



KS2 / KS3 WELLBEING RESOURCE COVID-19 COMMUNITY STORIES

A collection of real-life accounts
written between May and September 2020

Local stories; view-points from other countries; stories shared by young and old alike, from all walks of life and offering a range of perspectives.

A teaching tool and community resource to help with
understanding, expressing and reflecting on the
personal and community-wide impact of Covid-19.

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Ages for independent reading, followed by content age, if different, are shown

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Social-distanced Play



Lockdown feels stupid. You can barely spend any time with friends and they're not allowed in your house. Next Monday is the 6th of July and I'll be inviting someone round to play Minecraft with me. I like it because it's pretty creational and I can build things. Sometimes I'm just thinking about what I can build next.

In the beginning of lockdown I went to the park and did a bit of biking or we played football as a family, but sometimes, when Iona, my twin sister, doesn't want someone to have the ball, she just lies on top of it and I have to kick it out from under her!

I really like football and play in the garden. We helped our dad make a patio here and it's good for playing football because it's quite flat. I practise skateboarding on it too, up and down, up and down. We helped by flattening the rubble out and spreading it all around so my dad could put slabs on it. It was a long job and I enjoyed helping but sometimes it got a bit boring so me and Iona started doing challenges like "biggest pile smashed down is a winner" and we even made pretend things out of the rubble as a game.

Recently I've been able to play a lot with my friends at the park. But football with friends, how do you social distance in that?! I would usually tackle because that's my style. My dad always says "try to pass and shoot" and we mostly stay apart from each other but not always.

One time I scored such a goal, I didn't even expect it at all and it went right in – and my friend Louis, he swung me round like anything. He just doesn't understand social distancing. A lot of people run around like lock-down isn't a thing, like it's a legend. I think it's ok though 'cause it's near to the end of it. Schoolchildren are going back to school so they're already learning and mixing.

I don't like going to school at home 'cause I like my proper teacher. Dad pushes us quite hard and mum is just so relaxed. My real teacher has done 2 videos though. Because I've finished all my maths sheet she said I'll get a charter star when we get back to school so I was pleased. I've done a bit of Skype video with my friends but I kind of don't like it – seeing your friend but on a screen, like your friend turns out to be a computer.

I'm looking forward to going back to school, I'll be able to see my friends for real, every day. I quite like going on walks and it's been good now that I can go with a friend. Mum loves to walk and I take my bike quite a lot. Iona and I both got new bikes in lockdown. My friend Louis loves the steep hill but I love it more, I like going on really fast stuff; when I'm coming down the hill like that it feels like I'm flying.

One of our gerbils, Brownie, has died in lockdown. We were watching a programme about people escaping from their homes, and then we found her. I felt sad and wondered if she got a gerbil virus. I carried her to the grave and we planted a sunflower over her because gerbils like sunflower seeds and Brownie liked them very much.

Sing your Heart Out



My name is Lolly and I am 10 years old. I have a brother, Frazer who is 8 years old and a baby sister Cece who is one. My mum and dad had to work during lockdown and we stayed with my Nana and Poppy who live downstairs.

My Nana did a lot of schoolwork with us which is quite good because she is a teacher. Some of the subjects I was given from school were tricky because I didn't even know how to do them but Nana taught me them from scratch, she is quite a good teacher! I am going into year 6 now and I have SATS next year and I do not want to fall behind. I enjoyed studying with my Nana but it was sometimes a bit stressful – learning at home is incredibly stressful!

It has been quite hard with my dancing, we haven't been able to dance face to face, or practise our routines on zoom because of the timing and the delay when dancing in our groups. We were meant to go to the Dance World Cup in Italy where we dance against a lot of different countries. We came 3rd last year and we all got medals! There are about 20 children in my group, and I am one of the oldest.

We will have missed 6 months of school in September. I went back on two set days for three weeks, but it was quite hard because in our classroom we had no decorations or displays. We had to stand on little dots as you couldn't really go near anyone or sit with anyone else on your desk and it felt a bit lonely some times, it wasn't quite easy to play with people.

I sing and play guitar, my Granddad does too. For the past six weeks on a Monday night we sang songs in front of 20 people in an Open Mic on zoom. There were no other children and I was the youngest. Some of the songs we did are 'I was only joking' by Rod Stewart and 'My Girl' and next week is going to be my favourite. We're doing a song called 'Old Man', it's a lovely song to sing and Poppy has a lot of memories from it.

My birthday was really fun. Some of my presents were activities to do, we made cakes and brownies and we made some slime. A group of really close friends pulled up in their cars at the front of our house on the curb and sang the Birthday song which was really sweet. I feel it might have been better than if I had my birthday not in lockdown because every year normally I have the same party, a disco - it's nice that I did not have the same party this year.

Football is the Thing



Being one of the ones who got to go to school was kind of nice in the beginning. I was really lucky I could be with other children and I got to play football every day! The P.E. teacher got permission to play a different kind of football game; just little amounts of people, playing 3 or 5-a-side. You couldn't cross the half-way line, so no tackling; social distanced stuff. You passed between your team and scored from the halfway line (although sometimes we crossed the line to shoot when the teacher wasn't looking!). It was actually quite fun.

I didn't do much footy at home, there's not much space for it in our garden. But my brother spent a lot of time doing tricks and keepy uppies. He started lockdown on around 500 and by July he was doing over 1000! Him and his friend kept sending videos to each other of their latest record. It was something to keep them going I guess, but back then I could play football at school.

I did see my friends on 'House-party' quite a bit, playing the games, trivias and quizzes on it. We also got inventive with it and made our own games, agreeing together to change the rules and create something new.

We did do a lot of artwork at school in the beginning and I like the creative stuff because I'm a doer and time goes by more quickly when you're 'doing'. You always get to do something different so the days feel less repetitive. The best was the massive Marble Run that we made from bricks, tubes, all sorts of bits and pieces. My friend and me started it and others added to it, working in twos, so we all got to build it together, in a social distanced way.

We were all years mixed together then because we weren't very many children. You got closer to people you kind of knew before from other year groups. Then when more children were allowed back to school, from this one big class we got split from the inside, and us year 5's were separated from the friends we had made in year 3 and 4.

I don't mind lots of rules, but I don't like it when the rules change, I like to settle into stuff. When the split happened everything changed again, like when you have a new teacher. Suddenly we had a one-way system, and we all had to queue for ages at one sink to wash our hands. There was a lot of washing hands all day. With more kids in it was harder to social distance and there was no more football. It was all quite annoying and I felt unsettled.

When I go back to school I'm hoping it will be like it was before the holidays, I hope it won't be back to normal-normality. That feels like years ago. It'll be winter soon and people always get colds and flu. Coronavirus is a bit like flu so I think it will come along at a similar time. Then there'll probably be another lockdown and everything at school will have to change all over again. At least if we went back to part-normal it wouldn't be so much change to cope with.

I'm just off to play my first official football match, actually it's a tournament. I usually play CDM (central midfield defender) so that keeps me busy on the pitch. Hopefully we'll win some of our matches and that will make for a nice memory.

Magic and Mystery in the Garden



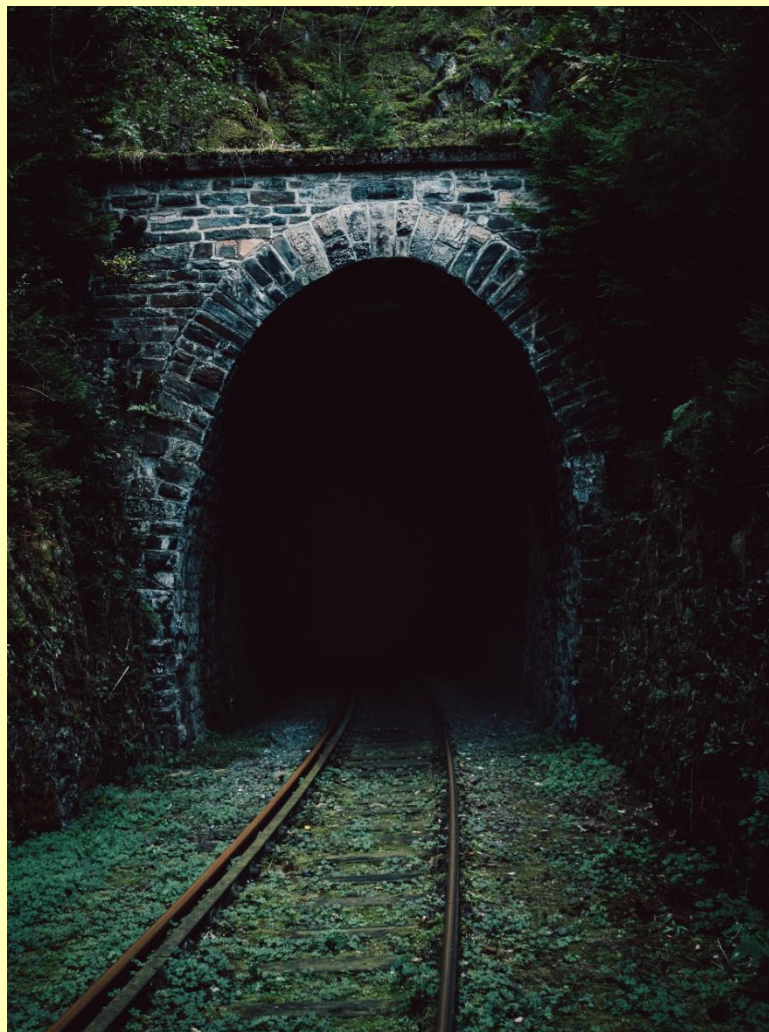
There has been a lot of telly. I tried to structure lots of other activities but on some days it just felt like school work, cooking, eating, life admin and going to the same park was too much. And whilst we watched lots of telly we discovered Lego elves!

