

# The Loom



ABBOTSLEIGH

ABBOTSLEIGH OLD GIRLS  
NEWSLETTER  
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## COVID-19 Supplement

### Editor's introduction

No matter who you are, where you are or what you do, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been felt by us all. Along with the impacts of devastating bushfires and drought here in Australia, 2020 has been defined globally by the immense challenges of this pandemic, the likes of which haven't been seen in a century.

In July, the AOGU called on you, our members, to share your COVID-19 stories, capturing your experiences and reflections of life and work during the pandemic. We have been thrilled to receive dozens of articles and photographs, from Old Girls of all ages, living all over Australia and the world, and engaged in so many different walks of life.

Some of the stories are sad and confronting, some are humorous, so many are uplifting, all are inspiring. Each article is a snapshot, as told by an Old Girl, of a moment in time and place. The articles were written in July, August or early September, and hence reflect the COVID-19 situation at the time of writing.

We are delighted to share these stories with you, in this very special edition of *The Loom*. The AOGU believes it's important to have your COVID-19 experiences recorded and archived, for future generations to understand how we in 2020 are navigating this pandemic as individuals, and together.

Thank you to the 45 Old Girls who shared your stories: your contributions are invaluable. Thank you to the AOGU Committee members who joined me on the editorial team: Melissa Slattery (Walsh, 1977), Fiona Hobill Cole (Armstrong, 1981) and Karen Love (1987).

And most of all, to all of you who are on the frontline or are essential workers keeping us safe, thank you. Many of your stories are represented here.

**Rebecca Baillie (1989)**  
**Vice President, AOGU**  
**September, 2020**

## Sally Marden (Forndran, 1989)

Nurses feel strongly that one should never die alone. Every day for four months, I went to work at the Royal United Hospital, Bath, UK, not knowing what I would see, who I could help, and who I would watch die. I was struck by the number of COVID-19 patients for whom I was the only person staying back: to comfort them when they were dying, to help them make their final Facetime call to loved ones, to hold their hands and stroke their hair, as they literally drowned from the dreaded virus.

I have worked as a specialist nurse in the UK since 1998, and am currently the lead Sepsis and Kidney injury specialist nurse within Royal United Hospital's critical care outreach team. I seek out and escalate appropriate patients to the intensive care unit, or palliate the patients who are the sickest of the sick. I cover A&E, paediatrics, maternity and all ward areas. It is an extremely busy job and the catchment area for the hospital covers 500,000 people.

COVID-19 has changed the hospital significantly. When we first heard of the sudden influx of patients arriving in London (two hours down the motorway), we had about two weeks to prepare for the onslaught. This was a very strange time, as we all needed fit-mask-testing, equipment supplies, distance measures and protocols to be put in place. The hospital was suddenly buzzing with builders putting doors on all patient areas and building new wards. COVID patients needed to be separated at every step throughout the hospital. The hospital built an 18 bed Intensive Therapy Unit just for COVID patients, separate wards were transformed to treat COVID patients and all theatres and outpatient activity stopped suddenly. The number of patients through A&E dropped from approximately 300 a day, to about 30. Where did all the chest pain, stroke and trauma patients suddenly go once lockdown was enforced? The corridors were empty, in what is usually a very busy district hospital.

But then the COVID patients came. There was real concern about how infectious they were. It is an invisible virus, so every time a patient coughed, spoke, struggled to breathe, you constantly wondered if it was 'just that time' when you got infected. I sat for sometimes hours comforting them, in the hottest summer conditions – my gown, mask, face shield, gloves all dripping with sweat, while I tried to hold back tears. I have cried many times, both alone and at the bedside, at the sadness of it all – so many people just so scared and not being comforted at all by loved ones. I felt so bad to be the last person they would see. I didn't know anything about them – what kind of life had they had? Who had they loved? Strangers who, day after day, I tried to comfort the best I could. But I never once felt satisfied by my actions and the care that I gave. When do you ever do enough for the dying?

I have had to leave my three children at home every day. They are 16, 15 and 12 years old. My husband also works at the hospital as a gastroenterologist and the kids asked early on who out of the two of us was the most exposed to the COVID patients? It was me. So, from then on the kids craved my attention when I got home, in subtle ways. My son kept asking to go for a walk, or kick a ball and he wanted to take pictures of me doing everything. 'Why?' I asked. He told me he was making memories, as he was sure out of the two of us, I would be the one to get sick and die. It broke my heart. My



16-year-old daughter was very quiet and scared, shutting off from me a little, as she thought I was 'dirty' and bringing the virus home. My middle boy has special needs and we had to make the tough decision to place him in boarding school. We both needed to be at the hospital every day, and so couldn't give him 1:1 care. It was really challenging sending him away, he is very much part of the family and very loved. He didn't understand, and we all missed him terribly.

My two children at home were alone for five months' online schooling. I haven't sat by them once to help and guide them through this strange way of learning. This made me feel guilty for never being there for them. Thank goodness they are both extremely mature and resilient kids, and thrived academically despite this! Their school was amazing and provided outstanding pastoral care; I was concerned for the kids' mental health due to this prolonged time in isolation.

Another significant challenge was listening to my friends complaining that they weren't at work, or were at home every day with their kids – I craved both, and just felt so annoyed with them saying this to me! The number of friends missing their gym, favourite restaurants, the cinema and normal life was boggling to me – I didn't have this lockdown experience at all. I worked extremely hard, both physically and mentally and struggled with not being there for my kids. I had to send one kid away, just so we could both go to work. All the time I was desperately trying to suppress my anxiety at catching and dying of this dreaded virus to which I was SO exposed every day!

The fallout from this pandemic is now clear. The number of mental health patients is filling the hospital beds every day. They range from 12-90 years old, and the stories break your heart. Job losses, anger, anxiety just a few causes. Abuse is astounding, violence is frightening, overdoses are commonplace, and suicide attempts just too many to count.

And these are just the incidences who need hospitalisation, God knows what is going on out in the wider community?

Coming out of wave one has been a relief. I am completely spent and broken mentally. I struggle to do many tasks. I would love to exercise regularly, but I am finding it difficult, as after a day in all that gear I am exhausted, dehydrated and extremely reflective.

We are managing to get away next week for a well-deserved break – just as the second spike is hitting Europe and the numbers are on the rise again. After our first trip was cancelled, we are desperately hoping to get on the plane before another lockdown occurs. The winter months are looming. The flu season is tough every winter, and with COVID on top, things are going to be just awful. We are talking at work about how exhausted we all feel and are trying to take time away, before the numbers creep up again. There is a huge amount of uncertainty about the coming months, nothing of which is positive. Having been through it before, we feel ready mentally for what is coming.

The virus is nasty; it doesn't discriminate. My husband has lost two colleagues, and I have seen more than 400 nurses be infected. It is not the time to be complacent, rather to stay vigilant – inside and outside of work. I have never appreciated so much the safety of the family home, and the security of us all sitting around the table together. Laughing and just hanging out is so special during these strange and uncertain times.

The pandemic has taught me that people's life experiences generally affect how you react to situations beyond your control. I could never turn my back on my job, despite the risks I walked into every day. It was extremely hard to have this genuine drive to help, when I had kids at home who needed their mummy so much. I always respected the life I have: I have seen so many people die and I don't take anything for granted. Take care everyone.

**If this article raises any issues for you: Lifeline 13 11 14 or Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800**

25 July, 2020



Sally Marden donning PPE for work at Royal United Hospital, Bath UK

# Elise Julien (1968)



Elise Julien, PhD is a Clinical and Counselling Psychologist in private practice in Melbourne

I live alone in Melbourne, am divorced, with three adult kids and four grandkids. My children and their families live in Melbourne, Geelong and London.

A Clinical and Counselling Psychologist in independent private practice, I have rooms in St Kilda Road, Melbourne, but am currently set up in a home-based business. I am a Fellow of both the Colleges of Clinical and Counselling Psychology with the Australian Psychological Society. I have been conducting telehealth since 24 March, 2020, as I also fall into the vulnerable category. Psychologists are deemed essential workers.

I feel having an insight to my life in Lockdown 2 in Melbourne will form part of long-term history. It will also give others in Australia a picture that most are not currently experiencing at this level. It's not easy.

My working mode has changed dramatically. At very little notice, I moved my entire business home. In one month, there were four different Medicare rules re invoicing clients and definitions of vulnerability etc. This meant clients had to be constantly re-educated/updated. Appointments focused onscreen are very intense – there's no wriggle room, you must stay in the screen. It is not how we usually communicate.

Psychologists had to bulk bill Medicare clients, with subsequent major drops in income. I had to keep up with the changes after hours, listen to regular webinars and rewrite Intake/Consent Forms re telehealth. I had to work on weekends to keep abreast. The COVID-19 Medicare items then eventually reverted to allowing a co-payment, which reduced financial stress. I felt exhausted, stretched and on some sort of treadmill.

### Skip forward to now.

I am settled into my work from home; all my clients have transferred and most never cancel sessions. I am better able to pace myself, have flexibility as to what hours I work and can fit in emergency appointments.

Many of my clients are in crisis. For example, three clients have separated during the Lockdown; another client found her separated partner in an attempted suicide; another is undergoing IVF and changed conditions, with associated grief;

one lives in a toxic relationship exacerbated by lockdown. I debrief with several colleagues on Facetime for my own self-care. I am so fortunate, as I love my work and I know I make a difference.

Personally, I am reconnecting to my home as a haven. I have improved the Feng Shui, I burn essential oils in my work space and have fresh flowers. I've improved all sorts of small things that make my life easier and more pleasant. I have a new mattress, electric blanket and doona and it's now a delight to get into bed and be so comfortable! There's no work commute, which saves hours and energy each week. My room rental has been halved.

I honour myself by cooking nutritious meals and snacks and find this grounds me. I'm not run off my feet, as there is no social life. I keep connected via telephone, texts and Facebook, and have a regular, distanced and masked-up meeting on opposite sides of the driveway!

In Lockdown 2, I am not allowed any other person in my home. I cannot see my daughter, son or his family either. I wear a mask everywhere and shop once a week at a local independent supermarket where there are far less crowds. I still attend or have tele-medical appointments, as I am currently undergoing treatment. I walk daily, locally only and then stay at home.

I have learnt to plan my weekends. I support our musicians by watching concerts at Melbourne Digital Concert Hall and The Arts Centre on a Saturday night, paired with a tasty meal. I'm proud to say I have learnt how to stream on a non-smart TV!



Realities of life in lockdown

Yes, there are times when I feel alone, lonely, concerned, overwhelmed, isolated, sad. I miss seeing my friends and those hugs from my grandies! It is usually short lived. I try to get outside or turn on my music. I try to focus on what I can do, practise self-care, keep active and be kind to myself. I remind myself that there are people from all walks of life who are in a much worse financial and/or psychological situation; there are those who have COVID-19 and those who have lost loved ones. I am so lucky.

I am prepared in my mind that Melbourne’s Lockdown 2 is unlikely to end mid-August. My planned trips in July, 2020 to Helsinki, the Baltics, Prague International Congress of Psychology 2020 and in November to Antarctica have obviously been cancelled; my 70th birthday plans thwarted. It was going to be a big year... but little did I know!

I will focus on doing something meaningful for others instead: a fundraiser for The Archie Roach Foundation, to support work towards changing the minimum age of criminal responsibility, when children can be legally incarcerated, from 10 to 14 years old. It’s an ugly truth that exists.

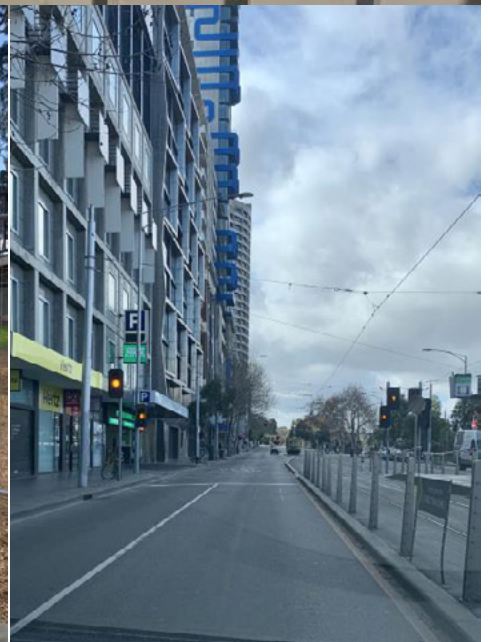
I am opening myself for reflection during lockdown, to ponder what my new lifestyle could be. It is an opportunity for a reset. Yes, there is a silver lining!

**Update by Elise Julien from Stage 4 Lockdown- Melbourne’s 2nd COVID-19 wave, August 23, 2020**

Melbourne is now in Stage 4 lockdown. We are in week three of minimum six weeks at Level 4 – confined to home except for essential food shopping (only one person from each family can go), chemist, medical appointments (most by telehealth), one hour of exercise per day, or travel for essential work (you need a work permit). We must do all this within 5 km of home, unless we have a permit. All cafés and restaurants are takeaway only and most office supplies are order online, click and collect.

If you live on your own, no visitors are allowed at all. If you’re in a relationship, then you’re allowed to travel more than 5 km to visit. It’s mandatory to wear a mask if you leave home. We must maintain 1.5 m between people and wash hands regularly.

**If this article raises any issues for you: Lifeline 13 11 14 or Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800**



Elise Julien’s reflections of Melbourne lockdown

## Amelia Koh-Butler (Koh, 1982)

Widowed only weeks before lockdown and iso, I found myself coming back into work as part of the Westmead health district COVID response team. At different times, we have had daily or weekly briefings. It has been stressful at times. Many of my anxious and tearful colleagues have turned to me for words of hope, as they make decisions not to live with their own families while they are working with COVID-19 cases. Some of these frontline workers stay at Parramatta Mission's Westmead Motel.

Part of my role is to care for international students. I run an online soup kitchen and cooking show for 150 households! I also take 'at risk' people from Western Sydney University or Parramatta Mission for COVID testing. Each time I take someone, I make sure I have 14 days' supplies at home. I put on my PPE and prep the backseat of my car to transport whomever I am taking. After I have dropped them home, I then fully self-isolate until their test comes back negative. Even then, I usually try not to have any contact with others for about a week.

After 30 years of married life, I am having to relearn what it means to live on my own. I have at least 4-5 hours of online meetings every day, so I am being social. When I see people in real life, I am often geared up, and we are all trying to hide our anxieties and frustrations. Cooking, music, art and my balcony garden are my companions.

I run Prayer Space times online and get joined by the most interesting people! Prayer Space has involved sending people some colouring in, getting them to light a candle, leading a meditation, or a bit of yoga.

I now operate on an international timetable. Many of our students and my colleagues are in other parts of the world, so meetings can be anytime. (I have learnt to keep a shawl, brush, earrings and water by the computer!)

I facilitated an online funeral for a family in Indonesia. The deceased died of COVID-19 and the body could not be released. The local church was unable to do what they normally would and the whole family had gone into isolation, so, their nieces here asked me to do the service. Friends helped me to make it a bilingual event and it was a moving time of sharing. We all cried a lot, but we also blessed one another.

Anzac Day was particularly moving. I placed several wreaths at different sites and people added their own poppy. We then put them at key places in Western Sydney and I coordinated about 50 different groups to share stories of peacemaking around the world. I also delivered 300+ Anzac biscuits.

As difficult as this time has been, I have also felt hopeful that we are reminded of what is essential. Love and beauty and kindness are more valuable than they have ever been.



Amelia Koh-Butler is Parramatta Mission's Multifaith Chaplain to Western Sydney University (based at Parramatta and Westmead); Worship & Liturgy Convener of the World Methodist Council and Uniting Church's National Advocate for Ecumenical and Interfaith relations.



Soup Kitchen Meal kits are delivered to about 150 households each week. Amelia runs 'Koh's kitchen' online... where people cook and eat together.

## Belinda Luscombe (1981)

When my husband began to show symptoms of COVID-19, about a week after we found out one of his co-workers on a building site in New York City had a positive test, I wasn't particularly worried. He's a middle-aged, athletic, healthy guy. Our kids live elsewhere. We would just hunker down for a few days and get through it together.

After all, the pandemic has forced many people to do work that they have traditionally outsourced. Families are home schooling, cleaning their own homes, cooking more meals, doing their own home repairs. Even if nobody in their home has fallen ill, people have had to behave more like health workers, by maintaining a hygienic environment, avoiding contamination and wearing protective garb. So, big deal, I would get to be a nurse for a while. (I had symptoms too, but they were much milder.)

Admittedly, the talents nursing requires—compassion, patience, the ability to offer comfort—are not my strong suits. My skillset lies more in pestering people and being prepared to make them uncomfortable. The only medical skill I've ever mastered is making a bed with hospital corners. But I knew it would be impossible to get a test in New York City; only hospitals were administering them at the time and overwhelmed medical staff didn't want anyone there unless they were having difficulty breathing. I knew going to see a doctor was out of the question. Going to the pharmacy was also out of the question. In fact, for probable coronavirus carriers, stepping outside the front door was out of the question. I felt we could manage on our own.

I was wrong. I soon discovered our many shortcomings, which included maintaining a home without a working thermometer. And failing to keep the supply lines of Tylenol intact. I didn't really even have a personal physician, because we just used the local clinic. In normal times, these were small oversights, easily addressed within 24 hours. During a pandemic, they were disastrous.

Despite these deficiencies, I didn't want to let anybody know too many details of my situation. I felt a little ashamed of catching the virus, even though my husband probably got it before the lockdown. Part of it was a fear of ostracism. But mostly, there was pride. We were immigrants to New York City who had done okay. We were people who offered assistance, not people who needed it.

One particularly grim night, I awoke to find my husband walking our home in misery, his forehead burning. He was exhausted and couldn't sleep. He hadn't had food in days but didn't want to eat. No identifiable body part hurt, but he felt awful. There was nothing to do but just share the misery. I rubbed his back. We sat in silence. Eventually I figured I might as well remake the bed. That finally helped him get some rest. (Let's hear it for hospital corners!)

It took me a lot longer to accept my fate than it should have. I needed to ask for help. Actually, I didn't even need to ask, I just needed to accept the help that was offered. When a colleague gently insisted, against my protests that we were fine, on dropping by with her own thermometer and acetaminophen, and threw in some lemons, bread, vitamin drinks, chocolate and latex gloves, the floodgates broke. She left a bag at the door, waved through the glass, walked away and I realised being alone was not the same thing as going it alone.

