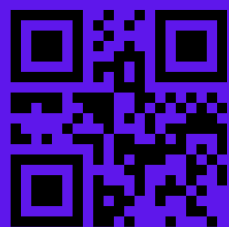




CONNECTED

A YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY
STUDENT MAGAZINE



VOLUME 1 • ISSUE NO. 1



"Invisible threads are the strongest ties"

Friedrich Nietzsche





CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	1
<i>The Gap</i> Connor Hannon	2
<i>Life Over Lockdown</i> Lizzy Harrison	3
<i>Top 3 Lockdown Albums</i> Sky-Lotus Coakley	4
<i>Teams Oddity</i> Linda Burnett	5
<i>Cooking for Freedom</i> A.T. Ainscough	7
<i>Aíthespora</i> Kieron Bourke	8
<i>Now and Then</i> Stephen Bishop	9
<i>Top 10 Escapist Reads</i> Cassie Harrison	10
<i>Peace in Self-Expression</i> Elliot Rivron	11

<i>How to Survive Lockdown</i> Linda Burnett	13
<i>Family of Three</i> A.T. Ainscough	14
<i>Lockdown Fashion</i> Morgen Dorsett	15
<i>5 Lockdown Video Games for Students on a Budget</i> George Wardell	16
<i>Workshopping</i> Jayne Stead	17
<i>Podcasts and TV Shows that will make you feel human again</i> Elliot Rivron	18
<i>Breaking the Ice</i> Natalie Roe	20
<i>Productivity at Home</i> Cassie Harrison	21
<i>Resilience</i> Beth Percy	22
<i>Spotify Playlist</i>	23
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	25



FOREWORD

We are delighted to share with you *Connected* – a brand new York St John University student magazine.

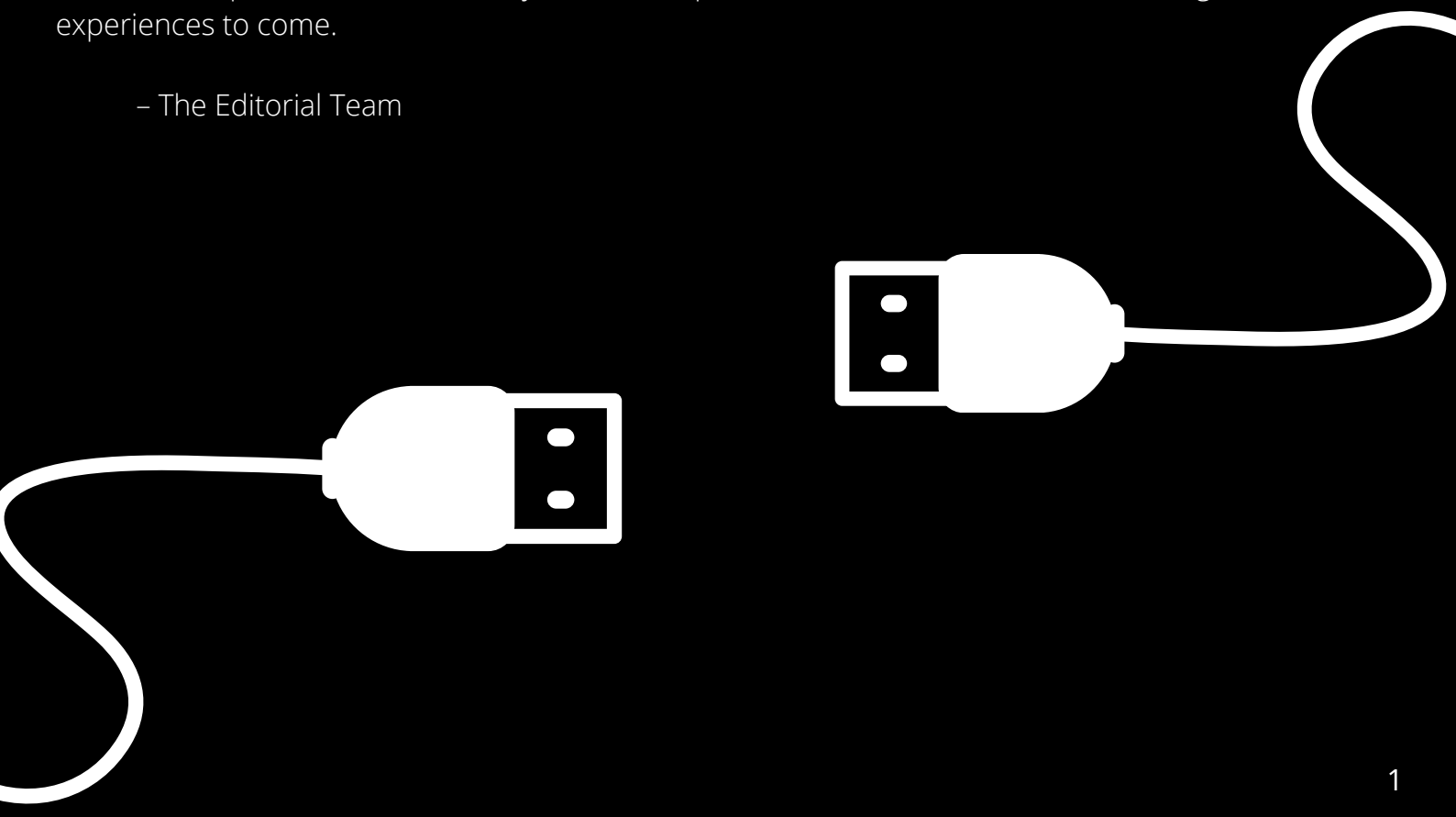
As Creative Writing and Publishing Student Representatives, we were keen to offer a creative outlet for students that would allow them to share their thoughts, feelings and anxieties related to their experience of student life over the past year. As expected, the pandemic played a significant role in this, but we were delighted that all submissions were hopeful in some way – whether that was in the advice offered or in the simple belief that next year will be better.

The concept for the magazine and its name derived from a resounding and shared feeling of a desire to connect with fellow students, as well as its double meaning of literally being connected online. We felt that *Connected* worked on multiple levels to really sum up what we, and our fellow peers, had fundamentally lacked in this past year; true and genuine connection.

As a result of this, we received a variety of submissions. Some expressed honest experiences of life as a student during the pandemic, and others offered advice by way of music, video games and books that have helped them to persevere during this unprecedented time. All of the submissions provided a glimpse into the lives of York St John students and highlighted that the student experience of the past year has been a largely individual one, unshared and unique in every case.

We hope that *Connected* will act as a symbol of the resilience of the York St John community, which continues to prosper despite current circumstances. The past year has been anything but easy, particularly for students, but we hope that this magazine will provide a space in which you can relate to other's experiences, reflect on your own experiences, and look forward to a brighter future of experiences to come.

– The Editorial Team



THE GAP

It sinks in, truly, that York still exists not when I spot the upward jut of the Minster on the horizon, but when the train rattles past the PLATFORM 10 sign at the station. The high ceiling and tall columns are splashed in the sepia-amber of late September 5PM lamplight. The noticeboards neutrally list off incoming arrivals with digital indifference. A pigeon, plump and grey, flits to its home between the spikes atop the café. It's all as it was six months ago. I think I'm disappointed.

