

Fused Juice by Andrea

I was champing at the bit in January 2020. I was living in Kilmarnock. My grandchildren, whom I cared for on a weekly basis, lived in Barrhead and Kings Park respectively. I sold my Kilmarnock house on 27th December 2019 and bought a house in Barrhead. The reports from Wuhan in China of deaths from a new virus were filtering through the news about the same time.

I knew it would be a nail biting wait to see if the sale would complete and if I'd be able to move house. It was, but I made it. When I moved in it felt like I'd got there by the skin of my teeth. But more lucky escapes were to follow.

There were four men who carried everything into the new house. That was Thursday 12th March 2020, I hope I'm remembering that correctly. I think one of the four men may have passed on the virus but will never know for sure.

I was due to go to work four days after moving in. On the day I was due to go back to work I woke to a persistent cough. Every news item and all online advice said don't go to work, especially if you have a cough. I lay in bed wondering what to do. I felt poorly, but not awful. In fact I felt a bit weird.

I found it hard to decide to stay home, I usually work through my illnesses if I can. But I texted my boss and then, I think I fell asleep.

I had a whole house to unpack and sort but I was too tired. That was my principal indicator I was ill. Thinking back on it all, I was confused, I was struggling to order my thoughts.

I needed groceries but couldn't go out. I phoned my daughter Melanie and she arranged for shopping to be brought over. Adam left the shopping on the doorstep. All this was already so strange.

Soon I felt dreadful. I slept a lot and struggled going up and down stairs. I was drinking water and tea and not eating. When I lay down and ran an internal scan of my body I became aware that my lungs felt odd. I could only inhale half of my usual capacity, or so it seemed to me. I had no way of knowing what was happening, there was no reliable source of verifiable information, or so it seemed, in these early days in Scotland. I couldn't get through on any NHS phone numbers. I knew enough to realise that the last thing I wanted was to go to hospital. I'd seen enough of what was happening in Italy to know I didn't want to go to a hospital. I'd have to wait it out.

My daughter phoned and reminded me to eat. She told me later that she had been terrified. I'd told her about my lungs feeling as if the bottom half of each one was filled with concrete, such was the sensation. In my mind I had a picture of the bottom part of the lung being black. It's called the inferior lobe I believe. Instinctively I turned myself upside down to better breathe. It turned out later that medics found that the prone position could be helpful to Covid patients.

I was confused, I felt ditzy.

I didn't have much hunger but Melanie had told me to eat and she is a fiend for being healthy. I looked in the fridge and put every green vegetable in the blender including the broccoli. I had to dilute it with water to make it thin enough to drink but I drank it without giving it a second thought. I remember walking past the lilies my son Andrew had sent to the house as a new house present and wondering why they'd lost their odour. I lay down and slept again, waking to a clear recovery, still weak, still a little uncertain of myself but better able to inhale.

I'd got Covid19 in the early days. We didn't know then about loss of smell as a symptom, that news came some weeks later. Nor did we know about the loss of taste. I don't know if you've ever tried drinking liquidised raw broccoli but it is truly disgusting. I will never know if I'd have recovered if I'd not drunk the greenest smoothie there was, but that is my story and I'm sticking to it.

My later memories of the lockdown are of seeing my seven year old granddaughter fighting back her tears, I think she had heard it was affecting older people and she was worried about me. I remember my own managed angst as I looked through the living room window at the two littlest ones and they jumped up to the window and waved at me excitedly, perhaps too young to even wonder why I didn't go into the house.

I'd been met with scepticism that I'd been ill from some colleagues as so few of them had been infected at that time. That was annoying. I felt vindicated when anosmia was added to one of the symptoms.

I walked around Barrhead. There are good walks to do there. But often I'd pass people who had that scared sense about them, they'd speak wryly with a strained hello or the occasional "weird isn't it?" It made me think of all the historical stories I'd read where villagers would greet people warily lest they be Plague bearers.

In particular I remember the ghostly quality of trains trundling steadily from Kilmarnock to Glasgow. I saw them on my walks. I think, for some of the time, they were completely empty.

There were shortages of things, yeast, flour, toilet roll. There were instant multi-millionaire social media stars. We tried to do zoom meetings, but that doesn't really work for small children.

I noted the incidences of house sales being completely scuppered by the lockdown and silently acknowledged how lucky I had been.

Eventually I had to drive to Glasgow to get a replacement screen for my laptop. I needed it for work of course. Nobody had told me (I'd missed the memo!) that parking restrictions were lifted. I went into a car park and couldn't get out. The exit ticket wouldn't work. That was a dystopian hour or so. Eventually a woman who was working from home had the call I'd made routed to her and I got out. I identified with the lone deer that had been photographed on Buchanan Street in Glasgow during lockdown, I was startled, frozen in time by the utter weirdness of it all. I was like that deer.

I'd sometimes had a brief chat with Michael Rosen (former Children's Laureate, poet and radio presenter) over the years on social media, pre pandemic and during the event. I use a name on social media from Greek mythology and I think he'd spotted that. He has always been very lovely. He said he'd become ill. I tried to offer some reassurance telling him I'd had Covid but recovered. He acknowledged this. But then he went dark so to speak. He was dangerously ill for weeks and when he recovered his eyesight and hearing were affected. Waiting for news of him is perfectly described by being on tenterhooks. I was the cloth stretched tightly by sharp hooks, they dug into my human frame.

I felt so much for all the relatives and patients who had suffered so much. Even now I well up remembering how much people endured. And clapping NHS staff was never ever going to be enough, not in a month of Thursdays at eight in the evening.

My daughter-in-law worked in a home for the elderly. When last I asked her, twelve of the residents had died after contracting Covid19. She had direct experience of people who'd been hospitalised and then returned to the home. Then there was going home after a shift and stripping off before entering her home and putting all her clothes in the washing machine. And she is still testing on a regular if slightly less frequent basis. No, clapping, applauding care workers will never be enough. They need pay rises and a society that recognises the value of their work. Their status, for me, is the top of the tree. The carers are the most loving of us all.

I wish I could remember the funny incidents, there were some. But it was a tough experience and recalling it now for this archive is not an easy thing to do. If you're reading this now you will know. Each of us with a story to tell. Whatever your experience of Covid19, of the Pandemic of the Lockdowns, life has I believe, changed. Perhaps my healthiest take on it all is to acknowledge how very many lucky escapes I had had, managing a house move just in time, my green smoothie caprice, escaping the car park and coming through all of it more or less intact and very grateful.

Andrea, 27th July 2022