

The Smell of Bread

In March 2019, the reality of the COVID-19 crisis manifested in a stay-at-home order. I lived in Marysville, Washington, and the signs of problems began about a week before the order. At this time, I began to wonder what would happen if everything shut down. I became focused on food. Friends on Facebook began reporting grocery shortages and posting pictures of empty shelves.

Milk, eggs, and bread went fast. I knew I could do nothing about eggs, but I could store shelf-stable rice and soy milk. I could also bake bread. The governor had not fully implemented the stay-at-home order yet, and I rushed to several local stores to find a bread-making machine. Years ago, they had been all the rage. However, when I went looking, I could not find a single one being sold in stores. I ordered from Amazon, and it arrived the day before the Washington state shutdown order. That night I realized I would need yeast and drove to the store in the late evening. Empty shelves of flour and yeast greeted me. In one small box, on the top shelf, single yeast packets sat. They were the only yeast products left in the store. I bought half the box.

At home, I had an emergency pail of flour. My husband used a wrench to pry open the lid, and soft, fluffy flour puffed out. It felt gentle on my hands, and I wondered why I didn't bake more often. Armed with my flour and yeast, I began baking bread daily for my family of eight. The entire house would fill with the smell of delicious, warm baked bread. The scent became highly anticipated. Each day instead of the musty odor of people having to stay inside for weeks, my house smelled of baked bread. It had been so long since we'd had homemade bread, I had forgotten the thick, solid, tastiness of the loaves. We sliced large, inch thick slices and put strawberry jelly or butter on top. Each loaf lasted one day. The best time to eat it was an hour after cooling when it was warm and could melt the butter. I will never forget the smell of

homemade bread and the peace it brought to my family during the early days of the stay-at-home order.