I lick my dry lips behind my mask and rest my hand on the harsh red SOCIAL DISTANCING – LEAVE THIS SEAT EMPTY band around the aisle seat. There is the typical ubiquitous TransPennine window smudge obscuring the view, but I don't dare risk putting my bare hand on the glass. Platform-side, the vending machines are crossed out with caution tape, empty rectangular crime scenes. Nothing's different, but everything's changed.

A jerk as the train applies its brakes. We are now in York. A city that, in my mind, had dissolved into three low-bandwidth virtual seminars – a final gasp before communication went dark. I wrote the last of my dissertation in a haze—don't go outside, get your bibliography right, more and more people dead each day, only three thousand words to go—and believed, more than I'd like to admit, that when I hit 'submit', there was no university left to receive it. It was over. The world shrunk to me, my house, and all the people and places I'd never get back.

It's the funniest thing. Right at the point my nihilism reached fever pitch, I still applied for my MA. This will go nowhere, I told myself. There is no point. I sent off the email. Rubbed at my eyes to ease the screen migraine everyone seems to get now. Left the tab open, neglected. Six hours later, a reply. So glad to see I'm still keeping in touch, so happy that I'm still choosing to be part of the university community. People I thought long-gone, friends lost to absence, were hoping I'd study alongside them. Overjoyed to reunite in September. I'd forgotten, somewhere down the line, that the world is still there, that I'm still part of it.

Ping. Please gather all your belongings before alighting. Maintain a two-metre distance from both staff and fellow passengers at all times. You must keep wearing a face covering whilst on station grounds. Mind the gap between the train and the platform edge. Have a nice day. *Ping.*

The best way I can describe that moment of departure, of return, is vertigo. One foot crossing that chasm from train to city, back into a world that has taken so much, but not quite everything. A reality that promises to once again be in motion, an end to the state of paralysis. This is it.

I exhale hysterically. Oh god, please let this be it. I never learned how to use Zoom.



- Conor Hannon,
MA Creative Writing

LIFE OVER LOCKDOWN

What have I done over lockdown?

Well, I'd like to hope I've lost weight. I surprised myself, committing to a healthier diet considering my snacking habits and horrendous sweet tooth, but I did it. I got into a regular routine of running one or two times a week. Even after Christmas, New Year and that one week where I didn't spend a day sober. I've managed to get my running distance up to 5km and maintain it.

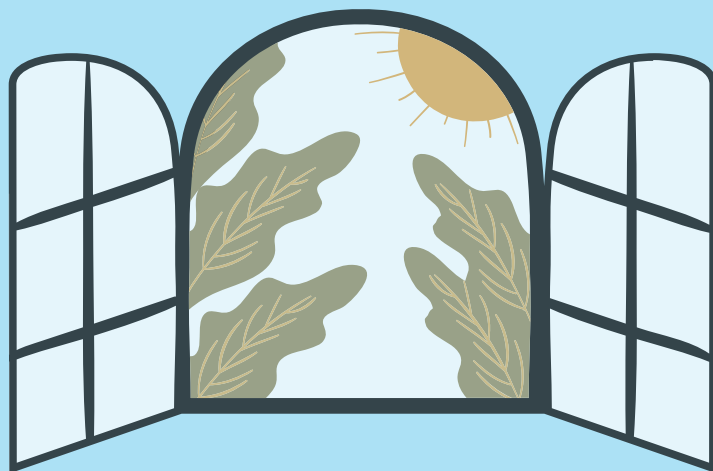
Additionally, I had to help at home with my baby sister's online teaching, so this meant fixing my sleeping pattern. If you could even call it that. As a self-proclaimed night owl, I always do more work and I'm ten times as productive at night, so it took some adjustment waking up at 8am every morning. But being forced to do it has transformed my sleeping pattern into a solid structure, I hope – apart from when I accidentally stay up until 4am in the morning.

Did you know waking up in the morning means that you can get your work done by lunchtime if you try hard enough?

It's been so weird finishing at lunchtime and realising that if I dragged myself out of bed early and broke my lockdown bad habits, I could have the whole afternoon off for personal projects or relaxing.

One of my goals throughout it all was to do lots of work on personal projects, which I think I have, but also to gain back my mental wellness. The first lockdown was enough to make my social ability disappear, and it took a long, hard moment of self-reflection to realise this. When lockdown two and three came in I knew exactly what I had to do to stop it happening again. Aside from using my journal – my saviour on my bad days – I made sure to be more active and socialise, go out for a walk and get away from the screen if I needed it.

When university started again, my over organised self got a new notebook, set out my weekly schedule on a whiteboard and prepped myself for studying mentality again. A whole year online seemed daunting and slightly frustrating at the price we pay for it, but I was one who learnt how to make the most of things. I can thank my stubborn determination for that. Persistence has always been something I've thrived at. Plus, having three siblings means you build up a little patience and resilience here and there.



- Lizzy Harrison,
Creative Writing Year 2



TOP 3 LOCKDOWN ALBUMS

1. *Blue* - Joni Mitchell (1971)

The first and arguably the most important choice on my list is Joni Mitchell's *Blue* (1971). *Blue* is Mitchell's magnum opus, laden with soft but vivid lyricism with the power to transport the listener to Grecian isles, parks in Paris, or the dirt red roads in Spain that she sings of. It is not only the uniquely transportive abilities of this album that make it so salient in the time of the legally enforced loneliness that is lockdown, but the way Mitchell soothes us with lilting instrumentals. Whilst Joni Mitchell's staple instrument is an acoustic guitar, in *Blue* she ventures to use the lesser-known Appalachian instrument, a dulcimer. She confessed in an interview with Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers, however, that she was unfamiliar with the instrument. Mitchell's ability to create such enchanting melodies with an instrument she did not know how to play served me in experimenting with new hobbies and taking artistic risks, allowing me to escape my comfort zone whilst remaining within the confines of my own house. Mitchell's words remain lodged in both the dust of the earth and the hearts of her listeners fifty years after its release. The languorous allure of this album remains as impactful as ever, particularly in the year 2021.

2. *An American Prayer* - Jim Morrison (1978)

An American Prayer is the album in which Jim Morrison truly comes into his own as a poet, made all the more impactful by its being released 7 years after Morrison's death. Unlike his previous albums with The Doors, *An American Prayer* is made up of mostly sombre and transformative spoken word poetry. It is a lament for Jim Morrison and the words he blessed the world with. Listening to this album feels like taking a small trip into Morrison's mind, which is an expanse filled with hot sand, dusty summer heat, angels, and the weary souls of travellers. When I listen to this album, I feel protected by these images, like I've stepped into somewhere timeless and infinite, where Jim Morrison is still alive and Corona is just a beer.