With access to an extensive dressing up box my boys were inspired! In gold unitards topped with either a tutu, a pinafore, a cloak; with feather boas, Christmas hats and cat whiskers the 'mummy, chase me' game suddenly became more complex.

Before I could catch them I was trapped in a magic portal: 'zaziiim!!' Or they had escaped into another world from me through another portal, carefully closing it behind them! A world away from their restricted everyday life? A better world?

Even before lockdown we had discussed whether we should buy a trampoline; friends kept asking why we didn't have a climbing frame, a swing, a teepee. But in the end having an uninterrupted stretch of grass on which to run up and down their imagination has been enough. I'm glad I was able to put my faith in it as I think they have come out the other side with so many more stories to tell!

An Italian Adventure



I am a 12 years old girl and my name is Gaia. I live in Italy in Pisa with my sister Apolline who is 8 and my mum. From the second week of lockdown (beginning of March) my school started online lessons. We used Zoom to communicate. I do 10 subjects and each teacher took turns to deliver their lesson.

My day started at 9am when my first period teacher would take the register. We had to sit in a quiet place with our school equipment and dress accordingly (we don't wear uniforms in Italy). I had 3 lessons per day then break for lunch then back for back for 1 hour in the afternoon for homework. This was Monday to Friday every day until lockdown was over. For our final grades we took tests and our teachers kept track of what we were doing on Zoom. During the day we were not allowed out apart from to the nearest shops (no further than 200 metres).

Sometimes we would go to my grandparents who live 5 minutes away by bike for a couple of days so that my mum could carry on working. We had to be incredibly careful as there were many police cars roaming around, checking that people were not out without permission. We would leave in the evening with our bikes (me, my sister Apolline and my mum) with the bike lights switched off and a torch. If the police stopped us, they would have fined us 400 Euros each and my mum was very worried about this.

One night we saw a police car driving in our direction and we started cycling very fast and hid under a railway arch. We were so scared, but we kept giggling. My mum was quite angry, and she said that if the police heard us and fined us, she would take it off our pocket money until it was paid back! They didn't see or hear us, and we got to my grandparents safely!

Rapunzel - a re-imagined modern tale



Not so very long ago, although it seemed like forever, a little girl lay on the living room floor drawing a picture. It was her Nana's birthday next week and the little girl was making her a very special present. It was a picture of a tall tower and sitting in the window was her favourite character, Rapunzel, combing her long hair.

School had closed and because her mum and dad didn't have to go to work anymore there was plenty of time to play games and watch films in their flat at the top of the tall tower block.

But it soon became clear to the little girl that really her parents just wanted to watch the news as if they were waiting for something, The little girl wasn't sure what they were talking about and when she'd asked her mum about the news she'd just smiled and stroked her hair.

So she went into her bedroom to play with her toys and read her favourite story about Rapunzel and how she was locked in a tall tower by a wicked witch and waited for a prince to save her. One day the little girl was reading her story by the window when she looked out onto the estate.

From the window she could see the playground. Her dad said that she wasn't allowed in the playground anymore. She wasn't allowed to see her friends or visit her Nana. Suddenly she saw something. It was another little girl and she was running toward the playground.

As she watched, the little girl slipped through the railings past the slide and the trampolines and sat down on one of the swings. The two children's eyes met. They froze for a moment then the girl on the swing smiled. It was the sweetest warmest smile that you can imagine. The little girl in the flat smiled back.

The next day the mysterious girl came again. This time the girl in the flat was braver. She stood up on her bed and leaning against the window she shouted “What’s your name?” The girl in the playground could see her and was trying to talk to her but of course she could not hear because of the glass so she gave a puzzled look. This encouraged the girl in the flat to shout louder and bang on the window “Do you want to play?”

The door to the bedroom opened “Who are you shouting to?” said her mum “There’s a girl in the playground. Can I go down and play with her?” the little girl said but by the time Mum reached the window the girl in the playground was gone.

Her mother smiled and stroked her daughter’s hair.

Day after day the friendship grew. The two children would smile and the girl in the flat would put the palm of her hand against the glass and wait for the day when they could meet.

One morning her father came to her, would she like to come to the shop and buy a pint of milk? Of course she would, she'd love to come to the shop, she hadn't been out of the flat in days. As soon as the door to the flat opened the little girl ran down the stairs almost tripping over her own feet with excitement.

As the flat block door opened she charged through it across toward the playground; the slide, the trampolines, the swing were all empty, there was no sign of her friend anywhere. When her father caught up with her he put an arm around her and together they walked to the shop. They bought their milk and a packet of sweets but even her favourite sweets could not cheer the little girl up.

She had not seen the girl in the playground, the girl whose smile was so warm and sweet. But then, just as her father was opening the door to the block of flats she saw her sitting on the swing, staring up at her bedroom window looking for her. Without saying a word she ran toward the playground but already the other girl was up and slipping back through the railings.

Breathless and panting the little girl called again “Wait! Please wait, I want to speak to you!” This time there was no glass. The other girl heard her and she stopped. “What’s your name, please tell me what’s your name?” “Hope”; my name is Hope”. “Thank you” said the little girl. The two children exchanged a sweet warm smile then turned and ran back to their flats.

A Room of my Own



A really big event happened in lockdown. Me and Will, my twin brother, got bikes, with 21 gears to be precise. We had 6 year old bikes and we're nearly 8 so it's really, really good now we have bigger bikes to ride. We're allowed to cycle around five of the streets just around our house.

I go on a pogo stick a bit sometimes and Adam at the bottom road, he gave me an old 2-wheeled scooter. I go scooting the streets that we're allowed to go down, and on the Thursday night clapping we go round and round on our bikes, saying hello to everyone.

Sometimes we cycle about looking for treasures but so far we've only found flowers and stuff like that.

When I wake up we have breakfast and we walk round the block and then come back in to 'go to school'. My dad teaches us every day and my mum twice a week as she's mostly trapped upstairs; she has to do her own homework. She does phone calls and skype – she's basically an NHS person.

We have a 'times tables' for lockdown. First it's maths time, then English time, break time. Then arts and crafts and lunch time of course. Sometimes it's 'outdoor project' and once we had to hammer down bricks and tiles for a patio.

It's very different to normal school, we would be in a class full of children but we're sitting in a kitchen with just two people which can be boring, but it's kind of nice 'cause you can go grab a drink when you want and at school you have to wait till break or lunch to do that.

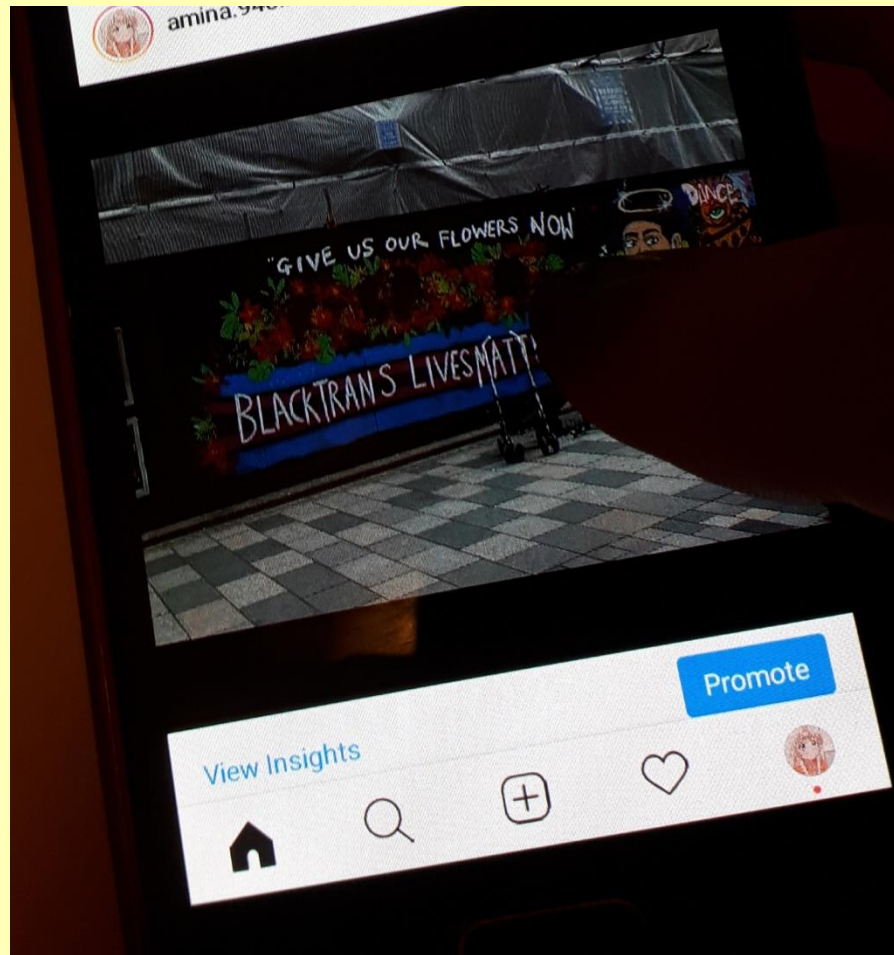
In the beginning of lockdown it felt like I was trapped indoors and wasn't allowed anywhere, but I got used to it. Obviously it's just different. It's a really big thing to get to go in the car somewhere, even just a mile. The other day we went in the car to pick something up at Halfords and it was actually really fun.

