

THEIR VOICE

Wearing mask to the store is nothing to monkey around about

The sock monkeys saved the day. Up until Friday I was pretty certain the phrase “Mom, can you make me a mask, too?” was safely labeled in my brain as “Uttered last at age 7, will not use again.” But was I ever so glad that my mother did in fact take the time to stitch me a mask along with the pile she was making to donate. That the fabric was a series of laughing sock monkeys made me hesitate but hey, it was a mask.

I’d love to have a box of the medical variety to protect me as well, but due to the asleep-at-the-wheel management of four different presidents — that was noted by The Daily Times in its March 2 editorial — medical masks are in such short supply for even the front-line medical folks who need them, I’d feel obliged to donate any I had.

So cloth sock monkey mask it was. I figured it couldn’t hurt just to be cautious and polite to the cashiers and other customers when I make my rare supply runs.

It was a beautiful weekend and like many in our corner of suburbia, I thought the best way to enjoy the sunshine was spring yardwork. Which is

how I found myself attacking the sedate little shrub at the corner fencepost.

I don’t know if somebody’s dog fertilized that thing all winter or some hole in reality transferred a creature from Tolkien’s Middle Earth to my yard but the dainty entity that was knee high when last we met as the leaves fell was by Saturday a 20-foot tall monster with poisonous limbs of pollen reaching into the heavens to drop their wrath upon me as they fell one by one to my sword, sorry pruning shears. They crashed down and like the wayward knight, I failed to notice the evil trap as the pollen danced around me while I carried my victim’s severed limbs to the brush pile.

Insert at this point the wife’s urgent request for a small supply run for some essentials that had run low.

So it was that I found myself in the grocery store parking lot just several minutes later, and appalled by the creature I saw there. It was red-faced, with a sweaty forehead, eyes swollen and nose running like a faucet — surely it must be ill. I’d have backed slowly away to at least 18 feet if it hadn’t been my own reflection. Which is when I gave double thanks I had my mask. I’d have been at best led away by a store manager if not at worst attacked as a zombie without it. The sock monkey mask certainly saved me from scaring the bejezus out of everyone.

So with that in mind, here’s what I learned about masks: 1) Even if you aren’t worried you may have COVID-19, a mask is the polite assurance to the other folks in a crowded area like a store or gas station that you aren’t sending bad things their way.

2) When we all jump at every sneeze or cough we hear, that mask is a bit of reassurance to those around you. They’ll still back away and look at you with side eye but not the way they would if you were just standing there having an allergy fit.

3) There is a lot of truth to officials worrying about people misunderstanding who the mask is protecting. Let’s be clear, a cloth mask doesn’t protect you. You wear it to protect everyone around you and give them assurance you’re trying to keep your cooties to yourself — even if they aren’t coronas.

I know it but still remind myself because my brain is so hard-wired to thinking masks works the other way around. I simply felt safer wearing a mask even though I wasn’t.

4) If a cashier says “thank you for wearing the mask,” the correct response I heard from the woman 6 feet in front of me at the checkout is “no, thank you for being here today.”

5) Among the multitude of homemade masks appearing, the sock monkeys motif is apparently unique among pandemic fashions and will still make some people smile if not outright giggle.

Please don’t tell me” it’s not that bad here,” or “I’ll wait until they tell us we have to wear a mask.” This is being considerate to the folks keeping things running, the teenager working the checkout line who sees hundreds of people per shift and appreciates those who give her some reassurance they aren’t the one who will send her home sick.

And really, which “they” are you waiting on? The gov’mment? Would that be the side who decided shopping in Chinatown was a smart move of reassurance or the side that insisted this was no worse than the flu?

Wearing a mask out in public is the next step in social distancing at this point and it simply makes sense to do your part to protect those keeping the essential services running.

It’s nothing to monkey around about.

MARCUS FITZSIMMONS is the copy desk chief for the design center at The Daily Times.

TODAY’S BIBLE VERSE

SUBMITTED BY **DONNA MICHELS**, FRIENDSVILLE

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Luke 15:10

YOUR VOICE

Letters to the Editor reflect the opinions of the writers and are not necessarily those of The Daily Times.