3. *Heaven Or Las Vegas* - Cocteau Twins (1990)

Unlike the other two albums on this list, *Heaven Or Las Vegas* is light, lilting dream-pop to take the edge off of living through a pandemic. Alongside Robin Guthrie's melting, shimmering guitar, Elizabeth Fraser contorts her vocals into strange shapes that mould and warp until the words become unrecognisable. Once again, we find ourselves asking the timeless question, 'what are the Cocteau Twins saying?'. Yet at the same time, we don't care. The inability to decipher the lyrics makes the album even more mesmerising. The music feels magical and otherworldly, impossible to locate. We truly don't know whether this music came from Heaven or from Las Vegas. This album helps me to lose my grip on the grim realities of the world for 37 minutes, and right now that is enough.



- Sky-Lotus Coakley
English Literature Year 2

TEAMS ODDITY

With profuse apologies to David Bowie

Ground Control to Number One
Ground Control to Number One

Get your coffee cup and put your headphones on.
Ground Control to Number One *(ten, nine, eight, seven, six)*

Commencing countdown, camera on *(five, four, three)*
Check your audio and keep your fingers crossed *(two, one, lift-off)*

This is Ground Control to Number One.
I'm letting you join now.

Have we everyone? Is someone waiting still?
Any problems with your connectivity?



Oh, here is the bank of little faces,
peering restlessly.

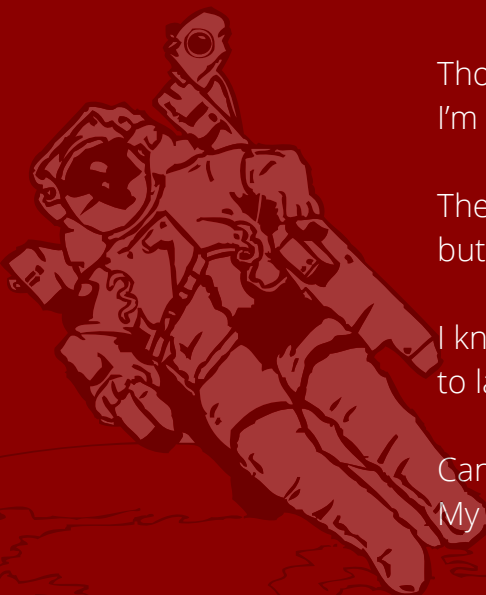
Hard to recognise
with their frowns and rolling eyes.

Though I've read the books and am prepared,
I'm feeling very sick.

The others seem to know which way to go
but I'm un-technological, I know.

I know my stuff but feel tongue tied
to launch my views world-web-wide.

Can't concentrate for very long.
My brain's gone dead, there's something wrong.



Can you hear me, Number One?
Can you hear me, Number One?

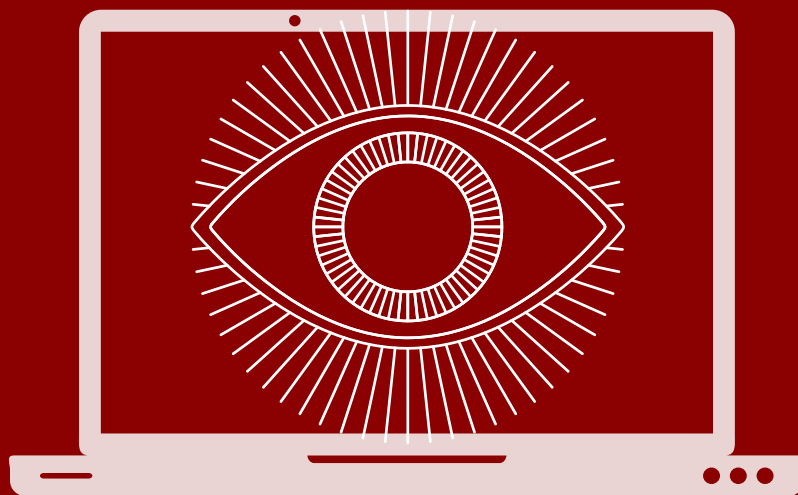
Ground Control? It's Number One.
How can I make the grade?

Here am I floating round my flat screen,
plummeting off course.

Face-to-face is through,
and there's nothing I can do.

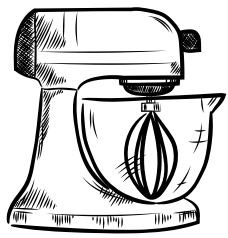
This is Number One to Ground Control
I'm slipping from the module.

There is no eye in Teams
to observe my fading dreams...



- Linda Burnett
MA Creative Writing





COOKING FOR FREEDOM



A crime has been committed and I am sentenced accordingly.

The crime is not my own, but my punishment comes inevitably, in the form of a letter, typed and signed by a man who does not know me. He tells me to shield, locking me in.

My flatmate works at the local shop, and must still go in for her shifts. She sees her boss every day but only sees me on Zoom. I hear her voice through the wall we share, and through my screen. She sends me pictures of her walk to work. I touch the photos of trees and leaves and see the emptiness around them.

It is not a world I recognise.

Normally, I work too, but I cannot go in, so I wake and watch the window like a TV.

The world is at war, so I download computer games.

The world is at war, so I learn which grocery packages can be washed before they disintegrate.

The world is at war, so I read. I travel to lands of saints, dragons and witches. I travel backwards and forwards in time, beyond this awful year. I learn about the sky and about the earth. I try out new languages. Then, I read an old cookbook which I didn't even know I owned. It sparks a light, like the dot of a star in the sky, pushing through against cloud and pollution.

After my flatmate leaves, I spray the kitchen until I choke on the bleach. Afterwards, I wash; my fingers, my nails, my palms, my wrists and arms. I sanitize them too, for good measure, and only then can I proceed to cook.

This is part of my punishment.

As days become weeks and months, I make anything and everything, filling the hours between online classes and Zoom calls with family and friends.

I bake honeyed apples, which spill out all over the oven and scold the roof of my mouth. I fry crisps out of thinly sliced potatoes. I battle to make cucumber sushi, without any of the equipment. I almost destroy a pan cooking a Japanese omelette. But my punishment is ongoing, and eventually, my pans suffer no longer and my oven fears me no more. When my flatmate returns from work, I am always already back in my cell. I begin to leave half of whatever I made that day. My cooking has become presentable enough to be consumed by others.

Day after day, I cook and watch the News, waiting, like a child at Christmas. When the day finally comes, I cry at the sight of a needle going into the arm of a stranger. It is my key, my daylight, the cream for my red-raw hands.

I practice baking a cake in the shape of a syringe. When I am called, I take it in and offer it to the volunteers who end my punishment and save my life.



- A.T. Ainscough,
Creative Writing Year 3

AÍSTHESPORA

I wrote this piece to help a friend with four-wall fatigue. The word "mushrooms" was chosen as the poem's thematic seed; with the intention being to grow an imagery and symbolism that the reader can experience as a kind of emotional refreshment. Life, movement and communication are universal propositions which continue to evoke our cultural pasts and presents. Here these ideas are approached on a microscopic and cosmic scale; in the tone of mushrooms, to offer through poetry an 'enlargement of the walls'.

Happily these hounds flap with musicians
noses and find under the autumn leaves the
dewy fungi and bedded leaves,
fresh misted pillars of trees framing the clean,
wide sky.

