

ICONS OF PATIENCE

The first lockdown Newcomers and
Visiting Scholars writing project



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Newcomers and
Visiting Scholars

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Now with hope of a vaccine on the horizon, this online publication documents thoughts, feelings and activities of our NVS contributors during the earlier stages of this 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. The range of lockdown conflicts and contradictions captured so sensitively by the individual voices of our members is striking: isolation yet friendship; confusion yet clarity; perseverance yet frustration; fear yet courage; sadness yet humour. Here are small delights in the shadow of darkness. When you look, read, or even listen, I hope you find the experience as uplifting as I did.

My thanks go to Jane Luzio and Jenny McGuigan, who have helped every step of the way. I feel sure they will both agree that we can turn to this, a little history, really, in many years to come and say, "Look, this was where we were, what we did, what we thought and felt in the Spring of 2020. This is what we managed to get through...together."

Marianna Fletcher Williams

November 2020

Foreword

Many thanks, of course, to Marianna for being the inspiration for this wonderful project. NVS has always been a place where people from all over the world can come together to discuss, debate and express their thoughts and ideas. This record of the past year in poetry and prose is a true testament to that.

Amanda Farnsworth
NVS Chair

Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir 6: Sing Gently

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InULYfJHKIO>

I Miss the Rain in Winter

I miss the rain in winter, which is cold and damp.
In the spring of 2020, the whole world has been in a lockdown
The only link between spring and me is a small window.
Color and hue have been changing outside the window.
Dark grey boughs and branches turn to pink and white petals
Bits and pieces change to a brilliant glow.
Pale yellow grows to be dazzling new green.
The weather is extraordinarily fine with the sun shining, bright and warm.
On the green, the fen and the river, cows, birds, swans must have been swaggering, chasing and picnicking.....
While inside the window, there is a silhouette in the trajectory of movement from the
Single bed to the desk and to the bathroom.....
In the deep and late night, I am awake with a start, wet with cold sweat
Am I having nightmare again?
No, it is not in a dream.
Listen, the old woman next door is dancing to the square dance music.
I pull the thick and heavy duvet to cover my head,
But my thoughts are like ghosts out of a cage and never coming back.
They travel back to my hometown, to my mother's home-cooked dishes.
They fly to my family, to their smiling faces, comforting hugs, and our happy time together.....
My face is blooming with sweetness.

Suddenly, the devil in the dark intrudes and drags me back to reality. I am suppressed by loneliness and fear all
At once, gasping for breath. Tears keep pouring out and flush my memories,
Until it becomes colder and colder, just like the wet rain in the good old days. Cambridge is glooming in winter,
with sunrise and sunset particularly late and early, And cold rain falling intermittently every day.
On the street, the morning chill makes me shiver, retract my head and wrap tight my coat,
I curse sometime, "what bad weather! When will it end?"
While my body never flinches and keeps hitting the road to the UL.
The raindrops land on my face and my body, smack, smack, and I am drenched. My glasses are more and more
fuzzy and blurred with the rain.
My thin body under the thick down coat is aching with cold. Then I run, I must run facing the heavy rain.
My footsteps crackle louder with more suffixes.
My outfit is cold and wet, but my body is warming up, with a dense steam emerging
From the top, and the rain doesn't even water it out.
Finally, I walk lightly up the stairs and sit in my usual seat at the end of the corridor, Click, a yellow light spreads
out, wreathing my whole body in,
I am like bathing in the illuminous light of the sanctuary, Warm, calm, and satisfied!
Vaguely, I notice reading figures come and go.
Occasionally, I look up and smile,
Time flows quietly,
The future seems endless,
And everything is so peaceful and beautiful.....

Lili Tao

28 April, 2020 (in Cambridge)

A view from the Saddle

I went cycling to Gog Magog Hill on 14 April. At first I didn't find the way so I went down the road and saw a small village called Stapleford. However, I didn't give up and went back to find this place again, and found it in the end. It was a hill and you can see the whole view of Cambridge city on top of it and you can also see a large rapeseed field. There is a notice which says "skylarks nesting, all two-and four-legged visitors on North Down, please keep to the path." I admire the attitude and seriousness of British people towards nature and wild creatures. That's why so much wild life lives here in a very leisured way.