This was confirmed when the thermometer read 104 (40 degrees Celsius).

Here is the skill set that is useful in both journalism and the caregiving professions: a willingness to relentlessly pursue people for information. All the telemedicine lines I tried had very long wait times. So, I texted a nurse in Tennessee we had once house-swapped with, but whom I've never met. In the wee hours of the morning, I called a high school friend from Australia, where it was mid-afternoon. I emailed a kidney specialist neighbour three floors up, even though the only correspondence we'd had previously was when I 'accidentally' took her newspaper.

Mostly what these friends and strangers told me was that I was doing what could be done: Keeping up the fluids, trying to keep the fever in check, monitoring the breathing. They helped me make a plan for what to do if things got worse. While my husband slept I occasionally counted his breaths—one doctor told me that more than 25 a minute meant he may be struggling to get enough oxygen. I made a record of his temperature and noticed when it seemed to rage (evenings). The panic subsided and was replaced by a routine. And eventually, after about 10 days, he began to get better.

Possibly, we would have come through it without help, but I wouldn't have wanted to. One of the most indelible lessons of this scary time is that you can survive alone, but you need others to flourish. The most dangerous pre-existing condition my husband and I had for fighting the virus was our devotion to self-sufficiency. Independence can be its own kind of social isolation.

This article first appeared in *TIME*, April 29, 2020

You can read other COVID-related articles by Belinda Luscombe here:

[What You Miss When you Have to Wear a Mask](#)  
[Did We Give our Neighbor the Virus?](#)

## Caitlin Oschadleus (2019)



### Winds of Change

This year I am studying international and global studies at Sydney University. I also started working in the McCredie boarding house at Abbotsleigh and coaching a junior netball team.

It's often said that the only constant in life is change. We are constantly evolving, finding ourselves in situations that we never expected. At times, it will feel like we are standing on top of a mountain, the wind blowing through our hair, ready to take on any challenges that come our way. Other times, it feels as if we are being tossed in the depths of the sea, giving all our strength to just getting through the next day.

At the end of last year, December 10, I was sitting in my car outside Abbotsleigh Junior School, when a tree branch weighing around 250 kg fell onto my car, trapping me inside. The impact of the branch broke and dislocated two vertebrae in my neck, chipped another, as well as breaking a couple of ribs. After just over an hour, I was freed from my car and rushed to hospital, where I had surgery to fuse my vertebrae together. I spent about two weeks in hospital, and then two months in a (very flattering) neck brace. So, from the start, I had to get comfortable with knowing that this was not going to be what I expected my first year out of school to look like.

For a long time, I couldn't do much, except sit and think. So, as soon as I got out of my neck brace, I tried and expected to be able go back to the same, extremely busy lifestyle I had been living before. Instead, I found myself getting exhausted and soon realised that I didn't give myself enough time to rest and to heal. I had to change my own expectations around what I was able to do.

COVID-19 isolation looked a little different for everyone, some took the extra time to learn a new skill, others ended up busier than before, trying to keep livelihoods afloat. For me, isolation was a chance to reflect, and a chance to heal.

I recently came across a quote I'd noted while listening to Oprah's *SuperSoul* conversation podcast with Joel Osteen: "If you embrace the winds of change that you thought were going to destroy you, they will end up pushing you into a divine future." It got me thinking about the winds of change that our world is currently facing, as well as those that we are personally facing.

Isolation presented many different challenges, but also opened my eyes to the joy that can be found in the day to day, and how it has given so many of us a chance to stop, breathe and re-evaluate how we spend our time. While not being surrounded by people was hard, isolation gave me the opportunity to take the time to heal my body, to reflect and learn about myself, and to think about what I wanted my 'new normal' to be.

During isolation, I reflected a lot upon the idea of hope and what it actually means. This beautiful definition of hope by Morgan Harper Nichols came up on my Instagram feed: "Hope is not just wishful thinking. Hope is the audacity to believe: 'after all I've been through, there is more ahead of me.'" I love this definition, but I also think that it is because of what we've been through, not despite what we've been through, that there is more ahead of us. I am a big believer of there being a reason for everything we go through, both the good and the bad. Our experiences shape us, they develop our character, our story, our influence, and are continually evolving. Our stories have more power than we realise.

While embracing winds of change is definitely easier said than done, I want to end with the question, what are the winds of change that you have been facing? And in what ways have they made you stronger?



Clem, Rosie and Stella visiting Caitlin in hospital



## Judith Gardner (Bearup, 1942)



Judy Gardner at home in Fairfax County, Virginia, USA

I live in an independent living place in Fairfax County, near Washington, D.C. Just after the war, my father was transferred to London with the ABC and the family followed shortly after. I landed a job at Australia House and took advantage, visiting several European countries during holiday time. One summer, I was lucky enough to be sent to Geneva, to work in the Australian Delegation at the United Nations, where I could practise my schoolgirl French. It was so far from home and so interesting.

After nine years in London, I told my father I wanted to go home and he said, "that would be too bad without seeing America." My boss in External Affairs, whose previous post had been Washington D.C., set up a job for me in the Australian Embassy there. I met an American Foreign Service Officer and we married at his first overseas assignment, Madagascar. He had needed to get permission to marry a 'foreigner', and that was granted three days after he arrived in Tananarive. Other posts were Laos, Indonesia (after language training) twice, Turkey, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea.

The pandemic started here in early March. At first, two people could sit at the same table. Then, the dining room was closed and each resident was asked to fill in a form showing their choice for dinner. We then went downstairs to pick up our meal. This became a worry, as too many people were gathered together in close confinement. So, meals were then delivered to each apartment. We were asked to put a small piece of furniture at the door where the meal could be placed and the staff could be protected. The meals were served in styrofoam containers, which were destroyed after each meal and not re-used.

We couldn't leave the facility and nobody could come in. We could walk outside for exercise; there is a nice lake nearby, so that was pleasant. My husband is in assisted living next door, but I'm not allowed to visit him (have done Skype a couple of times, but that is all).

No resident has been infected with the virus, but seven staff members were and anyone who had been in any contact with them had to be quarantined for two weeks. All are now recovered. Anyone who has had to go to a place where there are crowds must then be quarantined. Two people who had had to spend time in hospital for other problems had to go through that too. Someone from the Fairfax Health Department came and was impressed with what had been done here to cope with the problem, but suggested certain changes be made. The gym, theatre, business office and craft room were all closed and exercise classes suspended (they are now back to before). Our temperatures are taken every day. Only one person is allowed in the lift at a time, unless it's with a family member.

Masks must be worn when in an area with other people. Our mailboxes in the lobby were made off-limits and mail was delivered to the front desk and then delivered to our doors. Apparently, this was at the request of the Post Office to protect their postman from any infection.

Shopping is a problem not being allowed out, so the two drivers who don't have many requests to drive people now have been put on shopping duty. They go out to purchase our necessities and bring them back to our door. Many items were scarce in the stores as people were stocking up when they could. I asked my daughter to get me some Vitamin C 500 mg. She went to the store as soon as it opened at 7 am, but said there was only one 1000 mg bottle left, so I'd have to cut the tablets in half! Most medical services closed for three months, e.g. I had my annual eye exam scheduled for June (appointment made six months earlier) but I got a call to say it would be rescheduled – for October!

A big problem was going to a hair salon, but when they finally opened, it was such a good feeling to get back to what you felt was your proper style.

Churches have been closed, as have schools. Students were given lessons at home by computer. All entertainers were barred from coming here, but now we see their performances on our computers. I am a tennis player, but no games now as the club closed.

My daughter is so disappointed that she has not been here since January, so she and her husband plan to drive cross-country from New Mexico, arriving here on 1 September to see me. The planes and airports worry them, though people still seem to be flying. As no one is allowed to stay at my place, they have rented a house, so we can have daily rendezvous—socially-distanced, unless they can get a test when they arrive here.

Some problems have yet to be resolved and even after all these months there are groups who won't wear masks, or stay out of crowds.

## Greta Archbold (Brown, 1967)



Greta on board the cruise ship Costa Victoria

On 20 February, I started a 48-day around the world trip. Before I departed from Sydney, my gut feeling told me not to go. Due to COVID-19, I was considering whether I was meant to travel. Nevertheless, we flew to Delhi to start with an exotic overland cultural and artistic adventure. Then we flew to Mumbai, to begin the cruising component of the trip, on the giant *Costa Victoria*.

After leaving Mumbai, it soon became clear that the ship was not welcome at other ports. We no longer headed for Mangalore, Kochi or Male. Instead, we stayed at sea for many days. On 7 March, we arrived at Dubai as no other ports before this would accept the ship.

Passengers completing their trip were offloaded and hundreds of new passengers boarded. I felt doomed, but in the Lord's hands. With all the hardships I had to endure on board the ship, my life was hell. As a reaction to all this I became anxiety-ridden, as did most passengers. I attempted to retrieve my passport and return home, but the *Costa* staff refused to hand it over.

However, in the middle of this journey gone terribly wrong, I managed to shine a light. I started a church service on board. Is this not what a Christian should do? Trust in the Lord and do good! My aim of having a weekly service was accepted, but there was to be no advertising. We held just two amazingly uplifting Sunday services.

After rumoured destinations, we were told the ship was heading for COVID-19 ridden Venice. Then, as we became desperately apprehensive and rioted, the destination changed again and we headed for Civitavecchia, near Rome.

Near Crete, the virus struck and a passenger was offloaded. Then, total isolation! Instead of being valued clients of Carnival, we became pigs in troughs, given junk food. Rather than church services in the tiny chapel, it became phone prayers.

After arriving in Civitavecchia and many days with no sign of Australians leaving the ship, I panicked. On 24 March, I appeared on Sky News Australia with my daughter Tory and disclosed the confusion and mess on board the ship. Tory had contacted DFAT, Sky News and Channel 7 in an urgent effort to get me and all Australian passengers home.

Five days later at 1 am, we were told to put our luggage out by 6 am, and leave the ship at 8 am for Rome airport. The Australian Ambassador came to see us at the airport, to tell us personally that we were definitely going home to Australia and not into an Italian hotel! Arriving in Perth it was fantastic to breathe fresh air, before being locked down in the hotel.

Having been around a passenger who had tested positive for COVID-19 on 4 April, I was also tested and found to be negative. I thanked God! However, this made my fourteen days' quarantine turn into 20. Fortunately, I found a Bible in the hotel room!

During this isolation period, I realised why I needed to make the trip: I saved a life! The person I had contact with went into rapid decline. I heard slurred words on the phone, anxiety-ridden breathing, mental decline. I called the hotel medical team who mercifully cooperated. His heart was failing, his breathing weak and he was immediately put on oxygen and then a ventilator. Without this rescue from me, he would never have survived the night. Twelve days later there was hope, he would survive! On day 20, I tested negative again. I had been told many times during isolation that I had a real chance of getting the virus. I prayed hard! I had loyal friends in Australia, the USA and UK praying for me daily! I am forever grateful for this real blessing!

I flew home to Sydney the next day, arriving on 20 April, overjoyed to be alive! I was considered a miracle passenger by the WA Health Department. There were further follow-ups of my health, because no one believed that I could have escaped the virus!



Greta, happy to be home

## Diana Collins (Margin, 1969)

For more than 40 years, Hong Kong has amazed and inspired me – it never loses its stride. I have been witness to some remarkable times, none more so than have occurred during the past year.

As I write in late July 2020, Hong Kong is experiencing its third wave of COVID-19, the first being in late January 2020 during the Chinese New Year celebrations. News of the virus on the Chinese mainland reached us weeks before and a feeling of déjà vu descended. Experience with SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2003 had put us in good stead to respond to this threat by again wearing masks, observing hand hygiene and reintroducing elbow bumps to substitute handshakes (that started here) – the vast majority were compliant then and are now. Our figures are relatively low, especially for high density living – currently there are 2,500 cases with 15 deaths in a population of 7.5 million.

Our second wave was led by infected residents returning before quarantine became mandatory. Frustratingly, the current wave has been initiated by loopholes in testing strategies for some travellers, including passing air crew and seafarers. As well as cases related to such causes, we now have about 50% of new cases with no traceable source, which is worrying indeed.

There are so many unanswered questions, however I find it heartening to see scientists from countries which are currently at political loggerheads remaining partners in ongoing research into this virus.

Early on, the shortage of hand sanitiser and masks was not unexpected; however, toilet paper flying off the shelves caught everyone by surprise, with Hong Kong and other parts of China the first to experience this phenomenon.

The wearing of masks generally has two meanings – they are barriers to prevent infecting or to prevent becoming infected. In Hong Kong, the government actively encourages those with communicable respiratory infections, or in situations where there is compromised immunity, to don masks, the appearance of which has led to the bewilderment of the rest of the world. While masks don't provide 100% protection, I started to wear masks at the end of January, though people gave me a wide berth thinking I was infected and 'at large'. Added to the early confusion in Hong Kong regarding when to start wearing masks, our government had ironically banned the use of masks some months before, as they were being worn to disguise the identity of political protestors.

Due to the nature of the virus being infective before being symptomatic, it is prudent to wear a mask to protect both ways, from spreading infection and from being infected, yet this simple act of reciprocity seems difficult for many to comprehend. Masks are also considered an obvious reminder of social distancing, but social distancing often goes awry. Watching other countries during the pandemic has been interesting – the big question has been 'who will be bold enough to wear the first mask'?

As a textile conservator in private practice, with a studio at home for decades, my work has not been affected. Colleagues in museums in Hong Kong have continued working in otherwise closed facilities and I have been able to visit corporate and private clients to inspect collections. Working at

home, as many will attest, has advantages and disadvantages, but there is one conundrum that I have never handled as well as I would have liked: am I at home or at work? Distractions from either side of the equation often hinder concentration. One benefit of current conditions is the improvement in communications – I shall virtually attend a professional congress to have been held in Edinburgh this November with networking, virtual tours and debates planned online.

While I have been fortunate, too many sectors in Hong Kong have been challenged over the past year with disruptions and, in many cases closures, caused by protests held since June 2019, the coronavirus, and now international disputes. Education has been severely hampered by extended school and university suspensions. Unemployment is high and like other governments, the Hong Kong SAR Government is providing financial assistance, including a HK\$10,000 (AU\$1,850) handout to all adults, with an aim to reinvigorate spending – a worthy cause; however, so many are opting to donate the money to any of the many reputable local charities.

On a more personal note, our tiny granddaughter lives close by, just a couple of islands away. Crowded ferry rides mean visits have sadly been limited. Thankfully, we receive very many updates in the form of pictures and videos daily, which help to make up for the lost cuddles.



Katrina Ma Sun Hei Collins, Diana's granddaughter born mid-January 2020, 11 days before Hong Kong's first confirmed case of COVID-19. Too young for a mask, she is wearing a baby-sized protective shield in public

## Emily Harris (Hickson, 1988)

Despite the unquestionable seriousness of COVID-19 and the ensuing mess that 2020 has so far been, the past few months have provided an unexpected and precious hiatus for my family.

We live on a property in north-western NSW. We have two children at university and two still at boarding school. In fact, our third child Phoebe is part of the now-infamous 2020 Year 12 Abbotsleigh cohort.

We live just outside the border town of Mungindi, a community which is deep in our hearts and to which we are very proud to belong. While our life here has provided our children with a vast array of important life-skill-educational experiences, the opportunities for scholastic advancement have been more limited.

In 2008, we made the tough decision to send our eldest, Sophie (Abbotsleigh, 2018) away to boarding school. She was just 10, and already our days of living 24/7 together as a family were ending. The payoff has been the wonderful friends our children have made, the excellent education they have received, the access to afterschool sporting opportunities and to extra-curricular activities such as speech and drama, musical instrument lessons and art classes (much of which would have been impossible where we live). The major disadvantage, however, has been that since 2008, we have not lived together permanently as a family. One by one, over the years, the children have come and gone from different primary schools, different secondary schools, university colleges, and all within the two different states of NSW and Queensland.

So, it was with great delight that on 24 March 2020, my husband and I welcomed all four kids (now aged 21, 19, 17, and 15) back into the fold – and not just for a two-week period of a scheduled school holiday break, but for what seemed to be an indefinite period. And we loved it. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't all fuzzy feelings and warm hearts every moment of the day, but it was a quantity of time to spend together that we didn't ever expect to have again.

How lovely it was to have dinners together every night of the week. For them to get bored of my cooking. To listen to them squabble over whose turn it was to unpack the dishwasher. To sit around a table and talk about how their school and university studies were progressing. To complete a jigsaw which, if you are an 'instagrammer', immediately classifies you as a happy family.

As boarding parents, when our kids come home on holidays, we try to make sure we don't have too much on, so that we can spend quality time with them. We tend to be a little less disciplinarian than we perhaps should be, as we are only with them for such a short period, and we want desperately for it to be a happy time. My husband, who travels a lot with his job, makes sure he schedules work around home so he can be here. We put off local social events which we might normally be involved in – because we would rather do kid-based activities and things that we can enjoy as a family. But when the children were home during lockdown, we too had to resume our everyday busy working life – and I think it was good for them to see how much we have going on when they are not around.

Another great advantage of this lockdown was that because no one else in Australia was doing anything remotely interesting, there was nothing being posted on social media to make our teenagers feel like they were missing out. They weren't comparing themselves to anyone else – they were able to simply concentrate on their own life, their own day, their own needs. They realised how lucky they were to be able to come home to isolation in Mungindi (although, to be honest, isolation is a way of life on a property, so nothing much has changed there). To think that I had spent so many parenting years trying to explain this to them – little did I know all it would take was a pandemic to highlight how great our life is out here.

The other thing I have noticed is how loud and proud we can be about being farmers! We have been recognised nationally as essential workers. Australia is more than able to grow and provide enough food and fibre to feed and clothe not only our own population, but much of the developing world's population. And we Australian farmers do it well.

While I sympathise with countless other families who have tough tales to tell, (and we too have had to make some tough decisions in our business due to coronavirus), I am still grateful for the precious time I have spent with my children. We have been able to re-connect with and reflect on just how good our life in rural Australia really is.



Emily Harris's kids at a black-tie dinner held at home in Mungindi during lockdown. They held 'Phoebe's fake formal' (complete with photo booth) just in case she doesn't get to have the real thing due to COVID-19 restrictions.