A pale sprout of temple shrooms cascades
and is hid, speculate in gnarl of the wood.
Invoking all the forest in its mystical
and worldly growth.

Sparkling under the dewy mosses
with a hermetically salvific assertion, reflecting
modulations in the deepest lakes and
broadest mountain ranges, glittering with information
under the starry pine.

Teaching in plumes and spores the
runic vines that crown the veiled door:
guiding towards the light, heaving the poisons
of the air, speaking to the reason of the human
with beauty and fruit.

Drifting in the tides and lunar awning:
soundly watching the planets icicle streams
in the soft cerulean mists, - adjacent Aliens holding
space for observant eyes; cast with numinous webbing
the Golden Catch of but a brief yet tritonic moment in time.



- Kieron Bourke,
Philosophy, Religion and
Ethics Year 1



NOW AND THEN

When I applied to YSJ to do an MA degree I had visions of the experience being very similar to that of my undergraduate history and drama degree, undertaken over thirty years previously in a similar institution – a former church teacher training college now turned into a small university (King Alfred’s College, Winchester - KAC).

But for now, it isn’t.

When I first entered the chapel at KAC it seemed warm and friendly, and a young woman leaving it smiled at me. That helped me decide to spend three years at KAC even though I am an atheist. In contrast, when I first entered the chapel at YSJ during my exploration of the campus before the first evening of my course, it was dark and empty, with big signs reading ‘Entrance only’, ‘Exit only’ and large jars of hand sanitiser. I didn’t like it.

When you had some spare time at KAC you could hang around in the student union, eat some cake and complain about the last lecture. For the moment at YSJ, the Union is a place I never go into, and have no wish to because there may be people in it. And I don’t want to come across more people than necessary.

When I went to seminars at KAC, you could speak spontaneously and there was a feeling of togetherness. At seminars at YSJ in the autumn term, students are at widely separated tables and wear masks, which make speaking a strain. We are in the same room, but we are separated.

When I went to KAC I didn’t need to eat meals there, but I often did because they were cheap and nourishing and having meals was part of community life. I have no idea what meals at YSJ are like, because everywhere I see that provides food seems to be empty and desolate. I wonder if full-time students are all making baked beans and toast somewhere, in their bubbles.

When I went to KAC the internet hardly existed. Now, it would be impossible to do the YSJ course without the internet, and in the Spring term also using a webcam and microphone for online seminars. Escaping a long dark drive to York and back once a week has its benefits at this time of year – but apart from one person whom I met last autumn, I have never actually seen any of my fellow students taking this module.

When I was at KAC a significant number of staff quickly became personally known to you – not just academic staff but also librarians, technicians, reception staff. So far, I have only met one academic member of YSJ staff and that was last autumn. I have also exchanged fleeting words with two support staff.

I still have four terms to go, two thirds of the total. For this reason alone, I am glad to be part-time rather than full-time. Perhaps something can be salvaged after all.

- Stephen Bishop,
MA Creative Writing



TEN ESCAPIST READS

When life weighs me down, reading enables me to lose myself in alternative worlds. My favourite books feature characters that I become invested in and a plot that grips and surprises me. I crave unexpected twists and a refreshing dose of humour and inspiration. Here is a compilation of those that did the trick for me - my top ten escapist reads.

1. *The Lido*, by Libby Page

An uplifting, touching novel about the value of community, friendship and belonging.

2. *Blood Orange*, by Harriet Tyce

This domestic thriller packs a suspenseful punch, with its twisty plot and complex characterisation.

3. *Room*, by Emma Donoghue

A heartbreaking but eye-opening story, told from the extraordinary perspective of a five-year-old boy in captivity.

4. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, by Stieg Larsson

Larsson's compelling storytelling makes this more than just a murder mystery.

5. *Where the Crawdads Sing*, by Delia Owens

An enthralling coming-of-age narrative, entwined with an awe-inducing theme of nature, and a murder mystery.

6. *The Flatshare*, by Beth O'Leary

Tiffany and Leon are flatmates, who share a bed, but have never met. A unique and comical spin on a traditional romance.

7. *Confessions of a Shopoholic*, by Sophie Kinsella

This is an easy, lighthearted read - guaranteed to have you laughing aloud.

8. *Never Greener*, by Ruth Jones

A playful, yet poignant story of messy relationships, beautifully crafted by the co-writer of Gavin and Stacey. It's bittersweet.

9. *Once Upon a River*, by Diane Setterfield

The epitome of traditional storytelling - this incorporates myth, magic and mystery within the most atmospheric setting.

10. *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott

A slow-paced, and easy-to-read classic, with exquisite character development. You'll want to read about the lives of the March sisters forever.

- Cassie Harrison,
MA Creative Writing



Peace in Self Expression

When Elliot Page came out, he said whilst he could trace back his identity to his childhood, what forced him to truly face his gender identity was the pandemic and lockdown. This seems to be a common story, with the amount of coming out posts on Twitter and Facebook doubling over the last year. For some, only interacting with people online or in their household gave them a sense of freedom, space and reflection they'd never had before. When people are given space, they figure out more about themselves and the world around them. They realise what they need to do about the things they've been trying to ignore.

I've been out as queer since I was twelve and trans since I was 18. I've identified as a biromantic asexual nonbinary man for a long time. But my gender expression is something I had to face over the last year. For years I wore a chest binder, causing me pain due to my asthma. It alleviated some of my dysphoria, but why was I really doing this to myself? So I wouldn't have to hear someone call me 'she'. Why should I have to put myself through pain to try and appear as cisgender and be accepted?

This is not to say that all trans people do this to please cis people. It can cause feelings of relief, happiness, and gender euphoria. But for some there are medical reasons why tucking and binding is next to impossible or dangerous. For me wearing a binder was a symptom of a larger problem: social dysphoria and people pleasing. My version of masculinity, my identity, and my maleness does not involve a binder. One day it will consist of a flat chest and testosterone injections, but for now I've made peace with how my body currently is. This was a long journey. A stereotypical one that ended in yoga and mindfulness. And surprisingly, a pandemic.

Lockdown took away any opportunity for social dysphoria. For months I didn't get misgendered once. My partner, family, and friends all know me, my gender, and my pronouns whether I'm wearing a binder or not. I'm lucky that I was able to have this freedom. I was able to relax and be more free with my gender expression. I didn't have to try and trick strangers into thinking I might have a penis any more. I could explore myself.

I realised that my masculinity wasn't the version we'd been forced to replicate. Trans people are held to this to a much stricter level than cis people. Harry Styles gets to appear in Vogue in a dress, but trans men are denied hormones for not being masculine enough. Cis women get to be tomboys, but trans women get kicked out of women's hostels for not being 'feminine'. When I'm in a safe, accepting bubble I don't have to worry about how others will perceive me. My form of dismantling the gender roles forced on me was letting my hair grow a little longer, painting my nails, and letting myself enjoy Taylor Swift's new album. The thing I realised, however, was that none of these things were feminine, I'd just been conditioned to think they were.

