

First Trip to the Grocery Store

I geared up with trepidation wearing old latex gloves used on our RV and a 10-year-old N95 industrial mask. I wore dedicated slip-on shoes that I would don and remove just before entering the garage upon departure for COVID territory. I had two disinfectant wipes in sandwich bags to wipe the grocery cart and hard surfaces upon return.

I arrived early and waited a half hour for the store to open at the special seniors and compromised immune system person time 7-8 a.m. Time seemed in slow motion and I felt the weight of every moment. My anxiety was evident in my labored breathing through the mask; it reminded me of snorkeling knowing you had limited breath and there was immediate danger if you removed your mask.

As I entered the store behind an elderly lady, I noted that disinfectant wipes were lying all around the floor near the dispenser and saw there were none left. Glad I had my own; I pulled my wipe out. The lady in front was most distressed and I reached over as I spoke that I would wipe her buggy handle for her. I dropped the wipe-- said "Five second rule" with a nervous laugh and picked it up and wiped her and later my buggy handle.

I was so nervous I thought I could get everything without reaching in my shirt pocket and contaminating my list. I did eventually get it out. I wanted to be as quick and thorough as possible to minimize my exposure. I faced the challenge of not finding items and having to make substitutions trying not to touch an item but once to remove it to my cart so as not to contaminate it for someone else. I wanted to keep the 6 feet distancing but found that hard passing people in the aisle. I needed eggs but found 4 or 5 people huddled around the egg display so I rolled by to get another item and then double back. Fortunately, there was a carton left. Facing shortages or none and trying to keep distance was a challenge. Buying for 14 days' worth made the cart heavier and more unwieldy.

The grocery store staff could not have been nicer but I saw the fear in the older cashier who was checking me out. I thanked her. I noted that the older gentleman baggers I often saw were absent. What baggers there were young people.

I noted a polite more elderly gent than I without mask or gloves who apologized to me when I came hurriedly by—shame on me. That would not be the last time I let my fear override my consideration for others. I have tried better since. It's humiliating to see that faced with a real threat of serious illness or

death one can be so bound by self-preservation as to forget the other person is just as precious and probably just as nervous.