

In late January, most people around me considered Covid-19 to be the next "avian flu". It was not taken as a serious threat at the time and I even remember my colleagues having a "corona" party on the roof of our building where we all drank corona and made jokes, as we unknowingly awaited the worst pandemic in a century.

As the months went on and things seemed to escalate daily, I tried as hard as I could to resist going anywhere that required a mask. I couldn't fully accept all of this and really only left my house to run or take walks, I was working from home and could order groceries or food at any time of day or night so it was an easy thing for me to reject at the time. Eventually I had to give in because I needed to occasionally stop by the office so I ordered some nice black cloth masks that could house HEPA filters. It took much getting use to but wasn't terrible wearing the masks and as I began to venture out more and more, it started to become routine. I'm on my way out, grab my sunglasses, keys and now mask, all which are kept in the same decorative bin on a table next to my front door. Come home, throw keys and mask into bin, place sunglasses on the table. Leave, grab keys and mask and sunglasses, come home, put keys and mask into the bin, sunglasses folded neatly alongside. Every day same thing, until it is something that I no longer thought about or consciously did.

One day, on my quarter mile walk to the office, I smelled cinnamon. I looked around but in that part of the city there wasn't a bakery or coffee shop within a few feet, didn't see anyone walk by me and couldn't even understand how I was smelling such a strong aroma through a cloth mask with a filter. I started to realize that I couldn't even remember the last thing that I had smelled while wearing this mask, so this was definitely unusual. But like many of our fleeting daily thoughts it was just that, and by the time that I was in the elevator my mind was busy on other things. I come home, keys and mask in the bin, sunglasses on the table. Leave the next day, grab mask, keys, sunglasses and walk to work. I stop at a coffee shop on the way and again...cinnamon. Instantly I'm taken back to the previous day and asking myself, "was this what you smelled yesterday?", but quickly realizing that I didn't go this direction, so I hadn't walked by this place. I get to work and again its forgotten quickly. Come home, wake up, leave for work, come home, every day the same routine and many of those days, not all though, I had at some point smelled cinnamon. Finally, one day I came home and entered the house extremely distracted, having a work conversation on my phone while fumbling with my keys and trying to take off my sunglasses off at the same time. The phone started to slip as I was approaching the "drop off table" and in my haste to catch the phone I dropped everything else onto the floor. Sometimes life forces you to slow down and this was one of those times because this was probably the first time in weeks that I was just standing next to this table and focusing. In the bin, where the masks and keys go is a stick like, brown bundle of something that first appeared to be a dehydrated plant. I picked it up and immediately could smell that thick, rich cinnamon flavor and connected dozens of fleeting, scattered thoughts to their final conclusion. My girlfriend had bought some decorative, fall scented potpourri, placed it into this bin and every day the inside of my cloth mask slept on that cinnamon bundle.

My brain will never again associate the rich smell of cinnamon with fall or desserts, but now will think of masks and a global pandemic. It seems like it could be a long time before my brain can break this

association and have return this spice to its proper neural connection, but sadly wearing masks is now the thing that feels normal to me. If there is any positive take away to all of this for me, its that I often realize that we are probably living through notable history right now, something that will be remembered and written about for a long time. Being that I love history and in much of what I read I usually stop and think “what was that really like in XXX place at XXX time? I wish that I could have seen it...”, I try to keep perspective and realize that one day in 100 years someone will be wondering the same thing about right now.