

Miami Herald columnist & author Dave Barry on Coronavirus

On day 43,000 of sheltering in place, I decided to make a face mask.

For a while they were saying that we civilians didn't need to wear face masks, but now they're saying that we should. At least I think that's what they're now saying. The only way to know for sure would be to turn on the TV news, and I don't want to do that because it sounds like this:

NEWSPERSON: Coronavirus! Coronavirus! Coronavirus! For more on this, here is a different newsperson located somewhere else for safety reasons.

DIFFERENT NEWSPERSON: Coronavirus! Coronavirus! Coronavirus! Now back to you

NEWSPERSON: Thank you. Coronavirus! Coronavirus! Corona ...

And so on, 24 hours a day. Sometimes 30 hours a day. That's how much coronavirus (Coronavirus!) news there is.

Anyway, I think now we're supposed to wear masks. When I walk my dog, Lucy, around my neighborhood I'm seeing more and more people in masks. We all keep our distance, of course. We eye each other warily, like gunslingers in a Western, ready to react instantly if the other person draws a gun, or — much scarier — coughs.

But I think I'm getting eyed more warily lately because I'm not wearing a mask, and neither is Lucy.

If I could, I would buy a mask, but that is of course ridiculous. It's like saying "If I could, I would fly like a bird" or "If I could, I would buy toilet paper." So I thought maybe I could make a mask. It would be something to do, and I'm desperate for things to do. Several days ago, when our bank statement arrived in the mail, my reaction — seriously — was "All RIGHT! Now I can BALANCE THE CHECKING ACCOUNT!"

So I Googled "make face mask" and the first thing that popped up was an article on the CNN website titled "How to make your own face mask" with instructions "based on guidance from the Vanderbilt University Medical Center and Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin."

Step one was to cut some fabric into two 9x6-inch rectangles. So far, so good. Then came step two: "On the top of the 9-inch side, pin or mark a 2-inch opening in the center of the top edge of the 9-inch side, between the 3.5- and 5.5-inch points, along the top edge. Then, sew the edges on either side of where you pinned or marked the opening."

This is where the Vanderbilt University Medical Center and Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin lost me. I cannot sew. I am not proud of this: It's just a fact. Over the years

I have tried many times to sew things, and I always fail badly. My sewing incompetence is so extreme that it was once noticed by Oprah Winfrey.

I am not making this up. Back in the 1990s, I was in Chicago to promote a book on The Oprah Winfrey Show, and as is required by federal law for male authors on book tour, I wore a navy blue sport jacket. The morning of the show, one of the buttons fell off, and I attempted to sew it back on myself, using a sewing kit that was in my hotel room. By stabbing my finger repeatedly and using approximately 200 yards of thread, I was able to create a large complex thread snarl around the button without really attaching it.

When I got to the TV studio, Oprah saw this thing dangling from my jacket — it looked like the button was being attacked by some kind of mutant insect — and asked me about it. When I explained the situation, she called for a needle and thread and told me to hand over my jacket. Then, in front of a live studio audience, she sewed the button on, efficiently and firmly. Oprah is a person of many talents.

My point is, I cannot sew a face mask. So I have decided that, if I have to go to a public place, I'll wear a bandanna. My preference would be for a conservative bandanna, ideally in navy blue, but the only spare bandannas available in my household are ones from daughter's old summer camp, Camp Highlander. They are quite colorful. When I wear one over my face I look like a festive bank robber, who perhaps is robbing the bank to raise funds for a community-theater production of "Cats."

But I will wear my bandanna. I also will keep sheltering, and social distancing, and washing my hands, and avoiding touching my face, and whatever else they tell us we need to do. If, tomorrow, they tell us that everyone should duct-tape a spatula to his or her forehead, then by God I will duct-tape a spatula to my forehead. Because I really, really want this to be over.

I don't like the feeling of helplessness, and of wondering if the people in charge really know what they're doing. Maybe they should ask Oprah.

I don't mean to sound overly negative; so far my family and I are doing OK. I hope you are, too. Because we're all in this together. So if you happen to see me in the supermarket — I'll be the festive bank robber — we can give each other supportive waves from a safe social distance. And then we can fight over the lone remaining spatula. I hear they're running out.