

COVID-19 International Council of Psychologist (ICP) Remembrance Stories collected by Dr Sandra Neil Clinical Psychologist

Please submit stories to DrNeil@satiraustralia.com

COVID-19 International Council of Psychologist (ICP) Remembrance Stories Project' Part 2

“The COVID-19 pandemic represents a massive global health crisis. Because the crisis requires large-scale behaviour change and places significant psychological burdens on individuals, insights from the social and behavioural sciences can be used to help align human behaviour with the recommendations of epidemiologists and public health experts. Here we discuss evidence from a selection of research topics relevant to pandemics, including work on navigating threats, social and cultural influences on behaviour, science communication, moral decision-making, leadership, and stress and coping. In each section, we note the nature and quality of prior research, including uncertainty and unsettled issues. We identify several insights for effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and highlight important gaps researchers should move quickly to fill in the coming weeks and months”.

Nature Human Behaviour | VOL 4 | May 2020 | 460–471 |
www.nature.com/nathumbehav

COVID-19 (Part 2) in Australia has newer physical and psychological, interactional, spiritual changes

The quality changes and transparency of official statistics on Coronavirus, have been called into question in past two months.

There are many questions now. Is it safe for people to go outside? Will we wait until we have is a low or no level community transmission?

Socialising with other households in the UK is only allowed outside. In Australia, different rules apply in different places. For example, in Australia we cannot cross state borders.

There are now in Australia fewer and fewer hospital beds!

What has happened to our five senses? Are the senses more or less acute, is eyesight clearer, hearing more sensitive, tasting more or less a lost sense, smelling of flowers more pungent, or more extreme??!! Obviously, moving is more restricted and restricting. Hugging and using arms to love another person has been confined to family only, and even is restricted by rules of COVID-19.

I am sending out the call for more stories that are current now, of common experiences. For example, being at home with children or animals, no matter how insignificant your story may feel, for the reader it creates a listening ear, or an open eye, and stories of feelings of being understood.

Please submit your story to DrNeil@satiraustralia.com

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I. A Young Lawyer in Her Own Words Is Stuck Because Of Covid-19

I have a new job, and love life, my friends and family, life with all its vicissitudes.

In COVID-19 there is no way to have a new relationship. I feel I'm losing time – time to be me, to have my own family.

I can't develop your personal life because I feel I'm stuck at home. I can't meet people, I am stuck at home. It's now a global pandemic. Normally I can't sit with a problem. I do as much as I can. I can maintain my personal things. Outside I would go on dates. But now I am not meeting anyone, I want to have dates, meet someone and have a family.

I miss young people, loneliness from not being with other people and its camaraderie. I was just going out working with new colleagues. I can't get it. I never thought I got "drunk" off the crowd. Its so intoxicating. I am energized by other people.... I miss the crowd,

It is such a nice bonus to have live music and bands. I want to go to the tennis, I love sitting there at events. That's why I love travelling so much. Last year seeing beautiful history in London walking past Buckingham, Palace Apartments.

Thinking about the changes in my five senses, the changes are momentous. The new book by Australian author Julia Baird 'Phosphorescence' deals with many questions of how to deal with life when the world is dark and COVID ridden. The five sense change.

Seeing: normally home/lunch too...until doing emails for work. I went into the backyard. I like being outside and my eyes adjust to the sun & the light.

Hearing: the sound of the city are less during COVID19, more quiet; in court it is quieter than normal. I am learning to communicate well with masks. But sometimes I can't speak.

Touch: One feature of COVID19 Phase II, I know a phrase called "touched starved" I have been missing touching people or "touch hunger" – Mum brushing your hair. Holding hands – Mum is not afraid to touch / she likes communal and family experiences, Mum, Dad as well, we fuss when we see them, sit near them, they often hold my hand (they are divorced).

Tasting: I don't eat my favourite food, its not as good, I love food. Every night I run out of ideas. My favourite is Japanese - - its lovely. Italian food, my mother is Italian, we Italians don't cook often for children – they eat what adults eat. Loving butter, olives, radicchios salad, with fennel, salt, vinegar its light aniseed. I like the smell in our new place – we moved to a new house, it feels like our place with me and my sister. Sunflowers, daphne, lavender. I am growing silverbeet, cos lettuce, all in together in salads. Taste is very important.

Different perfumes that I wear out, Bulgari, Jasmine Noir, and when I am home Body Shop Mandarins and Oranges, clean and fresh. So, smell is more important to me.

These touch, taste, smell, seeing, hearing, speaking, and even moving has become intensified, since we have shifted into wearing masks, social distancing, isolating of all the states in Australia. There are different rules for each state. If you break the rules you will be fined \$1200 and if you illegally cross state borders you can be sentenced to jail for 6 months, or, fined \$20,000.

It was nice to verbalise the curses of COVID, but it does have blessings of thought, feeling, experiences.

II. Notes on a pandemic

Newtown, NSW. 2020

WASH YOUR HANDS the poster said, with a picture of a pair of hands holding soap under running water. I stared at it while waiting for my takeaway coffee. It was pasted on a boarded-up shopfront next door to my local cafe. I was standing on a big blue dot on the footpath. Only four customers were allowed inside at a time.

In such a relatively short period, just a stroll up to King Street had become a surreal, almost dystopian experience. The the taped-off children's play equipment, the rows of closed shops, the 'takeaway only' handwritten signs outside cafes, people wearing face masks, the conspicuous absence of low-flying aircraft rumbling from above, a normally constant background sight and sound in this neighbourhood. And the eerily deserted streets.

No, 'deserted' wasn't really the right word - reclaimed was probably better. The road space left empty by the normally bustling vehicular traffic had been quickly filled by hordes of food delivery couriers on bikes, dozens of them, peddling furiously, eyes blazing, their large padded backpacks stuffed with packaged meals of salt, fat and sugar. It was like in a nature documentary when the dominant species in a particular environment disappears and a new species emerges to take its place.