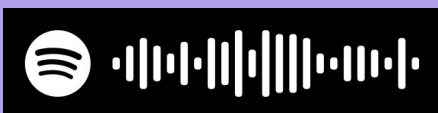
When I paint my nails and my hair is long, I'm reminded of my Celtic warrior ancestors. When I listen to Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish I let myself enjoy them! Maybe it's not intellectual or masculine, but who cares? Their songs are great. The idea that music is gendered is ludicrous. It took being locked away from the world and it's pressures to realise this. I always worried this would mean I was less of a man, but I'm not.

Of course, this started to change as lockdown relaxed. It was great in theory, so long as I was careful, I could even go to Tesco. How exciting! But when I was stood in the checkout line, I heard someone say 'the line is over by that lady there.' For a second I didn't even think about it, assuming they meant someone else. Until the stranger stood around two metres away from me. My stomach hit the floor. It hadn't even occurred to me to try and 'pass' that day.

One day, I'll be able to have a deep voice, flat chest, dress how I like and be called 'he' automatically by strangers. But I'm not going to hurt myself in the meantime to get that acceptance and privilege. I'm a man, and I'm nonbinary. And since my grown out hair and nail varnish belongs to me, I guess that makes them masculine too. I hope the level of self-expression, comfort and awareness some of us have obtained over lockdown remains after the pandemic.



- Elliot Rivron,
Creative Writing MFA



HOW TO SURVIVE LOCKDOWN WITHOUT A TIMETABLE

1. Wake up.
2. Eat chocolate*.
3. Check: a) WhatsApp; b) emails; c) texts; d) snail mail (and reply if urgent/ fun).
4. Turn on music source: a) Spotify; b) radio; c) CD player (depending on vintage).
5. Make coffee (black if milk has dried up again).
6. Dance/ jig/ jog on the spot for at least one upbeat song, while kettle boils.
7. Eat Frosties (dry from packet, if necessary – see 5).
8. Watch some daytime TV: a) *Homes under the Hammer* (if awake in time) – can be aspirational/ fantasy/ true horror; b) some sport; c) a soap; d) an ancient film; e) repeats of anything you find on iplayer. Just wallow in schmalz because you can.
9. Eat chocolate.
10. Make any (or all) of the following:
 - a) a list (e.g. your favourite songs and why; your top ten destinations after lockdown; the last three times you spoke to a human being; the reasons why you thought a university degree was a good idea etc...the list is endless)
 - b) a cake – banana is a solid option, but you do need bananas (and flour, eggs etc)
 - c) your bed... and lie in it.
11. Pretend you are doing historical/ sociological research and read: a) a book; b) a magazine; c) a free newspaper; d) a flyer about a local restaurant.
12. Work up to reading a course book (or online document) – you may surprise yourself.
13. Read a coarse book.
14. Make notes on your course.
15. Make coarse confetti out of your notes.
16. Eat chocolate.
17. Take any (or all) of the following:
 - a) a walk – or alternatively open a window (see 15 above).
 - b) a breath – deep breathing in for 5 seconds, out for 5 seconds, always helps.
 - c) a stroll to the local shop (to replenish essential supplies of the three major food groups: milk; sliced white bread; chocolate).
 - d) a bike ride (N.B. bicycle required for this activity).
 - e) a hike... but remember to come back.
18. Join Teams tutorial with coffee. Leave Teams tutorial. Get more coffee.
19. Eat chocolate.
20. Trawl internet for recipes requiring a quarter tin of sardines and a scrape of peanut butter. Make a shopping list for future supplies if anything looks doable and nice.
21. Make something half-edible with remaining contents of fridge.
22. Take up a hobby – anything new, daft, creative or weird that you've heard about or fancy trying, like embroidery, jigsaws, matchstick modelling, song writing, origami...
23. Eat chocolate.
24. The rest of the day is now your own for socialising online, computer games, any of the above, especially if you didn't manage to fit in all of your five-a-day (see 2, 9, 16, 19, 23) earlier. You deserve it!
25. If all else fails: Eat – Sleep – Repeat.

*Dark chocolate especially can help lower cholesterol, prevent cognitive decline, reduces risk of cardiovascular problems, tastes nice and makes you feel good!



FAMILY OF THREE

I chose to write Family of Three for Connected as I was initially drawn to the emotions of being uprooted. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many students found themselves either back in their family home, or alone in student housing, suffering loneliness and disorientation. At the same time, although huge numbers of families were buying dogs, cases of dogs losing their homes and going into rescue centres were also rising rapidly. I imagined how distressing this abrupt, irreversible change and subsequent isolation would be for these dogs, especially as they would not understand what was happening or why. I wanted to mirror the student experience through a different perspective and found the experiences of rescue dogs keenly relevant. However, in the ending of Family of Three, I still incorporated a sense of hope, in that whatever comes next may be different, but it can still be good.

My handler had already taken me on a walk, but when he called me, I wagged my tail and ran towards him anyway. He had that thing on his face; a strange shape that covered his nose and mouth, but he sounded excited as he clipped my lead onto my harness.

He didn't take me beyond the centre as usual, but to an outdoor pen, where two women I had never seen before were waiting. They also wore a thing across their faces, so I could not see their expressions, but both were crouched low on the ground, with treats in hands and offering words that were kind.

Before I was brought here, it was Mum who had spoken kindly to me. She had been home more than ever, though we did not go out much anymore and the things on people's faces had frightened me. I only stopped barking when Mum taught me that it was still her beneath that strange shape.

One day, she had been sad. I had put my paws on her knees, pressed my nose to her cheek, butted my head against her hand. She held me close, but it did not make her smile. Instead, she drove me here, to this centre, where a person I didn't know at the time was waiting. I sniffed his trousers and smelt other dogs. Mum patted my head, before handing over my lead.

Inside the centre, the other dogs before me were in rows of pens behind glass doors, some with their noses pressed up against them. They barked at me, setting each other off, and, as we passed, my soon to be next-door neighbour growled. Normally, I did not entertain such bad manners, but I called out to him in desperation: What is this place? Where is my Mum? He did not reply.

I settled by the door, so Mum would not miss me when she came to take me home. When night crept in, I thumped my tail and though I wasn't a puppy anymore, all alone, I began to cry. My ears pinned back against my head, I licked my lips and howled for my Mum. I thought that if she could hear me, she would come.

She didn't. Instead, after a time, the women came, with their treats and kind words. They kept returning until I trusted them enough to put my paws on their knee, press my nose to their faces and butt my head against their hands. They patted me and through their eyes I saw them smiling. I liked them and they seemed to like me.

One day, my handler gave them my lead and I was encouraged into a car. I snuggled up in the seat and my new parents soothed me until we arrived home.

- A.T. Ainscough,
Creative Writing Year 3



LOCKDOWN FASHION

Lockdown fashion trends have mainly consisted of joggers and comfy clothes. I did this at first, but due to wanting to get back to who I was, I decided to mix it up and went for different outfits such as comfy shorts and a crop top, or even high waisted leggings with a sports bra - to keep the comfort but to also dress up for the summer days. I went from looking like I had been dragged through a bush, to then trying to reclaim who I was.



