

**In this document you will find the two final feature articles written for my Professional Writing module during my third year at the University of Plymouth.**

**The first, 'These four walls – Isolated and Alone: How lockdown has impacted mental health', is a research article about the impact the Coronavirus lockdown had on a variety of people. The purpose of this article was to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing, especially during restrictive circumstances, and to create a sense of understanding for everyone struggling during the lockdown. When writing this, I followed The Guardian's submission guidelines and target audience.**

**The second article, 'How Time Flies, Or Not – Bearing Witness to Prague's Astronomical Clock', is a travel feature documenting an experience I had when holidaying in Prague. It is amusing and satirical, whilst also dropping helpful travel hints and portraying part of Prague's City culture. It is aimed at the 18-30 age range, male and female, people that enjoy visiting new places.**

## **These four walls – Isolated and Alone: How lockdown has impacted mental health**

*Life as we know it is cancelled.*

Coping with our mental health is hard at the best of times, but it becomes even harder when we are, essentially, in a nationwide solitary confinement. The United Kingdom has been in lockdown for three weeks already, and they have just announced it will be at least another three weeks more.

I will admit that I, like many, am struggling. The decision to leave my vulnerable mother with my brother and move into my partner's family home was tough. It felt like utter selfishness and betrayal.

But like my friend Chloe said, **'Sometimes you have to be a little selfish to be happy'**.

Mum seems to be doing okay despite, 'Feeling abandoned by my delinquent daughter as she has chosen to isolate with her boyfriend... I am coping by drinking all the gin she left in the house and eating all his ice cream that he left in my freezer whilst trying on all her cool clothes. Life's good.'

It's not just the rules preventing us seeing loved ones in our own country that has been postponed. The lockdown also means that international travel, unless for essential trips, is banned.

Laila from Denmark says, 'I was coming over [to England from Denmark] for Easter as it has been a long time since I was there with [my step-family] and my husband... I was really looking forward to my trip, I have not had any problems with the virus, but I miss you all

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very much, so I am so very sad and lonely as I cannot go anywhere. I hope it is over very soon'.

Our lives were put on lockdown.

We can't go out and do our normal things such as going out to the beach, for lunch, to the pub and other things that bring us all together and boost our mood. The inability to do all of this has a huge impact on our mental health.

Many others and I are left feeling trapped at home and are struggling to find motivation to do anything at all.

One seeming dark comfort in all of this is that we are not alone in our feelings of loss and negativity. Others are struggling, just like us.

Luke, a Falmouth university student that has left his accommodation and moved home said, 'Not seeing your partner sucks. I'm missing mine a lot'.

Many are feeling the same, as many young people aren't living with their partners and are forced to isolate without them.

Chloe, a twenty-one-year-old child and adolescent support worker in Coventry said, 'Me and my partner Skype. We did four months apart last year so as s\*\*t as it is, we know how to get through it... but it is really hard. I don't really have anyone else either and I can't travel home now because I can't prove it's an essential trip... I also have to be available for work, so if I got stuck [at home], I wouldn't be able to do my rota shifts'.

Whilst in the same boat and living apart from her partner, Miley, a twenty-two-year-old surgery practitioner for Colchester said, 'It's awful I miss him so much!' However, she also

happily suggested '[They're] going to meet for walks though so it's okay.' At a distance of course.

It is good to look on the bright side, otherwise it'll seem like there isn't one.

Ryan, a council member from Devon who has been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, said 'I'm drinking more. I'm worried about things as most people are but actually, I'm enjoying being less busy and not having to rush around anywhere. **I have more time for me.**'

Thinking of this as a time of recuperation and a break from the hectic normality of everyday life will help to take your mind off the negative side. When was the last time you had so much uninterrupted time for you?

However, despite having more time for ourselves, some may also not find that a good thing.

Autumn, a vulnerable new mother from Kent, confessed, 'At first I was coping, I was finding little things to do to keep me occupied. But it's so hard having a one-year old to entertain. In the last week, my mental health has deteriorated a lot, I even find myself thinking that maybe it would be best to catch the virus just so I can be somewhere other than these four walls. I've thought about self-harm, I've thought about abseiling from my balcony... without the rope.'

Autumn also said, 'I keep going because my daughter needs a mummy, although most of the time I feel like I'm failing that too... video calls to family are not the same as having them in the same room. I need a hug from them more than ever. I feel like I'm on a downward spiral... the light at the end of the tunnel is becoming dimmer by the day. I'm not an indoorsy person and **I feel like this is the biggest challenge of my life so far.**'

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For many of us this is the biggest challenge of our lives, mentally and physically. The country and arguably the world haven't seen restrictive situations such as this since the likes of the war.