All of this created such a strange tableau. I took it all in as if I'd time travelled from thirty years ago and was getting a sneak peek of what the future looked like.

Two women, also waiting on blue dots for their takeaway orders, were standing nearby, 1.5 metres apart. "Apparently there's a cafe on Enmore Road that gives out a free face mask with every takeaway coffee," I heard one of them saying to the other.

"Lots of places are doing that now," her friend said.

"Yes but these aren't just surgical ones - these have filters."

"Oh, you mean the N95 ones? That's pretty good. Which cafe is it?"

I smiled inwardly at the double irony of it all - chatting so matter-of-factly about the different types of face masks, of all things, and without a trace of intended irony. Who'd've thunk? Certainly not my 1990 self.

My number was called, the masked shop assistant handed me my coffee and I made my contactless payment. I glanced at the WASH YOUR HANDS poster again as I was leaving. It was already looking faded and weathered, with ragged, curling edges and some strips torn from it, revealing bits of the poster underneath, advertising an event now long since cancelled. And pretty soon, someone would come along and slap another poster over the top of this one, advertising something new, some exciting, innovative, socially-distanced event.

It was an endlessly interesting experience, seeing all of this through 1990 eyes, but with the surprising and sometimes brutal clarity of 2020 vision.

III. Covid-19: Promise of a Better Tomorrow

Without a doubt the announcement of most of Victoria returning to Stage 3 restrictions was like a heavy blanket landing on top of us all. Previously, we had been enjoying a peek at the sun, and our hopes had risen with people being able to socialize together again, even if limited to small numbers; small businesses started seeing their customers beginning to return and they began to believe their businesses may just survive; we had gotten through the worst and we were confident we had the stamina to make it through to the end. An end that was within our reach. We were on the way to beating COVID-19. We were going to be victorious!

Then it was gone. Our hopes shattered. Our impending victory snatched away by our Government's stern and serious words.

In my profession I speak with a large number of people daily, and a bleak and heavy mood was palpable and present in everyone after that announcement. The misery in the tone of their voices; the forlorn look on their faces; and their sagging postures, all told the same story: they were beaten and their resilience exhausted. A demonstration of hopelessness I hadn't witnessed at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

I found myself subconsciously becoming more observant of others; paying greater attention to people's attitudes and behaviours during phone calls and in video meetings; taking note of anyone acting out of character, and checking in with them afterwards to offer a safe space for them to talk openly. Being more considerate and thoughtful to others; appreciating it's impossible to know how anyone is coping at any given moment, unless they're given the opportunity to speak candidly.

Over the next week I noticed some other changes. The leader of site operations introduced into the weekly leadership meeting agenda, time for each person to share how they are feeling – personally and about work. It is an invitation to speak rather than a coerced conversation and people are welcomed to disclose as much or as little as they wish. I've been surprised by the vulnerability most have demonstrated; evidence of the overwhelming need people currently have to speak and be heard. But I was most surprised that a business leader, who is extraordinarily operations and revenue focused, would think compassionately and create time for such conversations to occur. Humanity has entered the leadership psyche.

There has also been a significant rise in impromptu messages and phone calls from people checking on each other's wellbeing. An SMS from a friend simply stating "I love you" or "I'm thinking of you". Brief phone calls starting with "Hi, how are you faring in these crazy times?" Memes or videos posted on social media that encourage laughter, typically satirical of COVID-19, and messages of inspiration and hope. Others promoting people's businesses to help them continue trading in changed and innovative ways.

Genuine care and concern for others appears to be more prevalent, with the wellbeing of those we care about becoming our new priority. There seems to be a greater level of appreciation that people are stressed and overwrought at different times, and empathy and thoughtfulness are the more common and appropriate responses. We

are experiencing a greater appreciation for those people in our lives, and we're telling them so.

While COVID-19 has brought out the worst behaviours in some, I have found the majority of people I speak with to be demonstrating more thoughtfulness and care towards others. Humans are behaving with more humanity than I've ever experienced before, and with the longevity of this pandemic I'm hopeful this change will become a permanent part of our culture; a promise of a better tomorrow.

IV. Covid-19: Safe in My Castle

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic I worked in an open-plan office, with co-workers constantly dropping by to have a "quick chat" or being called into any number of meetings. There is no place to sit quietly and not a minute to myself for quiet reflection or thought. The pandemic has changed that, as I'm required to work from home – a place where I am on my own and without distraction.

The introvert inside of me is now in her element. No longer repressed nor her wishes overridden; she is now reveling in no forced socializing or in-person interactions. She is living happily inside her personal environment; a place not shared with any other. Everything she needs and wants is contained in her space: houseplants for life; sunlight & fresh air flowing through the continually opened windows; every food, snack & beverage she may desire; a treadmill for daily exercise; photographs hanging on her walls, reminding her of the beautiful world and future life awaiting her; phone and computers for communication; and movies, books, music, and scented candles to satisfy her senses. There's even a drawer in her bedroom filled with special toys to assist satisfy her carnal needs. This is my introvert's castle, and she has no reason to leave: safe; comfortable; and happy in her sanctuary built for one.

As much as this pandemic is causing distress and angst for the majority, it is also working to the advantage of those of us with introverted tendencies.