As restrictions were changing and life was trying to go back to the norm, I was up, dressed and ready to go, whether it was for a coffee with friends and family or walking my dog and accidentally falling into the pub for a takeaway beer! More than usual, my dog became a huge part of my life due to moving back home from uni. He was there everyday, so I took lots of photos with him! Due to him always being there, from waking me up in the morning, to spending the whole day together and then going to sleep, he managed to see all of my different fashion choices each day.

Once back at uni, my fashion choices aligned with many drinks with housemates in an attempt to take back the time that had been lost. Many types of outfits were chosen such as casual but smart looks like dresses, jeans and a nice top or going all out and putting heels on too, even when still in the house. Everything finally started to go back to normal - going out with friends and my boyfriend, going to bars and pubs to sit outside. My fashion from a year ago came back but with more confidence - who doesn't want to show off when you have new clothes that no one has seen! I became a shopaholic in the pandemic, but now I have some amazing pieces. Lockdown improved my fashion choices, and now I am finally feeling like myself.



- Morgen Dorsett
Media Production Year 3



5 LOCKDOWN VIDEO GAMES FOR STUDENTS ON A BUDGET

What a year 2020 was! We, as students, have largely been glued to our screens either participating in online classes, completing assignments, or talking to our friends and family over Zoom or Skype. I, for one, have found it difficult to attach much positivity to my time spent with my PC, as I spend so much of my time online researching and writing my own thesis. As a lifelong gamer, I realised that my time spent playing on my consoles has been invaluable for maintaining my sanity over the last year. However, having entered the final year of my course, I realise that the money I have available for gaming is at an all-time low. As such, I have been adding to my video game collections on older consoles or PC in order to minimise the expense. Here are a few cheap games that might help you with lockdown boredom:

1) Age of Empires II: Definitive Edition (PC, 2019 - £14.99 on Steam) – If you are a fan of history and like a fast-paced strategy game, this is certainly one for you. Many PC gamers will have played Age of Empires II for countless hours in the past, but the recent remaster breathes new life into an old gem.

2) Any of the main Pokémon titles (Any Nintendo Handheld Console) – 2021 marks the 25th birthday of Pokémon and there has never been a better time to take a walk down memory lane and play one of the many offerings from Nintendo's smash-hit series. Sometimes nothing beats kicking back and battling trainers with your favourite Pokémon.

3) The Elder Scrolls V – Skyrim (Multi-Platform, 2011 - £1 on Xbox 360 at CEX) – Every gamer knows Skyrim, and every Skyrim-player knows the jokes about it being available through almost any medium you can imagine. Bottom-line, this is a mega role-playing game and totally worth revisiting (or discovering for the first time), especially at this price.

4) The Sims 3 (Multi-Platform, 2009 - £12.49 on Steam) – You remember The Sims? Of course you do! Imagine how many social outings Sims went on in 2020 – more than me. The third main entry in the series was as solid as they come.

5) Rugby 08 (PS2/PC, 2007 - £0.50 on PS2 at CEX) – EA Sports' Rugby 08 is still the best offering for fans of the 15-a-side game, and, at 50 pence (plus delivery), it is an absolute steal. If you fancy a cheap sports game, or to return to an old classic, it is definitely worth a punt! (terrible pun intended).

Five honourable mentions:

Human: Fall Flat (Multi-Platform, 2016 - £11.99 on Steam)

The Walking Dead: The Telltale Definitive Series (Multi-Platform - £20 on Xbox One at CEX)

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (Multi-Platform, 2015 - £8 on PS4/Xbox One at CEX)

Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy (Multi-Platform, 2017 - £18 on Xbox One at CEX)

eFootball PES 2020 (Multi-Platform, 2019 - £8 at CEX)



- George Wardell,
PHD History Year 3



WORKSHOPPING

Oh my, here is an augmented man – half robot – waiting to kill, hiding in a roof, sliding through the cracks. Down he goes, swooshing through the ceiling tiles and attacking the innocents. But wait, he is an innocent too. He is being used, abused by the state. He is a weapon. He is an unwitting soldier. His ears have been poured full of vitriol, prejudice, lies and instructions to eradicate. He has a moment of pain that brings clarity, before the short circuitry in his brain fires again, and he returns to his dogma and his mission. I go from fearing him to feeling anxious for him.

Here is an exquisite piece of description. Oppressive heat, dust, cranes flying overhead. The things I am learning about birds I hadn't ever cared to know. The cleverness of being woven into landscape and placed somewhere other. I let myself sit in the warmth and the silence, and watch the birds fly by on their journey.

And here is a girl flying through the air to her death. She has chosen this, but my heart bleeds for her and the hints of why, break me. I am troubled by her, but I also know she will be safe now. The darkness of the end rushes at her and she is finally at peace.

Oh, and this one. Here is a woman who carries moving tattoos on her body. They appear as she gets wiser, telling her stories on her skin. They slither and hide, finding their perfect resting place. A love story worn on the outside. I want this one to be a whole novel.

And now we have a feminist taking on the publishing world. Here she is all bold, sassy and saying what needs to be said. Her rage is just and admirable. Her caustic fury sings and burns. The tired, old publishing industry that is portrayed is taken apart and exposed. She sure is telling them straight. I love her!

Tears come at this next one. Simple moments captured in poetry. Small parts of lives crafted so perfectly they make me weep. Just when you think no one sees it like you do, poetry invites you in for a cup of tea and a chat. Ah, you say. You see it too? And you settle in and remember you like poetry very much.

Oh, and there's more. Other stories fill me with tales of sexual discovery, dementia, hideous puppeteers that are cruel to children and a shadowy bedroom with a real monster under the bed and a gasp out loud twist that makes me smile widely in admiration.

So, I offer my own. A woman who turns invisible for a well-earned rest from her family, another woman who turns into a fox, a boy who is broken gets mended by the surgeon. I offer them tentatively like a child doing a show-and-tell in primary school. I feel exposed and wonder if I will be good enough. But people are kind, and helpful, and critical in a good way, and I see that I have arrived in the right place after all. I have found my tribe.

With thanks to all my fellow MA Creative Writing work-shoppers who have given me the best reading throughout this difficult year.



- Jayne Stead,
MA Creative Writing

PODCASTS AND TV SHOWS THAT WILL MAKE YOU FEEL HUMAN AGAIN

Being constantly terrified about the state of the world is exhausting. Whether it be because of right-wing politics, continuous bigotry, or the literal pandemic. It can make you feel disconnected, drained, and desperate for any contact whatsoever. Of course, if you have a mental illness, you're no stranger to this. I already knew what it was like to feel trapped in your home, to feel unable to socialise, and to be terrified about the state of the world. This experience has led me to be the expert on how to fill your time. When it comes to coping mechanisms, everyone is different – but when it comes to being calm and having a temporary distraction, I can help. All you need is access to Spotify, iTunes, and/or Netflix.

EMERGENCY PODCASTS

1: *Bad Gays*

Firstly, a podcast for when you want to escape, but keep your brain active at the same time. It's an inclusive podcast about horrible gays and evil twinkles of the past and present from queer Nazis to Andrew Sullivan. The two presenters are queer historians who discuss how their sexualities and social climates connected to their villainous natures. The hosts are queer experts drawing from their knowledge of queer history, and they have a Patreon, which sends you links to publications on various historical and political issues. It's an academic Godsend.