My dad built a balcony for the tree-house and it's so nice, I go in there every evening. The first friend I saw when we were allowed was Cleo who I've known about 6 yrs. There was enough space for us to play in the tree-house together and it was really fun.

We've had so much deliveries and I've had my birthday present delivered already! My friend's birthday was spoilt by lockdown because she was going to have a treasure hunt and none of us could go, sad times. But I am going shopping on my Birthday and I think it's quite nice that Boris Johnson is letting us go to the shops.

I sometimes get a bit fed up with my family - I see the same people every single day – and I go in my tree-house. Will likes to say it's 'his' tree-house too but he never goes in there. My parents are never in it so then finally I can be by myself. I make potions sometimes and it's peaceful, except for noisy people passing by on the street but I say hello and chat a bit with the ones I know, like Daisy, and Janet from across the road.

Social Media Saves the Day



On the 12th of March, I returned from a college trip to New York, merely hours before the whole city locked down. Whilst I was aware of Covid's presence there, it almost didn't feel real. Rules weren't yet in place and it felt like everyday life with extra hand washing and anti-bacterial gel. Though of course, after returning and finding out that New York went into lockdown just after we left really put it into perspective. Only days later, a lockdown was announced here and my family decided to follow some guidelines straight away. This was difficult for me because I hadn't been able to see my college friends for a week and now we all had to stay inside.

I overcame that quickly though and turned to social media and apps like Zoom to communicate with my in-real-life friends as well as Internet friends. I participated in many Zoom calls with my close friends because we missed each other so much. We were all just boxes on a screen though and we craved face to face meet ups and missed each other's hugs.

I feel that I bonded with and grew closer with some of my Internet friends because we were all in the same boat, stuck inside, not being able to see our in-real-life friends. We had not only a lot of time to pass, but also a need for communication. We shared our experiences and what we were doing to pass the time. Some of us were baking bread, brownies or cakes – I got into Asian cooking. Others had found new hobbies like crocheting or painting or DIY. We shared a lot of these things on Instagram, sending each other pictures of our creativity.

Social media, Netflix, YouTube, and Spotify have taken up a large part of my time in lockdown. I have been interacting with many people online and watching a lot of TV shows. Being someone who loves Kpop, I have been keeping up with new releases of my favourite groups such as BTS, Stray Kids and Blackpink.

And there has been so much content created over this period! I streamed many music videos and watched many livestreams including the ones created during the lockdown for entertainment, such as 'Dear Class of 2020' which was made to celebrate university students who were graduating (I may or may not have made my parents stay up past midnight to watch BTS's performance on that). I have discovered a lot of new music which has taken up a LOT of my phone's storage space (oops!).

Over this six month period, Covid 19 has not been the only problem that has cropped up for us. Racism has caused The Black Lives Matter movement to sweep through us in an incredible torrent of protests, fundraisers, and petitions. Personally, I have been sharing posts on social media as well as signing petitions and educating those who didn't understand and/or wanted to help.

I've been very engaged with raising awareness about this cause and causes like Black TRANS Lives matter too. Being part of the LGBTQ+ community myself, I feel very passionate about it. I went to a Black Lives Matter march locally with some friends. The atmosphere was a mixture of anger, pride, and euphoria. It was an incredible experience and I'm extremely proud to be part of this movement.

I feel that generally I've been more politically active, and I've been more invested in the news. Not only for our country and our (very slow) progress through this, but other places where suffering is at another whole level, such as Yemen who have had the virus hit amid a humanitarian crisis.

I've signed petitions, spread information and donated money because at least these are things I can do from home to help.

A Story within a Story



Please right-click
on the link below
to open and hear
Florence's audio story:

https://sites.create-cdn.net/sitefiles/9/4/0/94028/FLORENCE_S_AUDIO_STORY.m4a

Adapting to School Life



The week beginning the 16th March was probably (hopefully) the weirdest of my teaching career. It began with the whole school in. As the week progressed the year groups gradually ebbed away, until we ended up saying goodbye to our Year 11s with sweets, photos, speeches and giggles in the main hall. They had signed shirts, asked teachers to write messages in their books, clutched exercise and text-books, hugged (any attempt at social distancing was completely futile), and walked around their school for the last time as students. The mood was euphoric and tinged with sadness.

To add to the surreal nature of proceedings I was celebrating my 50th birthday that day and they all sang happy birthday to a red faced me. A year group robbed of the satisfaction of completing an exam, robbed of a Prom, robbed them of the delight and relief of their last exam.

I didn't return for 8 weeks. Never before have I had such a long break from education as a teacher. When I returned it was to supervise 8 delightful students, children of care workers, GPs and nurses who by then "knew the drill". They sat at computers and worked on their home learning that had been set by teachers - while I attempted to give assistance and not get within 2 metres of them. Tricky. Mostly they showed just how resilient, good humoured and self-sufficient they had become.

One day we were left with just two students by 12.30. We decamped to an office where we worked socially distanced at computers. One boy, aged 11, had arrived that morning hood up, in a foul mood. He was now chatting easily with the girl from year 10 but he was bored without his friends or the focus of a proper lesson. I said: "Do you want to go outside and run around a bit?"

Watching from the hard-court area where I sat with a cup of tea, I'd see him doing sit ups and planks. It truly was a case of showing initiative and self- coaching. I could almost hear him telling himself “right now, three-minute plank” or “ok, twenty sit ups.” It was a memory I will cherish.

Working from home has been very strange. My bread and butter, my normal days, are full of interactions as a drama teacher and form tutor and suddenly it's me and a laptop, answering e-mails from anxious staff, formulating grades for GCSE, participating in virtual meetings, learning a new language (Zoom, furlough, Teams, socially distancing), planning online work, checking and marking submissions.

No rehearsals, no drama club, no theatre trips or art exhibitions. But lots of ideas for an online exhibition and sharing some of the fabulous work I've been sent, including a skilfully edited duologue by two girls filmed in their separate homes.

I've been posting a challenge and a #thingstomakeyousmile photo on our arts Instagram post every day since the start of lockdown. I've been watching theatre online, reading plays, and longing to see my students face to face again.

Whatever else comes out of this for the students, they will have tapped reserves of patience, creativity, and determination unknown to them previously. They will also have experienced boredom, frustration and loneliness. There is absolutely no doubt that this generation, whether they are 2, 12 or 22, are going to need our support, love and care in the years to come.

Redeployed in the Swabbing Team



My name is Kim, I am a Health Visitor and have been redeployed into the swabbing team. My role as a health visitor stopped abruptly when the coronavirus pandemic hit the UK. There were approx. 50% of the team that were told they were going to be redeployed to help on the frontline. I was not given much notice about where I was going and expected to be sent to a ward to help out as best I could. I was surprised to have a phone call from my manager to say I was going to be joining the swabbing team and the (1 hour) training was going to be the next day and I was starting work at the weekend.

South East Ambulance Service were employed by Public Health England (PHE) to carry out the swabbing and so myself and 15 nurses set up the team to cover Surrey and Sussex to work 7 days a week. There was one nurse working from Tangmere, one from Durrington and two from Brighton daily. The shifts were 8am-8pm.

Our role began with swabbing Key Workers. We would get our work from PHE in the morning and then set off in the Ambulance with a paramedic. I remember being nervous on my first shift but soon realised that everyone was in the same boat, unprecedented circumstances with no real rule book to refer to. I swabbed nurses, Dr's, went to Prisons and Police stations, swabbed vicars and bus drivers and everyone who was at the time being told to carry on working to keep the country going.

We travelled all over the County, to places I have never been to before, to villages and towns that I did not know existed. Everywhere we went we were waved at and the smiles and appreciation from the general public was tangible. It was hard to go anywhere without being given free coffee and sandwiches by shops and garages and pushed to the front of the queue...something that I am not used to and felt a little uncomfortable about.

After a few weeks we were told to move into the care homes and start swabbing the residents. This was a sad time. The true horror and anxiety of what Covid could do in the care homes was very real. Very elderly and vulnerable residents who had not left their rooms in weeks, day rooms closed off, no relatives allowed to visit, -solitary confinement at a time in your life when you need human to human contact the most.

Can you imagine how an elderly person with dementia felt when someone in a white hazmat suit arrived in their room to perform what is a very unpleasant procedure? We saw many tired and worn out carers who were doing their very best with inadequate PPE and low on basic stocks.

I worked Bank Holiday VE day. There were flags and well wishers everywhere. When my crew mate and I came out of a care home there was a £10 under the Ambulance wiper with a note of thanks from someone. I am hoping over this whole time that the NHS's worth is appreciated. We are the luckiest nation in the World to have such a service and I feel it is sometimes taken for granted and often doesn't get the financial recognition it needs after every Budget. For instance, it is just as important as Defence as needs to be on a par with it.

Working weekends again and missing my daughter's birthday as I was out for 14 hours was a challenge. Nevertheless the whole experience has been positive for me, I have felt I was doing some important frontline work and the people I met from all walks of life were appreciative and lovely: standing at St Richards Hospital in a line clapping with staff one warm Thursday evening... very emotional.

Who Cares Wins



They say that you never know how you're going to react in a crisis until it happens. When the pandemic hit, my first thoughts were a strange tangle of fear, disbelief, denial and hope. I contacted loved ones, friends, family and even people I hadn't been in touch with for ages to make sure they were alright. Even while I was guiltily enjoying the reduced traffic noise, increased wildlife and Blitz-like community spirit, my thoughts turned more and more to people whose home life would have become like a prison; for some a place of real danger.