I last left my apartment four weeks' ago to attend a regular, monthly appointment and after my treatment on that day, I mentioned to the receptionist that I hadn't been outside for the two weeks' prior. Her reaction was immediate and her face revealed the horror she felt for me. I laughed and quickly clarified that I'm loving being indoors on my own and have no desire to leave my apartment. My treating physician popped his head around the corner and confirmed to his receptionist that some people enjoy being indoors all the time – they don't like going outside. She seemed confused as she tried to process such a foreign concept, and it appeared to me she required comforting. I explained that I have plenty of sunlight and fresh air in my apartment as I have rows of windows across the front and back walls and keep them all open so there is continuous airflow, and with the numerous indoor plants that live in every room, it's almost as though I have brought the outdoors inside. The receptionist appeared to relax after my elaboration, thankfully.

That interaction made me realize how narrow our thinking may be, generally only considering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic within the bounds of our personal experiences, and not giving much thought to how others are experiencing it.

I'm not someone who people generally perceive to be introverted, as outside of this pandemic, I'm interacting with people constantly and comfortably so. However, I've always appreciated this persistent, underlying desire I have to be alone; able to enjoy my own company, and only interact with others by my own initiative. The pandemic has afforded me this opportunity and is enabling my introversion; and my introversion

is VORACIOUS having been repressed for so long. Although, curiously I'm spending more time speaking with family and friends than I ever have, as there's no sense of obligation to have to go out and visit them, I can just pick up the phone or video-conference them between work tasks.

While the majority of people seem to be craving the return of socializing and human interaction, whether it be in workplaces; homes; or social venues, there are some of us who are thinking quite the opposite. Introverts are safe in our castles right now, and the future threatens to drag us from our places of comfort and force us back into unnatural situations, after having our introversion nurtured so well during this pandemic. True, I'm not an extreme introvert and my inner introvert will reluctantly retreat without too much fuss, but I do feel short bursts of resentment at the future that's looming.

V. The Yak

One of the people I know writes a column called "The Yak". Here are his best COVID related stories.

Toilet Paper Carnage

Dear Yak,

I'm a respectable mother, grandmother and tax-paying pillar of society. But yesterday at the supermarket when I was panic-buying toilet paper, I accidentally bit a woman's finger off.

In my defence, it was her own fault. She was reaching for the very last jumbo pack of premium, 4- ply, rose-scented, soft, strong and very, very long, but it was mine because I saw it first.

Luckily the plastic wrapping protected the product from her spurting blood. But when I got home I noticed some bloodstains on my brand new cashmere cardigan. Should I send her the bill for the dry cleaning? It seems only fair.

Yours most sincerely,
Toilet Paper Carnage!

Dear Toilet Paper Carnage!,

I have to say I'm really enjoying this whole toilet paper crisis. And it seems so fitting that this humble but essential personal hygiene accessory is grabbing global headlines right now. After all, it serves as a great metaphor: life is like a sheet of toilet paper – you're either on a roll or taking perfumed rollercoaster (this was edited, sorry Yak...)

Hope this helps.

With kind regards,
The Yak

When all Hell Broke Loose

Dear Yak, To stop the spread of COVID-19, it's now mandatory in my city to wear face masks whenever you're in public.

To save money, I decided to use my own face covering instead (this is allowed, as long as your mouth and nose are covered). So I dug out my old Iron Maiden balaclava (a memento of my youth) and wore it to the bank.

Oh Yak, all Hell broke loose. I was tackled and pinned to the floor by two security guards (at least they hand-sanitised first). It was a very unpleasant, undignified experience. And this is a bank that prides itself on its quality customer service! I wasn't impressed. Should I switch banks?

Yours sincerely,
Service with a Smile

Dear Service with a Smile,

To be honest, I don't think switching banks will make any difference. They're all as bad as each other. The first (and only) time I ever went to the bank was a very unpleasant, undignified experience too. They threw a net over me, injected me with TRANQUILLISER and bundled me onto the next flight back to Nepal! (Economy!) I wasn't impressed.

Keep your money under the mattress.

With kind regards,
The Yak

VI. The 'Curse of Corona' and the 'The Blessings of Corona'

An Unedited Conversation Between Two Psychologists "M" and "S"

Saturday 8th August 2020

M: Number 1, the 'Curse of Corona', the most, perhaps the most significant heading is that as far as I am concerned the problem with Corona is there is a great degree of uncertainty, lack of clarity, ambiguity, the unpredictability about it all. None of us know how long it will take, we don't know what the level of risk is, we don't really know what to do, and we don't know who to listen to, and all that is creating a great degree of anxiety and tension.

From my point of view is this, Corona has created for lots of people a great degree of loss, there has been loss of health, loss of freedom, loss of mobility, loss of privacy, loss of job, loss of income, loss of businesses, loss of people, loss of contact. Loss as we know is a key element of depression, so whilst the uncertainty and the ambiguity, the first thing is the underlying cause of anxiety or as you prefer to call it angst, the loss or the losses is a cause of depression or the risk of depression.

There is the anxiety about the future and of course there is loss of self-esteem. There is another dimension and that is guilt, and the guilt it due very often because some of us have it, we are doing well under it, and sometimes we are a bit quiet about doing well, because it's not nice to talk about how I am doing well when everybody is supposed to be suffering and most are suffering. So, there is guilt and perhaps even shame, because shame sometimes you don't behave as well as you can. Go back for a minute also to the ambiguity part and that is also we have a lot of instructions of how to behave, and most of us get very confused about a whole lot of elements of contrast in being instructed or the guidelines from the government, it is not that you don't want to obey but at sometimes you get confused or we are not sure and sometimes also the

instructions of how to behave are don't make sense and therefore you feel resentful of the instructions.

Let me say, number one, I don't think it is ambiguity in what I said, meaning this, clearly there are some people who suffer from Corona and there some people who benefit from Corona because I have never said that there are no individual differences I talked at group level, at the individual level one man's meat is another man's poison, if you are an extrovert to stay indoors by yourself maybe a terrible thing to you, if you are introvert you have now a reason or an excuse not to feel obliged to spend so much time with people so one man's meat is another man's poison.