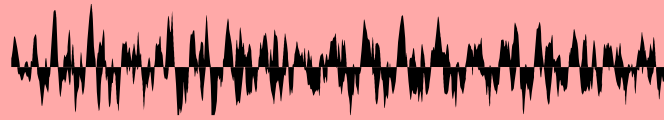
2: *Real Life Ghost Stories*

What distracts me and makes me want to curl up in bed so that my teddies can protect me? Ghost stories.

I have always loved the supernatural, but I've also always been quite easily frightened. The solution? The *Real Life Ghost Stories* podcast! Emma and Dan manage to joke about the horrors of the paranormal and have a healthy dose of scepticism along with a few theories to help you put the scary things in a logic science box. They are always inclusive and avoid possession stories because of how often they are linked to mental illness. Their film reviews are great but depending on how strong your movie opinions are can be a bit frustrating. Still, I love every second.

3: *Wake Up with Niall Breslin*

If you are looking for a mindfulness podcast that doesn't take up too much time or request too much of you, might I introduce: Niall Breslin's *Wake Up* podcast. Of course, to refer to it as a mindfulness podcast feels too simplistic. There is so much more to it than that. They have a different theme every week, and on the day of writing this it was about listening to music mindfully and I got to wake up to 'I Wanna Be Your Lover' by Prince. It was amazing.



1: *The Midnight Diner*

For a long time before I went to bed every night, I watched an episode of *The Midnight Diner*. It makes you feel like you are inside of the titular midnight diner, and included in the group of misfits who hang out there. Sometimes supernatural, but generally quirky melodrama with bittersweet endings. It's bound to relax you, and make you cry sometimes. It also has tips on how to make Japanese food at the end. Only problem is that it makes you hungry.

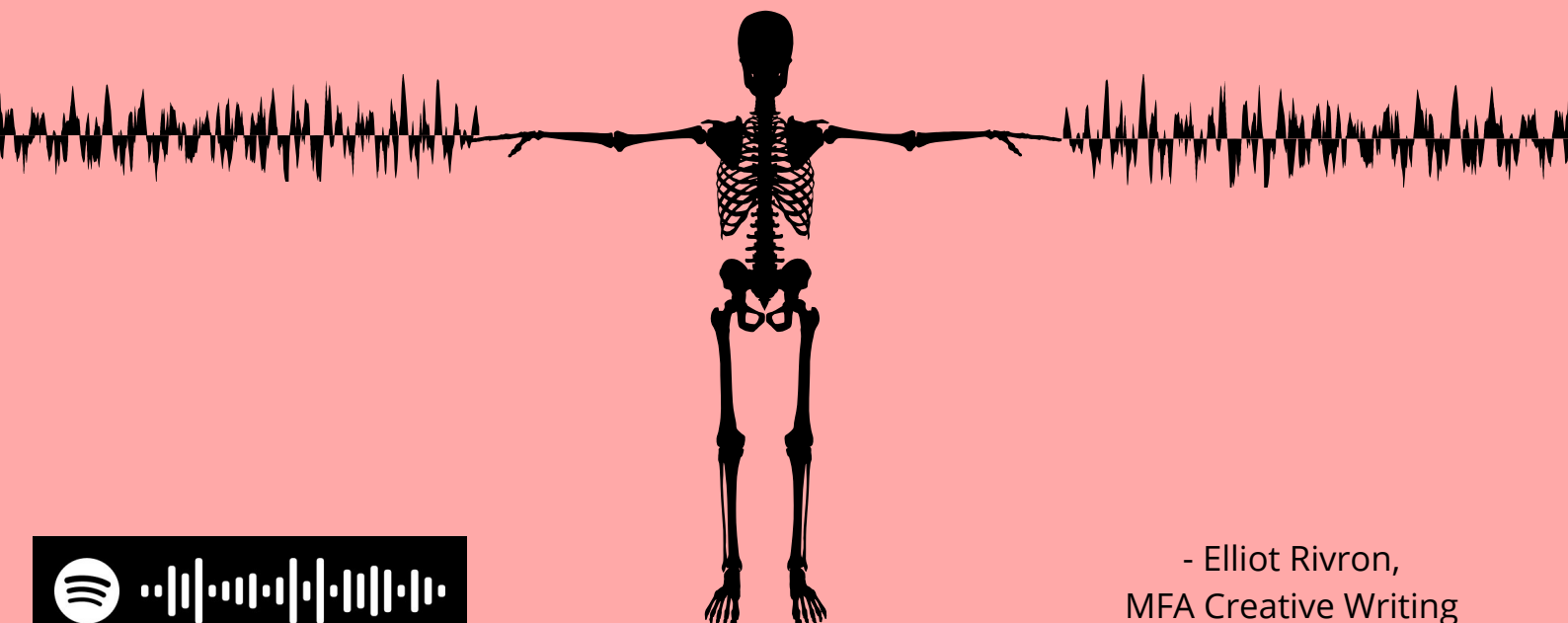
2: *Carole and Tuesday*

This sweet little anime about two unlikely friends forming a musical duo is actually a huge allegory for racism and the horrors of right wing politics and nationalism. There's also an AI story line and the ethical issues involving that, as well as some horrific results of eugenics thrown in. It's got an amazing soundtrack, it's based on Mars, it has an illegal immigrant from Earth film a rap song in his cell as he's guarded by immigration officers, and has a side character who manages to mix rap and opera *brilliantly*. It makes you feel optimistic about the future, about the good of humanity, and that art really can change the world..

3: *Call My Agent*

If you want to get out of your own head for a while and become obsessed with the problems of fictional characters, I have the show for you. *Call My Agent* is set in a Parisian acting agency called ASK. Whether it's a dysfunctional, badass lesbian icon who falls in love with the agency's auditor, a young millennial woman who just wants her distant father to accept her, or a young black actress who is too pale to get the part of a drug dealer but too dark-skinned for a police officer - you will fall in love with them. The show is hilarious without compromising the drama. It gives you a healthy dose of escapism and distance from real world issues without ignoring them entirely.

On the sixteenth of June, Dan from the Real Life Ghost Stories podcast passed away from an underlying heart condition. I'm grateful that I got to experience the joy he brings to the podcast which brightened up the last year so much. My thoughts and love go out to his partner Emma, and to his loved ones.



- Elliot Rivron,
MFA Creative Writing



Breaking the Ice

It probably looked strange, three masked people hanging about a car park. At night, in November - with the wind blowing around us. We may have looked like we were about to rob a bank or do a dodgy drug deal behind the library. Instead, we were making friends.

As an MA student starting my student life in the pandemic, making friends was difficult. The fourteen members of my class were spread out far and wide in our classroom. Our faces half-covered, voices part-muffled. All of us were nervous about our new venture. It was difficult to read people's expressions under the masks. The subtle details in facial expressions were missing. I couldn't tell if people were smiling at my jokes. Could they even hear them, being seated so far away? We couldn't break the ice by trooping down to the pub, or tumbling into the student union, or getting a coffee and cake for a chat.

