

## A Story of Dating During COVID – 19

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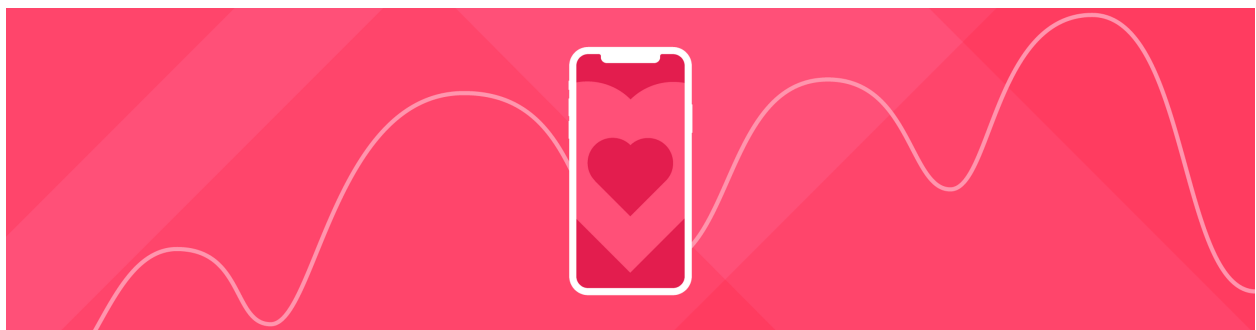
*I decided to illustrate tips and pearls of wisdom for dating during COVID-19 through a story that combines ideas revealed in the NYTimes, NPR, PBS, and various state health departments.*

It seemed like everyone was still talking about Chase's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was the last time all of his friends had gotten together since COVID-19 infringed on every inch of their lives. After relocating his business to Denver, Chase had invited his high school friends, a handful of visiting college buddies, his work colleagues and his girlfriend of the week to join in celebration of his birthday.

One week later, the stay-at-home order hit. Chase once again had to relocate his business operations, only this time it was to his basement office, while his employees retreated to their homes. He missed the constant banter with his work friends and employees and the noise around the office. But more than that, he *really* missed the afterwork scene - gathering with friends at the breweries, the excitement of discovering different women, deciding who to invite out or... over.

He had had a series of very passionate relationships that he thought might last when he was living in California. They didn't. Months earlier, he called his mother one evening in frustration and told her to forget about grandkids. She thought he was joking.

Then COVID-19 happened and Chase realized that he was lonely and admitted to himself that despite his busy social life, he had been lonely even before the pandemic. The stress and fear of the pandemic put life into a different perspective. He wondered how he was going to find love between the floating virus particles. He wanted a real hug and genuine human contact. He was



tired of the one and done dates. He wanted a true steady companion to celebrate life's joys and conquer life's adventures.

He clearly needed a whole new way of thinking about dating. His charisma, more than his curly dark hair, bright green eyes, cute smile, and athletic build, had always been enough to attract the ladies. He remembered reading in the online article that dating app engagements hit record numbers, with some companies reporting a 700% increase in activity in the past few months. Without missing a beat, he registered online for the most popular dating apps that he had

heard his friends talk about: Hinge, Bumble, and Tinder. He then came across JSwipe for Jewish people interested in finding love and he thought about his Jewish grandmother. What would she say if she knew how many women he had dated? He thought about how times had changed from when she was looking for love in the 1950s. He had taken home so many women on their first or second date, often using that as the deciding factor on whether to build a relationship.

Chase's exploration into the online dating world started slowly. First, he texted women, then started virtually chatting with them through Zoom, usually while they each had a drink. Without having to worry about where to go, who is paying and how the night will end, his dates were filled with more conversation and real communication.



He found that he and his date were more open about their priorities and feelings early on. He was surprised to hear himself say things like, "I wish..." "I miss..." and "I'm scared." It led to conversations about fears, hopes, and dreams, including what he wanted in a relationship.

Rachel stood out from the others. She was easier to talk to and while she got dressed up for the first few Zoom chats, he then got to see the more authentic side of her. Sometime she wore make-up, but not all the time. Sometimes the background revealed a clean living room, and other times a sink full of dishes. They were even able to joke around about their crazy COVID hair.

Since they didn't have to commute to a date location, they were never in a rush but could just relax and enjoy their time together. Dating had never been so chill and relaxed. It had never been so enjoyable. Little did Chase know, but COVID was working to his advantage. COVID dating allowed their relationship to be a slow courtship. It felt more romantic and there was more attachment developing than in any of his previous relationships. He had never gotten to know someone before the kissing started. He didn't know that sex leads to a release of hormones that trick you into thinking you are in love. This time he had a chance to fall in love for real.

As he dreamed about meeting Rachel in person, Chase realized that he would have to be more creative and make more of an effort than usual. He imagined dates that were safer from COVID. These tended to be more cut off from the rest of the world, making them ripe for romance. They talked about meeting and what that would be like for each of them. They talked about each other's risk levels. He had been home alone, with his only work contact being through Zoom calls. He wanted to limit his contact because he visited his grandmother once a week to help with chores and to drop off groceries. Rachel had a roommate and they were both working from home. Instead of dating, Rachel's roommate opted for an intimate buddy that she knew was safe and could fulfill her needs for human contact without putting her at high risk of exposure. Some other friends had opted to designate intimate buddies with no interest in pursuing a longer term relationship.



Rachel dreamed about physical intimacy with Chase. Before the first kiss, would they each get tested for COVID, like with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases? They would have to talk about it and decide. After kissing, would they engage in sexting, then intimate video interactions, and then in-person sexual interactions? A larger ventilated space would be safest... perhaps outdoors... maybe wearing a seductive face

covering, maybe positioned so that we are not directly face-to-face? They were smart and Rachel enjoyed the idea of being creative and the conversations that would precede any interactions and feed the flames.

Fortunately, Chase and Rachel were on the same page when it came to their first meeting. Had they not been on the same page, Chase and Rachel were each ready to insist on measures to ensure their safety. They both agreed that they felt comfortable meeting in an open public space while wearing masks. Confluence Park seemed a safe place to meet and stroll outdoors in their masks. Chase remembered how his grandmother talked about meeting his late grandfather and stories of how they used to go for long walks along the harbor and dream about learning to sail. When Rachel arrived, she was radiating in a beautiful summer dress. She hadn't dressed up, not even for work, in months, and was enjoying the freedom of a dress. Wanting so badly to see if she was smiling, Chase found himself watching her eyes closely and learning to read her eyes and eyebrow expressions. Their gaze melted any COVID distancing between them.

Chase had brought a large blanket which, after their stroll, he laid out on the grass. They both sat down and continued talking when Chase noticed the backs of an older couple, sitting on lawn chairs holding hands under the shade of a blooming linden tree. Rachel looked at them, turned her head towards Chase and smiled. Only this time, he didn't notice. He was too busy staring at the older couple. "Grandma?" he called out. The petite gray-haired lady turned and looked back between the two chairs. Blushing beneath her mask, she said, "Oh hello, Chase. This is Bob. We met on Match.com."