

## **A College Senior who Contracted COVID-19 shares her Experience with the Virus, her Last Weeks of College and her Time In Quarantine**

Katie Clark

In grey sweatpants and a parka, she rolled forward in her grey van next to the masked man in blue scrubs, an apron and thick plastic mask. It was her turn to be tested for COVID-19.

The patient parked her car and listened to the man's instructions, leaning her head back for the test. When the swab hit the back of her nasal cavity, tears filled her eyes. It was just a reflex, she said, but for thirty seconds tears rolled down her cheeks.

Just over two weeks before this, she had returned from spring break and was working as a research assistant at a small hospital in Michigan. Her daily routine included school work, taking notes for other students, a shift at the hospital and some down time before bed. The senior was planning summer work and shopping for graduation dresses.

Fast forward to now, schools have closed down and there is still no word on the probability of a physical graduation ceremony.

Rose Wilson thanked the man for the test and went home to continue her self-quarantine. Four days later, she received a phone call with results from her test.

Positive.

Rose is a senior who was studying computer science at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor campus. When classes moved online, she followed Michigan's stay-at-home order in her apartment while working as a research assistant at Michigan Medicine Hospital. Her last day of work was March 11 and she moved home with her parents on March 19th in Traverse City.

One week later she started to cough, followed by a slight fever, aches and chills. She began self-quarantining in her family home, but her gut was telling her that she had somehow contracted the coronavirus.

"I got a fever two days after having a cough," Rose said. "I never really get a fever, so I was almost sure. Some people said I could have the flu, but I had gotten vaccinated for that for my job so I knew it wasn't the flu."

Rose's fever started around 100 degrees while taking ibuprofen. She wanted to get the coronavirus test because of her position in a hospital and called her local doctor to ask how to get one.

"A lot of websites with hotline numbers said that if your symptoms are mild, they prefer you stay home to not waste testing resources," Rose said. "I'm young, if I do have it, it will blow over because I didn't feel bad and I didn't have the breathing problems people were talking about."

After talking to her doctor, she was urged to get tested and went to a local testing site at a small clinic. This was where she received the coronavirus test and was told to wait between four and seven days for results.

"I hate saying this because it's so cringey, everyone laughs," Rose said about the feeling of getting the swab test. "But it feels like it's touching your brain."

Due to the virus, Rose's temporary position at the hospital was suspended and she returned to her childhood home in Traverse City to stay with her mother and father. She did not expect to contract the virus, and because her father has asthma, the risk of spreading COVID-19 to her parents was even scarier.

"My dad has asthma and I was really concerned," Rose said. "I wasn't concerned for myself at all, but I was really concerned for him and really scared at the thought that I could have brought it to him."

Rose received a phone call from her doctor around four days after her test. She had tested positive for the new coronavirus, and she was expected to begin a strict self-quarantine.

"After that, I had daily calls from the health department where they would track my symptoms," Rose said. "And offer help to my parents if they need it."

Grand Traverse County, Michigan, had only ten cases at the time of Rose's diagnoses. She was one of just nineteen cases in the county to date. The local health department questioned Rose about her symptoms during her time with the virus to track her health.

"They would ask me 'what are your symptoms today?' and sometimes they would list symptoms and I would say yes or no," Rose said. "They would ask me what my temperature was and my parents would ask like, legit 20 questions. They asked, 'what should we be doing and should we quarantine from each other?'"

She isn't sure where she contracted the virus, but suspects it was possible to catch it at her work in the clinic. Rose also counted two weeks back from her first symptoms, and believes she also could have picked it up in a store in Ann Arbor.

"On my last day of work I was in pre-op in the hospital talking to patients and could have gotten it there easily," Rose said. "The only thing I've really done on my own was the grocery shopping."

Rose's symptoms with the virus were not terrible, she said, but there was one night that she really feared for her health. Her temperature reached over 105 degrees and she felt terrified because nothing was bringing her fever down.

"My fever was between 104 and 106 until that next morning so my mom and I would try different things," Rose said. "She would put a wet washcloth on my forehead, at one point ice packs behind my neck or under my armpits. Twice I took a semi-cold shower or sat in the bathtub for like 10 minutes."

Rose's mother, Margaret Wilson, cared for Rose during her self-quarantine. During Rose's worst night with a high fever, Margaret put herself at risk to take care of her daughter.