COVID-19 and takeout

Dear Editor:

As a family physician, I am thankful for the health measures Gov. Bill Lee and others in authority have enacted to reduce the spread of COVID-19. In the midst of many good measures, there is one missing that I hope to see put in place ASAP: Mandating that food handlers and servers wear masks to reduce droplet transmission to food and packaging would be a reassuring step.

Although transmission in/on food is not thought to be a major player, it would be great for it not to be in the game at all, given how many of us are eating takeout these days.

A few months ago, 13 of us got a takeout lunch (various sandwiches) from a local eatery. Two days later, 10 of us were rather violently sick

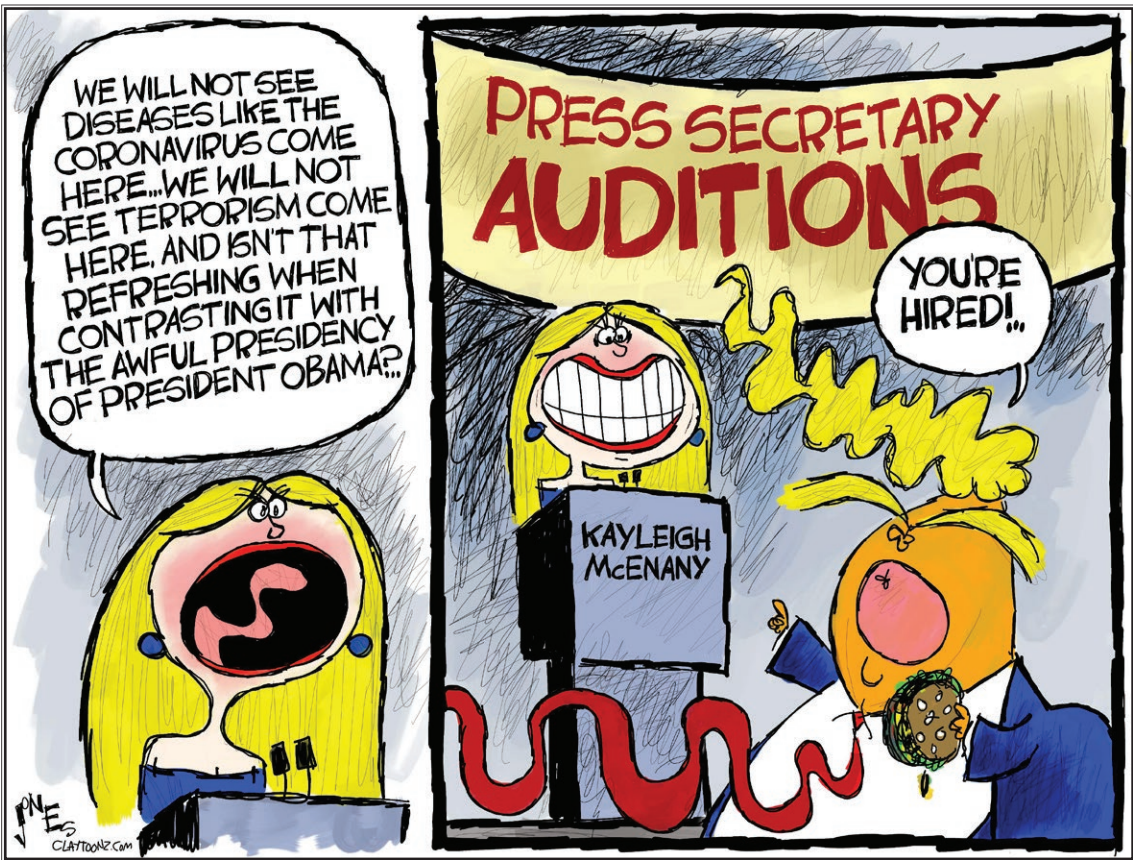
with various gastro symptoms (vomiting, diarrhea, one passing out and needing IV fluids). The health department tracked it to one employee with norovirus. Obviously, this is a rare event, but the virus passed to us very efficiently.

