



Stressed over dessert

By Priya Subramanian

I'm not an avid baker by any means! My go-to is usually frozen cookie dough, which I stock up on (no, not a COVID-19 grocery hoarder)! Always easy to bake a fresh batch of cookies that could brighten up someone's day, or help say hello to a new neighbor, or simply say thank you to someone!

With these noble intentions, I embarked on a baking endeavor one morning during this strange Corona era we live in. The recipient of my baking efforts would be a member of my community who graciously donated puzzles to bored kids during this quarantine. She wasn't going to accept any money, so I reasoned homemade goodies would be a nice way to say, "thank you". It sounds like an uncomplicated act, right? But as I painfully realized, an *infectious disease* can play on our minds worse than, and much before it begins to play on our bodies.

First, I washed my hands (for 20 seconds each time) at least three times before I opened the dough. I paused and speculated. Perhaps I should just *distance* myself from this idea, in the same manner, we have *socially isolated* the last few weeks. (Self-doubt is never a good thing, and admittedly, human beings are quite tormented with it in

these crazy times we live in. A doctor friend told me that psychiatric wards were crammed lately. I can see why!)

I decided to check with the spouse, the more analytical voice in our family, on the cookie idea. “Hmm”, he said, “it’s a nice gesture!” Together, we deduced, home-baked was ok, we hadn’t stepped out in weeks, we run an ultraclean household, and lastly, the high oven temperature might even kill COVID-19. Besides, the lady and I had an arrangement! She was going to *disinfect* the puzzle boxes and leave on her porch where I would pick them up from. Now, I’ll do the same. I would *disinfect* the packet and leave it there too. How simple!? (or how complicated?!)

I was thrilled with this exchange with the better half. Not only did it give me more baking confidence, but also because our work-from-home schedules these days have us interacting through texts and hand gestures most of the time! I couldn’t remember the last time we had a decent conversation betwixt round-the-clock conference calls.

Armed with new courage and resolve, I headed back to the oven and did something I’d never done in my kitchen before. I wore a *mask* on my face, making sure my nose and mouth were covered. Next came disposable latex-free gloves. Felt like I was prepping for a battle here! If this was me in my own space, imagine the plight of healthcare folks going into work every day now. Really sad. I said a prayer and hoped the macadamia nut goodness I was about to bake, would carry forward positivity in the world.

I placed the dough gingerly on the oven tray and put them in. As the butter in the dough melted and the cookies started to spread (a word I am not liking much lately), I contemplated packaging options. Should I use paper bags, a Ziploc bag, or a box? The final choice HAD to be a surface that could easily be *disinfected*. The winner was an old Christmas cookie box that resurfaced out of nowhere! *That was the universe sending me a message this was ok to do?*

The sweet aroma of the cookies filled our entire home, one where door-knobs and counter spaces are being *sanitized* twice a day. As I pulled out the warm beauties from the oven, I remembered a baking tip for thicker, chewier cookies. (**Stay home and flatten the virus curve**), *but do not flatten cookies*. I warily picked them with my glove, their lusciousness so tempting but I bravely resisted a taste. After *sheltering them in place* in the box, I brought those prized *Lysol* wipes over to *disinfect* the exterior. (By now I can *decontaminate* items in my sleep!)

Next, I needed to spruce up my appearance, after all, the baking hustle actually involved a drop-off! An outing! My son was excited he could enjoy a drive, and of course, the puzzles were FOR HIM. We drove to the lady's house in silence. As he looked out in wonderment at the lush outdoors and folks biking and running, I mulled over the (*Covidian*) wisdom of this entire exercise (the baking, I meant!)

I got down from my car and sanitized my hands. Breathe in, breathe out, I told myself. I walked up to the lady's porch and placed the box. Forget *hellos, handshakes, or hugs*. I didn't even touch her doorbell. I just quietly picked up the puzzles and returned to my car. I sent her a 'thank you' text and in a matter-of-fact manner, stated I had homemade cookies for her in a (*disinfected*) container.

Pat came to her reply, "Aww, that is so sweet of you!"

In another day and age, that quick validation would have brought me so much joy. But in today's *disease-stricken* and the *paranoia*-filled world, I returned home puzzled (pun intended!) of how my act of gratitude would be received! How a *submicroscopic* agent has changed the very nature of human interactions!

Baking, I've heard, is therapeutic. But at that very moment, I felt like perhaps I needed therapy!