I found myself wanting to reach out and help. I knew that support services were being inundated with people like me trying to be helpful, and that's when The Bevy meals on wheels project grabbed my attention. I started delivering hot lunches once a week to local residents in the east Brighton area.

Lunches for people who would usually have been coming together at one of the supported social clubs at The Bevy to enjoy a meal and group activities but who were now stuck at home, often on their own. I felt socially awkward at first, not sure of how to talk to strangers through my mask and gloves; worried that I wouldn't know what to say or that I'd do the wrong thing. I got to know the faces on my route, and I found myself enjoying my hour of deliveries and chats.

One Friday, Terry, one of my regulars, told me that he'd not had TV or internet since a cable had come loose from the wall. I put together a list of local companies who could come out and give Terry a quote for the work. It took me a week or so to realise that Terry didn't have anyone else calling in and no phone to contact an electrician himself. I made contact with Fiona at Sacbod Electricians who, despite having no availability, came out on a weekend especially because of Terry's situation.

I met Fiona at Terry's on a Saturday morning, and after a quick look at the problem, was able to fix it on the spot. Although I'm good at the practical stuff, good at delivering the meals efficiently, good at getting the work done I've never worked as a front-line person before. I thought I wouldn't be very good at going beyond simply providing for people's basic needs; that I'd be too scared, too formal, too boring, but I've realised that I was avoiding something else. I've shied away from this front-line work because it means feeling deeply for someone, risking having them rely on me. It means caring.

So now I care about what happens to Terry, I'm anxious for him, I want him to be okay, he matters to me. Getting close to people can be scary, but I've also learned that it means I care, that I matter, and because of that, I can help. Now I know how I react in a crisis - I can count on myself to care.

A Teacher's Heart in the Community



I work as a Nursery Practitioner at Bevendean Primary school providing free education to children aged 3-4 years. The school is large, but undersubscribed, allowing us to have classes of up to 30 children.

Our awareness of the virus began slowly – first of all being aware of cases in China, then Spain, then France. Soon we were all aware as a member of staff had had potential contact with the virus and due to a lack of central guidance for managers, the school made the decision to close for 1 day while they waited for advice from public health England at the beginning of March. We reopened briefly in mid-March, before closing as lockdown descended. Like many schools we still were open to children of key workers and vulnerable families. We used our staff ‘snow leads’ system to manage the situation, which was a funny title when we had all the heat waves! I’ve been really impressed with the level of planning our managers have put in place.

I've seen how differently people react to Covid-19: some people are really cautious and have kept their children out of school, others are not worried, but didn't want their kids going to school while others were off. As a result, we've had as few as 3 children to care for on some days and at most only 7 kids. I'm looking forward to returning to work in September but am not sure how many kids we'll have as registrations have been very low so far.

Personally, I've had to reduce my working days and be redeployed across the school. We have a minimum number of staff working with kids, so I'm always working with other colleagues and under lockdown I ended up working with people I'd not regularly worked with before. With my extra time outside of work, I found myself feeling strongly that I needed to do something and reconnect with my community. I was aware of other people working harder and doing longer shifts than they had been before lockdown and I did feel guilty sometimes.

I considered using my prior nursing experience, but the NHS was inundated with volunteers. So, just 2 days after lockdown I was volunteering for my local pub, The Bevy, helping them deliver their 'meals on wheels' to local people who could no longer come to the pub for their community group days. I also helped out at the school with providing free school dinners for kids and collecting food from depots and driving it to outlets.

Plus, at home we've had the usual 'open door' policy for waifs and strays, so I've been as busy as usual in different ways.

I've been walking and gardening and there's been a real holiday feel during the crisis, despite all the cancelled events in my diary, and I have sometimes felt like I'm treading water and that the situation is unreal and dreamlike. There seemed to be a lot of positive change and possibility coming out of the situation and although I am hopeful, I do feel suspicious about laws and regulations coming in which could affect the bigger picture long term.

I do feel that I've learnt to be more aware of others' perspectives about how they react to the virus, and to be inclusive and not judge. After all, we need to look after each other.

Supermarket Sweep



I work at Tesco's in the checkout assistance – 'scan as you shop'. It was really hard in the beginning, back in the middle of March, before the pandemic even hit us, while everything you saw on the news was actually happening at our store: from customers queuing at 5:30 in the morning to panic-buying of toilet rolls and hand sanitiser. I saw people become selfish; I saw them in a different light, some even grabbing shopping out of other people's baskets.

Customers became scared that they couldn't get what they needed and on one day we counted 650 customers in the store at the same time! We'd open the doors and the queue would ram in. I thought "if this is what it's like here in our small and cosy town, how are people coping in big cities?" My cat lived on very posh cat food for a while as that was all that was left!

My family life was hard too as I was the only one leaving the house to go to work. I felt scared of the pandemic and very unsure about what was going to happen next. The atmosphere at work with so many angry customers could feel threatening and my family found it very hard seeing me upset when I came home from work, crying. But they always managed to pick me up with a hug and a smile. Thankfully I have a wonderful friendship with my work colleagues and we call each other our second family.

One day an elderly gentleman came into Tesco for some bananas and paracetamol. He was about to leave with nothing so I went over to ask if he was ok and he explained that he couldn't get his two items. So the next day I started early and managed to get his bananas and gave him some paracetamol that I had at home. I didn't tell him that they were mine. He was so appreciative, he cried and I welled up, but these were happy tears.

We feel sorry for the school children but feel there have been some good lessons learned for some by being at home and taking part in domestic routines, including our grandchildren. We miss them terribly, no cuddles or hugs, but technology allows us to keep in touch as much as we want to. When we grew up we did not have the joy of having a phone and contact was by letter writing, so conversation and arrangements took quite a while.

Until 18th May we stayed locked in but then we went for a walk in the field behind us. It was interesting to see how Nature was thriving and had changed since before the Virus. On the 26th of May we took our first steps on the pavements around the streets nearby and observed the changes in other people's gardens. Life has changed for us but we feel that if we observe the rules we are doing the best we can for all including of course our dedicated NHS.

By April things started to improve, people started to come together. My job changed a lot due to measures that have been put in to place to protect staff and the public.

We can be put anywhere from being outside making sure the queue is working and customers are staying a safe distance apart to counting customers in and out as we are only allowed 80 in the store at a time. It used to be a case of 'the customer is always right, always comes first'. We've all had to adapt to being in control of how customers shop here to ensure we can keep social distancing for both them and us while also making sure they have had a good and safe experience while shopping.

And now, so much positive has come out of this for us working in Tesco. Most, if not all the customers are lovely. We have had cards, chocolates and gifts and they always say thank you and appreciate what we do which, sadly, previous to the pandemic, was not always the case.

A lovely regular customer made us key rings. They are made of wood and shaped like a shopping basket which is engraved with “Thank you for your service, you are heroes too”. I feel like suddenly a whole world of people like us, people who are in so-called ‘lower skilled’ jobs are being properly appreciated for what we do!

The Virtual Classroom



My name is Gill and I live in Portslade. On March 17th I was teaching a year 3 maths lesson when my head teacher came and told me that that anyone with poor respiratory health was to be sent home. I left after the lesson and from there stayed at home. I had to prepare work for children to send it electronically for them to do, mark it and send it back with any critical things to look at and how to change it.

The sad thing about that was there was not any way for me to verbally explain what I wanted them to do or how to make anything easier.

Teaching is a completely different world. Teachers understand how to explain things and children go with that, asking when they are unsure, and the problems are solved. Many of the children didn't do the work because the parents found it quite difficult to understand, especially in Maths. It was like me asking them to get in a car and drive it and they'd never had any driving lessons.

Emails were answered immediately as well as parent conferencing and queries asking how to work problems out, there was no let up. We then went into zoom conferencing, not zoom lessons, as the children needed to see a friendly face rather than more work.

At the same time, I was teaching my grandchildren for 3 x 45 minute lessons each day. They found it extremely difficult a lot of the time. They asked: “Why are you torturing us, Nana, you are supposed to be kind to us!” They were quite lethargic and wanted to give up the ghost, but they did plod on - it was a chore to say the least. So I understand how parents felt and I felt very sorry for the parents.

In my school the key worker and vulnerable children returned and were all put in bubbles. The Reception and Year One children came back but no other year groups until September. The persistent effort and achievements with children online have been really brilliant. Some achieved more than I would ever have expected them to. Just to keep going and sending things in from the first to the last day.

Of the 30 children in my class, 15 children still managed to keep up with the work. It wasn't easy for lots of my children, many live near the seafront in flats without gardens. It will be so lovely to see them again.

We're going back in bubbles of 30 and not mixing with the other year groups. We will have 15 desks in each room and everyone has to have their temperature taken, desks looking forward, no group work, very alien to what they should be doing. We will eat together, do as much learning outdoors, reading, maths, and try not to cross contaminate with other class bubbles - which is going to be tricky. If anybody has any virus then the whole bubble will have to stay at home for 2 weeks and I'll have to go back to online learning again.

These 6 weeks of no online learning have been the best thing for me, as well as knowing that I'll go back into school. I also had my birthday and that was really lovely, but it was again most strange. Birthdays in lockdown have been strange.

The best part was when I could see my extended family again. Not to see my other daughters and grandchildren was very difficult, and to go out for a walk or a family bike ride was great. I had a bike bought for me, and it was so lovely to get the wind in your face.