## Melissa McGrath (1989)

2020 has indeed been an interesting year so far. It started off ... busy!

I am an Emergency physician, working in the Gold Coast University Hospital, on Queensland's sunny Gold Coast.

In February, we were at our busiest, seeing 360+ patients a day. We were following what was happening in China closely, and in late February, at a meeting with our local public health physician, I first heard the phrase 'flattening the curve'. Things changed from then onwards.

My husband, Michael, is a nurse and we discussed early on the possibility of schools closing, and our responsibility to do 'the right thing'.

Michael cut back on work as I ramped up. The children stayed home and online learning began!

I worked long hours being a 'COVID Commander' – juggling calls from the entire health area about whom to swab and whom not to.

Rosters were rewritten, leave was cancelled, trips and conferences were postponed, fever clinics were opened and many, many workflow plans were made in collaboration with staff throughout our health service.

Lockdown started, our morning huddle prior to the ward round was moved outside and then...

The patients did not come.

Everyone was scared. Scared to come to hospital. Scared they may be exposed. There were loads of staff and, for once, not much to do. Hence, agitation grew amongst the ranks.

People that work in ED are not good in 'quiet times'. Personalities explode and tension is apparent.

However, what was apparent was the ability to act together as one team. The head of neurology was doing ward rounds with the surgeons and the orthopaedic doctors, having had their lists cancelled, were around for quick consults!

Everyone, including me, wore scrubs. And funny little hats that peoples' mums and grandmas made for 'the effort'. And everyone gave us food. My curve was definitely NOT flattening!

The delineation of 'who' you were and what level was pretty irrelevant – people just all worked together with an absence of egos (often a prominent thing in medicine). This was refreshing.

Gradually there was a shift back to BAU (business as usual).

Now in mid-August, we are preparing for another wave, although hopefully it will not arrive. However, our workflows are still operational. COVID-19 is not going away soon.

We will need to learn to live with COVID-19, as we wait patiently for a vaccine that will guard against the disease processes that can carry with them so much morbidity and mortality.

So, keep on washing your hands, keep on keeping your distance. Be safe, be kind and stay well!



Dr Melissa McGrath, in scrubs, Gold Coast University Hospital

## Christina Barry (1976)



Christina teaching singing online from home

I'm usually based in Cambridge, England, teaching singing and occasionally performing. I am also a Lay Minister and spend a day a week on pastoral work.

In mid-March, as borders started to close, I realised that not only would I not be able to fly to Australia as planned in May, but that I might not get there at all. What if my parents became seriously ill? The world had suddenly got very big again. I packed some music, flew the following day, and self-isolated in the studio at my sister's (Katherine Brown, née Barry 1971). What a relief – yet, had I done the right thing in abandoning my life in UK?

My school went online immediately, but there was only a week until holidays, so I decided not to deafen my sister's neighbours with late night singing. Once out of isolation, I moved across the road to my parents'. My father (96) and mother (92) are usually fairly independent, but I could do their shopping and teach them how to Zoom. My son moved down from his secondment in Sydney too. I was in the right place.

Teaching online in the evenings worked surprisingly well. Internet delays (latency) meant all singing teachers had to find new ways to accompany students. Fortunately, I already had a lot of resources on my iPad and I surfed the net for others. I had to be even more organised than usual, emailing attachments to students 24 hours prior to each lesson. Some students decided to have a break and I was pleased not to have extra late evening sessions. I'm fortunate that I'm winding down a bit now, so the financial hit was manageable.

Singing spreads the virus, so returning to normal won't be possible for a long time. Online teaching works okay, but we don't hear the detail or tone so well and most students want to return to face-to-face. There are a lot of discussions and webinars about how we might continue. Now back in UK, I'm doing some summer holiday 'garden' lessons and converting a small extension into a 'coronavirus studio'. Hanging a giant plastic curtain between the main room (me) and the extension (student) should reduce the risk.

The singing profession is in a precarious position. I fear that theatre, opera and musicals won't return for a long time and teaching may be difficult. My school is supportive and is constructing a divided singing studio, but many schools and colleges aren't allowing any face-to-face teaching. Screen teaching looks here to stay. An effective vaccine will help, but there will inevitably be a long gap and many theatres and studios will fail. I feel lucky that my performing and teaching was mainly during happier times.

The pandemic has taught me not to take intercontinental travel for granted. I assumed I could fly home in an emergency – and yes, this time I just made it, but for the foreseeable future it won't be possible. My family and I talked more deeply about the associated practicalities and emotions. I feel readier for final goodbyes.

Pastoral work for the church has also changed dramatically. I can't visit nursing homes and group activities have stopped. I was torn early on in Australia – was I Martha or Mary? My natural inclination is to fill a day with tasks and yet, just being with my parents was the goal. I had to slow down and just be. It's not clear how pastoral support will resume. Maybe this is time that God is giving me for me, for prayer and reflection instead.

## Suzanne Anderssen (1992)

I work in Brisbane as an Air Traffic Controller, managing Brisbane and Coolangatta Airports' airspace. The effects of COVID-19 on air traffic movements has been quite devastating to the aviation industry.

I was overseas in March when the crisis hit Australia and on returning home, was required to self-isolate for 14 days. During this period, my workplace was in turmoil. Controllers around the country were given new rosters – no easy feat for 1,000 of us – as we were segregated into four crews. This was to allow for three crews to cycle through shifts and one crew to remain at home for 10 days as backup in case a controller from one of the cycling crews tested positive. The ATC Tower at Chicago International had been forced to close to air traffic from March 17 for six days, affected by coronavirus. This caused even more havoc to the industry and public, and Australian ATC was keen to avoid this.

The collaboration between my employer and the union to create the new rosters was outstanding. To this day, it brings a tear to my eye seeing how much was achieved when two parties work together, putting differences aside and committing to the same outcome. Safety of the air traffic controllers and that of the airlines and travelling public was the highest consideration and that has continued.

Meanwhile, home schooling began in March for almost three months. This was yet another dynamic our family had never encountered, but was actually quite fun.

The airlines have been hit enormously hard, with international travel and most domestic travel virtually coming to a standstill. Traffic levels have dropped to about 10% of usual, with Brisbane movements now at about 30% pre-COVID levels. It is not expected to return to the pre-COVID levels until 2025. As I write this, Qantas prepares to make 500 domestic and international flight attendants redundant.

My job this past year has also been to create and deliver procedures and training for Brisbane's new parallel runway. Despite this very 'unconventional' year, Brisbane trained 150+ controllers and was ready to open the new runway on 12 July – on time. This was a remarkable feat by the many people involved in getting it across the line. People were unable to communicate face-to-face, and even when they were in the same room, were separated by 'crime tape' and 1.5 m. Again, this only happened through collaboration, adaptability and a good deal of understanding from the many involved. We're all pretty computer literate with webinars, Skype and Zoom now, holding us in good stead for our new future world.

Traffic patterns in Brisbane are now very new and different, as we all adjust to having parallel runways. We continue in our segregated crews and have come to know our colleagues more deeply – the slower traffic levels allow for richer conversation and connection. The future is a little uncertain as, without planes flying, revenue is shaky and controller numbers might need to be reduced over time. But the skies remain safe and controlled, so don't be afraid to book your flight!

## Lucinda Smith (2004)

I work for a law firm in Sydney's CBD, King & Wood Mallesons. On 4 March 2020, we received an email from the Chief Executive Partner (CEP), outlining general health and safety, work arrangements for our other offices and work-related travel. The following day, all staff were instructed to take their work laptops home – the firm was preparing us to work from home on short notice. The following week, each team trialled a day of working from home to see if the servers could handle many staff working remotely. That same week, we had someone with a suspected case of COVID-19, as they had just returned from overseas travel. Working from home arrangements came into effect immediately while the office went through thorough cleaning. We were one of the first, if not the first law firm to close due to the growing pandemic.

My office has a lovely view of all the cruise ships that dock at Circular Quay, so being close to the tourist hotspots (including seeing the *Ruby Princess* in all its 'glory') was a growing concern for me. I had heard from a few other colleagues that some teams were being allowed to work from home, and being told to not even think about coming into the office, until this all dies down. As I live at home with my elderly parents to assist with their medical needs, I discussed my concerns of commuting to and from work with my supervising partner (this was Sunday afternoon). While having this discussion, the CEP sent out another email, advising all staff to work from home. There was a grace period to come into the office to take any files home, but by Wednesday, all offices around Australia were in lockdown. By this stage, not all retail stores were closed.

At that time, my partner, who is a Federal Police Officer, was away for work. He told me to take my mother grocery shopping and buy items as though we were going into lockdown. This had me petrified. I was more scared because I didn't know what this meant, thinking it was like something out of a zombie movie. Everyone was panic-buying and there was next to no food on the shelves. Fortunately, we were able to get groceries and other household items. It was strange to witness people be so violent, over necessities – I even was a victim of verbal abuse over toilet paper.

I had developed a cold from all the stress and worry and must have passed it onto my partner, who was sent home from work. He went to stay at his parents' place, as he was worried he had contracted COVID-19. As you could imagine, I was frightened. I didn't know what to do. He could not be tested as he had not shown symptoms for long enough to warrant the need for a test. Five days later he was given a referral for testing. Thankfully, the test result was negative. Instead, he had contracted pneumonia. Whether I gave something to him, or he contracted it while he was away for work, remains a mystery, but a big weight had been lifted off my shoulders when he told me.

It's now July and I am still working from home. We don't realise how much we take for granted. Not a day goes by that I don't hug my family and tell them I love them.

You never know what curve ball you get thrown in life. 2020 has been one heck of a curve ball.

## Samantha Selmes (1987)

I celebrated my 50th birthday in mid-March 2020, with a party for 35 people at our home in Hackney, East London, just days before London went into lockdown. I asked friends with colds, sniffles, temperatures or any suspect symptoms to stay away. The rest of us ate, drank, talked, hugged, kissed, danced and got sweaty until the wee hours. None of my guests got COVID-19, or rather, a couple subsequently dated their exposure to the weeks following that party.

My husband, a lawyer, easily made the transition to working his marathon days from the home office, our garden or both. And our boys got used to doing PE with Joe at 9 am every morning to kick start their day of home schooling. As lockdown wore on, however, some days did see them still in PJs at lunchtime!

At first we felt under siege. What was this apocalyptic illness? Would I be able to find food for my family? Could we risk breathing in the exhalations of people walking ahead of us on the street?

The figures were devastating. And the UK government's response confusing, inconsistent and finally irresponsible and dishonest. Our borough of London soon had the third highest infection and death rates of any in the UK. Our Easter trip back home Down Under had to be cancelled, for fear of infecting older relatives and the futility of spending 90% of the time in quarantine anyway.

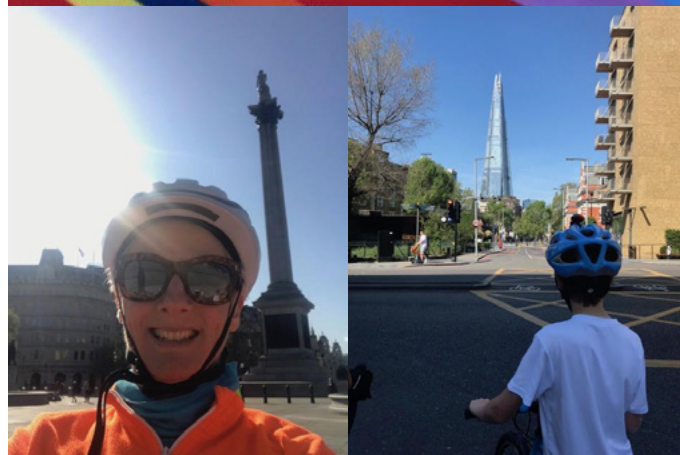
One evening, overcome with weariness and worry, displaying some symptoms but not the obvious ones, I took to my bed, with a thermometer and wondered aloud if I had to write 'farewell letters' to my sons... But, it was 'just a cold'. I think. Or maybe not. There's so much we still don't know about this illness!

On the plus side, we have now enjoyed 16 straight weeks of dining together every night as a family; an unheard-of luxury with my husband's huge job. We have cycled most of London during the quietest period of lockdown, when the streets were ours to explore; free from tourists or traffic. We played many hours of family boardgames. Our boys practised their musical instruments more often. Seven or eight times I was woken to the delightful arrival of a breakfast tray. We occasionally had family movie nights which led to later bedtimes. And throughout, mostly, the weather was glorious. We were hugely grateful for our garden and outdoor space.

We went wild swimming in a river with friends. When finally we permitted ourselves some social interaction, it was euphoric. Restaurants re-opening this week feels like Carnevale! And yet, and yet. The spectre of The Second Wave hangs over us still.

The children returning to school – the older child to conclude his primary schooling, the younger to pick up the threads of Year 4 – felt like a huge weight being lifted from my shoulders. No, I guess I won't be retraining as a teacher! Picking up my twice weekly training sessions with our local running coach – staying more than 2 m apart at all times, outdoors – was heaven, after all the lockdown lard. Ordering in from fancy restaurants which had closed felt good; not only a break from 35 weekly food preparations, but hopefully keeping great businesses going.

And throughout it all, an enormous gratitude for the key workers on the front line and fervent thanks that 'there but for the grace of God go I...'



Samantha Selmes and her family enjoyed cycling in London's deserted streets; boardgames in the garden during lockdown



## Cathy Macleod (Lynch, 1993)



Cathy Macleod at work in a Glasgow hospital, 28 July 2020

Hello and best wishes to all AOGU members. I started my nursing training at University of Sydney in 1994 and had always wanted to travel and work overseas. So, after graduating in 1996, I worked for 18 months at Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick, before leaving for London in 1998. I loved the independence and excitement of living and travelling in the UK and Europe, and eventually settled in Glasgow, Scotland with my husband, Donald. We successfully navigated our IVF journey, and little Christopher joined our family 4 ½ years ago!

I've been a specialist orthopaedic theatre nurse at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Glasgow, since 2005. I love my job, and often joke that I forget who I am nursing: my patients, or my staff.

In March 2020, everything changed. COVID was an anomaly, a virus affecting China, then Italy, Spain, then London. We knew then it was inevitable that Scotland would also have to step up to these unprecedented times.

First, elective surgery stopped. We had a couple of weeks of anticipation: waiting, training, updating skills that no one thought they'd need to use. Then, we were told that our skills were needed in Intensive Care/ High Dependency Units, as the number of COVID cases escalated rapidly in Glasgow, and throughout the UK.

I performed duties in High Dependency (HDU) and Intensive Treatment Units (ITU) for only a fortnight during COVID-time. I was humbled and saddened by the suffering I saw, and proud of the way in which I could rise to a significant challenge. At its worst, we were losing 80+ patients each night in Scotland alone- and our death rate was so much lower than that of England!

The learning curve was so steep and I could not have performed my duties without my colleagues' support. My happiest moment was seeing a patient post a note of thanks to our social media page. She was a retired ITU nurse, with severe asthma, and had contracted COVID during a stay in HDU at another hospital. Despite all the odds, (she described herself as a 'stubborn b\*\*ch!'), she managed to avoid intubation. I was lucky enough to be involved in her care, and it was such a boost to hear that she had recovered! The statistic that sticks in my memory: once a patient was intubated in ITU, the mortality rate was 80%. Success stories were so few.

My saddest moment was reading on the BBC news website of the death of a paramedic whom I had nursed four days previously. He had contracted coronavirus doing his job in a rural area due to a lack of PPE (Protective Personal Equipment). That was the moment that I lost faith in my government and its duty of care to public service workers. His death was like a physical punch to my stomach. I will never forget his name.

Now, in Scotland, lockdown is lifting slowly. We continue to do our very best in theatres at the QEUH, but we are fighting fires. The knock-on effect of COVID will be enormous waiting lists for elective surgery. I am sad that UK citizens will suffer for the absence of our public health service (one we are all very proud to be a part of). We are currently providing a trauma-only service. Hopefully, elective surgery (hip, knee, shoulder replacements) will restart here in 2021. In the meantime, I'll be here, ready to patch up the grandad who got bored during lockdown and decided to try out his grandson's skateboard. Sigh.

Australia's success in containing the virus gives me hope that my home country will not suffer as badly as the rest of the UK has. Keep up the good work everybody, and take care of each other.

Human kindness has never counted for so much, and we as individuals really can make a difference during this time. I hope that we never see another crisis like this again. Stay safe.

## Gina Bowman (1989)

As I type this from my home office in Madrid, the number of COVID-19 outbreaks around the country is increasing. It seems that we're at the precipice of a much debated second wave.

Infection levels have been rising for the past month, despite the fact we're in the middle of summer vacation and temperatures hit 40 degrees this week. At least this time we have a functioning medical system and politicians on alert.

The pandemic-related health statistics in Spain are eye opening. To date, there are varying reports of 300-350,000 cases and more than 28,000 deaths. I believe total fatalities in Australia are sitting at around 250 at the time of writing – and even that is too many.

During March and April, each day was like a new shock wave of higher numbers with no end in sight. A makeshift hospital was constructed in 48 hours by the Civil Guard (military policing force) inside a 35,000 m<sup>2</sup> exhibition centre. The largest field hospital in Europe during the pandemic, it enabled treatment of 4,000 patients in 40 days. An overwhelmed funeral and mortuary system saw the conversion of a local ice rink within a Madrid shopping centre into a temporary morgue.

The Spanish government has been criticised widely for late action and lack of communication (amongst other misdemeanours), especially given the preview provided by Italy only next door. For us, everything changed within a couple of days. On the morning of 12 March, my now husband, Juan, and I were signing our newly minted marriage documents at the office of our notary (JP), followed by a long celebratory lunch and bar hopping late into the evening. By Saturday 14 we were in total lockdown. In the following days, the country entered a state of alarm (federalised powers) and we only emerged into the Spanish government's version of the 'nueva normal' at the end of June.



Juan and Gina on holiday in Nerja, Malaga province in July 2020

For more than three months, Spaniards experienced some of the toughest restrictions on personal freedom that have been associated with the pandemic. Personally, I've never lived day to day with feelings of fear and anxiety from a threat so close to my doorstep. In fact, Juan didn't leave the house for six weeks due to an existing pulmonary condition. During that time, I accepted all deliveries and washed all products including fruit and vegetables with disinfectant (at that time the virus and its transmission was little understood). We were allowed out of the house only to buy groceries and pharmacy products, not to exercise, and once home I would wipe every surface I contacted, wash my clothes and finally myself.