Suddenly not having to go to work and staying at home becomes a nightmare rather than a dream when you aren't allowed to share it with loved ones.

Lori, a grandmother from Kent said, 'I wish I could go to sleep and when I wake up it will all be over.'

With the recent extension of the lockdown, it is looking unlikely that this will be over soon. But here are a few comments people had to say on ways they have found to cope during this time:

Kimberley, a university student said, 'I tell myself that whatever I do (or don't) is okay, because it's difficult right now, so **it's important to be kind to myself.**'

Alternatively, Elliott said 'I set myself specific goals and a limited time to achieve those goals, during which I turn off my phone so I can focus.'

Finally, Emma, a furloughed worker, has said 'I'm taking this time to enjoy the sunshine and decorate the house that I've wanted to do for so long!'

I am using this time to top up on my tan, dabble with a variety of flavoured gins, and keep on top of my university work. All in that order.

This is the time for us.

The time for you.

## **How Time Flies, Or Not – Bearing Witness to Prague’s Astronomical Clock**

*“Prague is a really romantic city,” my mother-in-law told us before we left.*

*She promised us an icy city full of romantic walks in hilltop parks and a cliffside zoo home to polar bears and tigers...*

“Jesus, its freezing here, I can’t feel my hands.” I say, blowing on my hands and watching my breath dance like icy smoke in the air.

We make it into Prague’s Old Town, adorned with cobbled streets interrupted by trams every which way and the horizon filled with golden-stoned buildings as wide as they are high. The narrower cobbled streets wind unapologetically in nonsensical directions, getting thinner and oldy-worldly as they go, resembling a certain alley where wizards might frequent to purchase wands.

It is easy to get lost in a place like this.

This is when my partner and I call it a day on the exploring and find somewhere to sit down to rest our aching feet and heavy backs. We find our way – more by luck than trying to follow Google Maps – back to The Square. It is decorated on every side with an abundance of restaurants, bars and old-fashioned jewellery shops trying to flog garish looking gigantic yellow stones that I am sure at too heavy to wear on one’s ears.

We settle in the outside seating area of one of the restaurants situated in front of the Astronomical Clock, getting as close to the charcoal-heated fire pit as we can. As we sit down, I notice that a soft woollen blanket is placed on each seat, I unapologetically pounce

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under its warmth. We find that these blankets are provided in every outdoor seating area by the local restaurants.

Now incredibly cosy, I feel disheartened with the local pubs back home lacking in such simple creature comforts.

We sit for the next hour drinking cocktails, which are more expensive at €9 in The Square than they are at one of the Irish bars down one of the narrower streets, costing a mere €6 per cocktail. I also hasten to add that the cocktails down the 'back alleys' are far nicer and fruitier than the Sex on the Beach we are currently drinking. My partner agrees.

We notice a huge crowd of people begin to form outside of our gazebo, blocking our view entirely and replacing it with Regatta fleeces and woolly hats. The waiter sees us cock our heads attempting weave our vision through the swarm of people.

"It's the Astronomical Clock, it's going to chime in fifteen minutes."

We stand up to watch the show and as the bells chime we see... absolutely nothing. Save for the metal man in the clock's right-hand corner ring his bell a few times. Was this it, the reason hundreds of people had stood here for the past quarter of an hour? *Surely not.*

We sit down and continue to drink, watching as the local conwoman approaches tables of people and takes their photos under the pretence she works for the restaurant, and then wants payment for her shoddy fridge magnet photos.

Now it is time for the clock to chime again and everyone watches on in silent anticipation.

"Are we meant to be witnessing the astronomical rings do something wonderful or something?" my partner asks.

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“No babe,” I say as I sip my cocktail. “The clockface barely shifts each hour, you wouldn’t notice the difference unless you saw it at 2pm and then saw it again at 6pm.”

“So, what you mean to tell me is that all these people congregate here every hour to see nothing?” He looks into my eyes and studying my face with scrunched eyebrows and slightly parted lips.

I look down at the drink in my hand, watching the orange and yellow mix into a sunset as I reply, “Pretty much.”

We sit and sip some more, watching one crowd fade away and another emerge an hour later, each of them looking for a show, none of them witnessing one.

After an abundance of spirits mixed with an excessive amount of juice, we make our way out of The Square to The Botanique Hotel where we are staying. On our way through the wobbly streets, we realise that many shops in the centre of Prague are open until 8-10pm, or later.

In our merrily drunken state, I can’t help but run into the Choco-Story Chocolate Museum to get our parents some chocolate cocks and edible boobs to enjoy.

Prague really is a city full of beauty and wonders.