

Summertown bulletin, from Moira

Hello everyone,

It's my turn this week and next week, when it would have been our AGM, Erica will be sending out the accounts and her chairman's report.

My instructions for this bulletin were to "say something interesting about bridge" and I have to confess that I am falling at the first fence. I have given myself a holiday from bridge, not just no playing online but no reading of books, articles, newspaper articles. It's not that I don't miss our Monday evening sessions. I miss them a lot but what I miss most is the friendly welcoming atmosphere and the familiar faces, not to mention Christopher's biscuits. Somehow bridge without the companionship doesn't have the same appeal.

So what have I been doing to fill these empty hours? Well, LSL (life since lockdown) seems to have fallen into a number of discrete phases. LSL phase 1 was full of hectic activity and good intentions: all these things that I had put off for so long, I now had time to do them all. So a frenzy of cleaning, tidying, finding what was lurking at the backs of cupboards and other domestic improvements. But I was never cut out to be a domestic goddess: phase 1 didn't even last a week.

Phase 2 began when we realised that online shopping wasn't going to be the easy dawdle that I had anticipated. We had ordered online before and had had accounts with both Ocado and Sainsbury's. Surely it couldn't be too difficult to revive these. Several frustrating hours later and we came to terms with the new LSL reality and panic set in. Yes, we could survive on what we had for some weeks if we had to, but it was life's little luxuries we were missing. Only one bottle of wine left, no cheese and down to our last squares of chocolate. The inevitable happened, of course. After some dead-ends, Cliff and I each managed to identify a wine supplier, we each placed orders and lo and behold the boxes arrived on our doorstep the same day, only a few hours apart. Then like Holly we contacted Bonners who are co-ordinating their deliveries with those from Fellers and the Cheese Shop. The delivery that caught us by surprise was one from the Cheese Shop –we certainly hadn't meant to order a whole kilo of Manchego! We are hoping now that it won't come to too much harm in the freezer. A friend has just told me that Aldens Meatmaster is also offering a good delivery service with meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, eggs and cheese. I'll have a look at their site next week, but I certainly won't be ordering cheese again for some weeks to come!

Gradually we have settled into phase 3, "the new normal". We are even settling into a sort of routine: newspapers delivered daily (what luxury!), a supermarket delivery roughly once a fortnight, a fruit and veg delivery once a week, , some gardening (there is always some task demanding to be done), the daily walk, the daily government press briefing. The hours soon pass and in our spare time in the evenings, Cliff is working his way through television series he never had time to watch before and I have rediscovered the joys of reading, when I can really settle down with a book not just read a chapter at a time.

The highlight of our day is our daily walk. We are so lucky here in Britain that we are allowed out for our daily exercise in the fresh air. I have friends in Spain who have been cooped up in their flats for 5 weeks now, only allowed out once a week for essential shopping. One couple we know well who live in an eighth floor flat say that their daily exercise is to run down the stairs to the bottom of the block and then climb back up again as fast as they can.

Instead we have fresh air and the most beautiful April weather we have had for some time. Pavement etiquette is interesting; the ways in which we all try to give each other space while still politely acknowledging their existence. Suzanne Abel and I passed on the pavement yesterday; we managed a wave to each other but not a word was spoken.

There is so much to enjoy in our daily walk, even if it does feel sometimes like a forced march. "Come on Moira; it's not exercise if you don't get out of breath" There's hardly any traffic on the roads and as a result, the air is so much clearer and the birdsong so much louder. I hope cars don't start cluttering up the roads again once this is all over, but at least for the moment we can enjoy the relative peace and quiet. Then we arrive at Port Meadow, my favourite spot in Oxford. Yes, there is always a bit of a delay around the gate as we all studiously avoid getting too close – not such an inconvenience for the British; we have always valued our personal space. And once free in Port Meadow, we can enjoy the distant views, the larksong rising loud and clear and the greenery all around.

But after this escapist interlude, it is back home for the daily briefing and a time to confront the grim reality of what is going on around us. It's overwhelming, and we try to alleviate the tension by shouting at the television as a succession of smart suited politicians, clearly out of their depth, trot out their presentations. It is all too terrible. Afterwards we escape again, Cliff into comfort viewing, me into comfort reading.

Around us, there are so many cases of bravery and self-sacrifice on the part of all of those key workers who are keeping the country going. But it is interesting that while in Spain they sing "Resistiré" (I will survive), and in Italy, they have started singing the national anthem, here in Britain we draw comfort from the pictures of Captain Tom, the modern epitome of the bulldog spirit, as he walks around his garden with his medals and his zimmer frame and raises 26,000,000 pounds.

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