What you asked me also is why is it that for example for me or for many people certain things are not a problem for me. 1. Because sometimes by my standard many of the things that are happening here are minor to my life compared to what I have been through. So as The Scouts say "be prepared" I am prepared for it. For example, to be frivolous when there was panic about toilet paper, I was delighted I thought it took me back to my adolescence, in Israel my childhood, my early adulthood, there was no toilet paper and so we used newspaper so that will be nice to go back to the way things were once.

S: My question is are the curses of Corona really the curses of the past in the person or are they self-inflicted or instead are they realities that come from the past, do you hear what I am saying, so that a lot of good came from a lot of horror all the time, even right this minute when we have just seen the bombing of Beirut, but there seems to be some enormous strength that is coming from that. I wanted you to talk about how the strength came to you from you having been in a war, how do you feel personally that the strength and actually strengthen your whole life I am sure, I just want you to explain the mechanism by which you think it happened.

M: I will answer it in a more general way. What happens is we know that any potentially traumatic event can lead to a person being traumatised to a point where his weaken in the future to deal with the same or similar potential traumatic events. Somebody else who has been through the same and found a way of dealing with it feels strengthened by it, we know now there is a lot of literature on post-traumatic stress disorder on one hand and post traumatic growth as it were, so and in my case it to some degree is also the degree of trauma or stress that you experience so the mechanism there are all sorts of explanations and theories for it. But I would prefer to lead it to very, very specific. To give a trivial example. I served in the army in Israel for two and a half years, during that time I served a lot of that time in the desert and every morning we had an expectation which included that you shaved properly, now many a times in the desert we had to shave early in the morning and its cold as hell and to shave when there is a cold wind blowing with very poor quality shavers at the time was a torture, so I had months of torture and since then for over 60 years now every time I shave I talk great pleasure in my ability to shave with hot water.

I have had now the benefit of years of pleasure that other people don't have.

Similarly, I will give another sort of, it is a simple example. As a child we didn't have a radio and I was dying to have a radio, eventually we could afford a radio and when we had the radio, we only had one station of the radio and even that radio the one station did not broadcast the whole day, so now after Corona when I have radio and podcast and television and the million and one things I think that I am like a pig in shit, you know in contrast. I make good choices and I enjoy it all. If you have grown up with everything being available to you to take it for granted, if you grow without or with less than subsistence levels very often you appreciate what you have got.

S: Ok, so and then in the 'Lord of the Flies' by William Golding many boys are trapped on Torgan Atoll without freshwater and provisions but rather than turning on each other they survived by cooperating with each other. It was an amazing book and had an amazing effect on me as a young person. One other example is the humanitarian, and if you watch what is happening right now in the middle east their cooperation amongst men and women who are really good men and women who are helping each other and trying to find, they have got no water and they have got nowhere to live and they do try to help each other and they are doing that; but then there was another incident which was about the Haldane Maximum Security Facility (I am sure you told me about this) that the most seriously convicted prisoners were given a canteen with stainless knives and porcelain plates and cells with flatscreen TVs and allowing those prisoners to have some normality and humanity was reflected in the rate in which these inhabitants reoffend. Apparently it is one of the most effective prisoners in the whole world it actually from bad comes good, and so I thought that I talked to you all about this, but maybe I didn't, and maybe you will talk about this too.

Have you another thing you want to talk about, the Corona Virus has got worse and we now in stage three, three and four of the Corona Virus if you know anything about how the virus actually works and what happens in the epidemiologists and how they work together, but now it is worse than ever and we have to face very big odds and I think the bigger the odds the more goodness is coming out. Do you feel that at all?

Blessings of Corona Virus

M: Well as far as I am concerned there are few things here. Number one, under the heading of 'Blessing', there are lots of people who are when you talk to them or you simply ask them the simple question that I have been asking for the last 5 six months "*are there an benefits that you have derived from Corona?*" and lots of people of have ambiguous benefits, they will say things like one boy who told me "*it's wonderful for my dog and for me because we have much more time together and the dog is pleading not another walk because he gets so much attention*". To kids who don't have to go to school and take great delight in the fact that the don't have to go to school and some of them now tell me about how they spend their time drawing or reading or all sorts of things.

For some it is an unmitigated, unmitigated areas or parts of their lives that have been positive for them and I will give you more example, a young man who told me now the Corona it is great for him there is football every day, there is basketball every day, he just moved in with his girlfriend so they have a lot of time together and they do wonderful things together that they didn't have to do before and on top of it he still has his job, he doesn't have to travel and waste time on travelling and his salary has not gone down and as result the money is worth much more today than it worth a year ago, so he thinks it is fantastic for him.

Here is another example, an academic who told me that she has become a mother recently and until Corona she had to be at the University and sit in lots of meetings that she resented because she thought there was a lot of waste of time, now she can most of the time she teaches online or on Zoom and her academic research she can do from home, so in fact she is now planning to use it as an example to convince the university where she works that she should be allowed in the future and the staff should be allowed in the future to spend much more time at home because it's better for everybody.

I can think of another of a woman who told me that she entered into a new relationship, and the partner kept pushing, pressing her to spend more time with him than he was really interested, but she didn't feel strong enough to stand her ground,

but now with Corona she has an additional support and reason to insist on more privacy.

Another family who I have been talking to who as a result of Corona has much more time together the parents and the children, before that they were so busy that life was become almost impossible for them. So now they are thinking about how they should in the future change their lives so that they would not be as busy because they realise that when the Corona life is better for them, they have more time together, less time apart and life is not as loaded and frantic.