L. Liping



Adapting to change

This is our ninth week of quarantine. We are Americans, a family of three, living in Cambridge for one year while my husband does computer science research. Our daughter is eight and is enrolled at a local primary school.

I realized the other day that we now spend the majority of our time at the kitchen table. This has become the place where we eat, where we play games, where our daughter does her schoolwork, where I work on water color painting (a new hobby taken up during quarantine), and where I try to forget all about that Covid-19 has wrought by gazing out the window into our small back garden.

Like everyone we have good days and bad days. My husband's research has been unaffected by the quarantine; he works from home and is on the phone or on his computer all day. It is my daughter and I whose daily lives have been completely upended. The thing that has been most helpful for us is keeping to a schedule, which I write each day on a white board stuck to our refrigerator. While they vary slightly, most days start with a workout on Youtube, followed by English class, a social call with classmates on Zoom for my daughter, lunch, math class, a Zoom call with my daughter's teacher, a walk outside, and then a smattering of art, ukulele practice, Lego building, or puzzles. Our daughter has spent hours of playing Minecraft with friends – and friends of friends from London to the U.S. Normally we would never allow her to spend so much time sitting in front of a computer. Now it is a necessity. Screens are the way in which all of us connect to one another on a daily basis.

While our world has shrunk to the confines of our home, it has also grown in certain ways. I'm learning to paint. I've got a much better sense of what my daughter does in school on a daily basis. I've connected with people I normally don't see or hear from. We've gotten to know our next-door neighbours by chatting across the garden fence. And, as enervating and unnerving as life under lockdown is, there is also a sense of camaraderie that comes from sharing this experience with others. We are, as the saying goes, "alone together." And truly it's not all bad.

Amanda Traves, with Richard Eisenberg and Emma Eisenberg (age 8)



COVID -19 : WORDS FOR NVS FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

As the NVS quilt has a patch from Western Australia, I thought to send a few words about how we are coping here in WA. Best wishes to you all.

When we first heard about the virus in January, I cancelled all ideas of travel for us in 2020. People thought I was being melodramatic, but time has proved me correct and so many people around the world have and still are, falling victim to this tiny virus. As I explained, it may be only Adelaide (3 hours flight) that you are going to but it is who you are travelling with that counts.

Time passed, WHO declared it a major world health emergency in late January. The global pandemic was declared on 11th March. Australia brought in mandatory quarantine for all travellers entering as a result. WA locked down early and hard. By late March we realized that all the cases of Covid were coming from returned travellers or people we had given medical attention to from cruise ships. Most of our 9 deaths in WA weren't locals. So all people coming into WA are quarantined in luxury Perth Hotels for 14 days. The Western Australians and families got to go to our beautiful holiday island, Rottnest. The one of Roger Federer selfies with our quokkas. Lucky them. So then we shut the border with the rest of Australia until they are on top of their Covid-19 control. There is now much pressure to open it again for economic reasons. The fly-in fly-out workers on the mines have to stay in WA for now and the mining keeps the whole of the Australian economy going.

Western Australia covers nearly half the landmass of the Commonwealth of Australia but we only have 2.5 million people. So keeping away from each other is easier, even in our population centers. Many people didn't take it seriously at first but soon complied. Sanitizer everywhere. The local boutique gin distilleries found a new lucrative market. Tradesmen have never been so busy, also plant nurseries, with people being home and needing a project. We found masks and respirators and PPE. Emergency measures were brought in to help people suddenly out of a job. Except the musicians and the artists, casual workers and international students on whom the universities rely for funding. The farmers found themselves without seasonal backpackers and South Pacific workers to get the crops in but now have office workers, international students and unemployed professionals helping in places. New business initiatives sprang up to put the products online including the Cheese Therapy initiative. A lovely story. Meanwhile the fire-affected areas were almost forgotten but there was rain over East and the farms starting to recover. Not all.