The Doctor's Diagnosis



I work as a GP in a small rural surgery. Our area has been relatively unaffected by the Covid illness – we have had less than 10 confirmed cases in our patient population of just over 5000 people and all of those cases have had only minor symptoms (and came from the local hospital). It has been extraordinary to see and read about the situation in other areas of the country and the devastating effect that the illness has had on care home communities.

My job involves the diagnosis and management of health conditions. In comparison to so many people who have been furloughed, or worse, my working life has continued as normal, however the substance of my working day has changed immeasurably.

Faced with the challenge of looking after those people in society with the most fragile health without increasing their risk of catching a potentially fatal infection, my practice rapidly switched to different patterns of working and means of communication.

Previously, our working day was based on seeing 30 people, face-to-face, with booked appointments. Overnight, we stopped these to avoid direct contact where possible and reduce the risks of transmitting the disease. We started using telephone calls, text messages, emails and video consultations to look after our patients.

These options have existed for the last 10 years, but we have always been too busy to contemplate a change that would be so disruptive to our staff and patients. Our patients have been extremely understanding and it is testament to their resilience that there have been no complaints.

Despite these changes, I think that we would still be at risk of being overwhelmed if there were high levels of Covid infection in our area. My colleagues and I can see on the news what happens to health services in areas of high Covid infection, but what we have not seen and cannot predict is what happens to the general health of an area when, overnight, GPs change how they work and potentially sick people try to avoid contact with everyone, including their doctors. How many cancers may have been missed, or high blood pressures, which might lead to heart attacks or strokes?

Early on in the crisis, I watched a video from a thoughtful and impressive GP, who was working at a Covid assessment unit in London. He described assessing patients with suspected Coronavirus and working out whether they needed to be admitted to hospital or not. What struck me the most was the advice to counsel the patients being admitted to 'say goodbye' to their families, since they would not be allowed visitors in the hospital and might never see them again. I cannot forget this.

These situations were not exclusive to people infected with the virus. Hospitals and care homes shut their doors to all visitors in order to reduce the risk of infection. With hospitals representing separation from loved ones as well as the most likely place to catch the disease, I have had many conversations with people who are unwell and in other circumstances would definitely be requiring admission to hospital, but who chose to remain at home to avoid Coronavirus.

Going forward, I suspect that my job will not be the same again. The over-worn phrase 'the new normal' has truth and I am hard pushed to think of an aspect of my working or home life that will not have be affected by the pandemic. My hope is that this can provide an opportunity to improve systems and beliefs that have continued for many years 'just because'.

Fingers crossed.

Shielding in Lewes



As retired and “aged” local residents of 80 and 76 we would just like to say a little about our life since the Virus. From the start of lockdown we kept to the Stay Home rule without fail. We both like listening to music of all types and the repeats of comedy on the radio. My husband misses Sport on TV but we are fortunate to have a large garden and so we have been able to work in it as exercise and recreation.

The weather has been kind and so there have been only a few days when we did not want to be outside. As we have a pavement outside our fence that leads to the Downs we have been able to chat with people about their ways of dealing with the current situation. Thus, although in isolation, we are fortunate to be in touch with others, social distancing, of course.

The local people formed groups to offer their help and mobile phone numbers that we can contact for errands and fortunately very early in the crisis I had an email from Waitrose offering me, as a valued and vulnerable person, the opportunity to order my shopping on line. I had not shopped on line before but within minutes I became an “on-line shopper” and have had a delivery every week.

This has pleased me as I can feel independent, not dependent on others who are helping so many. When my delivery arrives I am extremely cautious to wash all packaging and remove bags and containers. My shopping habits have been changed forever and I have since obtained other household items on line for the home. We also have regular deliveries from the local butchers.

As we are both from large families we have had lots of phone calls to keep in touch and we make sure we call and check friends and family.

We both had our childhood during and just after the war. The problem then was not how to access food but to actually be able to obtain it because of great shortages and indeed rationing. Parents could only get their food allowance using Ration Books. The Toilet roll crisis amuses us as we grew up having squares of newspaper strung onto a skewer as the standard !!!!

A Chatterbox in Need



PATRICK, August 2020

Independent reading age: year 3 +

Content age: year 3 +

I haven't been out and about much. I do my shopping, that's about it. I've been careful but also my back is playing up. I've had a bad back for years and usually have bad days and worse days, but now the tablets are giving me the shakes. I've called the doctor and he said he's "thinking about it". The tablets don't even work at all for the pain, and it's not the same talking to the doctor on the phone to get my point across.

I don't like the phone. I've got one of these mobile things and I take it with me if I am out, but I can't be bothered with it much. I'm a face-to-face person.

Jubilee Court, where I live, it's a sheltered housing place, about 30 flats and most of them are 1-bed flats, so a lot of us live alone. There are some of them that won't come out, the rabbit hutches I call them. But I like seeing other people and a few of us have been meeting in the shared garden during lockdown. Some are getting their shopping delivered because they're sheltering, they haven't stepped outside Jubilee Court, and it's nice for us all to sit and chat in the garden. We were doing it already, we've just carried on, but social distanced round the table, catching the sun when it's out.

It's good to chat, keeps us going, talking to different people; you just go down the garden and who knows who will be there today – it's a nice surprise!

All the social things I used to do stopped in lockdown, the Friday Friends Gardening group, Bridge the Gap 50+ social group. *The Bevy* pub and *Gladrags* have got 'Chatterboxes' going instead. We just had our first one last week to round off July nicely. The pub cooks us a lunch and the *Gladrags* people chat with us all ... some of us don't need help with that! I have my own chatterbox at Jubilee Court, my friend who's come along to this too.

It was really, really nice to see all these folk who we haven't seen for a while and see how everyone is doing; I needed Chatterboxes to happen. A new lady, Louisa came along. She's 92 and walked half a mile from her home to get here. She said she'd been told by the NHS to stay indoors but she has been going across the road to the park every day to feed the birds. She looks really well on it.

I love gardening and have kept myself busy with it in this strange time. I used to sell flowers years ago when I ran the hardware store with my mum. That's when my back went though, jumping off the back of the flower lorry, carrying great boxes of flowers.

I grow in the greenhouse now. It's for everyone to use but it's only me that goes in there now. No-one else seems interested. I've grown all sorts and get free seeds in my gardening magazine, "Garden News". I've got a lot of tomatoes on the go just now; some of the others will have them when they're ripe, I don't need them all, I just enjoy watching them grow, making them grow. Lockdown has been very still. At least plants are moving on.

Village View-Point



The very word, 'pandemic' makes people panic. Even in this small community, the little supermarkets were suddenly barren. Extraordinarily, the fruit stall was almost empty: did people think that fresh fruit would last for weeks?

My wife does the shopping, as she is under 70 and only one of us at a time is allowed to enter the shop. I haven't visited a shop for 14 weeks. We have managed to stay healthy and fortunately we enjoy each other's company.

Life has become slower: we walk and garden, we chat and read and write. Of course there is always a shadow of fear that the virus could reach us even here and that if it did, I, at least, would probably not survive. But it's not a constant worry. For many people, lockdown will have been very painful.

It must have been very difficult for those who have to live in small apartments, but we can walk out for miles every day if we wish and breathe fresh air. It has really only been the inability to see our children and grandchildren that has been hard.

We live in a tiny village of fewer than 500 people. As soon as lockdown was announced, a village help group was created on WhatsApp. A few young people visit the Health Centre, 5 miles away, for example, to collect and deliver prescriptions for those in vulnerable groups, and others will do their shopping.

A village charity delivers a fresh fruit and veg box to every person over seventy, front line workers and those with underlying health conditions. And because so few villagers are leaving home to go to work, we have met lots of people while walking the dogs who we didn't even realise lived in the village: so many were never here during daylight hours in the past.

In some ways, lockdown has reminded me of my early childhood. I was born not long after the Second World War, in a tiny agricultural village. Food was rationed, there were no supermarkets or big food stores, so there was nothing to panic buy. As most people made their own clothes, the closing of the High Street shops would not have worried them.

There were only two cars in the village: my father's and the doctor's. The village Policeman, the two teachers and the vicar had bicycles but most people just walked everywhere, often for miles.

Apart from the cows, sheep and pigs, it was very quiet. But we heard the birds: two of my brothers are still able to identify every British bird from its song!

As overall panic has subsided, the anger and selfishness of people has been replaced by kindness and there is a real appreciation of those who have continued to work in order to make it possible for others to go on living as comfortably as possible: not just the NHS workers and teachers but the Carers, so poorly paid for doing such a difficult job with so much love; or the bus drivers, the bin men and those in our food shops.

The quiet, the reduction in pollution and the sense of community, of care and respect for others has grown. The challenge for the future will be to prevent pollution rising again and to go on caring for others, as the panic over the virus fades.

Seagulls and Sisters



I was born in Higher Bevendean in 1936 and I've lived here most of my life. If we had had a lockdown in the 50s or 60s we would have had everything local, like a village. It would have been much easier for older folk like us, especially those who can't walk far. You would have been able to pop out to the butcher's, the baker's, post your parcels at the post office and buy your groceries there or at the greengrocers. There was a chemist if you did fall ill, a newsagents with sweets for the kiddies and even a shoe repair place. All this on Widdicombe Way, a real hub; but only the hairdressers is there now.

My sister Sylvia moved in with me during lockdown. She can get confused and it would have been hard for her to cope alone. My daughters help us out and I know it's the right thing to do, but it's a lot; overnight I became a carer, and along with having to 'shield' I sometimes felt like a prisoner in my own home. Once we could meet with family though my daughter took me out a few times. It was nice to get a break, to get out.

