

Clean Hands and Empty Spirits

Rubbing alcohol was pungent at my grandma's house when I was taking care of her in April 2020. I remember seeing my parents cleaning all of the surfaces in fears of accidentally infecting my grandma. This was the month that I probably used the most hand sanitizer and hand soap I'll probably have in my life. The water ran over my hands as I rubbed in the soap, followed by using hand sanitizer every time I came in contact with my grandma. My hands eventually started to crack and become dry from all of the cleaning products I was using. Not long after, I started to bring hand cream with me just to soothe the burning feeling on my skin. This burning, however, was nothing compared to the distress I was feeling inside.

The lockdowns were taking a toll on my mental health. I felt trapped. Besides work, I couldn't leave the house, and at that time I was sharing it with my family, as an apartment for me and my husband had not opened up yet. Some of the neighbors were very noisy too, only adding to the madness. I felt as if I had nowhere to truly escape and to be truly alone. I like being alone, but not when I have to hear loud noises with no place to go. I heard the cries of small children, shouting from adults, and the splashes from the communal pool. These were noises I could not move away from because everyone else was ordered to stay home too.

Between the odor of all the cleaning supplies and the noises I heard at home, it contributed to a feeling of emptiness, as if this was going to be my reality forever. That was my own version of Hell. I became enraged eventually because so many things were going on that I had no control over. Without the warm hugs from my husband and the physical comfort it gave me, getting through the time under lockdowns would have been nearly impossible. The lingering smell from the detergent my husband washed his clothes with and the natural scent that emanated from him gave me the familiarity I was missing through the smells of multi-purpose cleaners, hand sanitizers, and hand soap. The empty spirits I had were temporarily lifted through that touch and smell.