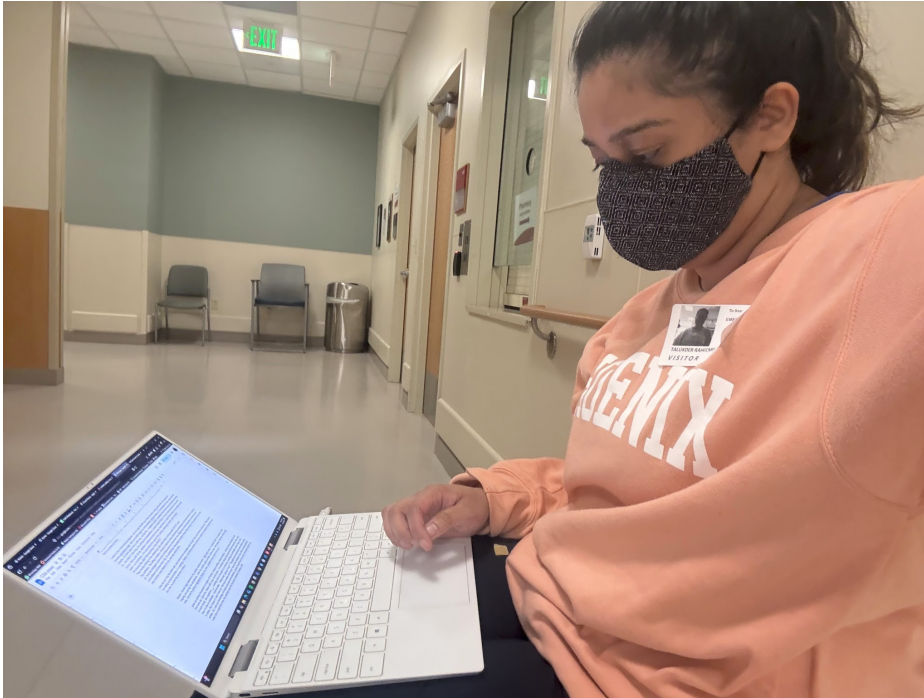


I Used to Be a Biomedical Engineer

By Rahie T
Nonfictional prose
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“If there’s anything I can be glad for, it’s that I’m glad it happened to me first to help lower the risk of it happening to my baby brother. Maybe he still has a chance to avoid long covid.” - Rahie

I used to be a biomedical engineer.

“So d-dimer levels are super high idk what it means specifically.”

No. No. But of course it would. Because it makes sense. Sense with the peer-reviewed and published research I reviewed, when Science was taken seriously.

The text read from only 22 minutes ago as I came across an instagram post that CRA wants to hear our stories from across the world.

I just want to scream into a void. It was only time before it happened to other people! The elderly and those with high-risk health would be impacted first. But it’s coming for you all! Why can’t you see? Why are you trying to stay blind to it??

It’s been more than 6 years we’ve been actively living with Covid. About 20 months that I’ve been living with Long Covid.

I’ll save my doubts for later

(“They’re going to do an ultrasound too”)

(I doubt they’ll find anything).

I could be freaking out. I was so close - so close to what comes naturally for me and just vent about it all as a story on social media. A snap of time frozen for 24 hours, to be read only by a select few, but with no permanent power to influence or teach others across the globe. But the CRA post was literally on my feed, on my screen - I hadn’t even

scrolled away from it yet. *Tell them the story. Provide awareness to others.* So I opened the document and am currently spilling my fervor anxiety.

I hear the front-desk triage speaking to a patient at the front of their queue upon them checking-in. “I’m not being harsh, I’m just telling it like it is. That’s part of the process.” He tells this to a distraught elderly female patient in a wheel-chair.

I don’t keep up with the entire conversation but I see later he tries to comfort her, after directions are followed. “You have the right expectations. I don’t see people on their best days.”

A call with mom - that’s another story. I have to be adamant that her rollercoaster of emotions doesn't bring our livelihood down, and doesn't become a larger source of stress that could worsen my brother’s life. That’s why I left her at home when we received the call from my brother. Coldly. It doesn’t matter that she wants to be here for him - I’m done with her whiplash of emotions. I need to be objective about this, sitting in the hospital lobby, dealing with my own anxiety about this.

I used to be a biomedical engineer. Do I call myself, that I still am one, when I cut most ties from the field, almost cornering myself into hiding away from the world a bit, not wanting anyone to know what’s going on with me? Do I still call myself one when I’m grinding into a new hyperfixation of jewelry making? But then I step into the ER and the ghost of careers-past takes over me—I wield the mental armor even as a visitor to know so many people in the hospital are hurting and the best I can do is be rational to think of the next best step to help all. Whether that was with a project, or now personally, the next few steps my brother can take to make sure he doesn’t get any similar symptoms to the ones I’ve now had to live with.

I’m a former biomedical engineer. With chronic health conditions and immunosuppressed responses - all my life. Born with a single kidney. South Asian, born in the US. A woman. I have a lot going against me. And through it all, the years of health care battles while working in healthcare, I’ve had to learn by being thrown into the fire the power of self-advocacy. Of having to be my own researcher, my own doctor, when years of specialists in the south could barely help me out. I found the answers I needed to help manage my symptoms, to increase my baseline. But it’s not enough – I need to find more, to get my baseline to a point that I can competently work a full-time job. (More than competently – I love and pride myself on being exceptional. How Asian of me)

Back in 2020, and 2021 especially, I had had so much hope. The power of OSHA, that surely with Biden having a Covid Response Task Force team that seemed the equivalent of the clinical Avengers, surely they would enforce protocols, maybe provide funds for schools and workplaces to maximize HEPA filtration into their HVAC systems because we’ve seen how bad Covid can be – the number of deaths. People say “Never Forget” for 9/11, and yet somehow, when so many more have died from Covid, it’s become an unspoken “Never Remember” of how bad those times were. And yet all during that time, since 2020, working in a hospital for the 5 years afterward, I had always masked up. Despite still to this day never getting a positive test, all my measures weren’t enough.