What I was trying to do was enumerate the blessing, for any blessing, the blessing to one person is a curse for another. I am trying to do is to catalogue the blessings to those that there are blessings, I take it for granted that every blessing that I enumerate to other people the same thing is the opposite, to take their example that you said, the prohibition against physical contact has been a blessing to quite a number of people who told me how it is now they don't have to kiss their grandmother, because they hate kissing their grandmother and now they don't have to, mother doesn't tell the grandchild anymore kiss grandma, because they don't like doing it. A person who is obsessive and doesn't feel comfortable with personal contact, or close personal contact, now has legitimacy, it doesn't mean there are many more people probably that suffer from the prohibition against the contact, but from my point of view there are two levels and it is important conceptually to understand. Because he is in isolation he spends much more time writing now and creating a whole lot of new place and he is movie maker, director and lots of examples of people who they opportunity to be alone has enhanced their creativity, now.

S: The conversation ends here.

But the blessings remained with me and I read the book "Phosphorescence" by Julia Baird who interviews experts on the "Drum" On ABC television in Melbourne. It will enhance your joy in life as well as your sadness. Her suffering is all our pain we share with others, and she writes of this with love and clarity.

VII. A MESSAGE FROM FRANCE JULY 2020

I received the message below from a colleague in France, and English is not her first language, but I love her expressive writing style. This in unedited for sake of preserving her creativity and humour.

.....
As I told you my USA 🇺🇸 translator is very busy with Trump as a president 😊
Natalia is married with a French man... and they are thinking of coming back to France 🇫🇷...

For me I told them that it is worse here than in 🇺🇸A
So I am alone... to speak about covid... as I felt it!

In France 🇫🇷 there were elections... on the 9 of March 2020 , on the Sunday... and on the next day... Monday 10 of March the President told... that at midnight 🕒 all restaurants, all airlines, all transportation... will stop!!! And we will not be allowed to get out from our home... for about 3 weeks!!!!

After there was a precision that we were allowed to get our one hour a day... close home... with an attestation..., telling why we were out for one hour !!!
For instance to get food... to take dog 🐕 outside ! To go to hospital 🏥 ...

It was incredible, no more cars in the streets... no more shops opened... only pharmacies, a little food stores!!!
No more post office 📮 !

We were so surprised 😞 and furious, because we heard that some weeks after, some people who were working for elections were dead or ill...

So to get the elections ready... government was able to let people going to participate... without taking all the precautions they should take!!!
So I did feel very sorry, because... already Jakarta wrote in February that Europeans could not come... I didn't understand ! Because in France 🇫🇷 there were a lot of manifestations where we could see our President going to theater.., telling populations to not wear any mask, to not worry.., the virus 🦠 will not come.., in France 🇫🇷

So to hear that Singapore airlines did cancel their flight ✈️... to hear that Indonesia did not allowed people to gather! was a real surprise !

And to hear that on Sunday you could do anything you wanted, travelling, driving, etc.
And hear on Monday morning that at midnight it will be obliged to stay home ! Was a real shock.

Many people did avail of the opportunity to leave Paris on Monday morning, driving or flying... to not be like prisoners in their flat... because in Paris... even the parks and gardens were closed ! And to live in a flat without garden like at the country is difficult if you are parents !!!

Because of course schools and universities were closed !!!

So I did stay at home 🏠, I do love it, even if I have a country garden in Deauville in Normandy, I did prefer to stay home in case of disease... there are a lot of hospitals and in my family they are all MD... but me... and one of my nephew is infectiologue and works with a very famous Professor who wrote a book which shows how France 🇫🇷 did kill 30 000 people !

Because even if you didn't feel well.. you had to stay home till you felt out of breathing !!!and when you were older... than 70 years... they didn't take you in charge in the Hospital and let you die!!! But if you were somebody known as a politician... you were not obliged to be out of breathe !

So it was very stressful to hear every the number of deaths at the hospital... which were so full that it was the reason why... they did ask people to call for emergency... when you were... near dying 😞

What an awful program.

So nobody wanted to get out... with the fear of the virus .

To get a masq was quite impossible !

And to get plastic gloves too..,

Happily I have a very small balcony where I used to bask in the sun. Because the weather was like summer!!! Which is rare in Paris in March !

And at night I enjoyed looking at the Eiffel Tower glittering ✨ every night !

We were not allowed to meet our family !!!

So we used to sms a lot...

My daughter who is 🦷 works as inspector of dentists so she could work from her home... with her computer.

And organizing the way... the dentists will be able to work... when the confinement would be over!

The confinement... was first for 3 weeks... and they added 3 others weeks!!! So the end was on the 11 of May ! But not allowed to travel more than 100km!!!

Only in end of June we were allowed to go further than 100km... so I was so happy to go back to Deauville..., where I am now.

It was a stressful time.

It is difficult to not meet people, to not meet your family !

But now we are a little relieved... but since 2 days... we are obliged to wear masques 🧐 to get out !!!

In February and March impossible to buy any masque 😞 and it was a real danger! And now... less dangerous.. we are obliged... once again !

So when you are older it is not a good period... because one year lost at my age... is very stressful.. because all your projects... are sure not to be realized !

And for younger and kids... they are wondering if they are br able to discover the world and to travel 🧳... as we used to do before !

VIII. THE INNER THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS OF A MOTHER OF TWO

A bit of a backstory. This is a young mother of two beautiful children from Indonesia, married to an Australian. Her own mother and family are in Jakarta. I asked her to express in words her feelings, thoughts and prayers this year.