Before lockdown Sylvia and I would walk in the field behind us. They've had bulls in there the whole time so we've just gone up and down our street. One day in July Sylvia was keen to take her jumper and coat, she was worried she'd get cold. When we were out I couldn't get her to take them off however much I encouraged. She got so hot she nearly collapsed on me, it was too much for us both. I've put them away now as the weather has been so lovely and neither of us will want that to happen again.

We've watched quite a lot of films on channel 81 – they show the old black and whites and we know all the old stars, Sylvia can recognise them you see. I try to find films that are pretty or about animals because she likes those. The other night we saw a big concert on the television and they were singing songs from all the old musicals. Just brilliant it was.

Do you know the seagulls were really hungry over lockdown. I wonder who else was thinking of them? With all the cafes and chip shops closed on the seafront they were really short on food, poor things, with little ones to feed. We were getting 'meals on wheels' from The Bevy pub and Mother Therasas and I started saving our leftovers and putting them out for the seagulls. I spread out several plates so they could all get some. Sometimes they did squabble though and then a couple of magpies would nip in quick for a bite to eat themselves. The seagulls loved the peas and beans and anything greasy...not the carrots though!

My cat doesn't finish his breakfast and I always put it out for him to finish later. But the seagulls got to know and they would line up on the wall every day, waiting for me to bring it out! It kept us entertained though!

Survival by 'Take-Away' in Germany



My name is Senem, I am Turkish and have lived in Germany for many years with my daughter who is now 31. For the last 11 years I ran my own small place, café Ebru, in Bremen. Before that I worked in all sorts of cafes and restaurants, mainly in large hotels, as did my daughter.

When the Corona crisis began I was terribly worried that I would lose business and my self confidence took a big knock. I had a hard time in the last few years because other cafes near me had set up, offering lower prices, but very recently they had gone bust. In order to keep going during those difficult years, I had worked full time at my cafe and also part time at a hotel, so at least I had been able to pay all my debts. When the lockdown began, the hotel shut down and I received some money from the job centre.

As it turned out, at the start of Corona my cafe was the only one still opening in the neighbourhood. School kids and employees of the nearby job centre had been my main customers, the schools closed, but the job centre kept going, though their own cafeteria was shut. So I started a take-away service, asking customers to bring their own containers.

I saved money by not having to buy boxes, and less washing up. My employees all had to be sent home but got paid by the job centre. I could earn enough to pay my rent and did not need money to go shopping for fun as the shops were closed anyway.

There was no call for breakfast, all I served was lunch and that was great – at last I did not have to get up at 4:30am every day and I was home by 3pm! It was truly a dream come true that I finally had time to spend with my family and my garden. No stress with traffic jams and finding somewhere to park, juggling two jobs. I had worked about 300 hours a month before and always gone out to the theatre, concerts, meeting my friends.

Now I was able to have time for myself, to read, to relax, and at last to rest and recuperate. I realised: You don't need all that action! Sometimes I even watched TV in the afternoon, I had more time for my partner and my daughter became the expert cream-cake baker.

In June the cafeteria at the job centre opened again and some students visited my cafe again. I have set up tables and chairs for 1, 2 or 3 people at safe distances and everyone has to wear a mask except when they eat. I keep sanitizing everything and nobody can use the toilet. I am not too worried of becoming infected, but I have become careful. We are all wearing masks and keeping our distance, I do not hug anymore.

It will be difficult now to find jobs in hotels. I have decided to work less and spend less money, go to fewer restaurants and buy fewer expensive items, travel less. I will still go and see a few rock bands but all in all I will become more modest and have less a stressful life.

An Actor Speaks



One of the things that has impressed me most about life during the Covid-19 crisis, is how inventive people have become, not just in how we work, but how we communicate, and support one another.

I am a professional actor and at the beginning of April, I should have been in Lithuania, filming some commercials for a Baltic telecommunications company, one of my favourite gigs! The narrative follows the happenings in a restaurant, rather like the OXO family ads here a while ago, and I've been involved for the last four years as "Frau Gerda". As foreign travel was impossible during lock down, none of the English actors could be there in person, so the clients came up with an ingenious solution enabling the commercials to run on.

A “body double” kitted out in PPE, played my colleague’s part, the chef in the restaurant kitchen. With a visor and huge gloves it was impossible to tell it was not the original actor, as he tried, and failed, to chop vegetables, taste a sauce, and see through his misted goggles! The English actor supplied the sound track from a makeshift studio in his daughter’s bedroom on the Isle of Wight, and the result was a comedic triumph! The saga of life in the restaurant continued, and we all hope to be back playing ourselves soon.

Self-tapes (where you record your audition at home and send it in) are an important part of how actors are considered for roles these days, but new restrictions have meant new challenges. A monologue is a doddle, but what about the other parts?

To help out mates, I have recorded off-camera voices at home, and sent an audio file to the awaiting auditionee, for them to fill in their responses as required (tricky to time!).

On other occasions I have been present, wearing a mask, and observing a two-metre distance,(sometimes al fresco), hoping my responses will still be picked up by the mobile phone recording us both. Fortunately, I never had to make myself heard through a window!

Zoom script readings have been a particular joy, while online meetings have facilitated the work of the various acting charities, of which there are many. Supporting actors, stage management, and others whose livelihoods in theatres nationwide have suddenly dried up, has been crucial.

The Actors Benevolent Fund, of which I am a Trustee, set up a 2020 Emergency Fund, and we have been able to continue our work and support throughout the year, thanks to I.T. and the generosity of the public!

A performance of the musical version of David Walliams' The Midnight Gang in which I played three old ladies (not all at the same time) and which deserved a far wider audience, achieved just that when it was streamed as part of the Chichester Festival Theatre Season.

You may have seen a request for donations after such free streamed performances. Well, those donations have meant support not just for the theatres themselves, but for their staff, and charities such as the Actors Benevolent Fund. So, thank you! All in all, my Covid-19 experience has taught me that isolation can lead to greater cooperation, and that's a good thing!

Sound Off



My name is Roy, I work as a live sound engineer – the man behind the mixing desk at concerts and gigs whose job is to make the performance sound good. All of this work is reliant on an audience being present. When the lockdown happened all shows stopped, and with them all of my work; adapting to the situation whilst still doing the same job is basically not possible.

In many ways what I do is a bit different from most jobs in that it is closely interleaved with what the musicians do. For many musicians, especially those who do what they do out of a love of their art, not being able to play together is like losing a limb. Maybe there is a bit more creativity happening as people try to find ways to record together over the Internet but, for many people, that creativity is a face-to-face interaction which does not work on a screen.

One other thing that contributes to the problems faced by lesser known acts is that the music business went through a major upheaval in the digital age. Without a physical product (CD / vinyl etc.) there is no control over the distribution of music. You can share a song via MP3 in an email and the artist gets nothing.

Streaming services, especially Spotify, pay little back to the artists so many small acts survived by doing live shows and that is precisely the thing that lockdown has finished.

Encounters are rare these days although I did drive out to a venue to sit in the garden with the owner and the lighting technician I work with to discuss the future.

For the venue owner Covid-19 has also been devastating although he is able to access some Government resources to retain some of his staff. In the case of the lighting designer and myself our work is supplied as self-employed contractors on a show by show basis so the Government help did not allow him to pay us.

To keep me occupied, I have had to fall back on DIY – I rebuilt our front door and discovered skills I did not think I had.

Shows do not happen out of the blue. Bands have to plan tours, book hotels, make sure that all the people involved are available, rehearse and generally engage in a big logistical exercise.

Cancelling all the shows up to Christmas is a major blow for the bands, the technicians and the venues. The same is true for theatre and anything that involves performance.

Who Wants a Proper Haircut?



NICK, August 2020

Independent reading age: year 4 +

Content age: year 4 +

We're open again, and how good it is to be back in the Salon. The first few weeks back were pretty crazy. 13 hour days, 7 days a week. It felt like the Christmas rush, only we'd all been off work for months so it was quite intense. We had invited our regulars to book ahead online and we are fully booked until the end of August. That's a good feeling though so I'm not complaining!

Hair appointments are spaced out more so we have time to clean and sanitize in between visits. It means a longer working day and we have to wear a visor and a mask now. We've got to be safe and careful with clients, but it's a pain to wear all day; uncomfortable and restrictive. Clients arrive in a mask and put all their belongings in a clear plastic drawer, so we can always guarantee a covid-safe place for them ...another thing we have to disinfect of course.

I found myself being more chatty than ever – I'd barely spoken to anyone face-to-face besides my close family. Clients have been understanding of all the changes here and it makes you appreciate the time that you put in previously, getting to know them, being friendly and chatty. Now I'm the one who needs a good chat and what goes around comes around.

Sometimes you need a real break from something to know how much you like or hate it; some people will have decided to change jobs thanks to lockdown. Personally, I was so looking forward to meeting clients and colleagues again, and getting back to the physical act of cutting hair. I subscribe to stylist vloggers and started watching hair instructionals every day. I'm very experienced but there's always more to learn and it helped keep me positive.