I had so much hope back then, pre-long covid, back in 2020 through 2022. And it seems like the window of kumbaya and super-heroness of supporting research to eradicate yet another multisystem airborne disease was going to win out...How laughable now. I think in times even more so now due to the political climate, we can see the shadow of a hand that corporations and capitalism in general has in whispering into bodies of research and CDC, having it echo to the public that people can return to work after only 5 days of having the illness, not 10. And now – barely anything. Keep the public working to their death, in whichever form it comes to them.

I used to be a biomedical engineer. As it’s now the 5th hour that I’ve been sitting at the ER, the ghost of biomed activations past, and my brother texts me intermittently of the exams scheduled for him next and the results, my brain gives me a soft hug. I know this. I installed similar modalities that he’s now undergoing exams in – CT, Xray, the

ultrasound acquisitions (insert Celine Dion's "It's all coming back to me now" lyrics). And a part of me, whether confidence from my own experience in what most likely my brother could have – or cockiness – I'm eliminating the use of why certain radiologic exams are needed.

They found nothing in the ultrasound, why would they continue with CT now? And we're going to have to pay for it.

Of course they didn't find anything in the CT.

The d-dimers. The effing d-dimers. Almost a hack to know something pertaining to microembolisms is going on. And the intelligent community of those who've done their due diligence to learning about Covid & post covid effects will know that's big. It's something I requested multiple times when living in the south to have my own d-dimer rates tested for me, and was never done.

I used to be a biomedical engineer. August 2024, I can trace it exactly to which event, despite barely any crowds and being outdoors, I can trace when it happened. Trace the downfall of it all - knowing when memory recall got bad, but unfortunately it wasn't my first time around, and blamed it on emotional trauma. When I was in bed rest longer than out of bed. When new warning signs were ringing but I was too exhausted to do anything about it. When the onset of long covid meant that therapies I'd spent years trying to find for other pre-existing conditions, now no longer worked. Goodbye CPAP miracle, and those finally restful sleep I'd only gotten for...4 years, was it? Suddenly my life for 3-4 months had become inundated with having 1-3 scheduled specialist appointments per week. ***Week***. And coming back with no answers. Of 'maybe's. Of 'Let's try'. Of more adverse effects to experimenting with prescription than any actual help. Everything I've found by now, that helps me manage "a half life, a cursed life" as pre-body Voldemort would say, I found from the online Long Covid community who were attempting to manage their own health – a grassroots movement of sorts.

How do you ring the alarm bell, and enforce the message well enough that you're taken seriously. That you're not being a hypochondriac or a Debbie downer, just being realistic to take as close to proactive measures as you can, to avoid the worser of fates?

Maybe I should had listened to my spidey senses more. That even now, 2-3 weeks later, my spine is still tingling and giving me sensations, code for certain spike protein cells to say "we haven't left yet. We're still here. And we're going to spread to those you love, whether they know it or not."

I grew up writing thousands of pages of stories, always writing, always typing - words came naturally to me. And even as I type this, those with Long Covid know - I'm actively being impacted with the memory loss, lack of word recall, the cognitive (___), holding onto a thought or a memory, wanting to annotate it onto here, and then it's like a mindwipe 1 second later - "What was I going to say?" Thoughts and memories are cotton candy in water. But I knew if I don't fuel my "nervous anxiety and worry" about the situation now, this is never getting written. So I use my knowledge of hacks and accommodations, giving myself and my story my best chance, to write this in real-time from the waiting room of UCHealth ER.

"Would you be open to hearing me explain the details for why it matters?" I text my brother.

"Eh, probably not/not really" He replies back.

Epilogue: We're more than a month after my brother's ER visit. He rested for 1 week after his visit. All the doctors could diagnose him with was arm pain - despite the d-dimer fact ringing that levels were astronomically high. He saw how much tears I was, articles I had sent him of people more athletic than him dying from heart-related issues or the effects from Long Covid they were now suffering from. Him resting for 1 week was our in-between agreement, whereas he wanted to continue training urgently for a marathon, and I wanted him to rest for a 2nd week, if not a month.

He appears fine still. But as the canary in the coal mine, where I've already been afflicted, I'm just holding my breath. I would love to be wrong, absolutely love it. But I'm scared for him, his future, his livelihood. Thus, I want him to learn from my experience – I'd love for anyone to increase measures after learning from my experience.

So I'll still be here — watching, waiting, observing, until I can't any longer.

~ Rahie

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Rahie T is a Colorado native, enjoys pulling witty quotes from Marvel to use in everyday circumstances and started a small business online three months ago selling handcrafted seed bead jewelry to help pay for her medical debt and help with her family's expenses as they're undergoing financial hardships. Her website is

<https://littlebluemarket.com/storefront/flower-of-memory/>



Online Shop



GoFundMe

She was a VA Health Care System biomedical engineer.