I was going through a difficult time, feeling stuck in a situation with seemingly no way out. For quite a period of time I felt like an ant trapped in a hot wok going round and round. I sought help and advice, I tried to think of solutions, I researched and read. Yet, I was in a perpetual state of anxiety and foreboding. I remember one day feeling closed in and cornered, I isolated myself in the room and sat on the chair simply crying out to God. I can't do this anymore, I tried, and I have come to the end of whatever I can do. I remember just saying I give up, I surrender. It was at that moment a sense of calm came over me and this voice that spoke into my heart saying it was never mine to carry, but until I stopped trying that burden cannot be taken away. Like a drowning person I have fought against the current and tide, trying to keep myself afloat when my saviour simply needed me to relax and let go so I can be saved. I saw in my mind's eye an image of God carrying me (a baby - helpless and completely reliant). In His other hand is a huge umbrella. Everything was still raining down upon me, my circumstances didn't change. It did not change for quite a while, but I was no longer burdened. The anxiety and foreboding was replaced with a quiet knowing that somehow it will be ok because I am being taken care of and protected. Day after day as I prayed, He surrounds me with His words of comfort and promises. It is often in the darkest moments that we see the light.

Psalm 124, v. 2-8

If the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us,
When their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive;
The flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us,
The raging waters would have swept us away.
Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare;
The snare has been broken, and we have escaped.
Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Months later, my circumstances have now changed somewhat, but not because of what I have done. In fact, many of the changes were out of my control, yet they have all worked out for good. Just because circumstances are beyond our control does not mean it cannot be good. Maybe not right now, but later. Sometimes, we have to simply just let go, and trust that we are in good hands, like a weaned child with his / her mother.

IX. LOVELESS IN THE TIME OF CORONA

As if dating for the first time in 30 years wasn't going to be enough of a challenge, I found myself joining the online dating scene during the Corona virus pandemic. I'd been in Stage 3 isolation for 6 weeks. At 49 years of age, after a year of grieving the sudden loss of my long-term marriage, my adult daughters gently nudged me, "it's time to have some fun Mum, go on a date and enjoy yourself".

We've been in lockdown together in Melbourne since March and, as Stage 3 restrictions lift in June, bringing the promise of freedom to visit a bar or coffee shop, it feels like the right time. My 18-year old daughter helps me set-up my Tinder profile whilst I giggle ridiculously, feeling a combination of terror and excitement. She guides me with selecting the 'just right, down-to-earth, smiling, not-too-sexy-but friendly' pics and shows me how to make a discerning swipe left or right.

"Eew!" I shriek, as the first possibility appears on my screen.

"Swipe left if you're not vibing with them, don't think too much about it" she reassures me.

Which, in hindsight, is excellent advice. Don't think too much about it - if only!

When Steve, 53, and I match, my heart races. He is gorgeous, tall and degree qualified. It's like my first Korean BBQ experience, putting all my favourite things in a bowl, tossing them in a wok, and creating my perfect meal. Here he is, Steve. Delicious. If only my married friends could see us! Or, even better, my ex-husband, as Steve and I sit laughing together in a bar, enamoured with each other, a striking pair. Thrilling!

It's still pre-mask life, so I prepare for my date, put on make-up for the first time in weeks, including lipstick, and style my hair. I'm regretting not having squeezed in a bikini wax since the restrictions have lifted, but figure this is date number one - there's still time. I feel great wearing something other than gym gear or pyjamas.

I'm first to arrive at the little wine bar, sipping a rosé when Steve arrives. He doesn't disappoint ... stylish, handsome and as tall as his profile says. He pulls up a stool, a little too close to me, leans in much too close to me, and proceeds to tell me about himself. About himself and what he likes to do in bed and what he is sexually open to. "I'm not really into porn but porn can be great when you're having sex together" he confides. "Let's face it, we all just want to get naked together".

Lovely to meet you Steve, this date is promising.

As Steve begins to share his divorce story, the waiter comes over to take our second drink order. He is young, charming and polite, a perfect decoy for Steve who, I now realise, is quite unsure of himself despite his initial confidence. He befriends the waiter and my enthusiasm sinks. Steve gives his undivided attention to our new friend, who welcomes his intense interest and settles in with us. I feel myself floating outside of the conversation, observing them in their oblivion to the mutual admiration conference they've started without me. I'm irritated. Excuse me Mr Waiter, could I please have my date back so that we can return to talking about being naked? This is not great Steve.

Our first date finishes on a high with a fully-present lingering kiss. I feel guilty kissing Steve as thoughts of the virus penetrate my foggy mind. What if he has CoVid, what if I do?

He seems completely well, it's OK. I'm completely well.

But one of us could be asymptomatic?

I'll get a test tomorrow, I'll self-isolate.

This kiss is amazing.

I will date him exclusively, then it's not irresponsible.

My daughter lives with me, I must think about her.

He has children to consider too.

He kisses my ear. We confirm another date for two days' time.

For our second date, we meet at a different bar with a less familiar waiter. Steve leans across to kiss me before our drinks are finished. It's intoxicating. I hope, as we turn to go, that my ex is standing gobsmacked at the bar, watching us. It doesn't matter, I'm leaving with Steve anyway. He drives me home after we confirm our third date for the coming Saturday night - a plan to watch a movie at his place, all this in the space of a week. He kisses me at my apartment building entrance. We both want him to come upstairs but I've made a promise to my daughter that I won't bring a date home whilst she's there. It's an incredible kiss goodnight but we need to stop out on the street. And now there's Saturday.

The text arrives from Steve on Saturday morning.

"I'm not feeling well. If I don't clear this up, we may have to reschedule our plans".

OMG, he has Covid? "Rest up, we can reschedule for when you're feeling better"

"It's not Covid!"

Um ... how do you know?

"That's good, are you OK?" Please tell me your symptoms.

"Yes ... just a headache and feeling like a cold is coming on ... sneezing, etc. I need to be well for my trip to Phillip Island".

Nice, but what about being well to see me? Besides, they ARE Covid symptoms!

"For sure. I was looking forward to seeing you but it's probably better for you to rest and I'd like to stay well". I do NOT want Covid.