We in the hills outside Perth, in the forest, have so much space to live in so staying at home was rather a relief after our very hectic few years and much travel round the globe. Time to ourselves. Reading books and revisiting old music records and CD's. Lots of house upgrades and a garden desperate for attention after being away last winter. The weeds must have had a ball. We also have 'bush' reserves close by where we can walk and hardly see another person. Apart from the crew of a sheep carrier that the Federal government recently forced on us, we have no new cases from WA. Only one person in hospital. This means we can now see the 'kids' and grandchildren in Perth but our son and family in California are in lockdown still and working from home. Our Kids here coped with that quite well, but balancing on the bed to do an important conference call isn't a long term solution. Our Daughter in law had her promising music career cancelled in the space of 2 weeks. Our daughter had to stay going to work some of the time (worrying) as she is an important member of the state team responding to issues of child abuse and domestic violence. So sad that this has increased 4 fold since lock down. Both of them are pregnant in difficult times.

Over East where there is a higher population, new infection cells continue to pop up but most of the infections are from returned travellers. So WA justifies keeping the borders closed. We also had internal travel restrictions until the regional cases were dealt with. Happily, these internal borders have now been lifted and Ken and I are off to the coastal town of Kalbarri next week where it is warmer and drier. We have been there nearly every year for 40 years, Ken has done a lot of research on the ancient Eurypterid tracks, with his able assistants, me and the kids. The flora in Kalbarri National Park is amazing and the sunsets over the estuary of the Murchison River, stunning. We have tried to support businesses while in lock down and now it is the turn of the tourism industry. It was going to be over East this month to help fire affected areas. Being selfish,

I am quite looking forward to going places without so many tourists, just like the old days when WA was intentionally a well-kept secret. Perhaps there are many thoughts to be had on our economy and how we all do things.

We have and still do, follow the course of the pandemic around the world and feel the misery, pain and the fear for other nations. But so far we feel very safe in our community here. Please all stay safe and well. Sue.

Sue Radford

Vanishing cars

There aren't many free car parks in Cambridge, but one of them is the road where we live! Day after day, both sides are crammed with cars, and occasionally an enormous lorry drives along, and then has to reverse because of the road narrowing and they can't get through.

BUT NOW?...Utter bliss. The road is clear, and best of all, lots of families ride past on their bikes. There's one family where everyone rides bikes except for Dad, and he RUNS!

Lovedy



Tassie or bust!

Tuesday was the start date for my new job in Hobart. I came to Cambridge for a post-doc, but my husband died half-way through, I clung on by my fingernails till the end of my contract, collapsed in a heap and haven't got back up for 2 years. So the move to Hobart for a proper, professional job was real progress. First I needed to visit my mum in Scotland. At 86, who knows when, or even if I'd see her again, moving to the other side of the planet? I also need to finish dealing with my husband's estate.

Then the virus hit. I moved out of the housing co-op where nearly 100 of us live together, so I could isolate to not risk infecting Mum. I moved in with my boyfriend, 3 loads across Cambridge on the bike. We rented a car and headed north just as Australians were being urgently recalled. I couldn't just leave without seeing Mum and sorting things out. We arrived just after my step brother, who was visiting from Australia, left and lockdown started.

Mum, a professional housewife, shops at M&S and Waitrose. There were no delivery slots to be had and the best I could organise was phone shopping and delivery to the car boot with the Co-op, but that was too much of an adjustment for Mum, who snuck out in the car at 8am to get her dose of M&S, the first time she's driven alone for years. Her husband, who is frail, would be very unlikely to survive the virus. After we left he did succeed in crashing the car into the side of the house, writing it off and requiring the attendance of all the emergency services.

The trip back to Cambridge was a record 6 hours across an eerily deserted country, with a risk of being stopped by police. As I started to prepare for my flight, Australia and Tasmania both introduced quarantine in government facilities. This would mean a month in solitary confinement, with no access to the outside world, maybe not even telecommunications. Australia's had good practice at this, it's been doing it to refugees for years.