Every virus is different, but with coronavirus sometimes being shed by asymptomatic people, a mask to reduce droplet transmission would be reassuring to takeout patrons. Otherwise it feels like ordering takeout is a bit like inviting the whole restaurant into our home. Even without a governor’s mandate, restaurants could undertake this voluntarily and put up a sign or advertisement letting us know. We really do want to support local takeout, just not at the unexpected expense of COVID-19 risk.

Andrew Smith, M.D.

Trillium Circle

Maryville



THEIR VOICE

When the pandemic ends, remember we are friends and not enemies

PAWLEYS ISLAND, S.C. — Sometimes it takes a virus to summon the better angels of our nature, to take liberal license with Abraham Lincoln’s famous words.

In his first inaugural address, Lincoln said: “We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory ... will yet swell ... when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

His words remind us that throughout our history, our leaders often have risen to outsize challenges with language that has inspired us. Other periods are notable for an absence of lyricism at the lectern — or before television cameras and microphones. As I researched Lincoln’s words, it was jarring to hear Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) criticizing California’s school closings as “overkill” in response to COVID-19, and saying “children could have went back to school in two weeks to four weeks.”

In such moments, we find it necessary to inspire ourselves. And Americans, though rabidly divided, are doing just that. More than a few times, I’ve heard strangers say, in so many words, “We’re supposed to learn something from this.” Coastal residents, especially in the Bible Belt, tend to be, shall we say, spiritually alert, often to others’ benefit. Frequently, this perspective coaxes out the question: What can I do to help?

This isn’t to say we humans are reliably angelic, especially not when we’re on the hunt for bathroom tissue. At the local Publix, which opens at 8 a.m., at least 100 people had gathered in the parking lot by 7:30 a.m. on a recent Friday. When the gates opened, caffeinated demons rushed in. One of the shoppers, Pawleys Island lawyer Margaret “Muffy” Kneece, told me it was a surreal sight as masked neighbors skipped the niceties — and the carts — and sprinted to the paper products aisle.

Well, they did say we’re at war, didn’t they?

Cognitive dissonance surrounds us. Nature is grand-jete-ing through springtime, taunting us with azure skies and dazzling us with color, while we ponder darkly the unseen microscopic world of bat viruses that seem bent on wiping out the human race. There’s an ambient, almost universal sense that any minute it may be our turn.

One escape, people have found, is by turning outward to help others, starting in their own backyards. This may mean standing on the balcony

and singing arias for neighbors. Or, say, running a marathon in your small garden, as one British man did, raising \$22,000 for COVID-19 relief. Church of Christ parishioners in nearby Georgetown, South Carolina, gathered at the local hospital parking lot to pray and sing their appreciation to employees leaving during a shift change.



KATHLEEN PARKER

Here in Pawleys Island, the loaves-and-fishes parable is becoming a reality. Restaurateur Josh Quigley, who co-owns three restaurants along the Grand Strand coastal highway, decided to feed people — at no cost. After having to furlough 300 employees, keeping only managers employed at reduced salaries, Quigley wanted to do something to help.

He consulted with local Episcopal Rector William Keith to figure out how to feed first responders. (Father Wil is also chaplain of the local fire department.) But before their brainstorming session was over on the eve of their experiment, they decided to make the food available to anyone who showed up. Copying the model created by One World Everybody Eats, a network of about 50 pay-as-you-can cafes around the country, Quigley created baked-pasta takeout meals to feed families of four to eight.

If you could pay the \$5 cost of the meal, fine. If not, Quigley said, the restaurant was earning enough from its other takeout customers to cover the cost of feeding those in need. Father Wil hopes to press other restaurants into service, taking turns one night a week so that locals can feed their families every night.

These unheralded efforts, small perhaps in their scope but vast in their impact, are a useful reminder that we are learning something as we try to build a better foxhole. Or, perhaps, those better angels of our nature are touching the mystic chords of memory, just like the man said.

When we get to the other side of this pandemic, the challenge will be to keep these bonds of affection — and to remember that we are not enemies, but, indeed, friends.

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VOICE YOUR OPINION

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