

3rd January 2020

I am wondering what this decade will bring to us. My enforced break, partially due to a hip replacement that was not quite as straightforward as I was led to believe and a sudden, traumatic family bereavement, has certainly given me time to re-evaluate my life and my practice as a counsellor and supervisor.

Over the next few months as I continue my own therapy and work with my supervisor I will be revising my website details. There will be changes, some new content but also some changes in direction that will be difficult for me to carry through but they are necessary to ensure my practice remains ethical and committed to the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions.

I am now almost back to full mobility but with much more awareness of the issues of disability and discrimination. I am also much more aware of the issues of difference and equality and that there can be no half measures or fudges and certainly no compromise on the commitment to address this and honour each individual.

I am also aware of disenfranchised grieving and that individuals who suffer their grief in silence and unsupported need to be recognised and offered equal support to help them if they require it.

All of my ideas will take some time to come to fruition and will require more time, discussion and training but change is the only certainty in life. Sometimes those changes are uncalled for and unwanted resulting in the loss of hopes and dreams. Bereavement is not just the death of a loved one, it is the loss of everything connected to that person that the family invested in them. The void of blackness that surrounds this is dark and silent indeed.

I hope to record more in this blog as I go along this year and as ideas and developments occur.

I offer you my best wishes for 2020 and the new decade knowing that Christmas and New Year may not have been a time of celebration but sadness and loneliness in the hope that there will dawn different hopes and new dreams for you, and I, during this time.

2nd February 2020

Here we are at the start of February and already the snow drops are out, the daffodills have put up their leaves and the buds are forming, even some of the little Tete a Teta are opening up. There are trees in bud as well and I have seen some plum blossom well established already. I can hardly believe that my magnolia tree has buds that are on the point of bursting open. It seems very early this year. Almost as if the seasons are in a hurry to get started and have left the starting gates at a gallop.

It already feels lighter, in that my mood and body feel lifted, as the days are gradually growing longer and I can keep the curtains open later and getting up doesn't feel

such a chore. I am hoping the rumours of snow in March that I have heard as just that and nothing comes of it. If it appears then the plants and trees will receive a massive hit and the magnolia tree's slowly opening buds will be damaged.

How does this fit in with everything that I have experienced recently? I suppose it feels as if the darkness of autumn nights and winter days do not last forever and there is some light to lift me out of the dark, overwhelming places I have felt I have been walking in.

I do wish that the race the plants and trees want to offer us, with colour and new life, would slow down a little. It seems to mirror the speed the world and it's inhabitants live at now. There is always something to do, someone to email or message or post about on social media. Call me old fashioned (I do use electronic devices so I am not that old!) but I long to put the brakes on and slow down, pulling into a quiet layby to sit and watch what is going on around me from the outside, not stuck going round and round inside it. Maybe we can each of us put away our technology and just sit and watch what is going on outside of the living room window for a while? No need to go out if the weather is bad but just look and notice. If the weather is good then try a short walk in the fresh air. Exercise has been shown to help ease depression and nature to improve our wellbeing.

So as the longer and milder days approach think about trying something new and see how you do. I have and found I rather like it. Spring will arrive soon and more light will shine. Be well.

April 2020

**Stay Home. Protect the NHS. Save lives.**

There is little more to say about the overwhelming events of the past few weeks. We are all living with the uncertainty, the unknown, the fear and the huge amount of loss we are experiencing and the massive grief we are feeling. The certainty of life we believed in and trusted has been ripped away and turned into statistics. Each statistic is someone's loved one and a grief unresolved because there has been no opportunity for goodbye. There is nothing we can do except do nothing, just be.

How difficult, how hard and almost impossible it is to sit at home with this alone-ness and loneliness. It is agonising to just 'be' in this time and this place, this space.

What is left to us? I guess there is hope somewhere. Like Pandora's box where she emptied out all the woe's of the world until it felt overwhelming but, right at the bottom of the box alone, hope rested.

This will end but we cannot say the world will return to 'normal', for what is normal now? We will be able to see our families and friends, go out for meals, to the pub and go shopping together and not stand 2 metres away from everyone. The fear will lift. That yearning for comfort and closeness now is balanced by a sense of fear and lack of safety. Alone away from each other but afraid together.