Qatar Airways had cancelled one leg of my flight rebooking me on a later flight which missed the connections stranding me in Doha, and were unreachable. I contacted my employer to see if they'd had a change of heart about letting me start later or remotely. It took him 10 days to reply, saying they'd delayed the project 3 months, by which time I'd finally managed to get through to QA and rebooked my flight. If I caught the new flight I'd have to quarantine in Melbourne and Hobart, but Qantas doesn't allow a stopover for this so I'd lose my flight to Hobart. I checked to see if I could travel by ferry instead and found that I didn't seem to meet the travel criteria. So this is what my boss meant by 'travel restrictions'. I contacted Jetstar, the Melbourne-Hobart carrier, and they said they would take me. Are you sure?, I asked, Your website says residents and essential workers only. Let me check. Long pause. Ok, no, we can't take you.

Time to contact my MP. Oh yes, you can travel to Tasmania. Are you sure, I asked, the ferry and the airline say 'no'. Let me check. Next day. Oh no, sorry, you can't come. Ok, well can you let me know how I meant to know whether I can travel or not?

QA cancelled my flight again and this time said I can rebook any time. So at the moment the plan is to go in July if they haven't gone bust by then. In the meantime I've reported the airline for not being contactable and complained to the UN about Australia's cruel and unusual punishment of people in quarantine. People have died in there. By the time I get to Hobart, I hope I have sufficient sanity to actually do this job.

Rowan Eisner



27 March 2020 (Friday) One week into lockdown

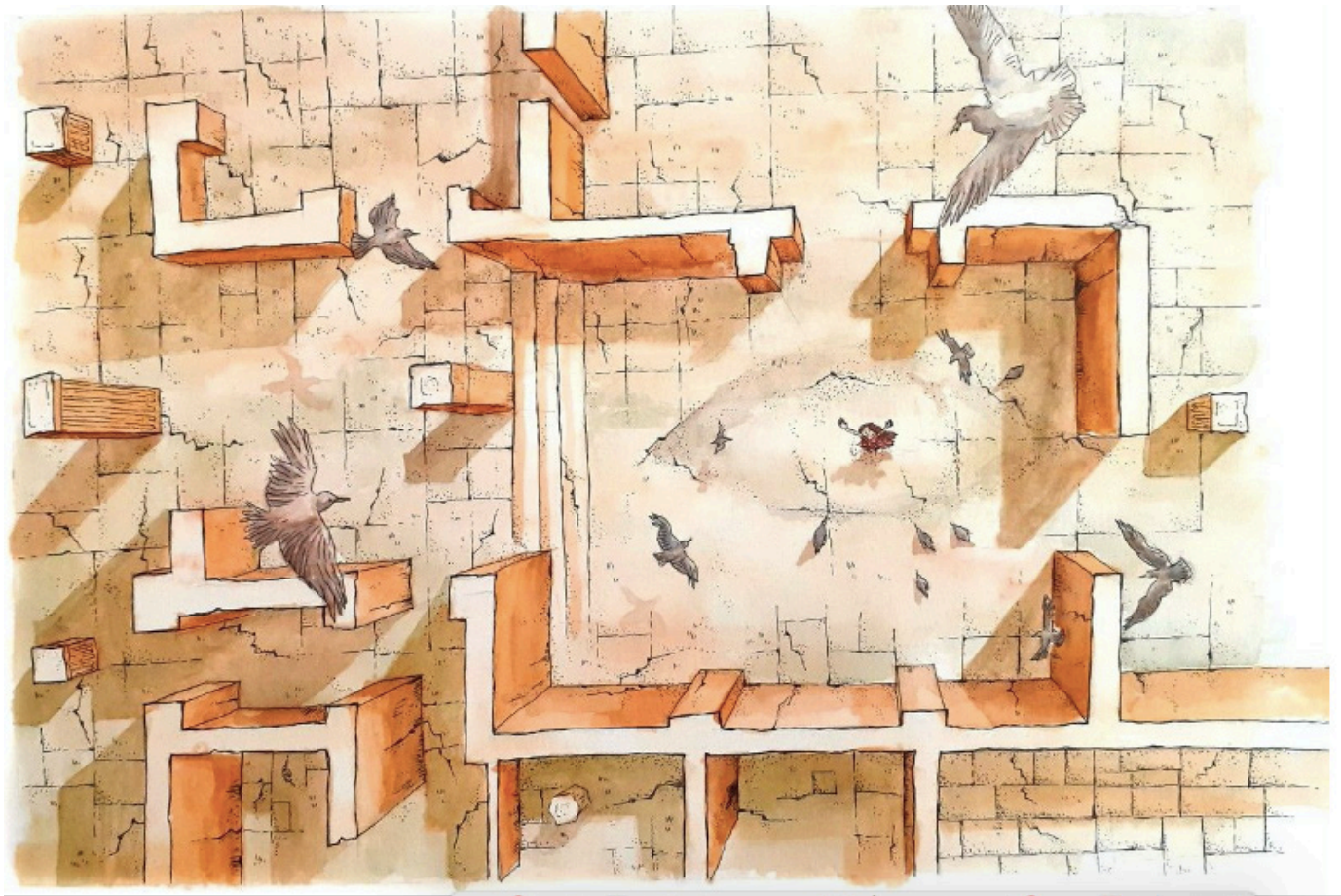
It's fitting that around the time we entered this quiet phase, my five-year-old daughter Cora acquired a snail for a pet. We have found lots of shells on our walks, but last weekend Cora and her dad Babi plucked off the wall of the house what they thought was a living snail. They put it in a jar with some grass and dirt, and we all watched it for a while. It didn't do anything. All we could see was the flat whitish shell, so pale that it almost looked transparent. Some of us (me, I confess) doubted whether there actually was a live snail in there. But Cora never stopped believing. She read stories to the shell and gave it a name—Wally, because they found it on a wall—and took the jar with her when she moved from one room to another. At some point in the afternoon, when none of us were looking, Wally made his way from the bottom of the jar to the top, demonstrating that there was, in fact, a creature inside, even though when he was tucked in at the top of the jar he still looked like an empty shell. So that was very exciting.