But we are lucky. We have an apartment large enough to exercise and a balcony for much needed Vitamin D. Some families are not so fortunate. Children weren't allowed outside for more than six weeks, teenagers longer. Now that medical services have returned to almost normal, the focus is on the emerging mental impacts of the disease, COVID-19 survivors with neurological complications and the potential longer term issue of depression amongst children.

Spanish history is as lengthy and puzzling as the grammar, but thanks to it, Spaniards have developed a strong culture of resilience and adaptability. Since the mid 1930s, they have lived through a civil war, 35 years of dictatorship and a brief (in global terms) stint of democracy and nation building that was sucker punched by the financial crisis. It finally climbed out of that stream of 'progress' only to tumble into the epicentre of a pandemic.

The country is in shock. The impact on society is visible and visceral. My husband, Juan, is a man of gargantuan stature, he's six foot seven, doorway-width and surprisingly stoic for a Spaniard. One night I found him sitting on the couch crying as he watched the news.

"Do you understand what these old people have lived through, what they contributed to Spanish society, to the economy?" he said. "They're dying in corridors of overflowing ICU units without family to even hold their hands."

Rumours are spreading that another lockdown in Madrid is only a couple of weeks away. Given current travel and quarantine restrictions, who knows when I'll next see my family and friends in Australia? To use the Arabic expression adopted by the Spanish, ¡ojalá! (god willing) they stay safe.

5 August, 2020

## Victoria Rennie (Gosper, 1987)



The Rennie family sharing Eliza's graduation online from St Andrews University

As well as being an Old Girl, I'm Deputy Headmistress and Head of Senior School and Boarding at Abbotsleigh.

Like for many others in the School community, 2020 has been a rollercoaster of emotions for me. It is hard to say that the year hasn't had its challenges – because it has. But the pandemic has also brought both me and the Rennie family some very happy, joyous times and we will certainly reflect on these fondly in years to come.

On the School front, working with a team of passionate and incredibly dedicated teachers made the shift to learning online quite seamless. I was so blown away by the collegiality and resilience of our teachers and girls, who worked tirelessly from their homes. It proved to be such a successful transition and the girls, in true Abbotsleigh form, didn't miss a beat!

With girls learning from home, being creative about how we could connect them out of the classroom led to the development of AOCE (Abbotsleigh Off Campus Enrichment). This became so popular, with the girls engaging in so many things, from fitness to cooking.

Of course, we wanted the girls to be back on campus, learning in the classrooms and with their friends. We worked hard to get them back to school as quickly and as safely as we could and much of my time was spent planning and re-planning on how to do just that! Schools are communities, places where connections, relationships and belonging are so important, and it became evident to me the importance of doing this face-to-face. No matter how good technology is, nothing beats talking and connecting in person!

On the family front, we have had some disappointments – cancelled 21st birthday parties, missed graduations and family holidays and the challenges of separation from our daughter and family in the UK have all been difficult. We have shared many tears with family and friends over Zoom and Facebook, as we faced and continue to face the uncertainties of when we might be together again.

Despite all this, God has blessed us with so much joy. Church online has meant slower Sunday mornings, sharing in church together over breakfast. My passion for all things food and cooking was put to great use during isolation and we had more family meals than ever before. Despite our inability to travel, we still had the joy of sharing in a virtual graduation across the world – watching together on FaceTime not quite the same, but still a celebration.

I continue to feel so blessed to be working at such a great school and to have the privilege of working alongside Headmistress Mrs Krimmer, who has led Abbotsleigh through the pandemic with such grace and expertise. She has inspired me to continue to serve and most importantly to look to the positives, and always take time to share a laugh together.



Victoria Rennie leads a cooking class for the Abbotsleigh Senior School girls on AOCE

## Lisa Pang (1985)

Life in Tokyo was still fresh, after only a year in the teeming, endlessly fascinating metropolis. With a population of more than 13 million, paradoxically, one can find plenty of peace and/ or plenty of action.

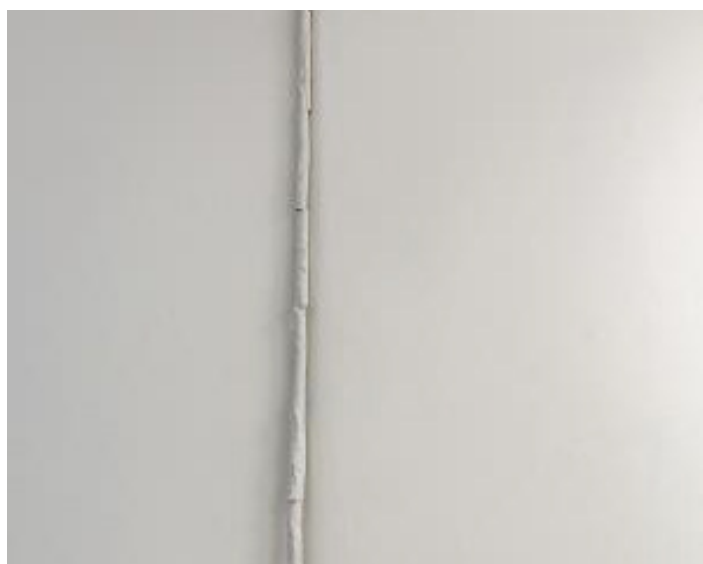
I returned to Sydney in late February, for what was supposed to be a three-week visit. The plan was to be in a group exhibition, spend time with family and friends, then return to Japan to complete work for two subsequent shows. Five months later, I am still here. As a result of COVID restrictions, the first exhibition closed early. The second was slightly delayed and required me to adapt my original idea, but went ahead. The third show is postponed.

Meanwhile, unlooked-for opportunities emerged out of these unusual times. I am currently in an online exhibition; 'Covimetry' curated from Poland, with 100+ artists showing work based on face masks and geometric abstraction. I also found an opportunity to show my 'Paintless Paintings', opening next week in Marrickville.

My visual arts practice is inter-disciplinary, crossing and conflating ideas and methods from painting, sculpture and craft with those from the domestic everyday. I have an interest in materiality as a source of meaning and in abstraction. My works often incorporate or resemble familiar objects, rather than what might be expected as art.

So, back in February when I came off the flight juggling my special luggage (a 2.6 m Japanese laundry pole) I went straight to the STACKS gallery in Potts Point. I offered to wear a mask as news of the novel coronavirus was spreading and was at that time associated with travellers from Asia. My friends waved away the offer, but our greetings were more restrained and touch-distant than usual.

*Shadow Palette* opened early March. The concept was the abandonment of colour in favour of light, shadow and other drivers of form. My work, *Swell*, consisted of small canvasses threaded on to a pole, the way I had seen washing hung in Tokyo. I wanted to make a work that almost hid from attention, sited in a curved wall niche. At the opening, people elbow and foot-bumped instead of kissing and hugging.



Lisa Pang, *Swell*, 2020 (Image: Document Photography)

The effects of COVID-19 on the community mindscape were apparent when a friend from school (T\*, 1985) contacted me to say she had seen my work on Instagram and it reminded her of a stack of toilet paper rolls. While initially biting, this was entirely appropriate. As an artist, when you put your work out into the world, you hope it engages directly with people and the contemporary. Toilet paper hoarding and speculation were of the moment.

My next exhibition was at SLOT window gallery in Alexandria and I was in the middle of another site-specific work, using newspaper front pages from Sydney and Tokyo. With *The Crossing*, I hoped that the work's form would echo the unique position of the lit window as a silent sentinel on a busy city intersection, while also referencing crossings as journeys. For the first time in making my work, I was thinking of my own life. I had arrived in Australia for boarding school at Abbotsleigh, aged 12.



Lisa Pang *The Crossing*, 2020 at SLOT Window Gallery, Alexandria (Image: Tony Twigg) Lisa is an artist based between Tokyo and Sydney. This work references her experience of starting Abbotsleigh.

The window gallery was perfect for pandemic viewing; the space was not directly open to the public, but *The Crossing* could be seen from the footpath or even from a car as a drive-by. Many people who visited sent messages to let me know they had been past. On looking back through the messages later, often with images attached, I was delighted to find that I could zoom in and see them reflected in the window glass – unintended selfies offering support. For me, this sums up the mood of the moment.



Lisa Pang *Redress*, 2018, acquired by the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery (Image: Lisa Pang)

## Alexandra Blaise Balmer (2000)

I am a Humanitarian Aid Worker and Country Director for DanChurchAid 'DCA', a Danish International Non-Government Organisation, in Juba, South Sudan.

As COVID-19 spreads across the world, the humanitarian sector is gravely concerned for the lives and wellbeing of displaced people living in fragile and conflict-affected states. COVID-19 has reached countries already struggling to cope with the impact of war and other crises and refugees and internally displaced people are among the most vulnerable to the consequences of this pandemic.

Millions are living in overcrowded conditions, often in camps or camp-like settings where recommended social distancing is all but impossible. Access to adequate health care and basic needs, including soap and water, were limited in sites long before the outbreak of COVID-19, so practising good hygiene, as per WHO guidelines, is also an impossible task.

I manage a team of 75+ staff, 13 are expatriate staff all of whom had to be evacuated in March 2020. This left a strong team of South Sudanese national staff to continue our humanitarian and development operations with 15 national partner organisations, to provide frontline humanitarian aid and peacebuilding initiatives. Access to clean water and soap is a major problem, as there is no piped water system in the country and we are reliant on boreholes or water trucking. Soap, hand sanitiser and PPE all became extremely expensive, as the country is landlocked and borders five other countries. Borders closed quickly. We are also fast approaching the rainy season here, when we will lose our road access to remote communities and be reliant on expensive air (plane/helicopter) assets, at a cost provided by the UN or private companies.

Our team has worked tirelessly to ensure humanitarian aid continues to reach vulnerable households – meeting all the recommended social distancing requirements – the sick, the elderly, pregnant and lactating women, children and people with disabilities and/or HIV/AIDS.

For the humanitarian and development sector, it's reasonable to describe the pandemic as a 'polycrisis' – a health crisis to begin with, but quickly becoming a hygiene, humanitarian, political, and socio-economic crisis. The crisis particularly affects poor, marginalised and vulnerable communities in the developing world who already have inadequate access to health care, hygiene, sanitation and income to support their families.

Do No Harm – is the driving principle of delivering humanitarian aid and protecting communities. It is a principle which drives all our work, not just in the humanitarian sector. I have prioritised with my team standard operating procedures (SOPs) for safety, security, access and health protection. These SOPs meet WHO, UN, South Sudan NGO Forum and our organisational guidelines for safely working in communities to protect them from COVID-19, while delivering humanitarian aid and peace building activities.

A study <https://www.dkv.global/covid-safety-assessment-200-regions> by a Hong Kong-based firm has identified South Sudan as the world's most dangerous country to live in during a pandemic. The researchers looked at South Sudan's level of healthcare readiness, government efficiency of risk management, monitoring and detection efficiency and the capacity to withstand economic fallout from the virus. Out of 200 countries analysed, South Sudan is ranked at the bottom, with Switzerland being the safest country to live in during the pandemic. South Sudan closed borders, and imposed lockdown and economic freezing measures late in the pandemic timeline and it hurriedly prioritised economic recovery over public health by reopening in May. Apart from South Sudan, the highest-risk regions right now, the report says, are Sub-Saharan Africa and South America, as well as some countries in the Middle East and the Asia Pacific.

There is no time to waste. Donor governments must work together to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 within the world's most fragile and conflict-affected countries. They need to respond not only to the immediate public health emergency, but to the pandemic's secondary economic, social, food security and protection impacts. They must share responsibility and protect the rights of refugees and internally displaced people at this critical time.



Ali Blaise Balmer, in South Sudan

## Annie Tennant (1989)



Annie Tennant is National Urban Strategist, Property, at Lendlease. She lives with her family in Sydney. (Photo: Stephen Blake)

Public spaces are the glue of good cities. They can represent our shared values as a society, or reflect the philosophical movement at a particular point in time. You could say large parks are the lungs of a city and civic squares are the beating heart.

Public spaces are sites of shared rituals, like the Paleo in Siena, the squares of Rome filled with the devout at Easter and Christmas, and the streets of New Orleans filled with Mardi Gras revellers. Or they're the sites of simple pleasures for one and all – footpaths filled with people walking to work or the shops, and neighbourhood parks for everyone to enjoy, regardless of income or background.

Public spaces are the key to creating neighbourhoods and cities that people actually want to live in. The public spaces we have often reflect our values as a society. They can show the care a community has for its neighbourhood through the care of a community garden; the decay of an amenities block or historic house reflects a government's budgetary focus on areas other than public infrastructure.

So, what does this mean since we have been socially isolated? And what does this mean in a post-COVID world?

Immediate issues such as social distancing have a huge impact on public assets. We're seeing this played out by pedestrians fighting to maintain distance on narrow paths; the fear of shared, contaminated spaces and the clear and present dilemma for those who've no choice, for example frontline workers or those in essential positions. These critical members of our community must continue to move through public spaces and use public transport. It also means certain open spaces have become overrun with people exercising, which we've seen in iconic locations such as the Bay Run and Bondi Beach in Sydney, St Kilda Beach in Melbourne, the Gold Coast south of Brisbane and Cottesloe Beach in Perth.

But public spaces have also become important places for new rituals and connection. Our streets became places of ritual at dawn on this year's Anzac Day, as we heard the notes of the

Last Post hauntingly drift across neighbourhoods. Or in New York City or London, where the streets are filled with applause for the frontline health care workers who are risking their lives for us – this 7 pm nightly ritual is bringing people together and making us all feel less alone.

With cafés operating amid social distancing measures, footpaths have now become places for chatting with strangers, as we reach for human connection. We're grateful for any public places to interact with other people.

What we're experiencing is a greater understanding of the real value of our public spaces and the importance of connecting with nature. More than ever, we need publicly accessible spaces that allow safe and separated exercise routes – separate bike lanes and continuous 'green' links that are ecological corridors, to provide a biophilic connection for people. People are eager to connect to nature and public spaces enable that.

Human beings have experienced pandemics before – the Spanish flu in the early 20th century is the most recent example. After that, our cities kept going, our communities rebuilt. Cities are resilient, they're borne from settlements or towns and mega cities have grown from these. It's rare that a city will be forsaken due to plague or virus. Cities do, and will, keep going.

Students of psychology know that people desire connection. COVID-19 won't stifle that. Look at the Zoom calls, the virtual video concerts. Since social isolation began, more and more inventive and creative ways to connect have emerged – often through food, art, culture and literature. What's the first thing that people want to do once they can re-emerge into society? See loved ones, eat at a restaurant, go to a show, swim at a beach, even return to their place of work.

Our desire for togetherness and unity means that public spaces and spaces for human connection, through nature, culture and art, will be more important, and more cherished, than ever before.

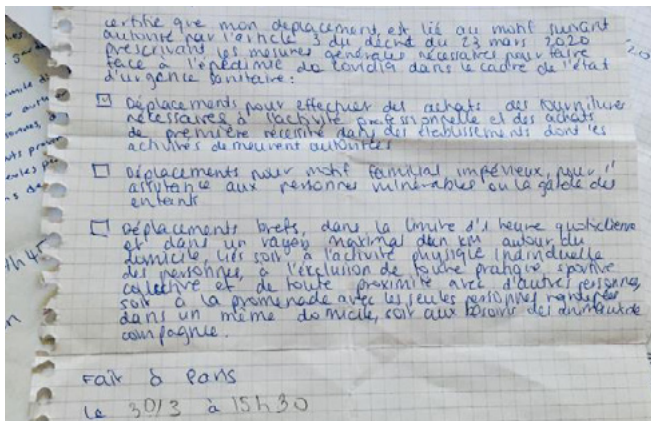
# Sarah Andersen (2006)

After relocating to Paris, I started a new job a week before lockdown, in group media relations and reputation at French insurance company, AXA. COVID-19 really crept up on us. In the final hours before lockdown kicked in, thinking it would last a few weeks but fearing worse, I raided my desk for equipment, which I then trucked home on the metro.

My partner and I worked remotely for three months from a 35 m<sup>2</sup> studio apartment. I wouldn't have known what this meant before my time in France... it means TINY! Sometimes one of us would have to take a call in our bathroom, the only space separated with a door.

For us lockdown meant:

- Not being able to leave the house without an attestation or statutory declaration, signed and dated (including the time) in ink. We didn't have a printer, so had to handwrite half a page every time we went out. It didn't take me long to find a local shop with a printer and experience my first instance of profiteering.



Sarah's attestations (stat decs) handwritten in ink with time and date before she could leave the house, like those seen during WW1 and WW2

- All shops closed, except for those considered 'essential', which meant supermarkets, pharmacies, and of course bakeries. We mustn't forget tabacs, where Parisians queued in hordes to feed their nicotine addictions! And little by little the definition of 'essential' unofficially loosened to the point where we had florists and hardware shops again.
- Unlike toilet paper in Australia, we had shortages of pasta, sugar and eggs. Flour was impossible to find for months, and bakeries started to sell it on the side.
- After a couple of weeks, with the arrival of spring, Parisians were enjoying the outdoors too much. Enter exercise restrictions between 10 am and 7 pm, plus a 1 km boundary.
- Our nightly routine of an apéro (drink and nibble) and clapping for healthcare workers. One set of neighbours was particularly steadfast and continued until the end of May when confinement was lifted.
- Life in a high-rise community was challenging at times. One neighbour found his true calling as a DJ... sometimes all day, at top volume. Naturally, he couldn't possibly wear headphones. Result? 60 dB inside our apartment with windows and shutters closed. A journey through France's greatest 80s ballads. Begging was ineffective. Eventually the neighbours banded together and involved police. Peace and quiet ensued for a week.

- A whole year of travel plans on hold, and a very slim chance of visiting Australia in the near future. The weekend before lockdown in France we were planning a trip to Milan over Easter. May is a month of public holidays; we had a sailing holiday booked in Croatia with friends joining from Australia.
- An almost-empty city that felt surprisingly safe despite being a global hotspot. Parisians are renowned for mass exodus in August, and the tradition dates back hundreds of years. Devoid of locals and tourists, our Paris experience felt unique and sometimes very sad, as we walked past empty and boarded-up restaurants and bars, and increasing numbers of for lease signs.

