

LIFE IN LOCKDOWN

When news of the pandemic arrived I was both afraid and bewildered. Suddenly I was classified as 'highly vulnerable' and in need of shielding from this unknown virus for at least 12 weeks. Agreed my health has not been good and I have several serious issues which would render me a high risk if I was unfortunate enough to catch whatever this threat to the world was called. I do not want to mention it's name – it does not deserve credit for causing so much fear and anxiety and for being responsible for the death of so many, either directly from the infection or from severe isolation causing loneliness and worsening of mental health leading to increasing dementia or even suicide.

I am incredibly fortunate that my husband is 7 years younger than myself and is very fit and healthy. Although I don't like to admit it, he really is my 'carer' because I would not manage to live so independently without his help. I suffered a near fatal car accident in 1998 followed by the onset of severe rheumatoid arthritis and now chronic kidney disease and adrenal insufficiency, meaning I am dependent on steroid medication to survive. I've recently had issues with my eyes which are worrying and ongoing.

My husband's workplace were very understanding re the lockdown and allowed him 10 weeks paid leave (he only works 2 nights a week) so I was not alone and this is how I survived unscathed. I missed going to the supermarket, seeing a friend's dog, seeing friends from the local radio station, missed just being part of the human race! Supermarket deliveries saved our lives (literally!) and they became the highlight of the week. I saw a lot of advertisements online for volunteers to help deliver food parcels and keep in touch with those isolating and the nurse in me wanted to be 'doing something' for others until the penny dropped that I was now the one who needed supporting.

Before the lockdown I had been involved with a local radio station and volunteered to help with a programme intended to help people with their mental health but obviously face to face meetings stopped. We decided to carry on making the programme from our homes and in spite of the expense (which we could not really afford) I decided to buy a laptop so I could participate. Thank goodness I did! This involvement gave me something on which to concentrate and I began reminding myself how to use a MacBook! I enjoyed recording items for the programme and became brave enough to use the 'GarageBand' application to record my very own music shows! These have continued and are broadcast on Tuesday evenings locally and via the internet. I never thought I would be able to record and edit successfully but thanks to the lockdown I've gained a new skill!

Living in a beautiful residential park surrounded by trees and birdsong also helped me cope with the isolation but the changes to our lives and the rules by which we now have to live are far-reaching. I don't know what the future holds but I am very worried that this 'new normal' will never become 'normal'. The wearing of masks and the ever-present threat of infection stalks us so that we live with a background of anxiety and fear. I am so glad that I have the most amazing memories of time at my beloved London Hospital when such states of mind were limited to annoyance at being put on nights once again, having to beg for my post from Lottie in the Luckes Home and finding my uniform hadn't returned from the laundry so I had run out of aprons!

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