Babi ordered a plastic terrarium online and took Cora to the Girton Woods to find companions for Wally. They returned triumphant, with two beautiful big specimens with a brown-and-yellow spiral pattern on their cream puff-shaped shells and slick, dark brown bodies. They also found some tiny snails with shells more like flat disks a centimeter in diameter. The pièce de résistance was a striped slug whom Cora named Slugly.

Snails are apparently nocturnal, so at bedtime there is always some sort of action. It's exactly the kind of action I need right now: silent and meditative. They sit on the cucumber or carrot we've given them and slowly slide their faces around. I assume they're eating. Waving their eye stalks, they ooze over the mossy clumps of dirt in the terrarium. They ripple up the clear walls, stretching out their gooey bodies and drawing their shells up after. And sometimes they just stop, draw in their eye stalks and feelers, and hang out inert on the side or the top of the box. They're icons of patience—perfect for this moment.

Hilary Smith

(U of Denver professor spending my sabbatical at the Needham Research Institute, living in Girton College accommodation)



Hidden omens

She saw omens, but survived Thursday.

Story: Maya Keshav

Illustration: Leela Keshav

Covid-19 Pandemic 2020

Stay at home and do not roam
The risk is far too high
Find things to do while you're at home
The weeks will soon fly by.

To eat and drink, and walk and sleep
That's how the days roll by
Learn something new, jump and leap
Surprise yourself and try!

For now it is a testing time
Fear and anxiety
Scientists work hard in line
To treat and set us free.

Until that time we have to think
Of how to fill our days
Keep well and fit and try to link
With friends in electronic ways.

Jane Luzio

Wildered wisdom

Where nests the bird, whose flight was freedom
That once flew in sight, in the wide blue yonder

The horizon blinks closer, as I stand ever tall
But the freshness in air, seems forgotten and lost

The wrath is unleashed, of untamed time
Unravelling the mysteries, of a frozen mind

Burrowed I find, the strength uncast
Flowing through veins, of my throbbing heart

The kite of ambition, is soaring again
As droplets of water, drizzling in rain

Bewildered yet alive, this wisdom I gained
I cannot be stopped, I cannot be chained

Lord Nayak