Pause. He may have already given me Covid. I can't give anyone else Covid!

"Just thinking it might be good for you to get a Covid test to check your symptoms? Just to be safe."

"I'll check into that".

No, you won't.

The next morning, Steve sends me a final text, confirming that he feels better "back to nearly 100% health". Miraculous. Two weeks later, I wonder where things went wrong. Our chemistry had been electric, until the threat of Covid hovered between us. Did I misread the signals? Had I been reckless in agreeing to meet and kiss him? Was I too forthright in asking him to get tested? Either way, my dating journey with Steve ended as abruptly as it began.

I'd like to say I learned my lesson about looking for love in the time of Corona. That then and there I turned off my dating apps and resigned myself to online yoga and Zoom drinks with friends. But Steve ignited something in me that had been lying dormant, not just since March from the first Stage 3 lockdown, but for years before in the confines of my stifling marriage. Desire ... the need to feel desired and desirable.

Back on Tinder, I've been offered a 'Yoni' massage by a man which, Google informs me, involves stimulation of the sacred female space or genitals with tantric massage. It kind-of sounds amazing, but who is this guy? To my eldest daughter's horror, she finds out that her younger sister has set me up on the Tinder app.

"Mum, you need to get off Tinder, the guys on there just want one thing".

So do I.

"OK, perhaps I'll give Bumble a whirl instead then". Yoni is a no ... NO!

As if the universe is answering the call of my sacred female space, I receive an unexpected cheeky Instagram DM from a friend with whom I flirted at a Christmas party 6 months prior. He happens to be tall, handsome and great fun.

"I still think we should have a pash you know" he tempts. Shhh, be calm, I whisper in my best tantric voice to the volcano erupting below.

"I'm up for a pash you know", I boldly reply.

"Oh really, let's do it today".

"Lovely, shall I swing by after my walk at around 3.30?".

"Yes please".

That afternoon, in the brief period between lockdowns, whatever has remained unfinished with Steve finds fulfilment. A part of me cracks open, finds expression in the fading light of that Sunday. More significantly, I find freedom from the binds of unrequited love that have imprisoned me in my past. The isolation and longing percolating as a single divorcee facing an uncertain future, whilst a deadly virus threatens, manifests in a moment to live fully.

Living alone through the time of Corona can create a yearning, trigger a primal need for human touch. How we navigate this, to stay sane, with safety, responsibility and dignity is new and uncharted territory. I'm pausing my dating apps for now, done with finding myself in a strange online relationship with someone that I haven't yet met, or may not meet again for months. Or who may not even be who they say they are. There are risks I'm not prepared to take. This is a window of time to learn to enjoy my company, to fill my own well.

Being loveless in the time of Corona may just, in fact, be the most loving thing of all.

X. **HOME IN MY LIFE**

On Monday 23rd March I was at home, at work on my laptop. Our team had started to work a few days per week at home, and I chose Monday. During the afternoon an email came to all staff from the vice-chancellor, saying to not come in the next day. All staff had to pack up and go home at 5, and the RMIT campus was closing up indefinitely. Our safety at work could no longer be guaranteed.

I felt alarmed. I had not expected this. My manager Michael asked me if I needed anything off my desk. It felt like an emergency, that our work lives were collapsing. I'd

be now working in my home for the foreseeable future. This idea felt cosy and exciting, and freeing.

Over the next few weeks I began to let my body rest by sleeping in a full hour later than usual. It dawned on me that I no longer needed to dress in my smart casual clothes and shoes. There was now no one to dress up for. And that I didn't have to think ahead about what to take for lunch each day, or have to spend money buying lunch at a café or food hall in the city. No more listening to the construction of the Metro Tunnel digging under my city block. I started to feel relieved and more relaxed than in the last three-and-a half years.

I began to like the idea of having my home office. Being my own business, it seemed. I had to mentally peel away my actual tasks from their usual habitat of my work desk and communal meeting rooms. I realised I wouldn't be seeing my colleagues in person, or the office kitchen, or Michael coming in the door each morning and waving at me from down the end of the corridor.

I felt safe and private, finally. Getting out of bed each day, making porridge and doing my morning stretches, I remembered the years I studied for my honours degree. At home, alone. Breakfast, then desk, then start working. It felt the same now: 18 years later.

I started to take a morning walk each day down my street to the park. The quiet and peace were so invigorating. Birds sang. Red flame trees stood against a brilliant blue autumn morning sky. I felt heartened seeing dogs running on the lower oval in the park, their faces happy, joy pumping around their furry bodies, barking, rolling, frolicking together.

The weeks wore on. I adjusted to my new life. Autumn afternoons became dark winter nights. I snuggled in to myself. My body began telling me we needed rest and care. I bought some fibre to sprinkle on my porridge each morning. I put together some loose-leaf herbal tea mixtures and stored them in big jars in my pantry. I began taking vitamin D, and started doing more stretches on my bedroom floor before bed. Salutes to the moon: stretching out tensions of the years of fulltime work, of constantly stepping up in my job.

And then Virgin Australia collapsed. It had always been there to take me back to Newcastle, to mum and dad and my brothers. I realised I won't be going up to them in June as planned. For the first time in my life, I felt cut off from my family.

I pondered on the words of my therapist: "You have to be in your own life now. You don't have a choice." I felt stopped in my tracks. All my plans were falling away and I had no choice but to sit and be present. She was right. I had to be in my own life. I had to just get on with it, like the rest of the population. It felt freeing and exciting.

To stay connected I joined some of the social media pages at work. I felt a new appreciation of technology: all of a sudden it was keeping me together with my team, and the wider RMIT community of friendly colleagues. I posted my photos of the park. Someone said a media blackout day worked well for him to switch off from the bad news.

