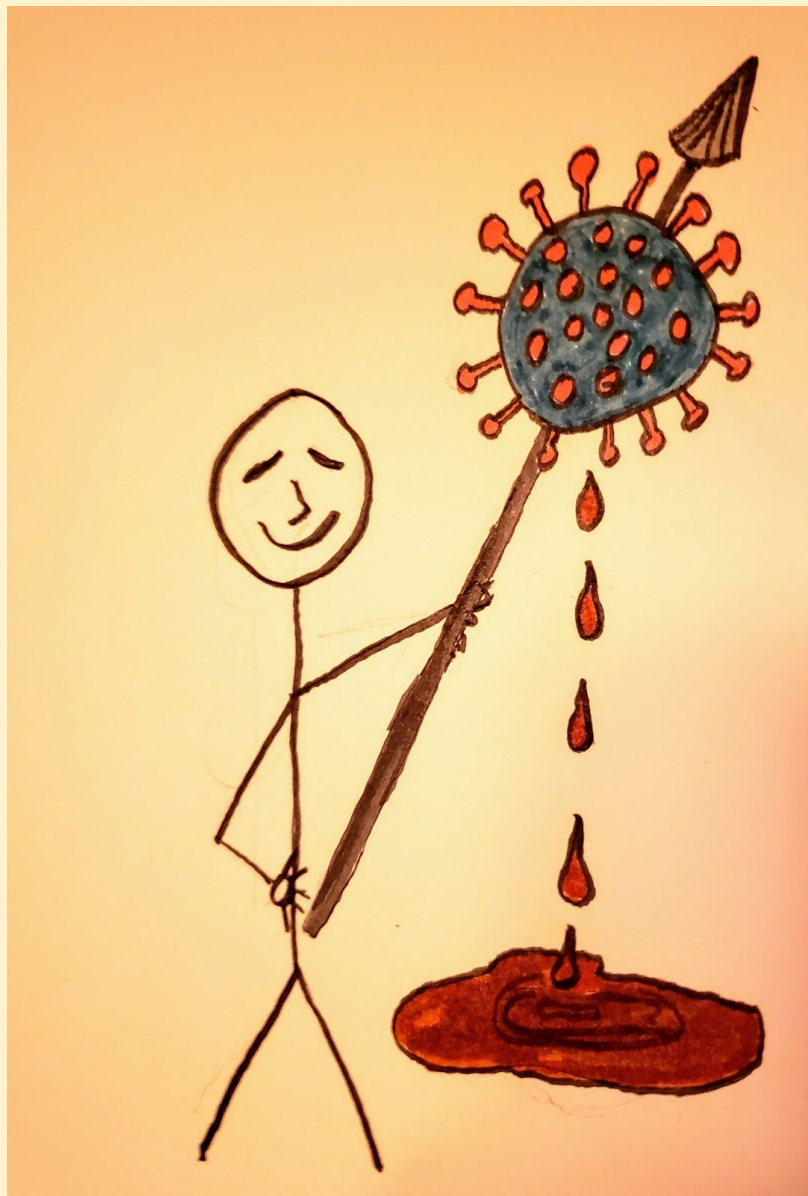


COVID19 and Me
by Rocky Shores
www.RockyShores.WTF



At 9:27 pm on Friday, November 20, I got a text that my test result was ready, and felt a jolt of anxious adrenaline when I saw it was positive. Not terror, or real fear even, more like the “this is it” thought before a race or wrestling match. The moment when Preparation meets Ordeal.

The Tuesday before, I started my leg day with a 20 minute run at incline, and after the run my lungs felt a little bit more taxed than they normally do. I'd increased the speed by a couple tenths of a mile per hour, so I figured it was that. I was actually pretty proud of myself for pushing through. After the workout I was a little more drained than I'd expected to be, so I added 4 ounces of cherry juice to my usual breakfast of cheezy eggs. By lunchtime I felt 100%. It was the same on Wednesday--another workout that felt a little more draining than expected, but not terribly hard. The feeling of being slightly drained was my first symptom, and I can only see it in hindsight.

On Thursday the 19th I woke up feeling like something was off. Not sick, really, just outside of normal. I temped myself, like I have at the start of every day since March. I normally run between 95 F and 97 F, but on that morning I was at 98.9. I had a runny nose with a little sinus congestion as well. Not a big concern, especially since I was working from home that day. I contacted the hotline and they told me to isolate and get a COVID test. The earliest test I could get was the next morning, so I went through my day as normal, except that I checked my temp a few more time throughout the day.

Around two in the afternoon my temp jumped to 100.3 F and stayed there for a few hours. I didn't feel any fatigue or muscle soreness. In fact, if I hadn't been measuring my temp I wouldn't have noticed the fever. By 7pm my temp was back to normal.

The runny nose was the real deal. I mean, my face was a snot faucet. I'd bought an eight-pack of paper towels the weekend before and thank heaven for that. I was wiping my nose every five minutes and still had to go at the keyboard with alcohol wipes four times a day.