I am writing this from a three-week escape to the south of France (which hardly even makes a dent in my annual total!). We don't know when we'll all be able to be fully back in the office



Empty Paris streets during lockdown

like normal; we're currently split into teams and expect this to last until November at least. Making the most of summer, we're slowly starting to see friends again in person, balancing the allure of cafés and bars with vast open spaces in parks. All of this tempered by the expectation of a second wave.



After lockdown: Sarah experiencing freedom in the south of France

## Christine Townend OAM (Woolcott, 1962)



Christine Townend at Kalimpong Animal Shelter, the Himalayas, India

Now retired, 44 years ago I founded animal rights organisation, Animal Liberation and for 15 years up until 2005 I was also volunteering/managing trustee of an animal shelter in Jaipur, India. My husband Jeremy kept the shelter's books. It was very hot in Jaipur in summer and so Jeremy and I went to Darjeeling in the Himalayan foothills, to escape the heat. There we started two animal shelters, one in Darjeeling and the other in nearby Kalimpong. I started the shelters because I had seen a street dog dying of strychnine poisoning. We talked to the Chairman of the municipality, explaining that the World Health Organisation considered it best to spay and vaccinate dogs against rabies, so that they guarded their place from intruders. The municipality agreed to stop poisoning dogs if we started an animal birth control program, which we did. So, the shelters were born.

The shelters are coping well with the pandemic. Lockdown has lifted now in Kalimpong, but there's still a lurking fear of coronavirus, as cases continue to ebb and flow. The Darjeeling and Kalimpong Animal Shelters have managed well, as they are deemed 'essential services'. There are staff at work every day, feeding dogs and cleaning kennels. The food for the dogs is not so difficult to obtain, as it is generously donated, and can be purchased. I am hoping that none of the shelter staff becomes infected with COVID-19, although the chances of that happening are hopefully slim, because Kalimpong and Darjeeling are fairly remote.

About a month ago, Kalimpong Animal Shelter had to suspend its animal birth control program for two weeks. But the veterinarian, Dr. Deo Pandey somehow still obtained the necessary birth control material, in the middle of the lockdown and when conveyance was difficult. It was crucial and urgent to spay dogs in the nearby village of Pedong, where the locals, due to the stray dog menace, had decided to kill the animals.

I have not been able to travel to India this year and am sitting at home in the Blue Mountains, with no idea of what is happening on the ground. Someone has donated a cattery, which has been designed by a French builder who is also a volunteer. I'm frustrated that I cannot even see this new cattery, but at least I do know that the animal shelters are being run as usual.



Staff looking after a street dog at the Kalimpong shelter



These puppies of street dogs were surrendered to Kalimpong Animal Shelter and badly need a home



## Rosie Meares (2019)



2019 leaver, Rosie Meares, spent lockdown back home in Cootamundra

As a 2019 leaver, I had only just started my experience as a university student, when the pandemic hit. I had attended college for a total of 4 weeks before lockdown started and I had to go home to Cootamundra. However, despite all the parties and fun I was forgoing and the new friends I was leaving, I really enjoyed my time at home.

I boarded at Abbotsleigh from Year 7 and my older brothers had been at boarding school before that. When they opted to lock down at home, rather than stay in Sydney, it was the first time in a long time that my family all lived together for such an extended period. Although there was still many an argument and the wifi was stretched to accommodate one brother working from home and my other brother and I studying online, it was a really nice time to spend with my family. It was also nice spending time at home in the winter. The summer holidays had been endlessly dry and smoky from the bushfires, so it was revitalising to see the paddocks become green again and to be able to walk my dog out in the fresh air.

Studying online proved to be a little bit difficult without the guide of a strict uni timetable. I found that having a routine and waking up nice and early each day helped, but it was a bit of an exercise in self-motivation. I started working, doing local deliveries in the afternoons for the pharmacy in town which was snowed under during the pandemic. This was another good way to add some structure to my day.

Other than that, my life was pretty normal. I was used to spending long periods of time away from my friends during the holidays and keeping myself occupied without many places to go, so it wasn't too hard to adapt to a locked down lifestyle.

But I am ready to go back to college now!

## Suzanne Dugan (1965)



Sue Dugan ready for a trip to the shops in the USA

I live between two homes in the USA. One in Arizona and one in Colorado. This is my normal fashion for going grocery shopping! Masks of some kind are an everyday necessity here. I look like I'm going to rob a bank!

## Lisa Higgins (1983)

Bookkeeping is not a glamorous job. It helps being good with numbers, but the most vital attribute of a bookkeeper is patience. Patience when things do not balance. Patience with computers. Patience with large quantities of disorganised paperwork. Patience with people.

COVID-19 has turned the accounting world upside down.

I run a small Sydney-based bookkeeping business, operating largely from my home office. My clients are generally small to medium-sized businesses. Overnight, clients had their businesses shut or severely impacted.

Almost every day in the initial stages of the pandemic, the Federal Government was announcing changes that I, along with everyone working in the industry, had to navigate. I had calls non-stop, emails all day, and, in between listened to webinars, read industry releases and was on the phone to the Tax Office, researching and finding answers to the myriad questions.

No one was ready. Everyone was desperate and anxious. The information that we could obtain was confusing and the goalposts kept changing. We had new words in our vocabulary like 'JobSeeker', 'JobKeeper', 'cash flow boost', NSW Government grants, payroll tax relief, rent reductions, and stand downs.

I was suddenly an essential service. Some clients were profusely grateful, some sent flowers, bottles of wine and emails of gratitude. A couple were demanding, aggressive and seemingly ungrateful for the additional hours of work and research I was doing. I realise now that this was a symptom of their own stresses, but I found this difficult to manage at the time. I could see, hear and feel the stresses of my clients. I was working harder than ever, but was not even sure if my invoices would be paid if everyone went under.

My personal world had also been turned upside down. One son had his around-Australia adventure thwarted and was now sleeping on my lounge (with his dog), my daughter was teaching kindergarten online from her bedroom and my office was now taken by another son whose job as a chef had disappeared overnight.

I was operating my COVID-19 financial rescue mission from my bedroom. One day turned into the next. I was working as many hours as I could physically and mentally manage. There seemed to be no respite and no end in sight. April, from memory, had 365 days!

My grandson was only eight weeks old and my son would send me videos and photos of him each morning – beautiful but heart-wrenching. My day would then start in tears as I longed to see and hold my grandson.

My strength came from friends Zooming for a chat and a wine at 5 pm on a Monday (who cares what day it is?!) Or, girlfriends from schooldays having lunch on a Friday – all of us locked in our rooms, sneaking a bit of a catch-up and relief from our situations, an online laugh, and a cup of tea.



Lisa's 6-month-old grandson, Chase

Professionally, connecting with other bookkeepers was also a lifeline to sanity – not only knowing that others were having similar experiences, but helping each other navigate our new set of ever-changing rules and related challenges. The bookkeeping community, I have discovered, is a very supportive and collaborative one and is largely filled by women.

My industry continues to face new challenges, working its way alongside the Government and the economy through these uncertain times. Luckily, all my clients are still operating and all are still hopeful of a recovery. Australian optimism getting us all through.

## Kathryn Hunyor (1991)

What an interesting time to work in the arts. I'm a Japanese-speaking arts consultant, curator and speaker, who creates experiences that bring the arts and people together.

My business spans the Pacific. In the five years since founding ArtsPeople, I've lived for three years in Tokyo. Whether I'm physically in Australia or Japan, my work is all about taking inspiration from both countries, to enrich our lives through the arts and creativity. I'm currently based in Sydney, but my business takes me to Japan 3-4 times a year.

Oh, hang on, I mean it did. That was before March 2020 ...

I consult to major arts companies such as the Australian Chamber Orchestra; create participatory arts experiences such as 'Jurassic Plastic' for the Sydney Festival (2018) and lead specialist art tours to Japan for the AGNSW Society. Every project planned for 2020 was wiped out in an instant.

The arts industry has been hit extremely hard. A vulnerable sector at the best of times, this year has been devastating. No concerts, no major events, no 'coming together' to celebrate, reflect or learn. Individual artists and practitioners have had to fall back on other skills to survive, and major companies have had to cut back and reinvent themselves overnight.

But as you might expect, there have been many examples of creativity and positivity in the face of this challenge. For many of my clients and collaborators, it's been an opportunity to try new things that they'd always wanted to do, but never had the time or resources. The Australian Chamber Orchestra (whose Tokyo concerts I was preparing for this September and October) is creating intimate recitals – 'Homecasts' – from orchestra members' homes. The Japan Foundation (a government body responsible for promoting Japanese culture overseas) has commissioned ArtsPeople to create a 20-minute documentary film about 'Jurassic Plastic' and the work of Japanese artist, Hiroshi Fuji. I have started a web journal based on my experiences living and working in Japan, and am collaborating with Japanese and Australian artists, curators and creative thinkers.

Many lessons have been learned. Personally, it's been a strangely liberating time of letting go. Many of us are saying to each other, 'this is all bigger than me'. Unlike the disappointment you feel when you miss out on a new project or opportunity – where you wonder how you could have managed things differently to get a better result – the disappointments of 2020 are free of self-recrimination or blame. As they say in Japanese, "*shikata ga nai*" – it can't be helped.

My collaborators and I are now more determined than ever to bring people across generations together to enjoy art. As I wrote on ArtsPeople's website many years ago, "in this fast-paced and distracted time we live in, I believe our community needs more moments of coming together that are meaningful, beautiful, thought-provoking, emotional, irrational, honest, idealistic, dystopian, utopian, funny, serious, confusing, overwhelming, energising, empowering and exciting. Although maybe not all at the same time...".

Looking to the future, I feel extremely optimistic. Once we're through this, it will be that much easier to convince people of the benefits of the arts to our society, particularly the art forms with which I'm involved. Immersive arts experiences for multi-generational, hands-on participation; concerts, exhibitions and public talks; and art tours to Japan will all experience a renaissance and popularity like never before. The digital realm, although a fantastic space for some amazing virtual arts experiences and a way to stay connected to each other, is no replacement for the 'real thing'.

Having lived through this time without one of our most critical needs being adequately met – that of real, meaningful human connection – the necessity of the arts to our society will be undeniable.

Imagining our post-COVID future, strengthened by this period of adversity, I'm reminded of a Japanese proverb: "*Ame futte, ji katamaru*". The earth hardens after rain.

## Pepita Carpenter (Owens, 1962)

I am a dog breeder based in Sydney. I feel very lucky that the pandemic has had little effect on my way of life – I can still go outdoors and walk around my acreage property, and I am still able to enjoy my life with my dogs.

After the births of my four daughters, I began breeding Miniature Poodles. Initially, I started going to obedience classes, which led me into entering trials. One day, while waiting at the kindergarten to pick up my kids, I was training my dog Tess in the street. A mother of a friend of one of my daughters started chatting about entering shows, something she did regularly. This mother said that she knew of a nice stud dog that would be a good mate for Tess, and that I could keep a pup and start going to shows with the pup.

The long and the short of it is that I did just that; learning the hard way how to groom, clip and trim a poodle for the showing. I found my way to many suburban and country shows over the years. I never took showing too seriously, but used it to get known and promote the apricot colour.

Eventually, I switched to Standard Poodles, apricot again, and continued showing them. Poodles were always the 'go to' dog for people with allergies as they have non-shedding, non-allergenic coats. I joined the Poodle Club of NSW and looked after the Puppy Register for many years. People started ringing and asking where they could get a poodle cross, or a Labradoodle (the Guide Dog people had started breeding these to try to produce a guide dog suitable for allergic, sight-impaired people).

I eventually thought that I would give the cross breeding a try myself, as the demand was growing. After three litters of Labradoodles, lovely but still heavy shedders, I turned to Spoodles. These work beautifully – non shedding, non-allergenic, with lovely temperaments, along with Cavoodles, which are great too. I am still breeding Poodles, Cavoodles, Spoodles, and Working Cocker Spaniels which I imported from UK.

At the time of our lockdown back in March, I had two litters of Cavoodles. I found it difficult to let people come only once to see the pups, and I had to limit visits to only one car at a time. To make up for lack of visits, I had to text regular photos of pups to their anxious new owners so that they could keep up with their pup's progress. Eventually all the pups went to their new homes in one busy weekend of timed appointments – with much sanitising in between each family.

Then, with many holidays cancelled, and kids home schooling – what better time than now to get a puppy! I have been inundated with phone calls and emails, sometimes 20 per day, but as I don't have any pups at the moment, I have very, very long waiting lists. I am planning my next litters for later this year. I don't breed more than three or four litters per year, so I know I won't have enough pups for all those on my current lists. In the meantime, with each contact, I warn about scammers who are very actively conning people about non-existent pups. I have had several calls from people who have been caught.

This pandemic has confirmed in a big way the popularity of dogs as loving, useful companions and friends! I can't see this changing any time soon.

## Anna Cooke (Chirnside, 1952)

For about a week we were hearing about the COVID-19 virus and what the New Zealand government should do to contain it. David and I asked a doctor in infectious diseases if she thought it safe to visit our daughter in Christchurch. With her okay, we flew from Auckland to Christchurch on Friday 21 March, with return tickets for Tuesday 24. For our return trip, I was armed with a nasal spray and mask, as four weeks' complete lockdown was announced from midnight on Wednesday 25 March.

Living 100 m from the bowling club, I thought I would practise, even if roll ups and tournaments were not organised. To my sorrow, all sport, theatres, restaurants, churches etc. were, in Abbotsleigh vernacular, 'out of bounds'. We were allowed to walk and cycle within a couple of kilometres of home and use cars only for essentials. Roads were very quiet. I found it best to walk briskly around the park a couple of times to get the heart rate up, once a day.

Being in the vulnerable age group (over 70) we were asked not to go to supermarkets, but these shops set up a wonderful delivery service, using the computer to list needs. Small shops like hardware, bakeries and butchers were closed as non-essentials.

Our 'spare' time was then organised. Apart from more intense housework and cooking for regular morning and afternoon teas with David, we worked on some craft work, until we ran out of materials or the ability to use machines at the Men's Shed, and puzzles to keep our brains ticking over. Probably the most-used things were the computer and the phone. We emailed overseas and rang friends and acquaintances especially those living alone, being grateful that our church produced a directory of phone numbers.

Actually, we found the lockdown quite fun – we slept in late, tried out lots of new recipes and ate too much. We did not run out of toilet paper! In fact, many of my age group feel we could have a week in lockdown each year. We are now in 'normal' phase, and are dearly hoping not to get a second wave of the virus. Some returnees are upset by having to isolate for two weeks, but this way we have caught those bringing the virus into the country. May it remain that way.

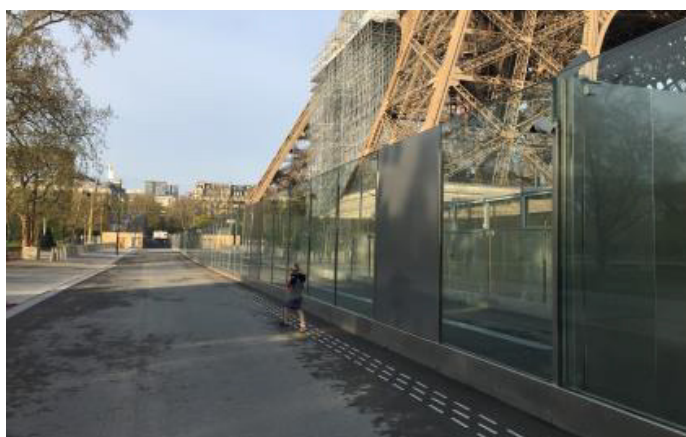
### **Update from Anna Cooke, August 2020, Auckland, NZ:**

I now have a little bit to add to my previous account written in July. The worst has happened and we now have a large family in Auckland who, unbeknownst to them, appear to have been infected with the virus for a while and have roamed about, infecting others. The source of that infection has not been discovered yet, but last night there were about 15 known cases from this. We have gone back into Level 3 and await our next advice. More masking and sanitising. Disappointing, but we were warned it would come. We were so enjoying our freedom.

## Jenny Barnsley (Wade, 1967)

After leaving Abbotsleigh in 1967, I taught (mostly as a teacher librarian) until 2012. My daughter, Ingrid Barnsley (AOG 1995) and her husband Ben have lived in Paris since 2007 and their children were born there. Since then I have usually made two trips every year to enjoy time with the family and to help out. My last trip began in early February 2020. The family lives in an apartment very close to the Eiffel Tower and I stay in a comfortable studio on the floor above.

Our daily lives changed very quickly, when the kids came home from school with all their books on Friday 13 March. Very soon most services closed and we set up school at home for four children aged from 4-11 years. Before long, we all were in total lockdown, with Ben and Ingrid also working from home. This was a big change for the household. As our usual home delivery for food became very unreliable, we had to venture out to the shops. In inner city Paris, shopping for seven people on foot with a trolley is time-consuming! The only businesses which were open were food shops and pharmacies.



This path beside the Eiffel Tower is normally full of tourists but became one of Jenny's jogging routes

I realise that many other countries have also been in lockdown, but it seemed sooner, more sudden and more stringent in France at that time. Whenever we left the building, we had to take our ID and a signed, timed and dated attestation stating why we were outside the home. Police checked this often. Ben was out exercising with the four children when he was stopped by police who asked if they were all really his! Of course, he had the requisite documentation with him, but thereafter we took the kids out in smaller groups. If you were out with a baguette under your arm or shopping bags, you were less likely to be questioned! Very quickly the parks and riverside walkways near home were closed and we were only allowed to exercise outside within a 1 km radius of home for one hour per day before 10 am or after 7 pm.

So, like for many others around the world, a new way of life began. For me it was back to the classroom and I was kept busy printing worksheets, juggling four online classes and submitting schoolwork electronically. The children attend bilingual schools and most of the work was in French! At times the internet connection was working very hard.



Home schooling in Paris

Since lockdown started, we had four birthdays, Easter and two weeks of school holiday. So, we found inventive ways to celebrate, entertain ourselves and keep in touch with family and friends. It was a treat to sometimes dress up for dinner even though we were not going anywhere. One weekend the kids did some strenuous outside exercise wearing backpacks and then erected tents in the living room for a 'sleep out.' They thoroughly enjoyed it.