"The tylenol would not touch her fever," Margaret said. "At that point I abandoned all precautions. I was holding a washcloth over her forehead, getting her in the bathtub. I did not follow protocol then but I quickly went back."

That night Rose and her mother managed to watch her fever and stay away from the hospital, but Rose did have chills along with tingling in her hands and feet from the high fever.

"I never get scared for myself," Rose said. "But that night, I was scared."

After her sleepless night with the fever, the duration of her time with the coronavirus was not terrible. During Rose's time in quarantine the senior couldn't simply focus on fighting off symptoms. She still had classwork to do to finish the semester online.

"Teachers are understanding, which is great," Rose said. "I never fully took advantage of anything, I didn't tell any teachers that I had it. I had a couple group projects but I didn't tell anyone that I had it because I didn't want to deal with people."

Rose spent her time in quarantine watching shows, sleeping and online shopping. She looked forward to meals delivered by her mother and did her online school work daily. Through it all, she found some positives in being self-quarantined.

“I’ve been able to do hobbies and things I would literally never do,” Rose said. “Because of this I’ve been able to read books, bake, cook and spend time with my parents as well which I probably would have taken for granted if I had been caught up in the normal swing of things.”

The coronavirus symptoms lasted from March 25 until April 4, and afterwards she waited a recommended seven days of continued quarantine from her family to prevent the spread of infection. Her mother was her main caregiver, and the family took many precautions to keep Rose’s virus contained.

“Once she had symptoms, Rosie said she would stay up in her room,” Margaret said. “In the time she was symptomatic, which was like 10 or 11 days of fever, we were really good about using disinfecting wipes and wiping down all the light switches and the door handles and making sure to wash her dishes separately or give her disposable stuff. ”

Even though their daughter had coronavirus and there was risk of spreading the infection to them, Rose’s parents were happy to care for her and to have her home with them.

“We were happy to have her here,” Rose’s father, Michael Wilson, said. “You don’t want to have somebody that is sick that you love who is away from you. We were happy that if she had it, she was here.”

Even after Rose’s fever went away, the family still remained in self-quarantine and kept their distance from her to be safe. The family was happy to care for Rose but were fearful about her health and the risk that the coronavirus brought to their home.

“There was fear, fear of the unknown and what could happen,” Margaret said. “You’re hearing about people ending up on ventilators and nobody wanted that. Fear and some anxiety, you know, I was fearful for Rosie’s safety and health.”

Rose’s father was prepared to contract the virus and felt it was only a matter of time.

“I think we were thinking that there’s no way we don’t get this,” he said. “We were around her so much. I think we got some phantom symptoms, we were taking our temperature.”

The Wilson's said that their community was really kind and helpful during Rose's infection with the coronavirus. Friends would bring gifts and food for the family and leave them on their front porch.

"We couldn't go anywhere so we had a lot of people bringing us food, alternate thermometers, flowers and cookies," Margaret said. "We were well taken care of. A lot of kindness, love and kindness shown to us and Rosie."

Rose's parents said that they feel sad for seniors during this time and will have to miss out on important milestones in Rose's life.

"I think we had a lot of plans, we had plans to go see Rosie's graduation," Michael said. "You know, just feeling bad for all of those seniors."

For Rose, having the coronavirus was a scary time, but the senior feels sadness that she won't get to share celebrations for the conclusion of her senior year with friends.

"In a way, I won't get to say goodbye to people like I normally would," Rose said. "But in the grand scheme of things, if you think about how this virus is affecting other people, it's kind of hard to just dwell on that kind of stuff."

The senior also feels fear about her future employment. Rose has been hired by an online retail company and hopes that its market will not be negatively affected by the virus, but still feels fear about losing her position.

"They have limited funds and I know that a majority of companies, if not all, have a hiring freeze," Rose said. "I have heard of some startups or companies deferring new hire offers for a year. So I am especially concerned for my offer, not because I've had covid but just because of the economic decline."

Rose was able to beat the coronavirus and wants others to try to focus on the positive. She said that many are hearing all the horrible stories on the news, but there are some cases that are not near as bad as the stories in the media.

"I know some people are comforted by hearing about it from me," Rose said. "Some people have had it horrible but I didn't, and it's helpful, maybe, to see that it's not always so bad. It's really nice for me to be able to say that, hey, it's also possible to get it and be totally fine."