

Sensory Memory for Pandemic Archive

Smell of Clorox wipes

One of the strongest sensory memories I have of the early pandemic months in spring and summer 2020 is the scent of Clorox wipes. During the pandemic, my father, in his 90's, lived with my children and me in Albuquerque, NM. My dad had numerous health problems I was extremely concerned with his health and well-being.

Early on, when wipes were in short supply, I hoarded the bright yellow canisters, some from the store and some from my son's dorm room which he had to vacate. I used them daily to wipe the surfaces that we touched the most, such as door handles, the microwave, and refrigerator door and at first, even to wipe down the groceries that I had delivered to avoid going to the store. The scent of bleach with a layer of lemon that the wipes left behind became a satisfying sign—an illusion that I had some control over my family's safety.

Over time, when evidence of how COVID transmitted became clearer, I used the wipes for my father's care—his inability to make it to the bathroom sometimes and wiping down the ever-growing stable of equipment Dad needed for daily life: an oxygen machine, lung drain kit, walker, portable commode. My dad passed away of in 2022, and while miraculously none of us ever did contract COVID, the smell of the wipes will always bring me back to that time of fear and uncertainty.