My return flight in late April was cancelled and after much discussion about whether it was better to stay or return to Sydney, my husband Rowan and I managed to get a flight. On arrival in Sydney I spent two weeks in hotel quarantine. While I would have preferred to self-isolate at home, I have no complaints with any aspect of that unusual process.

We are unable to take any other trips to Paris at present and it is likely that we will not see our grandchildren for Christmas either in France or Australia. Video calls are great, but they can't replace the value and enjoyment of time spent with the family. Luckily, I have lots of memories and photos of this unusual time.



Jenny, out of retirement and back in the (home) classroom

## Rani Wilkinson (Francis, 1989)

I am based in Noosa, Queensland and own a clothing label *ella & sunday*. My clothing is made by a small, family-run factory in a remote town in Rajasthan, India.

On 10 March, I began my most recent India trip, to work on our summer 2020/21 collection. I was concerned about coronavirus and what was happening across the globe, but India hadn't really been affected at that point and my focus was trying to get fabrics sourced and samples made. What would we do if I don't have a summer collection?

A couple of days later, while traipsing through a wholesale fabric market in Delhi, I was told by one of my suppliers that Indian Prime Minister Modi had, without warning, cancelled all incoming foreign visas. Back then, I rejoiced in the fact that I had made it. I would get my work done and return home, I thought. I might even bring my flight forward, if I work quickly.

Continuing my trip to Jaipur, I met with my usual fabric suppliers and explored new ones. I ran into other creatives from around the world and talk constantly returned to coronavirus. Some were panicky, others were concerned for their suppliers and friends, many (including myself) were focused on their work.

Next, I travelled to my little factory in Pushkar, where I started working on samples, print strike-offs, timelines. I also visited Fiona at The Stitching Project and discussed new prints, styles and colours.



Machinists in the factory, Pushkar, India



Shamshu with Rani

Coronavirus had become all anyone could talk about. Public gatherings of more than five people were prohibited overnight. It was hard to concentrate on the collection, but, after talking with my family, I decided to push on. The owner of the factory said he would complete my samples within a week, on a limited staff of five. I brought my flights forward to 27 March. It was Thursday 19 March.

Friday was spent with my head down in my little 'office' at the factory. I had dinner at a friend's rooftop restaurant not far from my hotel and sometime during the evening, my Indian friends showed me an online article explaining that PM Modi was cancelling all inbound flights on 22 March. There had been so much misinformation around that we weren't sure if it was true. It was also late in the evening and I would have to wait until morning to contact my travel agent. I decided to send an email just in case.

The next morning, I woke early and checked my email. I had not received anything from Australia but my flight on the 27th had been cancelled. After some time searching online, I confirmed that all international flights to India were cancelled from 22 March. It was the morning of the 21st and I was eight hours' drive from Delhi.

I called my husband and asked him to contact the travel agent. In India, I use WhatsApp for international calls and an Indian SIM for local calls and mobile data. After some back and forth, my travel agent left a message to say it was 12 noon on Saturday and it was time for them to go home, so, she would be in touch on Monday. Monday would be too late.

My daughter, Ella, emailed Flight Centre and within minutes we had an agent, Jaiden working from home. It was 9 am in Rajasthan. Calm and assured, Jaiden told me there were very limited options, but that he could get me on a flight at 9.30 pm to Abu Dhabi – Business Class, \$3,150. "I need you to be in a car to Delhi by 11 am," he said. "I will sort out the second leg once you are on your way."

Only in India, on an already stressful morning, could you manage to get a car to Delhi within the hour, but also score the world's worst driver! I was thinking the driver had never left Pushkar in his life, but in hindsight it may have been that he did not know the city. We got lost trying to leave...twice! I think I had a better idea of where we were at times! Then we hit a stray dog crossing the road!

The internet service was very slow on the trip, so Jaiden was sending me voice recordings of the different options I had for the second leg. We finally settled on a Perth-bound flight that had a layover in Brisbane. It did not leave Abu Dhabi until 9.30 pm the next evening. I was so incredibly thankful to Jaiden for his help that day.

What a harrowing three days, at such huge expense, and now I kick myself and wonder why I left in the first place? However, I don't think any of us could ever have imagined the global catastrophe that is the COVID-19 pandemic.

I now worry for travellers who are caught in the panic: my suppliers (friends who are like family), the homeless kids that we support in Delhi through The Sunshine Project and the huge Indian population that is in extended lockdown. Many of these people have no funds to get through days, let alone weeks, without work.

Our beautiful winter collection was delayed due to India's lockdown and I will somehow have to pull together a summer collection remotely, when people return to work. The only thing that quells the rising panic is knowing that we are all in this together.

Stuck in self-isolation, I read an article from which this thought has stayed with me:

"We have to surrender what was, for what is." Wise words.



Rani with a sample machinist



Pushkar, India at sunset

## Sophie Rankine (2008) and Eloise Rankine (2010)

We co-founded *elph* store in 2016, a bespoke retail space featuring the functional ceramic works of Eloise and other Australian makers, together with a range of homewares. The retail space is on William Street in Paddington and our soon to be launched pottery space is in Exeter, NSW.

In mid-March, the pandemic forced us to close our physical store; however, our online store remained open. The first month was really difficult – consumer confidence was low and people were struggling to find a routine in the pandemic. As the dust began to settle and people were spending a lot more time in their homes, we saw a significant uptick in online sales, which increased to 75% of in-store sales. In late April, we reopened our physical space and, while we haven't seen the same year on year growth, our sales have recovered strongly. The JobKeeper and other government payments significantly reduced our financial pressure and have allowed us to invest in equipment for our pottery.

A couple of months before the pandemic, we purchased a small property in Exeter in the NSW Southern Highlands, with the plan to open a bespoke manufacturing space. While our physical store was closed, we had the opportunity to dedicate a lot more time to planning our new space and we are now many months ahead of schedule. We had a small studio space in Paddington, but the larger manufacturing space will enable us to increase our production capacity – retail, wholesale and market revenue streams. We're planning to rebrand from *elph store* to *elph ceramics* to reflect our change in business model.

The pandemic has presented small businesses with a unique opportunity to stop and take stock of current and future plans. Many other small businesses have enjoyed the respite and many have been able to successfully pivot. We took this opportunity to solidify our plans to vertically integrate our supply chain, as we increase production of our own range of functional ceramics.



Sophie and Eloise Rankine in their Paddington store, with Emily the border collie

It has become even clearer that local manufacturing is not only a source of inimitable competitive advantage, but also a safeguard against supply chain disruption. Supply chain disruption, particularly of products sourced from China, will become a major issue facing businesses, as trade relations weaken. Our products are all Australian made, so we have had little to no disruption to our supply chain.

However, it has become difficult to source equipment. Ceramics equipment is either fully imported, or relies on imported parts. Delays were also caused by a heightened demand for ceramics equipment, which we expect was from an increase in hobby ceramicists, as they decided lockdown would be a good time to try their hand at the craft! Fluctuations in the dollar also had an impact on suppliers and less product was imported.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we are excited to relaunch our business as *elph ceramics* and open our pottery to the public. While the pandemic has been a stressful and disorienting time, it has also given us the opportunity to slow down, assess our growth plans and understand what is really important to us.

On a personal note, Eloise is very much enjoying her move to Exeter. She is looking forward to getting chickens and her border collie, Emily, is loving all the space. I was able to spend more time focusing on my MBA studies and have been enjoying weekends in Exeter.



The Rankine sisters' new manufacturing space, Exeter NSW



## Margaret North (Gill, 1954)

After many years in commercial life and running a small business, I am now semi-retired and teaching yoga part time. But this isn't about work, rather about how a cartoon owl has taken over my life.

I had flirted with learning the Italian language for a number of years, but the gaps between study had stolen the gains previously made.

Then, coronavirus-induced lockdown. "Aha," I thought. "Here we are – no yoga, no chatting with friends in cafés, no films, no theatre – what will be meaningful as I shelter indoors?" I am very impressed with my friends deciding to spring clean their homes, turn out all their drawers, renovate and update their gardens, get all their paperwork in order, or turn themselves into amazing chefs and bakers. Not for me. So, what?

Reigniting that languishing *lingua italiana*, via the computer program *Duolingo*, that's what.

Thus, The Owl came into my life. I turn on my computer to read the morning news, barely awake over my mug of tea and The Owl pops onto my screen: "Don't miss a day. Start now." So, I turn to the program and make my faltering answers. "Even making mistakes, you are learning," the cheeky thing encourages me.

I decide to take a day away from The Owl. After all, that sunshine beckons for a lovely walk. Sometimes, it is just nice to spend a morning chatting with shut-in friends on the telephone and the afternoon practising some challenging yoga moves. It is also nice to read a book, or watch television. People, particularly when shut in, do these things, don't they?

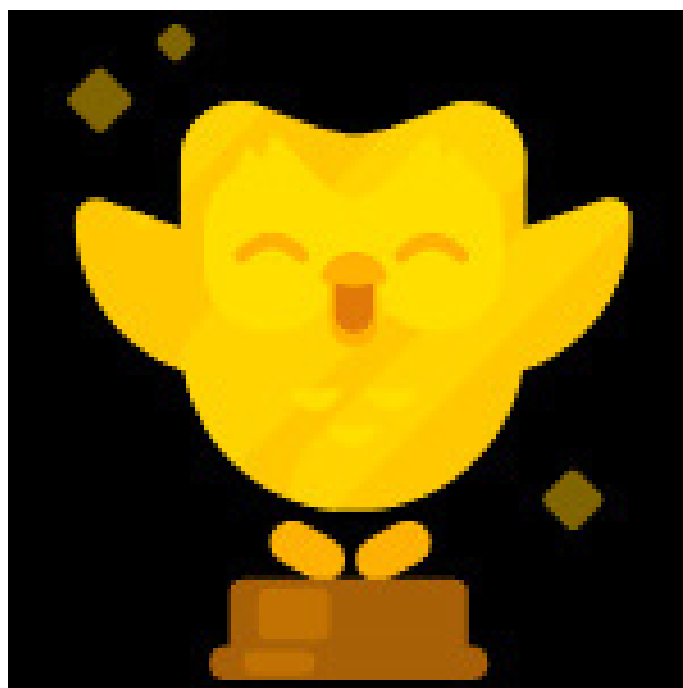
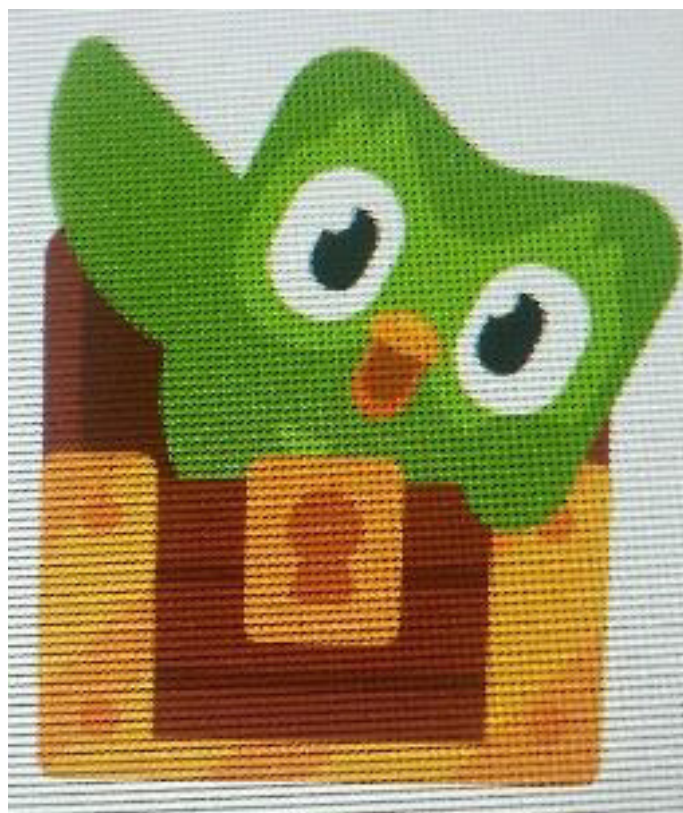
But does The Owl understand that? No. The Owl has decided that my time must be spent keeping him/her happy. "You have been with me for 154 continuous days – make it 150-FIVE!" comes the shriek. How can I turn my back on that? So, lured back into the program I go, struggling with those notorious Italian verbs, the subjunctive, the (obscure, to me) *passato remoto*, as well as the *mi, ti, si, ci, vi, chi, and the me, te, se, ce, ne, ve, che*.

Can this pursuit of me by The Owl ever end? Yes, it can and it has, oh so happily. After 264 continuous days of study, The Owl jumps up and down in huge excitement:

"You've conquered the Italian skill tree! You're awesome!" it squeals. Apparently, I have learned all that The Owl can teach me.

I am so glad that The Owl, my daily companion through months of lockdown, is at last very happy with me. And, what about me? *Sono contenta che il gufo sia felice ma meglio che sembri avere una buona padronanza dell'italiano.*

I'm happy that The Owl is happy, but better that it seems to have a good command of Italian.



## Cathy Morrison (FitzSimons, 1971)

I am a retired high school teacher of History, Geography, Commerce and Legal Studies, but I still get work as a casual teacher. As a History teacher, I am cognisant of the value and importance of primary sources from ordinary individuals when studying an historical event or period. When COVID-19 cases were first mentioned on the news, we knew little about the virus, or the impact it would have on our lives.

Since I retired in 2008, money earned from casual teaching has become my 'Travel and Entertainment Fund'. My daughters encouraged me to stay at home and not accept any more work. I had booked and paid for a trip to Morocco and Spain in May and June, but it soon became clear the trip would not be possible.

Since 22 March, I have been posting my COVID-19 experience on Facebook, with photos. I wrote something every day for the first 100 days. Now, I still record the day and date, but I don't write every day. I wanted to record my personal experience as well as the Australian and global COVID statistics, and found writing something daily encouraged me to make the most of every day.

I walked a lot, sometimes with a friend, sometimes alone. I took lots of photos to illustrate my day. I found that people were interested in my comments and I loved hearing of their experiences too. I explored my neighbourhood: Kensington and the Eastern Suburbs, taking a different route each day. I often got up to see the sunrise at the beach or in Centennial Park. I really enjoyed the changing light and seasons, particularly the autumnal colours. In May, I saw the arrival of the season's first cygnets in Centennial Park. The adult swans are very attentive to their young, but they couldn't prevent a clutch of three becoming one, or seven going to six. I have loved seeing the cygnets change from balls of grey fluff to proper feathers, seeing their necks become longer and them gaining more independence from their parents. I watched families teaching kids to ride bikes, or kicking a ball. Rarely did I see adults looking at their phones.

At first, when faced with the prospect of not travelling and not going out to dinner or the movies, I made a 'to-do' list. I quickly ticked off a number of the jobs, but then worried how I would fill my days if I got them all done... so, I slowed down and still have a lot of things on my list!

One activity I have enjoyed is making masks. I investigated and trialled several styles. At first, I used fabric I already had. I gave away the first 40 to friends and family with a note saying I wasn't charging, in the hope that they would 'pay-it-forward'.



Cathy Morrison, ready for a COVID-safe outing

Some people bought me a coffee or a drink. One friend sent me a note saying that a homeless man went on his way with money in his pocket.

I am now selling masks, as I have bought a lot of new fabric and supplies. In recent days, it has distressed me to see people in both Australia and America claiming it is their 'human right to NOT wear a mask'. It is such an easy thing to do to protect yourself and others from this terrible virus.

I am now accepting work and I'm lucky to work in a school where hand sanitiser and disinfectant are readily available. We have cleaners onsite all day, cleaning surfaces. The students are not spatially distant, but I do try to not get too close to others.

Pre-COVID, I frequently went to the movies and the theatre, so I have missed going to those. On the last day that cinemas were open, I saw three movies and my friends and I were the last people to leave that night. When they reopened in July, I was the first person back in the door. I saw five movies in the first week and sometimes I was the only person in the cinema, so lots of spatial distancing.

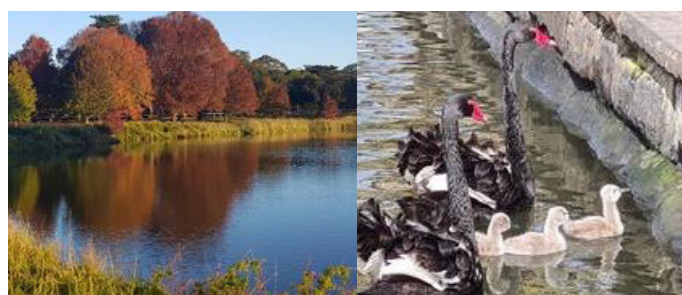
Six months into the pandemic, there is no end in sight. America hasn't managed to flatten the curve. Many European countries are dealing with a second wave. Victoria is facing a health crisis, particularly in aged care facilities. Many health professionals and frontline workers have tested positive, are in quarantine or awaiting test results. Defence personnel have been brought into some facilities as all staff were ordered off-site.

In NSW, recent hotspots are in Western Sydney and now in the Eastern Suburbs, close to me. Today, Queensland has closed the border to all residents of Greater Sydney. It will be months before we can travel interstate or overseas.

I personally know seven people overseas who have had the virus and survived. None of my family or friends in Australia has been sick. The expression 'we are all in the same boat' is often used, but so far, I know my experience of this pandemic is unlike many others. I still work when I want to, I haven't had to organise home-learning for young children, or work from home. For me, not travelling overseas, going to the movies or attending family gatherings have been the main consequences. This is such a small price to pay when worldwide to date there have been 16.6 million cases and 650,000 deaths. In Australia, we have had 15,582 confirmed cases and 176 deaths.

I don't know what the future will bring. There is no vaccine, though pharmaceutical companies are working hard to develop one and clinical trials are being conducted. This will indeed be an interesting time to look back on.

29 July, 2020



Autumnal colour and new life in Centennial Park

## Jane Etienne (Clark, 1977)



Soon after my degree in Social Work, I met a Frenchman, moved to Paris, got married and had two daughters. Francis was a diplomat and still is. Climbing the ranks, we travelled as a family and became nomads. Our last posting to Kazakhstan showed us what being a nomad really meant. It was a wonderful experience, but difficult for me. When I could, I would escape to Sydney.

