

Hmm DAILY

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Rachel Hoang, Utah



by Lori Teresa Yearwood

A BAD NIGHT'S sleep can meet many definitions, says Salt Lake City hair salon owner Rachel Hoang. There are the times when the sinus headaches hit, for example. And then there are the times of Major Stress. Like Sunday, May 17.

“I had a friend staying with me because she was leaving a bad situation with a boyfriend and so she had been hanging out with me over the weekend in order to separate herself from this person. My house was a safe space.”

On top of the “normal stresses of the pandemic,” Hoang said, it was the last week of school for her kids, and it was the week she was reopening her business, Curly Hair Studios. Add to that the pressure she felt to try to help her friend and it definitely all equaled Major Stress.

Midnight.

Hoang’s dresser fan and ceiling fan whirred, creating a cold white noise that served as a comforting contrast to the 20-pound weighted blanket she lay beneath. Still, one thought raced repetitively through the 36-year-old’s mind:

“Who else needs help?”

Of course, Hoang wondered if she had best helped her friend. Had she been supportive enough? Or should she have been less supportive? Her friend was planning on returning to her own home the next morning. Would she be safe?

“I analyze the situation until it is literally dead on the ground,” Hoang said, “then I realize I am not responsible for other people’s lives or actions.” Sometimes, the white noise helps to drown it all out. But that Sunday, the fans weren’t enough. Nor was the two-hour Epsom salt soak in her bathtub jacuzzi. Or watching *Frozen* on Netflix with her three boys.

Now, past 1 a.m., Hoang’s husband was downstairs watching television. Hoang lay down and closed her eyes, her mind drifting to a recent confrontation with a client. Hoang had been suited up in a plastic face shield as well as a mask.

“The client suggested that neither of us needed to wear a mask.” Hoang had already sorted out her answer: “The Health Department requires the stylist to wear a mask.”

The client quickly acquiesced.

“She knew I wasn’t going to change my mind.”

Still, when Hoang thinks about conversations like that, she can’t sleep.

“For weeks before I re-opened, I had all these conversations in my head ahead of time so I prepared myself with each client and decided which stylist should work with whom so we could support each other.”

One a.m. Everyone in the seven-chair salon is sticking to pretty strict rules: No more than four chairs utilized at one time. No more than one guest per stylist. No one waiting for appointments. The bathroom is sanitized after each client uses it, and the front door of the studio is kept locked so that stylists greet their guests one-on-one.

“We’ve also made a pact amongst ourselves,” Hoang said, “Until this is over, we will be very careful in our lives so we don’t bring it to each other or our guests. We’re not going to large gatherings and we’re not going to stores unless we need to.”

Three a.m.

Because of the requirement for social distancing inside the 1,300 square foot studio, Curly Hair Studios is operating at 50 percent of its pre-COVID rate. Thanks to federal grants for businesses, the drop in income hasn’t wrought havoc.

“But there is an overwhelming amount of people trying to get in, and you just can’t help all of them,” Hoang said.



Lori Teresa Yearwood. Photo: Cass Studios of Salt Lake City

Lori Teresa Yearwood's work can be found at loriyearwood.com