

My overarching memory of the pandemic and lockdown is largely twofold; the loss of close contact with our wider family and friends, and the loss of the freedom to travel, which conversely gave me freedom to commence writing up my thesis. In mid-February my family accompanied me, on what now seems a very surreal trip to Florence, for an International History of Nursing Conference, at which I presented a paper about Eva Lückes. Even then, we had our temperatures taken twice at Florence Airport before being allowed into Italy, which seemed bizarre, and alarming. After the conference, we went with the delegates on a special trip to see Florence Nightingale's birthplace up in the hills, over a gloriously sunny Florence. My family and I visited the Uffizi, and on the last morning, my eldest son and I climbed the Duomo- and admired the spectacular view. Looking back, there was an underlying fear about the pandemic unfolding just 200km north of Florence. We arrived back in England, in the middle of a storm, with a few mask wearing passengers, but to no temperature checks, and no quarantine. As we are now both shielding that will be the last such journey for the foreseeable future.

At the start of March, with an increasing sense of danger, my mother in law's nursing home, just five minutes' walk from our house, said that visitors were no longer allowed. We were granted one last precious visit- and hug with Daphne; we had a sense that would be our last, ever. Social isolation for people with dementia is particularly challenging, and she only occasionally understood that a 'nasty bug' was keeping us away. The home did everything that they could- but skype chats with someone with dementia, who thought at best we were in a Harry Potteresque 'moving picture'- and at worst got cross, because we did not visit, was so distressing. It was bitter sweet to see Daphne as she withdrew into herself, and turned from us towards the carers who showed her so much love. As she rapidly deteriorated, we frequently phoned, and were often able to speak to her, and say prayers with her. It was moving to hear that a hostess, who was not a Christian, had randomly read from Daphne's bible to her- but equally heart wrenching that we were unable to sit with her, touch her, and do those last things for her. She died Covid positive, two days after the home was finally tested, just one of some twenty thousand care home residents to die. Daphne's pandemic, socially distanced burial, was intimate, beautiful and peaceful, although sadly our sons could not come.

The enforced loss of freedom has had positives: whilst we continue to shield it also meant that I have started writing up my thesis. This quote by Eva Lückes resonated with me:

The most inconvenient and most dreaded of all illness is the occurrence of any infectious disorder; ... unless due caution is

taken, there is scarcely a limit to the mischief that may be done.... Lose no opportunity of impressing upon those whom it may concern, the paramount importance, the absolute necessity, of isolation in all cases of infectious disease. People are curiously incredulous of a danger they cannot see.¹

Sarah Rogers

¹ Eva C. E. Lückes, *Home Nursing Sick and Room Appliances* (1883), modern reprint (London, Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1883)