After Kazakhstan, we didn't know how long we'd be in Paris, so we emptied the diplomatic homebox (at least 150 boxes) to buy our own house in the Picardie countryside. The house, 100 kms from Paris in the village of Achy, was to be a weekender – a nice place to store our past. Little did I know that it was to become so much more: our lockdown refuge.

When COVID-19 hit France, President Macron announced we had to “anchor” somewhere, with those we loved. So, we headed to Achy. Our youngest daughter joined us from London. We were a family under the same roof again, we reconnected and were feeling close. COVID had brought me a longing to be anchored in France. Achy was becoming my anchor.

The natural environment of our country house at that time of year made living in lockdown that much easier. On my daily walks, I realised how beautiful the raw French countryside is. Before the harvest in July, the wheat kernels shimmer and sway in the wind. I was mesmerised into their dance, in awe of their movement, to the sound of the rustling wind.

Thanks to COVID, I've reconnected with the French community too. Being recognised by locals in the Achy food shops, getting to know the local farmers, and now wearing the mandatory mask alongside them, has made us feel fully accepted.

During our confinement, I Zoomed friends in Australia and New Zealand. This enhanced my feelings of closeness, despite the distance, especially as we were all living very similar lives. Belonging to a global community and not just drifting as a nomad within it, has been very uplifting.

I think that we have all learned and are still learning from the COVID crisis. For me, it has meant getting back to basics and getting in touch with feelings that go deep: feelings of connection, being closer to the people in my life, needing to be creative in my immediate environment and wanting to be part of our new community in France.

COVID has also brought me a feeling of closeness to my female French friends. It's shown me that I can feel the same sisterhood that I'd always felt with my Sydney friends, who date back to Abbotsleigh days. Previously, my relationship with the French women had always remained quite formal. It is difficult to let down your guard, almost frowned upon. Through COVID, my new French group of friends, an English conversation group for French hosts, welcoming spouses of diplomats posted in Paris, has become incredibly close. Every week we would speak on Zoom. As the weeks passed, being confined together made us sisters. We would share on a much more personal level and now use the 'tu' form of address, reserved for close friends.

One member of the group is an art historian. She chose a fascinating theme for our weekly discussion: a virtual visit to the house and garden of the 19th century painter Le Sidaner, in Gerberoy, 7 km from Achy. Le Sidaner's artistic flair went beyond the walls of his garden: he commissioned the planting of rose bushes by Gerberoy residents, which visitors still enjoy today.

What I am trying to do in Achy, with the ample time which the COVID confinement has given me, is just that: 'The roses of Picardie', also a song, are everywhere now.

This pandemic is perhaps meant to show us that, in order to protect nature and appreciate ourselves in it, we will have to stop moving, at least for the time being. Happiness is having a place you can call home.



## Caroline Curnock (Ross, 1963)

I was on the point of booking a long-overdue trip home from the UK, having not been back to Australia for seven years since our 50-year reunion. Our family had grown by four since then, so I felt a great-auntly visitation was due and I needed some cuddles.

We'd been getting used to constant reminders about handwashing, for how long (two rounds of Happy Birthday) and keeping a distance from each other. Then suddenly, the PM announced that the UK was in lockdown. All 'non-essential' businesses – shops, pubs, restaurants, hairdressers – had to close immediately; all except food shops, chemists and off-licences. We weren't sure why alcohol was considered an 'essential', but garden centres, which had spent months preparing for the spring and Easter rush, had to close – just when people had the opportunity to enjoy and work in their gardens.

Churches had to close, too, which was unfortunate, as many people, particularly those alone, may well have seen church as a sanctuary in a rather frightening situation. (Like most churches, ours went to a routine Sunday service via Zoom – but not all in our congregation are tech savvy).

Bath is a city of music, and I usually steward a lot of wonderful concerts, but that of course has stopped. That has an impact on our church, which is often a concert venue, providing the church with much-needed income. There are some fabulous concerts and plays streaming online, but it just isn't the same as live performance.

My husband and I found ourselves categorised as 'vulnerable' – i.e. over 70 and with inevitable 'underlying conditions'. We had to self-isolate and try to get home-delivery shopping. This wasn't easy as everyone was trying to book a slot, but after a few weeks, we got one. Meanwhile, kind, younger neighbours picked up the various necessities for us. It felt odd being given a very wide berth when they came to the house, but for good reason.

Two street WhatsApp groups were formed – one for serious messages and information, and the second for lighter matters. These certainly brought everyone together. We managed to arrange a VE Day street tea party. Everyone seemed to find some red, white and blue to decorate their gate or garage and at 4 pm we all took our tea and cake to the street and chatted. The road is wide enough that people could wander up and down still socially distanced.

We were allowed one hour a day to go for a walk, which was a relief. Conversations were had from opposite sides of the road – if we happened to encounter anyone – and people have become more outwardly friendly, at least acknowledging each other.



VE Day street tea party. Caroline is at the table in front of the garage.

Sadly, all parks and playgrounds were locked.

Our three children are scattered. Our daughter, her husband and three children aged 10 and under live two hours away, in Crediton. Normally we see them most weeks, but now we're not allowed to travel. Thank goodness for modern technologies. Stories with Grandad via WhatsApp have worked well, as have chess and Scrabble online. Our younger son and his family are currently posted in Naples, and sometimes Grandad reads to both families at the same time, which is fun and makes us all feel a bit nearer.

Early on, I had a lovely Zoom birthday party. I arranged with 'Naples' and 'Crediton' that each family would make Granny a birthday cake, complete with candles and I would bake one at our end. Then everyone Zoomed in at 2.30 pm UK time, and sang and we all blew out my candles together. It was fun!

Our elder son works on a superyacht in Vancouver, but was home on leave in Devon when lockdown happened. When he did return to Canada, he came via us to say goodbye. He was being so careful and protective of us, that we couldn't have farewell hugs or kisses, which was sad.



Caroline's little 'pandemic baby' grandson - born in Naples 10/6/20  
*Andra tutti bene* and rainbow appears on posters all over Italy: 'All will be well'

We had planned to be in Naples now, to welcome our newest grandson, and hopefully be helpful grandparents by entertaining his three-year-old big sister. Fortunately, our son has been very kind about sending us lots of photos and FaceTiming, so we have lots of virtual cuddles with young Wilfred Carlo (because he is Italian-made) Ross Curnock. He is seven weeks old now, and will probably be about seven months before we do meet him, on the family's return to UK.



Curnock family transcontinental Zoom calls

We have a weekly family quiz via Zoom, linking family in London, Winchester, Vancouver, Bath, Crediton, Naples and Norfolk, Virginia – about 16 of us in all. It keeps us all

in touch with each other's news and I hope we'll keep it going long after we get back to 'normal' (whenever that may be).

There have been some positive outcomes of the pandemic. People seem to be a lot friendlier, kinder and more helpful. Birdsong seems louder and more joyous. There's less traffic, less noise and cleaner air. Gardens and parks seem to be more abundant than ever, as though nature is providing a panacea.

I am sure there will be celebrations everywhere when this is all over – and I hope it is sooner rather than later. I hope at the very least that I will get to Australia for our 60th reunion in 2023!

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## Juel Briggs (1974)

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My biggest worry is that government and institutional measures taken in response to the pandemic will have disastrous effects on future generations – economically and socially. It's largely young people and future generations that will be the ones who will suffer the consequences – inflation, increased taxes etc. It will take tens of years for such debt to be paid off by taxpayers.

Any culture that we have left of the 'old way' where people 'saved for a rainy day' will be lost – because, with next to zero percent interest rates, there's no value in people saving. Better to live for the day, not plan for the future and take whatever government handout is available. Terrible for Australia, for our culture – and it's the culture which is ultimately what makes countries prosperous and safe.

On top of this, government policies have or will cause tens of thousands of businesses to go broke/close forever. That's tens of thousands of people losing their lifetime's savings and/or houses (which they have mortgaged to fund their businesses), and hundreds of thousands of jobs. Again, it's young people (such as the girls at Abbotsleigh now) who will feel the brunt of this.

Additionally, the way in which fear has been used by governments and institutions, and that people have allowed it to be used for unreasonable social control is concerning. People's irrational 'panic responses' are far out of proportion to the risk. They are being manipulated. This opens the door to us becoming something of a police state, as we are seeing in Victoria now.

We have lost perspective. The death rate from coronavirus [at the time of writing] in Australia has only been 1.2% (deaths/cases). Instead of using these statistics to help people understand that they need to keep calm and not panic, and that they also need to take responsibility to take sensible precautions against infection, we see massive panic mongering by governments and institutions.

Reason and risk assessment have flown out the window.

For me, these concerns outride any other thing about this 'COVID time'. In that sense, you could say they are a 'personal experience'.

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## Selena Liu (2014)

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I am a newly graduated dentist that works for NSW Health, within the Newcastle region. Working for the public sector has been an incredible experience, seeking to aid some of the most vulnerable in society.

COVID-19 has been a challenging period, particularly within a dental context. Our work is completed in very close proximity to people. It involves saliva and the production of aerosols, making appropriate infection control challenging. Most of the armamentarium we use to examine and treat patients create aerosols, which, prior to the viral pandemic, was not a concern. For example, when I air-dry teeth, am using vibrating instruments to clean teeth, or am drilling to place fillings or start a root canal treatment – all these send saliva and the patient's breath, in the form of tiny droplets, into the air!

Battling the coronavirus in the dental clinics has been rapidly evolving. I recall a week where restrictions and recommendations on what we could treat and what instruments we could use changed three times. We have seen an increase in face shields, disposable gowns and layering protective wear and we are spacing appointments further apart, to allow for surface disinfectants to be effective.

I wish I could say that I was fearless and unwavering as an essential worker at the height of transmissions within NSW. However, the truth is that I was fearful, uncertain and concerned about my health. Considering myself as a potential asymptomatic carrier of COVID-19, due to my exposure rate to aerosols, I did not see my family in Sydney and I missed them dearly.

I felt pressure to try and help the numerous emergency patients that attended in pain. I felt guilty when I could not place a filling due to the restrictions and worried how long that tooth had left, before a filling would not suffice and an extraction would ensue. When extracting teeth, there's always the possibility that it can break and due to COVID restrictions on certain procedures, retrieving the remaining tooth structure might not be possible. Ultimately, the patient might still be in pain until restrictions were lifted. "Please don't break, please don't break" was a continual mantra going through the dental teams' minds during these procedures! I was also acutely aware of the pressure on my lovely dental assistants, that the boundaries of what treatment I was comfortable with/ allowed to do might not align with their own.

However, in these unprecedented times, there has been much joy in encouraging and supporting each other. In my workplace, humour has been a wonderful antidote to the underlying tension. With their selfless acts of care for each other and their community, it has been an honour to work alongside such a team.

## Sarah Findlay (Denison, 1971)

I am a social worker working in a sub-acute hospital in Broadmeadows, a 'hotspot' in northern metropolitan Melbourne.

My patient population is frail, aged and very vulnerable to COVID-19. When the first shutdown began in late March, there was an air of unreality about the situation. To be honest, I felt it was all a bit of a nuisance. At work, temperature testing was introduced immediately and all staff were encouraged to practise hand hygiene and use sanitiser constantly. We did not have to wear masks at that stage, although I noticed that people involved with the adult mental health program always wore masks and face shields, which I thought was a bit over the top. My husband was working from home as his employer had requested all staff to do this. He is a manager in a Disability Residential Service, so managing disabled people remotely has given him some challenges.

I started studying for a Master's Degree in Advanced Social Work (MASW) this year. This has been an absolute blessing, as it has given me a focus when I have needed to be at home. My son and his family live in Sydney and it has been fun using Zoom, but I miss them all terribly. My daughter lives in London and I am so pleased she was able to visit Melbourne in February – I now have no idea when we will be able to see her again.

As the first round of restrictions eased, we made plans to visit our son in Sydney. He had wanted to bring the family to Melbourne but that idea was short lived, as the COVID-19 situation in Melbourne began to rise. So, we hoped to get to Sydney by car and made all the arrangements. At the last minute, the border between NSW and Victoria was closed, so that was that. Yes, I was disappointed that this trip fell through, but the way everything was building up in the media, with added cases every day, I was not surprised. My husband made a booking in about half an hour for us to go away to the country for a few days and what a blessing that trip proved to be! During our time away, we learned that once again lockdown had been instigated in the Melbourne metropolitan area, but that people on holiday could finish their time away.

I returned to work the following week and found that face masks and face shields were mandatory for staff entering clinical areas. We were each provided with one face shield, which must be sanitised after each wear. Face masks are also provided and each time we enter a clinical area; we must wear a new mask. There is an air of unreality about it at work, as we all have to get on with our normal tasks. However, we have noticed a huge drop off in patients admitted during the two lockdown periods, probably because people are not going outside and so are not so susceptible to falls and infections – often reasons for hospital admissions. There is a heightened air of anxiety though, as people realise how contagious this infection actually is.

Last week on Wednesday night (22 July), the rule came in stating that everyone in Melbourne metropolitan area must wear a mask whenever leaving the house, or risk a fine of \$200. As a strategy for lowering the rate of infection spread it might work well, as consequently there are far fewer people on the streets. I have been interested to see how many people are now making masks in a variety of styles and fabrics. Who would ever have thought mask making could be such a business enterprise?



Sarah Findlay at work in Melbourne, July 2020

## Anine Leakey (1991)

I have spent the last 20-odd years working as an events manager, both in Australia and London - organising everything from 200 people riding camels and drinking champagne under the stars at Uluru, to high tea for 18 international guests in a 20-room, crumbling French chateau in the Ariège. From 2010, I worked as Head of Events at BT Financial Group, organising black tie runway events and multi-day conferences. Then I worked at investment firm, Viridian Advisory; that was until COVID-19 hit and I was made redundant in March. It was quite a shock and I now find myself, like so many others, regularly riding the rollercoaster of emotions of fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, frustration – you name it!

My parents live on the South Coast of NSW, at a tiny coastal village called Potato Point and I spent the first six weeks of lockdown there with them. It is a region that has been severely affected by the January bushfires. Luckily Mum and Dad's village was safe, but they did have to evacuate twice when the fires came dangerously close. Seeing the awful aftermath on the surrounding areas that were not so lucky put my own worries into perspective: I saw first-hand the devastation the fires wreaked on the South Coast.

2020 is proving to be extremely challenging for many people, myself included, but after a few months of lockdown, I decided to put my business experience to good use and considered how I could help. In July, I launched my own events company, [www.a9eventdesign.com](http://www.a9eventdesign.com). My aim is to collaborate with some of the bushfire and COVID-affected businesses – providers, winemakers, designers and artisans – drawing attention to them here in Sydney so we can support them from afar.

I held my launch event on 9 July, teaming up with Woollahra jeweller, Matthew Ely. Given current restrictions, it was an intimate group of 10. We started the evening with 'Gin & Gems' in Matthew's store, enjoying the signature gin from a small, far South Coast distillery, North of Eden. The distillery has only opened its cellar door for two weeks this year, due first to the bushfires, then COVID. The owners were delighted when I made contact and invited them to partner with us for my launch event.

After a lightning-speed jewellery tutorial, we wandered up the road to neighbouring M Contemporary Gallery, where Barossa winemaker Michael Hall treated us to an entertaining wine tasting on Zoom. The Adelaide Hills were also badly burnt by the fires in December and Michael was able to tell people not only about his wines, but how the area is slowly recovering. Sitting in the gallery, surrounded by art, our guests were then treated to a delicious three-course meal prepared by Darren, who sent everyone home with a superb box of treats. In turn, all guests were invited to support the businesses by buying some Michael Hall Wine or North of Eden gin.

I've already contacted other wine, gin, cheese, truffle and oyster growers, and look forward to growing my little black book and supporting as many businesses as I can.

I enjoy creating memorable, carefully curated, intimate events for businesses, special occasions or just because we've all been reminded how important it is to gather with friends. If you would like to hear more, I'd love you to get in touch. And if you are a producer or would like to collaborate in any way, I'd love to hear from you too.



Anine spent six weeks' lockdown at her parents' place, on the NSW South Coast



Anine Leakey with jeweller, Matthew Ely



Dinner for 10 at M Contemporary Gallery

## Nonie Taylor (Leonie Jonker, 1997)

After finishing school, I completed a Bachelor of Engineering (Environmental) and worked as an engineer for 13 years. During that time, it became very clear to me the importance of good science and maths education in schools, in producing enthusiastic and passionate scientists and engineers. So, I completed a Graduate Diploma of Education and started my teaching career as a Science, Mathematics and STEM teacher at Barker College.

This year, our family took the opportunity to participate in a teacher exchange to Ontario, Canada.

We left Australia on New Year's Eve, on a blisteringly hot, smoky, summer's day, hearing only murmurs of some sickness in China. After a couple of weeks' skiing in Colorado, I jumped straight into teaching Science at Bear Creek Secondary School.

It was an adjustment to teach students who did not have computers and to move back to paper-based learning, but it was also nice to move away from the distractions of technology. My kids settled in quickly to leaving home in the dark and snow to catch their yellow buses to school.



Nonie attending a 6 am Zoom meeting – outside in the snow so as not to disturb her family

Living in the country, adjacent to a small ski resort, has been a highlight for us. My two boys would ski after school, until we managed to drag them off the slopes at 9 pm. We had a couple of 'snow days' – and although I had to attend work one of those days, I managed to squeeze in some ski time.

Two days before March break, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and Ontario decided to close schools for two additional weeks after the one-week break, to allow people time to isolate before returning to school. We left for Quebec, but very quickly things were shutting down. We returned home a few days later and began isolation.

Schools did not reopen two weeks after March break – in fact, they did not reopen again for the rest of the semester. We switched to distance learning – where students were expected to do three hours of work per day. This was a huge challenge in a town where many students do not have their own computers and internet is expensive. For my own family, it was an effort for the five of us to have access to technology to complete the required work.

Fast forward four months and Ontario is still mostly in lockdown. Restaurants have only just re-opened, but only for outdoor dining. Face masks are compulsory in any public, indoor place. My husband is still working from home. We are on our summer break, so, luckily, the weather is favouring outdoor activities and my boys have swapped skiing for downhill mountain biking.