I got tested on Friday morning and got the results that night. I buckled down mentally, knowing things could get really bad, but that with luck they'd go really easy.

The 2019 coronavirus enters cells through ACE2 receptors. In fact, its spike protein is pretty much ideal for hooking onto them. It's this entry point that allows the virus to attack a whole bunch of seemingly-unrelated systems. ACE2 receptors are most abundant in epithelial tissue. A good shorthand for epithelial is “skin-like”, so obviously hair follicles and skin are vulnerable. Also, a bunch of cells in

the heart, lungs, gut, kidneys, brain, testicles, and blood vessels. Because testosterone stimulates production of ACE2 receptors, men tend to be more susceptible to infection than women.

The ACE2 receptor has two possible positions--open and closed. In the open position, it pushes the body's equilibrium toward higher blood pressure and heavier breathing. When it's closed, it pushes in the opposite direction. When a whole fuckload of them shift to the open position the body can go into a high stress fight-or-flight type of condition, and when they close the body shifts toward being relaxed. This matters because the virus can only enter through ACE2 when it's in the open position.

Knowing this, it makes sense that the best treatment is to keep yourself relaxed. Keeping the body in the most relaxed state possible requires a little more presence and self control than normal. While I was symptomatic, I skipped caffeine, alcohol, bad news, and literally anything else I thought could raise my blood pressure or anxiety levels. I turned on all the lights in my apartment everyday, cracked the windows, did morning yoga, and went on slow, easy walks outside. I took a nap every afternoon and stayed in bed for nine hours every night, even if I wasn't asleep the whole time. I watched dumb movies and read mindless books.

I'm fortunate to have friends and family members who checked on me and even had good advice. Probably the best advice was to take a daily aspirin. Since COVID19 can attack the lining of the blood vessels, it can lead blood to coagulate and clot. It's the reason many otherwise asymptomatic patients wind up in the hospital with strokes or transient ischemic attacks.

Beyond the endlessly runny nose, my symptoms didn't get worse. From Monday (11/21) through Friday (11/27) I could only taste ketchup and salt, and couldn't smell anything. For a couple days my upper chest had a feeling of mild irritation in the bronchial tubes. It's hard to describe the sensation. If you've ever sat around a campfire for a couple hours, or been in a place where lots of incense was burning, and inhaled a bunch of smoke, it was the feeling in the lungs after that. A lingering sense that something was causing mild irritation. The day after I tested positive I woke up with a mild ringing in my ears. It hasn't gone away completely but has improved somewhat. Most folks temporarily lose some lung capacity with COVID19, and I may have also. I've gone for a couple hikes and pushed myself on some steep inclines, but haven't noticed any loss of capacity. I'll update when I start running again this week.

Beyond adding sleep I didn't change much, other than that I only ate healthy crap until the symptoms subsided. My staples during the workweek

are bananas, blueberries, walnuts, oats, salmon, and broccoli. I basically kept my diet to this until my symptoms subsided. Once they'd passed I spent a day feasting on fast food and Oreo cookies.

I was surprised that I got it when I did, and I'm still somewhat in disbelief. My activities through October and November consisted of working out and working on the weekdays, and hiking on the weekends. I hit the gym four days a week and the grocery store once a week, but always going at 6AM when the overnight cleaning crew had just finished and there were few other people there. My workplace is almost free of touch points and most of the staff is working from home. Everywhere I went, sanitizing, social distancing, and masking were pretty much universal. When people ask me how I got it, I tell them I have no frickin clue. My best guess is that I hit a touch point--a breakroom faucet, gas pump handle, public doorway--and inadvertently touched my face before washing my hands.

I was in isolation for two weeks. By the end of it I was beginning to feel anxious and depressed. On Monday the 30th, I found myself sitting on the couch whispering that my life had gone completely to shit. Then I was like, wait a second, I'm no worse off than I was two weeks ago. I knew it was the isolation talking. Quarantinitis is a real thing and it's got to be treated the moment it shows up.

Since my symptoms were super mild and I don't seem to have much lasting impact (if any), people who want to say COVID is no big deal could use my experience to argue that point. However, I personally know 17 people who've had COVID and two of them wound up hospitalized. A few haven't been able to smell or taste anything for months. I also know three people who've lost a family member to it. This virus can be oppressive, deadly even, and spreads like a motherfucker. If I hadn't been told to get a test I wouldn't have known it was COVID for several more days. Studies have shown people are at their most contagious in the 3 days before and 3 days after becoming symptomatic. I would have gone through the most contagious period without putting myself in isolation. There's a whole lot of people walking around with it right now, spreading it all over, and taking precautions to avoid it is wise.

With that said, if you catch the shit, take it in stride. Tell your friends so they can check on you. Get the grocery store to deliver good tasting healthy crap to your door. Ask for time off from work, read comics, and watch some bad movies. A COVID19 infection is a pretty little war. The best way to win is literally to relax it away.