I decided to have my own media blackout day. Instead of the news, I watched a funny TV show then went to bed early. My partner Kevin bought me a novel, and I began reading by lamplight. My body loved the extra rest, and it felt like an escape route into other worlds, away from our changing society.

In July it was announced that the New South Wales-Victorian border was closing. More alarm. I didn't even know borders could be closed. The last time it happened was

during the Spanish flu pandemic a century ago. I began to feel even more cut off from my family. I realised having lived in Melbourne for 24 years now, I am a Victorian citizen. My local park and the people in it: these are my grounds, my neighbours. This is my area, my home.

I told my brother Peter I felt sad I couldn't come up to Newcastle for the foreseeable future. He coaxed mum and dad into buying their very first smart phone, an impressive feat. We began to video call each other on a Friday. I felt so happy to see them and chat and laugh as if I was in the room, as I used to be pre-pandemic.

On Sunday 2nd August it was announced that Melbourne was going into a "Stage 4 lockdown". I didn't know what that meant. Perhaps none of us did. But we soon found out: mandatory mask-wearing, 8pm curfew and many more businesses were to close. The virus had spiralled out of control in our beautiful city, and more elderly were dying in aged care homes. I was glad mum and dad still live together in our childhood home in Shortland. Home: my other home. My first home.

One week later it came to me. I might not be spending Christmas 2020 in Newcastle. I cancelled the holiday apartment I had booked back in March. Kevin and I will be having Christmas in Melbourne. And curiously, I felt excited to be staying here, in my home. On my couch if I wanted. No pilgrimage back, no big family Christmas brunch this year. I'll put up my little Christmas tree in the corner of my lounge room, and string up on my walls the cheery bunting I made years ago. I'll bake a cake and Kevin and I can take a thermos of tea into the park on Christmas morning. My beloved park. We'll have a quiet day together of unwrapping presents and resting. After many years of searching, I've finally come home into my own life.

XI. WHAT IS MY COVID STORY?

What an interesting time in history we are currently experiencing! Looking back over the last seven months, I can best describe my journey referencing the five stages of grief, or acceptance as I prefer to call it.

I live in Melbourne Australia with my husband and 12 year old son and am originally from Northern California in the US. We own our own business and employ six staff. Back at the beginning of March 2020 when the information about the Coronavirus was just starting to hit the news, my first thoughts were that it was serious and concerning from a humanitarian viewpoint and wouldn't affect my life too much, either here or for my family in California.

Then mid-March arrived, and the seeds of uneasiness grew as 3 three staff decided they would prefer to work from home to lessen their exposure to the virus for the time being rather than take public transport. Then on the 18th of March my biggest reality check of how big this situation was becoming, came when one of my close friends in the US texted me that the Governor of California had just announced he was closing schools until the Fall and that meant the fine arts summer camp we run together every July would also be a casualty. This would have been my 33rd year attending the camp.

I was vaguely aware that the stages of grief were starting their cycle, the first one being Denial. "What?! Surely this will all pass and be handled by the 'Powers that Be' by the time I was due to fly out on my pre-purchased plane tickets on July 1st!?" This was crazy!

I'm not sure I remember passing through the Anger stage specifically. However, I do remember the shock of realizing I had never contemplated not being able to jump on a plane to go home if I wanted or needed to. This still causes me distress to some

degree. Apart from that, I think I was too busy getting my head around the government restrictions, financial assistance and grants, keeping our business afloat, managing my son's remote learning from our office and setting up all the technology we needed for our staff to work from home effectively and easily.

My husband and I were allowed to still work from our office throughout Melbourne's Stage 3 restrictions due to being business owners. That was a blessing and certainly helped us keep a modicum of a familiar routine to our lives until August when we moved into Stage 4 lockdown. I think the Bargaining Stage was that interim period of operating from our business premises while everyone else we knew was essentially working from home. We felt a little different and not quite like we were following the rules even though we were. It's an odd feeling to be doing things differently to the overwhelming majority.

Once we moved into Stage 4 and the novelty of actually working from home passed, different forms of the Depression Stage appeared. I experienced days with plenty of energy and focus and then there were days that my motivation completely disappeared and all I wanted to do is sleep or stare out a window. Having said that, my diligence and perseverance to keep moving both physically and mentally has been positive. I've been mindful to keep my exercise schedule consistent and our meals healthy. We focus on all the amazing changes that have occurred around the world and watch with pride all the examples of human ingenuity and our ability to adapt.

Going back to the cancellation of my summer fine arts camp in California, the Directors and I decided in May that there was value in asking the teaching and counselling staff if there was any interest in running a few online classes during one of the weeks that camp would have been in session. That idea took hold and before we knew it, we had over 80 classes, events and activities planned and we ended up running a full week of camp over Zoom! Our community and the spirit that brings us back together every year from all corners of the globe prevailed. The fact that every single one of us was affected by the pandemic brought us together and we persisted to provide the opportunity for growth and connection that the students and we all needed.

It's early September now. I don't think I'm quite fully embedded in the Acceptance Stage yet, however I'm finding ways of giving myself permission to have those low energy days. I'm making the most of the time at home, enjoying the window into my son's education and my husband's positivity and levity in the changing landscape. We've found gifts in braking distance and communication paradigms with friends we haven't been in touch with for ages. And the strengthening of friendships and family relationships has been a bonus. The lessening of air and noise pollution, growth of digital technologies, time to research and grow knowledge, increase of wildlife, slowing down of daily and weekly schedules are also things I turn my attention to. What I hope I'll take away from all this is the exponential growth of gratitude for so much I took for granted, from international travel to having a glass of wine with a friend in person at home, or in a crowded pub! And the reminder that life is not predictable, so to be present and make the most of the gifts today is offering.