There is still so much unknown about what next semester will hold from September, but almost certainly it will involve smaller class sizes and part-time attendance for students. I have never experienced so much uncertainty in my life, and at times it has been quite overwhelming. We have flights booked home for January, but no idea if those flights will operate and when we will actually set foot again on Australian soil.

On the other hand, this has been rich family time for us. We have all slowed down and aren't constantly rushing from one activity to the next. My three kids have had to be each other's friendship group and support network. We have experienced so many wonderful things and have been incredibly blessed to be in such a beautiful place, in an amazing neighbourhood.

Has this year been what we expected? Not at all. Are we glad we did it? Absolutely.



Snowmobiling in Quebec



Sunrise skiing at a local Ontario mountain



The groundhog which lives under Nonie's front deck



## Sophia Flight (2016)

I am a university student and a barn manager at a top thoroughbred horse stud in Versailles, Kentucky, USA.

My job involves the daily management of horses aged from newborn to mature horses. I am heavily involved in the breeding and foaling of the horses, the preparation and sales of the yearling horses and the management of the adult horses. The adult horses have either retired or are returning to the farm from the international racing scene.

Fortunately, COVID-19 hasn't affected my work life much, as our industry uses and practises biosecurity daily, but my personal life has been affected dramatically. Kentucky quite literally shut down to the point of there being only three shops open – the petrol station, the supermarket and McDonald's. Because of that, until only recently I had no opportunity to experience any American or Mexican culture whatsoever.

The industry has changed the way in which human contact was made during the Northern Hemisphere breeding season (January to June). No client was allowed inside the breeding shed, and clients were asked to stay in their vehicles while on the property. The rest of the farm went paperless. All day to day paperwork, medication sheets and client forms were done by one person daily, on an iPad, which was sanitised before and after use. Because we all live in proximity to each other, our temperatures were taken each day to ensure that everyone was healthy. The farm tours were cancelled and the only outside personnel allowed on the property were clients who had a medical certificate to prove that they were healthy.

I view the future of my profession as being bright. We have been very lucky as an industry to be able to have the job security that other people don't have. Now that restrictions have eased in Kentucky, I am looking forward to finally experiencing the culture that America has.

I have learnt to appreciate what I have and the small things in life.



Sophia Flight at work in Kentucky, USA

## Susan Prescott (1971)

For three decades, I lived on Sydney's North Shore with a husband, four children and a great teaching job. When the marriage abruptly ended, I fled to Peru, where I found a struggling school in the desert slums surrounding the Andean town of Arequipa. There I stayed for 12 years, teaching in English, dancing in Latin and even falling in love in Spanish.

Just 13 months ago, I finally bid "adios" to the town which had been my vibrant and welcoming home for so long. I arrived in Sydney on 25 November 2019, to begin the next phase of my life.

The joyful reunion with family and grandchildren came alongside generalised dismay over the catastrophic bushfires. Like everyone else, I watched the daily news, and wondered, "How could it get any worse?"

Perhaps not the best moment to return? Well... we all know what happened next. In apparently no time, the world locked down in fear, behind closed borders. Amidst images of empty airports, cruise ships resembling prisons and stories of souls stranded far from home, I realised how very fortuitous the time of my landing in Australia had turned out to be, after all.

Alarmed and confused I may have felt, but in my own land; a citizen with Medicare coverage and local bank accounts – not a foreigner on a visa in a country with a chaotic health system, unreliable access to overseas finances, challenging red tape for any transaction and all flights out cancelled.

But what of the little school at the foot of the Andes? On leaving Peru, I had pledged I would never abandon the students and their teachers. Thanks to modern technology, I have kept in regular touch with them as they struggle to survive this pandemic, undoubtedly the greatest challenge ever faced.

Peru has been in lockdown since mid-March 2020, with the infection rate still rising alarmingly. Construction and market-selling, normally the main sources of income for the school population, ground to a halt five months ago. The catastrophic repercussions for young students and their families mean that many now depend on handouts of food to survive.

Parents stand in socially distanced queues outside the closed school to receive basic staples such as rice, potatoes and lentils, purchased using the salary budget, with staff currently on half wages. With no 'JobSeeker' or 'JobKeeper', the school must manage entirely on donations.

Meanwhile, overcoming their own fears and difficulties, the dedicated director and teachers have managed to set up online learning. Yes, in a desert slum. How is this possible?

Most households have at least one basic mobile phone between them and, using the free WhatsApp, students can communicate with their teachers. Without the physical refuge of going to school, youngsters are forced to remain inside their shacks in appalling living conditions, enduring domestic situations often associated with abuse. They find welcome diversion in enthusiastically completing set tasks, creating educational videos and photos to send. As an unexpected bonus, some parents are taking an interest and helping. Online learning is boosting morale.

Sometimes, I find myself brooding over the freedom I took for granted to jump onto long-haul flights between Peru and Australia, England, Europe, Africa and the USA; how quickly it evaporated, and why, and whether it is lost forever.

But then I think of the courage of a marginalised school community far away on the other side of the Pacific. People I know and love, battling fear and sickness, determined to continue in their vision of empowerment through education.

Perspective returns, and with it, hope.



Susan Prescott's memoir, *Where Hummingbirds Dance*, telling the story of her experiences in Peru, was published by Xoum in 2017. A second edition has just been released, together with her latest book, *Beyond the Priest's Cottage*, a continuing tale of her adventures. Both books are available only on the following fundraising page, with all proceeds going to the Peruvian school project:

<https://booksale-gdg-j728n.raisely.com/>

## Bronwyn Smith (1976)

I was not a swimmer at school, but I had started swimming for fitness.

In 2015, I joined the Can Too ocean swimming program. Can Too train people for ocean swimming events with a pool session and a beach session each week over summer, in exchange for participants raising money for Australian cancer researchers. I had been pool swimming a couple of times a week and training at Mona Vale beach on Saturday mornings over summer and completing ocean swimming events, including the Palm Beach to Whale Beach swim. I was also assisting a Can Too group which was training for the Balmoral swim to be held in early April.

When the COVID restrictions started, public pools closed and ocean swimming events were cancelled. At the same time, my website work dried up, so I had lots of time with very little to do. Many people I knew were in a similar situation and I was really missing my swimming. One of my ocean swimming friends suggested we meet down at Mona Vale and swim in The Basin in pairs. We all drove down to the beach in separate cars, dropped our towels socially distanced on the beach and entered the water to swim in The Basin.

We had such a great time and agreed to meet again the following week. After Easter, we started meeting at Mona Vale several times a week since most of us had no work. We found that the surf conditions were a lot calmer than in summer and the water very clear. We discovered the seaweed, sea grasses, rays and fish of Mona Vale. We started entering the water on the beach side and swimming around to the north headland. A couple of times we saw dolphins swimming in the waves and started bringing underwater cameras to capture the sights we were seeing.

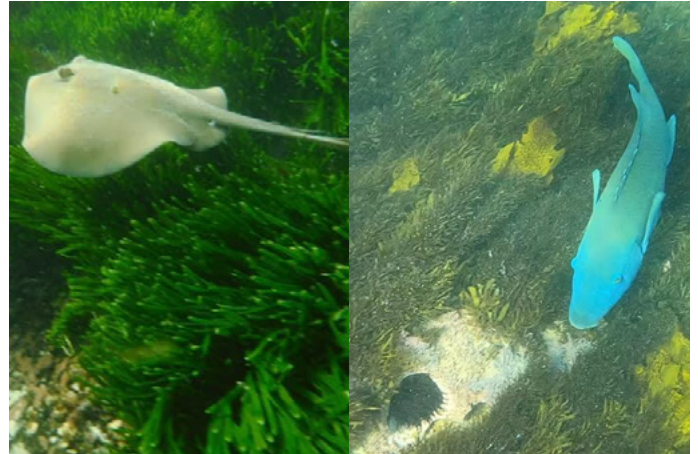
We decided to push ourselves on Anzac Day and swam from Mona Vale to Warriewood, walking back along the beach. Conditions were fantastic, we could see the sandy ocean floor the entire swim and there were small blue sparkling sea sapphires in the water. Some of our group ended up with stings from the creatures but they added to the beauty of the swim. We couldn't linger on the beach, but we could pick up coffee and a brekkie wrap and returned to our cars for our post swim snack.

The southern beaches opened, having been closed at the start of the lockdown, so we expanded our swims to the Manly to Shelly Beach swim. The marine life at Cabbage Tree Bay is spectacular. The area is a marine reserve and while I had been there during the summer months, the water clarity in winter meant that we were swimming with lots of fish. I swam with a cuttlefish, wobbegong shark and the resident blue groppers.

As the water and air temperature started to drop, we discussed wetsuits and in June I started swimming with a wetsuit.

While pools have now opened, squads have re-started and I now have some work, our ocean swimming group continues to brave the winter ocean. I have discovered a love of cold water swimming (wetsuit mandatory) which, while very different from summer ocean swimming, is very relaxing and invigorating.

If I had been told a year ago that I would be purchasing a wetsuit and swimming in the ocean through winter, I would have never believed it. But I am so pleased to have discovered a new winter activity.



Bronwyn Smith discovered a passion for winter ocean swimming during the Sydney lockdown

## Susan Jenkins (Meynink, 1969)

By Nick Salter, Susan Jenkins's friend and neighbour. Susan asked Nick to write their neighbourhood's COVID-19 story for *The Loom*.



Trombonist Nick Salter regularly performs for his neighbours, thanks to lockdown in Wagga Wagga (Image: ABC)

I am a musician with the Australian Army Band and am currently posted to the band at Army Recruit Training Centre, Kapooka, NSW. I'm a trombone player and perform various genres of music in different ensembles. Most weeks involve a March Out Parade for graduating recruits, which becomes part of this posting's routine.

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and Australia began its lockdown, the Kapooka band, like many other workers around Australia, were told to work from home. Without musicians to rehearse with, or March Out Parades, I was left to my own devices. I decided to work on a genre of music which I'd never spent much time on – improvised jazz.

As a soldier who lives a life of routine, mine quickly became: early rise, morning PT, a quick breakfast, before launching into practice. At first, I was concerned about noise (trombones being a rather loud instrument), but I didn't receive any complaints or angry knocks on the wall or front door from my neighbours, so I persisted. Day after day, I played basic scales and arpeggios, accompanied by a digital backing track.

Eventually, I began playing some songs from the American Songbook. I used the digital backing track app to play the bass, drums and piano lines and I would play the melody,



Nick's neighbours, including retired nurse, AOG Susan Jenkins (3rd from left) enjoying his performance (Image: ABC)

followed by an improvised solo and ending with the melody again. Titles like Georgia on my Mind, Summertime, Somewhere Over the Rainbow were all part of the repertoire which attracted the interest of my neighbour, Fay.

Fay is a great lover of music, musicals and showtunes and had been listening (not much of a choice due to the volume). It wasn't long before she invited another of our neighbours, **Susan Jenkins (Meynink, 1969)**, over for morning tea and they would sit out the front of her unit and listen to me practising.

I had never met my neighbours properly before COVID-19, so this was definitely an interesting way of going about it. After a week with Fay and Susan listening to my practice, Fay eventually called out for me to "Open the front door so we can hear you." Thus began a new routine... my morning performance.

Every day (excluding Sunday), I opened my front door at 1100h to play songs for my neighbours and any guests who happened to come by that day. Afterwards, I walked outside to meet them for a brief chat and relish in the friendly nature of the people I've been living amongst for more than two years.

Obviously, as a performer, I enjoy the applause and adulation, but there was so much more happening with these daily concerts. I realised that, with the lockdown, everyone's opportunities to visit friends and family were gone, going out socially was gone and going out to appreciate the arts was gone. What I was doing wasn't just a bit of practice anymore. It was a little ray of sunshine, in what might otherwise be a lonely and depressing week – being cooped up, away from people.

Word eventually found its way to the media and two stories were aired, one for the local ABC Riverina and, thanks to Susan Jenkins writing to ABC National, another story on ABC Breakfast News. You can watch that story here:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=239131750736638>

Now, with the easing of restrictions and my subsequent return to work, my daily concerts have been reduced. But once a week on Saturdays, I'm thrilled to still put on a little performance for my neighbours.

## Prue Walker (Bowman, 1969)

I am retired, and my husband Duncan and I spend a lot of the time being Grey Nomads, hitching up the caravan and travelling this wonderful country of ours.

We left home in Lennox Head, NSW in February to start our next adventure and arrived in Bright, Victoria for a caravan gathering. On March 22, we realised that COVID-19 was serious and our sons told us to hightail it home. We drove more than 1,500 km in two-and-a-half days to get home.

We self-isolated and neighbours in our street purchased what we first needed. We ordered Lite 'n' Easy – three meals a day for a week would arrive at our front door. Oh, so easy not having to think about preparing meals.

During isolation, I cleaned out 28 kitchen cupboards, 16 drawers and a large pantry. I now have a room filled with 'stuff' for a garage sale or op shop. I started sorting out photographs – which I still haven't finished. I walked for exercise down by beautiful Lake Ainsworth when things had opened up a bit and would bring home a coffee for us to enjoy.

Our cul-de-sac had its own Anzac Day, with families in their driveways listening to the service coming from Canberra.

Did this isolating affect me? Only in the sense that I was concerned for our son and his family, as they were living in Saudi Arabia at the time. Reports from them were grim. Thankfully they arrived back in Australia after seven years on 23 June.

What was I missing the most? Playing mah-jong and my art group. Meeting my elderly 87-year-old friend for coffee. Going to the indoor pool to do my regular swims was also out of the question, but I did watch a lot of Netflix! In June, when things were a bit more relaxed, I took a 90-year-old friend out to appointments and coffee.

Once we knew the Queensland border was reopening in July, we decided to hit the road again. We left home on June 22, taking our time to get to Lightning Ridge. We spent a week in the area, before being allowed to cross the Queensland border on compassionate grounds (to look after our grandsons in Goondiwindi) at Hebel on July 7. We hadn't seen our grandsons in person since Christmas/New Year. Thank goodness for FaceTime, as I think this was the most helpful thing for us to stay in contact with our families – especially those overseas.

At this stage, we are at Mataranka NT making our way to Darwin to spend time with my brother whom I haven't seen in years. After that who knows? Do we keep travelling around? There is no need for us to go home as we have a house-sitter. We have plans for a party to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary on 17 October and my 70th birthday on 18 October, but the likelihood of these eventuating is looking slim.

We have no plans after leaving Darwin except maybe to head back into Queensland – if we don't get locked out. If so, it will be south to SA, then back into NSW.

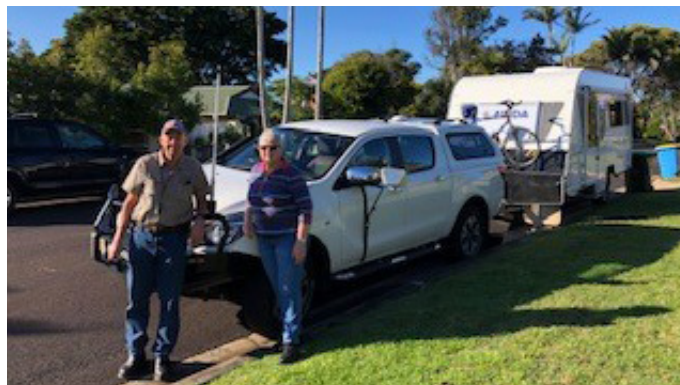
There's one thing I'm sure of: I'm pleased we haven't got a young family, as I've seen how the ones in our street have been struggling.

July, 2020

### Update from Prue as *The Loom* went to press in October:

We are still on the road, currently in Emerald, Queensland. Having travelled about 15,000 km since leaving home on 22 June, we've been up to Darwin, down to Uluru, across to the Atherton Tablelands and out to Cobbold Gorge. Now, we're making our way to Goondiwindi to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. Then, we'll head to Narromine to see my elderly cousin Gay Richardson (Shepherd), who is an AOG, before heading down to Canberra to see our youngest son who's in the RAAF. He and his family got the last plane out of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Things were getting pretty ugly there, so we are thankful that they got back safely.

After Canberra who knows? We are making the most of life while still able.



'Grey nomads' Prue Walker and husband Duncan hitting the road again in June



Prue and Duncan observing Anzac Day in their driveway

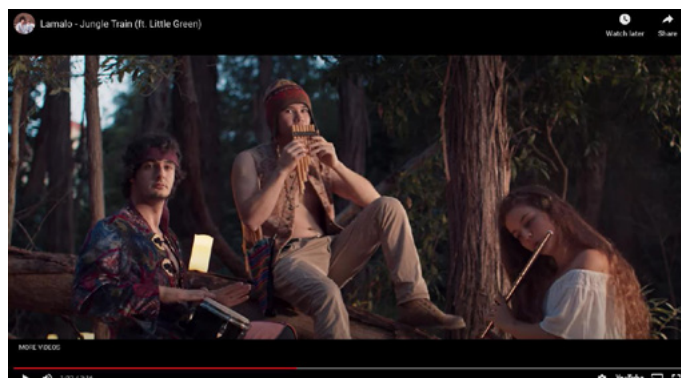


Lake Ainsworth, NSW where Prue takes her daily exercise

## Amy Nelson (2017)

2020 has brought many ups and downs, fears and uncertainties, but I would like to share a positive that I have found in this strange time. Being given the gift of time, I have enjoyed seeing people pick up new hobbies, make art or learn a new skill.

I have mostly been hiding away in my room making music this year, taking time to reflect and reconnect with my passion. The song titled *Jungle Train* is a collaboration between my solo project, Little Green, and Sydney based electronic duo, Lamalo. It's about freedom, empowerment and finding inner strength to overcome challenges.



You can see the music video Amy created during lockdown here: <https://youtu.be/xEZoiMqZkJo> and listen to the song here: <https://open.spotify.com/track/6OVcX4PAiGkCNrZDk7M2kl?si=E-JpNg-xSsikGv31tpCO7w>

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## Stay Connected

### Contact the Old Girls

Office: [aogu@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au](mailto:aogu@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au)  
or 02 9473 7740

Belinda Burton: [aogu.president@gmail.com](mailto:aogu.president@gmail.com)  
Sarah Franks: [aogu.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:aogu.secretary@gmail.com)

 **Facebook**  
[facebook.com/abbotsleigh](https://facebook.com/abbotsleigh)

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[linkedin.com/groups/5118582](https://linkedin.com/groups/5118582)