Yet, we see more beauty emerging in the natural world. Given the change our environment can heal itself and maybe that is a good place to end. If the natural world around us can begin to heal then there is a good chance that we can too, and just maybe, we have the opportunity to listen to nature and treat it with more respect and kindness, for it is our solace now in our aloneness. Even if all you have are a few house plants, that living world is still there. So are we, so maybe human kind and nature can be great dance partners together, sharing and living on this planet.

**<b>Stay Home. Protect the NHS. Save lives.</b>**

13th May 2020

**<b> Stay Alert. Control the Virus. Save Lives</b>**

We have slight, if confused movement, but not enough to think about working face to face in a small room for an hour at a time. So we will have to continue online or by telephone. Be adaptable and understanding. I just hope no one asks me to explain what you can and cannot do. I cling onto the 'stay at home as much as possible' and 'work from home if you can' as well as the 2 metre rule.

Talking with others I am both surprised and not surprised how the lockdown has become the 'normal' way for some. They are nervous of going out now that they can and prefer to stay home or in their gardens (if they have them) and avoid the general gatherings of the public and even talk with friends from a distance. Some have even admitted to me that they quite like being at home and don't want to go out!

Today, Wednesday 13th May, restrictions have been eased in the housing market, you can now carry out viewings, conveyancing and removals. This will help a lot of people who were due to move at the lockdown and had to put everything on hold. So much was changed to enable this extension to the usual time.

It has been, and still is, an extraordinary time with the vast figures of financial assistance rise and are just gobsmacking. It is hard to really understand the figures relating to those people who have died because of Covid-19. It is such a huge figure. Even I am struggling to remain with it to bear witness. Each statistic is someone's loved one, friend or colleague. I often wonder what friends and relatives will feel when time has passed and they did not have the chance of a full and final farewell of a funeral? I have no answers to that question. All I can say is that I can offer people time and space to voice their feelings and create a place in their life for the loved one who has died. Right now, in the midst of the pandemic is not the right time for that. That time will come later.

If you do need someone professional to talk to most counsellors are working online or by telephone and even if you are wary, do contact the therapist of your choice and have a chat about your concerns. I am happy to offer some time for this if needed.

Remember, take care of yourself. Stay Alert. Control the Virus. Save Lives.

28th June 2020

Even as we emerge from lockdown - slowly - there is still fear around. Since the images of overcrowded beaches have been in the media I have wondered why. Is it that the sudden release of tension and fear of getting Covid-19 is lessening and that relief leads to an excess of wanting to get out and enjoy the sun or is it fear of a second spike of the virus so people are going to make the most of it? I have no answers.

I have been saddened by the irresponsible actions of some people, who seem to act without consideration of others. I have friends who are shielding or are vulnerable and the scenes of massed gatherings on beaches, violence, traffic jams and packed parks is creating such concern in them that they are delaying any emergence from their homes. My own 'risk assessment' for increasing my trips out for shopping for anything but groceries tells me to continue as I have been and stay at home as much as I can.

Perhaps the saddest thing for me is that while the fuller lockdown existed nature began to recover and reestablish itself. The environment was clean and fresh. When I see the pictures of the amount of rubbish - 55 tons cleared from Bournemouth beaches - I am both saddened and angry. Sad that the care shown to others less fortunate who needed help during lockdown seems to have been an effort that many have been glad to give up. Someone has to clear up the mess and it is the local volunteers who are faced with this task. Was caring about each other such a hard task? It feels to me as if all the time in lockdown where the environment was free of our footprints has almost made people (I am generalising here) want to come out and put their stamp on their 'property', the land' again and make up for all the time they had to give up their domination. That is why I am sad. The care did not last long and seems to be discarded too quickly.

Thinking about starting face-to-face working as a counsellor, supervisor or writing for wellbeing practitioner has been both difficult and easy. The desire to be able to be 'available' for clients who don't want to work online or on the telephone is balanced by my situation and Government guidelines, particularly those around distance and length of time you are with a person. The longer you are with someone in a room, with or without much ventilation, the greater the risk, even at 2 metres. My counselling room is small, I don't have 2 m between chairs and only have a window I could open but that reduces confidentiality. I do have a cloakroom that I use for clients but my chairs are cloth and not easy to wipe down or clean. I am also asking myself if I want to risk bringing the virus into my home as I work from home anyway. As things stand my decision is to continue with online and telephone working until restrictions are fully lifted.