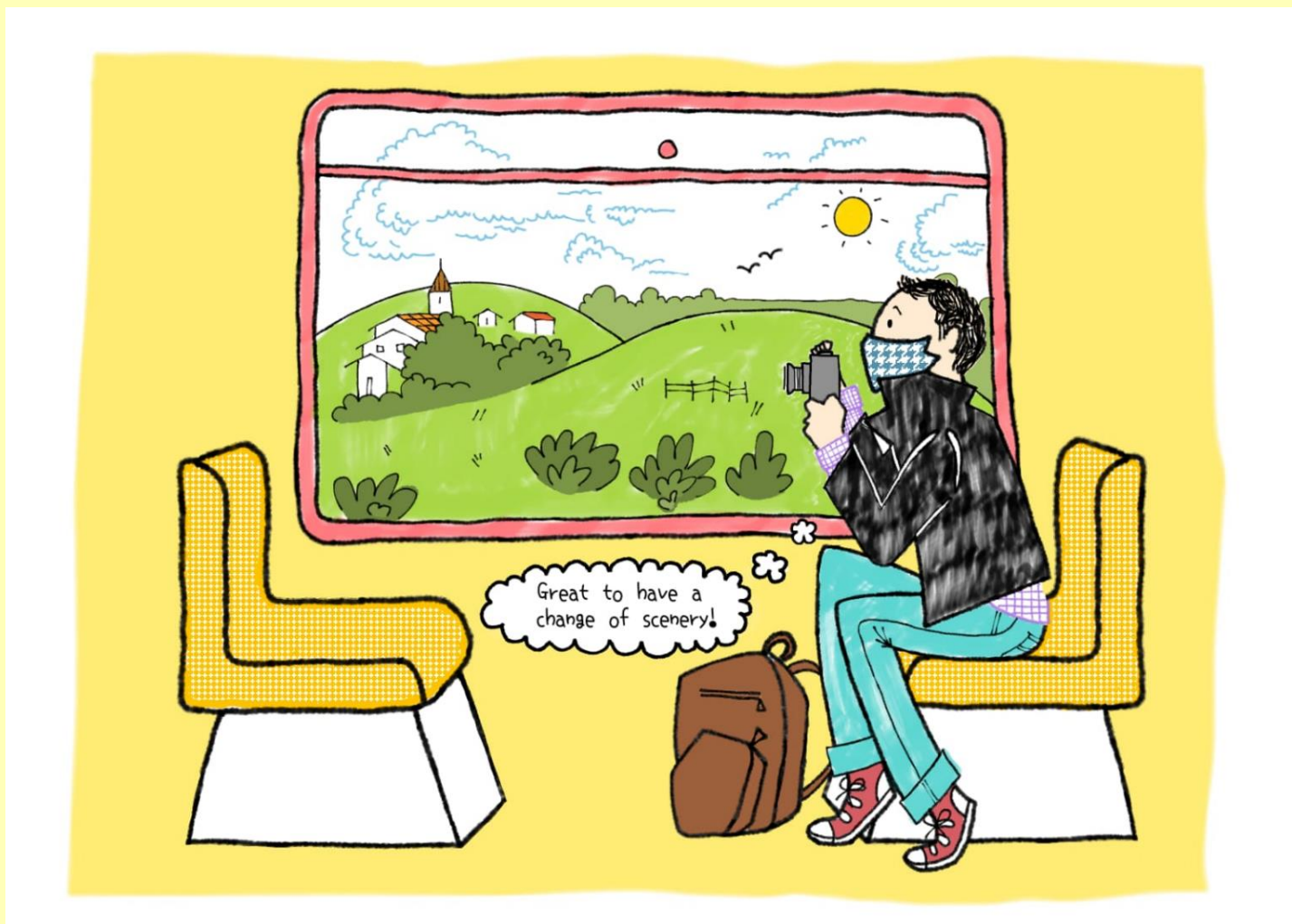
My wife is a hair stylist too and we cut each other's hair a few times. It was nice to do it more than was really necessary, we were both missing our craft. I'm glad people had a go themselves in lockdown – for me it means they were happier, but that they also realised quite what a skill it is to cut and style hair well, so they appreciated coming back to the salon even more.

We're a small independent business, in the North Laine in Brighton, the hub of independent businesses. We're not part of a big chain, there's no-one to prop us up in times like these. The salon did get a small grant from the government, but only I was lucky enough to get support for self-employed people.

The business can survive this, as long as we're not shut down for months again, but this has been a tough time for places like us and it's made me change my own approach to where I shop.

I've made a pact with myself to buy local, support local wherever I can. It's a chance to be more eco too. I'm a keen cyclist and it's been great to be on roads that are free of traffic and pollution; it's been a chance to think about how to be more friendly to the planet, virus or no virus.

Photography as an Outlet



I live on my own in Tunbridge Wells. I've been dealing with mental health problems for 30 years, anxiety for 25 yrs. I'm not worried about the coronavirus for myself but I get a bit down, a bit unsure sometimes because I don't want anyone else to get it. Being stuck indoors can be anxiety provoking, I can start to ruminate and wonder if everyone I care about is going to be ok. My anxieties tend to snowball and I can have an anxiety attack.

But ... I'm challenging it and getting through it. Instead of automatically taking a tablet to calm me I'm filling my time with new things which helps me get through and stops me getting so bored. I have a passion for photography and would normally always have my camera with me, taking street photography. So I have been going down town and the local park and taking pictures anyway, even if people aren't about.

I've learnt new interesting techniques and style from YouTube video tutorials. On 'street photography London' the guy has a videocam on his body so it feels like I'm actually there going round with him and he's showing me what he's doing. It's a good teaching forum for me in lockdown.

I do miss the shops not being open though, not being able to get my weekly magazines from WH Smiths or checking out the music at HMV. I miss the community café downstairs, 'The Kitchen Table'. I would go in there most days. 'Crossways', who run it, support people with mental health problems. It's a good place to socialise, anyone can go there and it's also a safe place to chat as they have people there who can support you. Damon, a support worker, still supports us who live upstairs, he calls a few times a week so that's good.

I do feel cut off sometimes; I don't have the same support as before, especially visiting mum and dad fortnightly for weekends. I whatsapp my family and seeing their faces, my brother and sisters, especially mum and dad makes a big difference – they are shielding and dad isn't so well, it's good to see that he's ok because I do worry about him sometimes. Actually video calling is a real help and I want to give them a big hug as soon as I can.

On June 5th I went to Hastings by train. I had a facemask, I took a tablet and the train wasn't busy so that was all fine. It was great to get away from my flat and have a change of scenery, get photos of things I couldn't get otherwise. The weather was good for photography, a bit clouded over which reduces the light and gives you definition on your subject against the sky. I got some good photos of boats, buildings and street portraits

I spotted one man with a cool long white beard and hair and asked him “do you mind if I take your pic? You look like Gandalf, do you get called that often?”. “Yup” he laughed. It was good to laugh.

I’ll put some on my website www.iaincapiephotography.com. It’s all new to me but I’m making one to share my best photos over the years. It’s a good project to have just now and I really want it up and running by my birthday, 17th June, so my family and friends can see my photos, it will be a treat from me to them on my Birthday.

The Wedding



The wedding planned for April 4th 2020
had to be cancelled because of
the lockdown for the COVID 19 pandemic.

Four months later, the bride and groom decided
to make a new plan for Saturday August 15th,
the first day that receptions were to be allowed
... although with many restrictions.

FRIDAY AUGUST 14th

At midday the bride received a phone call from the lady in charge of the church hall. She said that wind and rain were forecast for the next day and so the choice for the reception was either to be socially distanced outside in the small space of the church memorial garden, or to be in the church hall with all the doors and windows open; each family group at socially distanced tables and NO-ONE ALLOWED TO LEAVE THEIR SEAT!

Oh, dear. It seemed an insurmountable problem; should they choose the garden and risk everyone getting wet; the hall with the problem of keeping very young children in their seats for an hour or more and no-one able to talk to anyone from another family group; or something else altogether? One phone call solved the dilemma. A village ten minutes drive away agreed to the use of their field for a picnic.

SATURDAY AUGUST 15th

At 11.00 am the guests had sanitised their hands, written their contact details on a list, put on their face masks and were sitting in the church in family groups with an empty pew between each one. The bride and her father (who did not live in the same household) arrived to walk down the aisle, socially distanced by holding either end of a yellow ribbon - and the ceremony began.

There was some recorded music because no singing was allowed and at the moment that the bride and groom were pronounced husband and wife, the guests provided a noisy “hurrah” using percussion instruments instead of cheering, which was also forbidden. A special wedding licence had to be obtained and each person signing the marriage registers had to use a separate pen. Even the photographs outside couldn't be in the usual groupings.

The caterers had provided a picnic box for each family group which they brought to the village field. There, kind friends unable to be invited to the wedding (because the rules stated a maximum of 30 people) had erected borrowed gazebos as shelter from the rain; borrowed bunting and a few vases of flowers on the grass for decoration; and a small table for the cakes. It looked lovely.

Delicious picnics were eaten, speeches made, and toasts drunk to the happy couple. Guests were able to move around to talk to each other, easily keeping 2 metres apart, and the children played in the field. It was a happy and relaxed event.

And the most amazing thing – the weather forecast was wrong. The sun shone all afternoon!

Solidarity in France



My name is Marie-France so you might guess that I am French. I came down with the virus on 12th March and our lockdown in France came just a couple of days later. I felt like I had flu but with sudden peaks of fever. I was achy and headachy and sleeping most of the time. My husband, Nicholas became a first class nurse. He looked after me, propped my pillows, entertained me; he cooked and brought me food, but I had completely lost my sense of taste and smell so I could sense the texture of my meals, but they tasted of nothing. I've still not got it fully back and have to add a lot of salt and pepper to my food!

