



Submitted by Jan Marsh

Blog in a time of virus by Jan Marsh

DAY ONE

We go to Level Four to contain Covid-19. After the initial shock that such drastic action would be taken, I've decided to write a blog each day to record the experience. I am alone at home in Nelson with my cat. My only outings will be a daily hour of exercise and a weekly shopping trip. It's been building since January. At first the jargon sounds funny: 'self-isolation', 'contact-tracing' and now a new one 'bubble'. Everyday items we'd barely given a thought, such as hand-sanitiser and toilet paper, seem weirdly desirable. Panic-buying strips the supermarket shelves. We get used to it. People adapt. Then comes 'social distancing', not some kind of snobbery but keeping two metres away from those not in our household. That seems drastic as meetings are cancelled, churches closed, gym classes ceased, swimming pools, libraries, sports – all the fun ways we distract ourselves and mix with people – come to an end. It feels harsh but implies that something bigger is about to happen. We saw it on TV in other countries – lock down. The panic buying is a symbol of the fear welling up in us all at our loss of freedom, the restrictions that would separate us from our friends, our grandchildren, our religious groups. We are social creatures, of course we were panicking. House arrest or home detention are serious punishments, solitary confinement even more so and those of us who live alone will stay alone for the duration. Yes, phones, email and video calls are helpful tools, but face-to-face contact is the deepest need. It calms and satisfies us in ways we are barely conscious of. If this is the solution, how bad is the problem? I take a deep breath and look at the present moment. This morning I woke as usual, let the cat in as usual, opened the curtains to the sunrise, noting its apocalyptic red and grey hue and finding the humour rather than the fear. I did my salutes to the sun as usual. But it's Thursday, I swim with my friend and catch up over breakfast on Thursdays. There's no swimming, the pools are closed. What next? I've made a list of chores. I intend to blog regularly. I've put a teddy bear in the window for the children next door to see. I'll phone my sister and video call my swimming friend, trying to keep the shreds of my normal social life intact. I read a brave, sensible message from the Director of Medicines sans Frontiers and I weep - grateful that I'm not in a war zone and sad for the losses in this new normal. By the end of the day I'm feeling



pretty positive. I've had a good day: lots of phone calls, including a successful video call on the laptop and a less successful one on my rather old phone. I have a sense of achievement from doing a few small writing jobs and some gardening. I biked to the beach and had a walk along the sand. You know, it could be ok.

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DAY THIRTY-FOUR 28th April 2020

We move to Level Three, 'the Waiting Room'. Some restrictions are relaxed, some people will return to work but travel is still restricted and the focus remains on containing the virus. I drive into town about 9.30 for shopping, although I don't need much. I'm still looking for wholemeal flour for making bread so I go straight to the organic shop on Collingwood St where one of my neighbours is queuing although it doesn't open till 10. I tease her that she's like the people outside MacDonald's. My turn comes and I sanitise my hands at the door and go in. Success! They have two kinds of wholemeal flour and I get a bag each for me and my friend. I have less success finding someone selling takeaway coffee, though I can wait for that, and Oakland's milk machine is empty so I'll need to come back tomorrow. I take the flour and some other shopping to my friend and we chat as usual through the kitchen window, catching up on news and talking about some possible plans now that the restrictions are relaxed a little. As someone over 70 she has been at home for nearly six weeks, keeping to the rules faithfully, and she can now come out a bit more. She's a good cook and looks forward to going to the veggie shop to choose her own produce. We could walk on the beach together, perhaps, keeping some distance. I go home via the waterfront to check out the sea. It's a windy morning and the waves are choppy but not high. I have a swim in mind. By the time I get back to the beach in my wetsuit the wind has dropped and although the water's cold enough to give me an ice-cream headache at first, I get used to it and swim parallel to the beach for about half an hour. It's been a full month since I last did this and my breathing is tight, so I stop now and then, enjoying being in the water and looking back at the beach and out to sea. There are a lot of people walking but only half a dozen swimming: two quick-dippers, three squealy girls going out to the buoy and back, and me stroking doggedly along. I feel tingly and fresh when I get out. I'll definitely do this again. When the phone goes, I don't recognise the voice at the other end until it says, 'I'll give you a clue – hello, stranger!' It's my eight-year-old grandson with his trademark greeting. We have a great conversation about the joys of home-schooling when the house is full of interesting devices, the 200+ teddy bears he's seen on the neighbourhood bear hunt and whether it's right to include the one at his mother's house which has been taken down, is TV school any good (it is) and the robot he and his dad are making which needs a new part 3D-printed. He's such fun to talk with. Eventually he hands over to his father, who is working from home, but he comes back for a warm good-bye and 'miss you.' I look forward to being able to get to Wellington to see the family before too much longer. Later I set off for a walk around Rocks Rd where the traffic is almost at rush hour proportions and drowns out the podcast I'm listening to – that's the downside of Level Three! The sun is low and as I head back it slips behind the mountains



leaving a fingernail moon in the clear pink sky and a mirror-like sea, where there are some swimmers, some paddle-boarders and a kayak. It's peaceful and beautiful.