime fun. No luck.

Not wanting to spend too long in the crowded supermarket, I asked a young store clerk, through my cotton mask, if they had s'mores stuff. I had to repeat myself because it was noisy and he couldn't read my lips to help him understand me. He said they were out of marshmallows.

I grabbed some mini marshmallows I had already seen, individually packaged Hershey's bites, and organic graham crackers (whatever that means). It was all that was left for me. I guess I wasn't the first one to think of this idea as "a fun thing to look forward to," or "a fun way to pass the time." I remembered I should feel fortunate that they had these things at all. The credit card machine at self check-out had an upside-down zip-lock bag over it, protecting the keypad from germs. I assumed they change the bags daily.

The self check-out attendant was helpful even though I was a total pain. I accidentally scanned two items twice, I didn't have my rewards card, and I was buying beer. She waited for me to back up three feet before coming forward to assist me with my machine. I held up my ID for her to check. She smiled and said it was upside-down and then squinted to see my birthday from a distance. As the automated door swung open to let me out, I silently hoped she wouldn't get sick through this whole thing. She was nice and seemed to be only about 17 years old.

On the walk back, I did arm repetitions with my grocery bags to pass the time. The sun was beating down on my forehead and cheeks. I couldn't stop thinking about the germs. On the bags, my groceries, my hair, my hands. When I left the supermarket, I immediately rubbed hand sanitizer all over my hands causing them to crack and burn and stuffed my mask into a plastic baggie I had brought with me. It was a huge relief to breathe the outdoor air again and get that thing *off* my face.

On my walk home, I thought in great depth about my process of re-entry. I wanted to be prepared so as to limit cross-contamination to as few surfaces as possible until I could get to my disinfectants. And I needed my cat to stay away from my grocery bags. The last thing I needed was for her to cover herself in germs from the store.

I came in, put my groceries on the floor of the porch, left my keys in the door, and went to thoroughly wash my hands. I unloaded my personal items onto the entryway table and stripped down to underwear in the kitchen, laying everything over the wall of my washing machine.

I grabbed a dirty t-shirt (worn indoors only) from the laundry basket and put it on over my exposed skin. I wanted to jump straight in the shower right then, but I remembered what Dr. Sanjay Gupta said about only surgeons having to take such extreme precautions. I washed my hands again.

Shooing my cat from the grocery bags, I began to unload the few items I'd bought, transferring my s'mores stuff into a "clean" bag for tonight and putting the beer in the refrigerator. I folded up my reusable bags and hid them away in a bottom cabinet, reassuring myself that any unfriendly germs would die on their surfaces within the next 48 hours. I washed my hands.

I gathered my glasses, cell phone, headphones, credit card, ID, and wallet, disinfecting each thoroughly with rubbing alcohol. I laughed a sad laugh when I thought I should run over the exterior of my bottle of hand sanitizer as well. I considered posting this ironic statement on social media, but thought against it because global tensions just felt too high for jokes today. I fished my mask from its germ-filled plastic baggie, disposed of the bag, and scrubbed the mask with soap and hot water for well over twenty seconds. Worried that it would shrink in the dryer, I threw it in alone on the "casual" setting. It felt funny to put such a small thing in such a big dryer, all by itself.

My final task was disinfecting my bathroom light switch, all the door handles (inside and out), and my keys, which I had left in the door up until this point. I also did my porch door latch, and my leather key chain. I worried about what the rubbing alcohol would do to the leather. And then I washed my hands and drank a lot of water.

I took my mask out of the dryer to let it air dry the rest of the way. No need to waste more electricity on such a little thing, even if it means it will dry scratchy. Next, I will finally shower, taking care to get extra clean, moisturize my raw skin, and dress for a night out during the apocalypse. I hope my mask is dry in time, because I want to wear it.

6:27 PM 4/6/20

The bonfire hangout was cancelled. I am not surprised.