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5 things I learned after having Covid and pneumonia

By Tania Richard

I had Covid 19 that turned into pneumonia. I've been sick for 27 days and counting. *For the first 12 days I self isolated from my family.* My heroic husband brought me all my meals on a tray outside our bedroom and talked me off the ledge since being so sick caused panic and fear. I spoke to my daughters through FaceTime and texted with my sister and a small loyal group of friends. Otherwise it was me, my bedroom walls and an all consuming virus.

Here's a light sampling of the revelatory texts and observations I sent my sister when my fever was 101.8:

1. "I can hear my eyeballs."
2. "I can hear my nose. It sounds like bubble wrap."
3. "All men are gay."
4. "Musicals are absurd."
5. "I am never gonna break the law cause I'd never survive prison."
6. "Perhaps I should do all my parenting from isolation."

All of these texts made perfect sense to me. Plus humor was the only thing keeping me from constant despair.

My chills were full body convulsions. When I had to get up to go to the restroom or find more layers for warmth the air felt like hundreds of tiny knives jabbing at my skin. In addition to tiny knives there was a miniature jackhammer pounding between my eyes. I experienced constant waves of nausea and sharp pain in my legs.

The inside of my chest felt like it was covered in fur. My throat was perpetually in the beginning stages of strep when it is uncomfortable to swallow. For six days straight I had a fever that ranged between 100.4 and 102.9. Tylenol did nothing. In the mornings I'd wake up soaked in sweat that went through to my sheets and mattress.

I received contradictory information on whether or not I needed to get a test. One day a Doctor said it was unnecessary and there was nothing they could do if I had it anyway. "Act as if..." they said, "Isolate, hydrate, repeat."

The next Doctor I spoke to said I should get tested because I'd get care from a team of Covid 19 "experts" and it was important to know how many positive cases existed in

order to try and contain the virus. She made it sound like it was my civic duty to get tested when the day before I was told it didn't matter.

"Do it for Johnny!" or in case you don't recognize the Outsiders reference, "Do it for your Country!" (That reference is from Grease 2.) I digress.

My test came back negative which was baffling. At that point the Doctor told me there were false negatives. "You got the test too late. You would have tested positive if you'd taken the test earlier. Ignore the results." Also too since the result was negative I wouldn't get that "extra care from a team of Covid 19 experts."

I was shit out of luck.

The next day I felt worse than all the symptoms I'd felt before. I could not lift my head off the pillow. My fever was back to 100.4. The Doctor recommended I go to Urgent Care to get my oxygen levels tested and a chest X-ray. This was the twelveteenth Doctor I spoke to and the first time I was told to seek help at a facility. I'd been sick for 15 days.

Wonder of wonders I had pneumonia. My chest X-ray looked like a sky full of clouds. I was prescribed an arsenal of medication and am currently in the process of recovering. Slow but steady wins the race.

This experience has been brutal and confounding. Within in the same sentence information about Covid 19 contradicts itself. For example, "You should get tested but it doesn't really matter if it's negative because there are false negatives so you would need to act as if you have Covid and continue to isolate so don't get a test but also get a test."

Here's what I know for sure.

1. I had Covid 19 even though *my test results was negative*.
2. My husband is the best man I know and I am humbled by how he took care of me and our family. My friends are awesome. My kids are swell.
3. I haven't worn a bra in 27 days. You're welcome.
4. There is such a thing as too much information. I have streamlined my information on Covid down to 1 or 2 sources tops. All of the outlets dispensing information that directly contradicts, dismisses or reinvents depending on the channel you watch or the article you read creates false panic or calm within one sitting. I believe in the case of this pandemic less is more.
5. *There is no question that Healthcare Workers have been extraordinary during this crisis but it's important to note that Black people will encounter the same dismissive treatment they often receive when seeking medial attention.* I experienced micro-aggressive treatment when I went to Urgent Care. I felt as if I

had to prove my right to be there even though I could barely keep my head up or talk. When the nurse listened to my lungs she said she heard nothing despite the fact that I coughed uncontrollably every time I had to take in and release a breath. I had to ask for a chest X-ray. She gave in after checking my chart and noting it was in the Doctor's order. She never actually acknowledged I had pneumonia. After the x-ray results she said, "I'm going to give you medication to treat pneumonia," as if I didn't have it but she was doing it for fun. "So do I *have* pneumonia?" I asked. She reluctantly admitted that I did. When I told her I was going to put my sister on speaker phone while she gave me instructions for care the nurse defensively asked, "Is she a Doctor?" "No she is my support," I answered. She rolled her eyes. *The idea that Black people are disproportionately affected by Corona because of underlying conditions puts the blame squarely on our shoulders and negates the very real consequences of bias and discrimination. Systemic issues don't disappear when there is a pandemic.*

Wear a mask outside. Be kind to one another. Forgive yourself and others.

Bras are overrated.