It was hard, those first few weeks. I was suffering from terrible Imposter Syndrome. The majority of my class were straight from the undergrad course. They'd spent three years together in this environment. I'd been out of the game a long time. Would I ever catch up? Am I too far behind? Do I fit in with these younger people?

I had been told the way to beat Imposter Syndrome was to build connections with the group. It is harder to feel like an imposter in a group of friends. Hence the car park meeting. As the wind blew dead leaves about us, we discussed how we were finding the course, which books we liked, how the pandemic was affecting us. It was an organic conversation, so natural, yet impossible in the classroom.

On the last session of the term, we took off our masks. We were all spaced out in the classroom, so there wasn't any Covid risk. But we saw each other's faces for the first time, after three months of studying together. I must have imagined a lower half of people's faces - my mind filling in the blank area covered by material. Some people looked strangely different, their mouth larger than I had imagined, or their jawline squarer. Some of the men had beards, which I never once noticed. The most amazing part was that we all instantly started smiling at each other. Big broad grins of recognition.

Over the Christmas break, various WhatsApp groups, Facebook chats and Zoom calls were set up. Relying on tech to bind us, instead of face-to-face contact. Or mask-to-mask contact. We're looking forward to the day we get that pint together, or that cake. But for now, we can connect, and we don't even need to hang around in the car park.



- Natalie Roe,
MA Creative Writing



PRODUCTIVITY AT HOME

When working from home, our productivity can suffer. Without my commute and designated breaks, my days lack structure. There are no repercussions if I spend an additional hour in bed or attend meetings in my pyjamas. Weekends and work days merge. Why do the housework on a Saturday when it could be crammed into my lunch hour? Yet when said lunch hour transpires, I'm aimlessly scrolling social media.

If, like me, your productivity dwindles at home, these tips are guaranteed to haul you out of a motivational slump, when a leisurely approach no longer serves you.

Plan. When I don't want to leave the sofa, I sit with my diary and review upcoming plans and commitments. Mental organisation often sparks palpable motivation I didn't realise I had.

Get dressed. Though I've been known to eat lunch in my pyjamas at home, getting dressed signifies that I am primed to conquer the day - even if I'm merely flaunting fresh loungewear.

Stop listing, start doing. I love lists. Sometimes, I make lists of lists. But it's a method of procrastination. Time consumed noting important tasks can often be utilised to eradicate at least one of them.

Put a load of washing on. A strong accomplishment, requiring minimal effort. The distant rumble of my washing machine, even heard from my bed, tells me that I'm thriving in life.

Combat the abominable. Which jobs do you dread? For me, it's ironing. Tackle the worst first, and your future self will thank you as you sail through the remainder of your errands.

Get moving. Exercise boosts our energy, mood and self-esteem (NHS). So whether you're dancing around the kitchen, or running 5K, any physical activity will increase your motivation.

Give five minutes. When a task feels unbearable, set a timer, and give it five minutes. 0.35% of your day. It's rarely as horrible as we anticipate, so you are likely to be inclined to continue until completion.

Take breaks. Pursuing 'active' breaks away from my computer, engaging in a small task (e.g. chopping vegetables ahead of dinner) helps me to refocus while maintaining productivity.

Have a digital declutter. When you find yourself glued to your phone, use your screen time to streamline your digital baggage. Delete unwanted photos and emails, unused apps and unfriendly Facebook friends.

Let go. That task, unfinished without consequence, yet lingering in the back of your mind for the third week, is clearly not a priority for you right now. Scrap it and lose the burden.

Congratulate yourself. I like to acknowledge three things I've achieved each day. Even if this includes cooking, making the beds or taking a walk. Celebrating your successes increases motivation.

Nobody is expected to be consistently productive, but we can strive for a healthy balance - holding ourselves accountable, while also being kind to ourselves and embracing a slower pace of life.



RESILIENCE

Life is full of small resiliencies. Doing what you need to do rather than choosing the easier option. You know you're right but the argument isn't worth it. All you want is to eat how you like but you're not getting any younger and diabetes is a killer. Not putting yourself in danger seems like an obvious choice but it's often not. Now I'm not talking about stupid choices in horror movies, those idiots are on their own – I mean being safe is often hard. It takes effort and usually pre-planning.

As I sit here in lockdown three, my resilience is wearing thin. I miss my Mam. I miss everyone really but you can't get a hug like one from your Mam. I haven't seen my younger cousins in a very long time; when I see them next they'll probably do that little kid thing where they're not sure about me for a while. Like I'm a stranger. I dream about birthdays and family gatherings and the countryside. Home. Man, I could do with some rolling hills and greener pastures, right about now.

This year, I completed my degree, wrote my dissertation with a closed library, celebrated my birthday in-between lockdowns (safely – of course), applied and got accepted for a masters.

This year, my summer was wasted inside, I didn't get to say goodbye to any of my course mates or thank the staff for the past three years of my life, I missed my best friend's wedding and my graduation got cancelled. There are a lot of students like me, who had to show the same amount of resilience, otherwise the degree was wasted. Three years of hard work for nothing.

Initially I barely left the house out of fear but now the fear is gone, I'm just so bored. It's hard to be cautious when you're bored. The risks are repeated at nauseam through adverts, bus stops and news updates. We all know them by now but still my brain is just tired, tired of everything. But I can't give up! My Mam has gotten her vaccines. Both my grandparents have them now too. No one I love has died this year and that is because of a community of resilience. We know not to be idiots and so far it has paid off.

The only thing carrying me through is the fact that if I am safe then I will never pass it to someone else. I couldn't live with that. It's a lot of pressure to put on yourself when you're just nipping to Co-Op for some bread. Everything is life or death but my brain got used to it along the way.

But maybe in July I can go to a wedding. Isn't that an amazing thing to hear? A wedding! Fancy clothes, makeup, dancing, drinks, people being together and happy. People loving and caring about each other. That's the method and the goal – I will follow every rule I am given, not because it is convenient, but because I care about the strangers I walk past in the street and the people I will dance with in July. That feeling will guide me along to a future where I don't need to be resilient anymore.

I look towards it hopefully but with sleepy eyes still.

- Beth Percy,
MA Creative Writing



SPOTIFY PLAYLIST



'JUST LIKE WE NEVER SAID GOODBYE'

SOPHIE

'Way Less Sad'

AJR

'An American Prayer'

Jim Morrison, The Doors

'Space Oddity'

David Bowie

'Times Like These'

BBC Radio 1 Stay Home Live Lounge

'Sunny Crypt'

Francis Bebey

'Ombra Mai Fu'


Handel

'Three Little Birds'

Bob Marley and The Wailers

'The River'

Aurora



'Road to Nowhere'
Talking Heads

'Can I'
Tedy

'Death of a Bachelor'
Panic! At The Disco

'Storm'
Victor Crone

'Because We Can'
Fat Boy Slim

'Fire'
Kimya Dawson

'Somewhat Off The Way'
Dogs Die in Hot Cars

'9 to 5'
Dolly Parton

'Here's To Us'
Halestorm





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