I am 72 and I don't do "ill". But here I was, so weak and unable to walk barely 200 yards. Being usually an active and healthy person I was lucky, I recovered at home – although months later I still have post-covid symptoms and have had to slow my life down, a big change for a busy me.

Back in March I was eventually well enough to come out for the nightly clap at 8pm for health workers. It's been so important, starting up on 18th March in council apartment blocks in Paris where people were inspired by the same idea in Italy. A hospital director told us on the television "every night we know, we feel it, that you are thinking of us and you are behind us". He had teary eyes. It's one of the ways in which we have been unified in our solidarity.

I grew up in the shadow of the Second World War when France was an 'occupied' country. You understand danger on your doorstep and being restricted in your movements. I wouldn't say we are a very disciplined culture in general, but we know from our history that in a crisis limitations are needed. We needed to be told clearly what to do and our politicians acted quickly. They were also humble in the face of the virus and the changing information. So most people trusted them and complied with the strict lockdown.

And it was strict! From the outset you were only allowed out of your house for essential needs: visiting the doctor, chemist, supermarket, or helping a vulnerable person in need. At first you could exercise up to 1km from your home but that soon stopped too...unless you had an essential outing or to walk your dog.

Lucky us that had Minnie the Springer Spaniel to walk every day!

You had to get a paper signed by the police called an “Attestation” and giving you permission for each outing; the police came down the street every night, checking that people were staying at home. In more normal times we have a lot of social and political freedom in Europe and it’s good in a way to be reminded it’s not the same everywhere. It felt like curfew time; but it also felt contained and reassuring to me.

By April we were advised to wear masks and councils had to make sure there was access to masks for everyone who wanted them. In our small area this really brought everyone together.

The Mayor put a call out to borrow sewing machines and receive help from those who could sew; 60 people came to the town hall on one day to make free masks, all from donated fabrics. There was a very organised system to collect them from the Town Hall, a mask for each one of us, every resident.

I have seen this sense of sharing across Europe too, not in the beginning when we were all needing to look after ourselves, but then France was sending doctors to Italy, experts were coming here from Germany, a solidarity across borders and a sense that we are all in this together.

Brighton Reflections



Until the lock down I was the busiest woman, everyone always said, if you want some help, ask a busy person. Well, it seems I was one of those. I have two jobs and do a lot of volunteering as well. Too much to do, no time to rest. Now I am resting a lot. The store where I work is shut.

We are quite a physical group of people at the store and often hug. While we were still open but sanitising all surfaces we touched, I wanted to hug someone. I said to her, can I just give you a backwards hip bump instead? She said yes, and we bumped. Later I found out it was her birthday, so I had given her a birthday bump at least. I miss my colleagues and the fabulous work atmosphere we have. It is inspiring and healthy to see friendly people every day.

My other job as writer and director of shows also came to a halt. All theatres are closed, no rehearsals are happening, all shows are cancelled. Because I was so worried about the virus to begin with I did not feel creative at all. You'd think this would be the ideal time to write, but for me it was difficult. Then I was inspired to write haiku, which are very short and very precisely timed Japanese poems, and that helped me get started again.

One single magpie
The spring of grief and sorrow
Alone in the park

It has been a great challenge for me to concentrate on anything work related. Luckily I read that other people were struggling with similar problems.

I have been very frightened of this virus because members of my grandparents' families died from the Spanish Flu in 1918. My grandmother remembered it well, and in my family people did not hug because it was considered contagious to do so.

My default setting has been for years that I always have a stash of tins and pasta etc. hidden away in my cupboard. This mania to be provided for any catastrophe comes from my grandmother who had been a refugee at the end of the Second World War and ended up with nothing but what she and her three kids had been able to carry. No food, no plates, no soap. She had and I always have a good stash of soap.

What I keep telling myself is that I am one of the lucky ones; so far nobody I love has become ill. I have been spending a lot of time with my family, walking, talking, sharing meals, being kind and lovely to each other.

In the park walking the dog one day with my daughter who is 19 and lovely, we chatted to a young man. This was about 4 weeks into the lockdown. His name was Jason, he was in his late 20s and a nurse at the Covid Ward in Brighton.

He told us that he lived alone and his birthday was coming up, that he had been working long shifts non-stop, that nobody cooked or shopped for him. He told us that he missed his mum who lived further away. I think of him every day and hope he is safe and coping. I look for him in the park each time we go, but have not met him again. He said: "Don't get it, it's nasty."

Locking Down in Germany



My name is Hanna and I live in Northern Germany. I came back from a wonderful vacation – a Nile cruise with many visits to Egyptian archaeological sites – to directly enter a quarantine phase at home. No contact with others, besides the absolutely necessary shopping for food. I went from almost constantly being in a group to being all alone.

We had a fast but not complete lock down in Bremen, where I live alone. I could cope quite well, as I am used to working from home. However, not seeing my friends and family and telling them first-hand about my trip, showing and handing over my souvenirs was sad. I was living in my memories for the first weeks. I was happy reliving the trip, as not much else of interest was going on. I was reading the books I had bought, from hard-core archaeology to fictional stories with Ramses as the hero, from boy- to manhood, i.e. being tested and then becoming pharaoh.

A friend of mine who returned from Switzerland slightly later than me had to go into quarantine for 14 days. We were allowed to go around by two persons and without any permit or cap on the duration and as I live close to the river this was my easy way out on sunny evenings. Restrictions were on my job location, all schools and kindergartens were closed, also all other shops, restaurants, cinemas etc.

It took quite a long time until our government agreed on masks, and then only for inside activities. As Bremen always has been a liberal city: think of the fairy tale of the Bremen Town Musicians (Stadtluft macht frei = City air gives you freedom), the controls were not very strict and I heard of warnings but not of any fines. For a while I could not visit the beach, 65 km away and for weeks I could not enter the federal state where my father lives without a very good reason.

I found it hard to keep up with the fast changing regulations, they were getting overly strict – in my opinion – for a while. Now I think we have found a good compromise, hygiene concepts everywhere, masks indoors and trying to keep our distance, which I like anyway.

So I ride my bike without a mask but put it on before I enter any public building, even if it is just for paying at the fuel station or going to the loo in a café (where you will also find many means of disinfecting your hands), though I am having my coffee outside. I wash my hands when I return home and do not hug my friends, mostly. We do meet in twos or threes, and that is fine with me.

I learned to use WhatsApp much more, to share at least photos of objects which are giving me pleasure, to drop a short note, even to exchange spoken sequences by sending short sound files, as not everybody can receive videos. I practiced flute duets with myself, taping one of the lines and then playing to the tape, quite tricky to get it right.

I thought I would share the photo (at the beginning of this story) that I took from a hot air balloon in Egypt: view of the Valley of the Kings and Hatchepsut-Temple! So much space and freedom before much of the world went into lockdown.

A Sense of Malevolence



I went down with what seems very likely to have been Covid 19 on April the 3rd. My best guess is that I caught it from an old man coughing in a narrow aisle in Sainsbury's when I was out buying food. My instinct at the time was to get away from him, his hoarse cough in the confined space frightened me. I don't know where I got it, so let's say it was him, someone who should have stayed at home, but needed to go out and get food.

The timing of my symptoms was poor. I was in the middle of hosting a Chinese medicine lecture on Zoom. The lecturer was in lockdown in New York State thousands of miles away, her family had fled New York where the body count was high. That evening I felt inexplicably tired. My back ached which is unusual for me. Eventually the lecture ended, and I went upstairs to have a bath, to warm and loosen the stiffening muscles of my neck.

I felt distant and suddenly cold. The heat from the bath was welcome, but I felt more disorientated, stranger. By the time I had emerged from the bath I realised I had a fever and needed to go to bed. The fear was very hard to deal with. I was by then very well versed in the worst-case scenarios of this disease. I had seen the earliest reports of the pathogen in Wuhan. I watched the Chinese government shut down a city in an attempt to contain it. I knew that this could kill, and I was aware that it could also maim, like SARS which had left many of those who survived it permanently ill.

The onset of Covid hit me like a truck. I retreated to bed, contacted the woman giving the lecture and asked her advice and of her husband. They are both Chinese doctors, as am I. I used a combination of approaches, the first and most important being to allow the fever as far as was practical.

The fever never became dangerously high, so I stayed with my body's immune responses. Sweat, temperature, these things are there for a reason. The headache was bad, but I could release the pain with my own skills as an acupuncturist. I have no doubt that it could have been worse had I not known some of the things I know. I was delirious for a day.

Downstairs the lecture went on without me. I took a recording of it, but was quite unable to listen to it. I spent these hours dreaming black dreams of the virus. It's difficult to talk about this because it sounds so fanciful. I felt that I saw the interior of it. It was as though I was being given a tour of it, what it was. It wasn't going to do me much damage because I was fundamentally in good health. But it could.

I believe I was privy to its inherent nastiness and deceptiveness, a malevolence, the sense of which has stayed with me. ones.

I came away from my brush with it quite profoundly frightened. The feeling I have is that this has surprises in store, and not pleasant. On the second day the fever calmed and I developed a sore throat. I had no cough, apart from ten minutes wheezing and tightness the day after that. After that the tail end of the fever subsided and I was better.

I felt odd and tired for the next five days. I sat quietly in the garden a lot. I was in quarantine and people brought me food and checked in on me. I was aware that something bad had missed me and felt separate from life for some days as I contemplated this and the feelings of echoing trauma to my system, particularly my kidneys.

After that my health returned and I felt mostly fine, but I am unsure, as so many are: did I have it? What even is this? How did we as a culture get to this place? And how do we leave?