Where are we and our world, the only home we have, going to be in 2021?

6th September 2020

How did we get to September! I type the month in and can hardly believe we are heading into the tail end of the year. Suddenly, very suddenly it seems, the autumn

has arrived with longer shadows, days shortening and days drawing in. It seems to be holding a sense of anticipation of what might be to arrive shortly. A state of uncertainty lingers which is mirrored in my life.

I keep an eye, and ear, on the news for the current state of the Covid-19 pandemic and carry out regular risk assessments on whether I can return to face-to-face in person working and whenever I undertake them I come to the same conclusion: the study I use in my home is too small to offer social distancing and adequate ventilation. I remain only able to offer video or telephone working. I will maintain this as necessary.

I am recommencing back at the local cancer charity, Star Throwers, where I offered voluntary counselling sessions for clients, supervision for other volunteers and staff there and Writing for Wellbeing Groups, the latter is not recommencing any time soon. The clients there may have been shielding or need to remain so if they are undergoing cancer treatments or caring for those that are. Immuno-compromised clients many not be able to go into the centre for the foreseeable future. So I will offer video and telephone session there as well. I'd had a break from there for a year following my hip surgery and bereavement but after my own therapy I feel ready to go back. I missed the staff and other volunteers and the intensity of the counselling work.

Also adding to the anticipation I will be moving house, again, but although I have sold and things are progressing, it is incredibly slow at the moment as everyone involved in the housing market is so very busy. With the stamp duty holiday and Covid-19 focusing people onto their lives around work and home, more people able to work from home and an exodus from large cities to smaller towns and rural areas everyone working in this area is flat out. Crazy times. The move will mean I review my working practices and as the clinic I hired a room from last year is not yet allowing counselling on their premises because rooms are too small and lack adequate ventilation. Larger rooms are now dedicated to therapies where touch and couches are require and those therapists are regular users. I may well decide that I can no longer offer sessions in central Norwich, but just from home (restrictions permitting) or stick with video/phone counselling for as long as it takes.

I have found there are some definite positive aspects of video or phone counselling/supervision. There is no travelling, using time out of your day or paying for fuel or wear and tear on the car. No struggling to park or pay parking fees or girding loins to get on public transport. You are not limited by your local area, you can look further afield and really find the therapist or supervisor you want to work with. Downsides for clients - getting privacy, getting out of the house, lack of 'real' contact with a human presence in the room. They seem to balance out for me and I definitely like the money I am saving not driving to my supervision or therapy.

So where am I going with this blog today? Nowhere really but it feels like the world around us is playing a waiting game as well, not knowing which way to go and when to make the move! All I hope is that when I next put an entry on my website I am not still waiting to move!

Stay aware, stay safe and look after yourselves.

3rd October 2020

Autumn has crashed into us pretty hard with winds and rain, seemingly overnight from a sunny, warm summers day last week to cold, wet and windy the next. I suppose that autumn winds and rain are pretty much a certainty in October, which is more than anything else seems to be in the world right now.

Hands. Face. Space

I feel like I am trying to work out cryptic clues as to what these words might mean and even in the context of Covid-19 they are brutally short and to the point. I also wonder if too many rules and restrictions just makes people throw up their hands in exasperation as to what the hell is going on. Counties, towns and areas within large cities will most likely have different restrictions than someone living a few miles away, if not a few streets away. What hope do we have if the politicians who instigated the rules with the health scientists can't figure it out?!

Perhaps Donald Trump succumbing to the coronavirus will be a wake up call, a reminder that even the great can be toppled, that power is no protection from something so insidious as an invisible virus.

I think that we can only be careful about how we interact with others, avoid busy times, plan things so you spend as little time as possible in crowded areas. Washing hands is effective, as an ex-nurse I understand this, lots of hand sanitiser, hand washing as well as lots of nice hand cream to stop skin getting sore and broken. Wearing a mask is not being scared of the virus, it is treating it with respect as well as protecting yourself and others. Space seems to be the hardest rule to adhere too and not always down to other people but simply building or street design.

Do what you can to help yourself, your friends and families, keep an eye on the numbers but don't be overwhelmed by them. If concerned, pay heed to that. If your gut starts telling you to take notice of it, listen and back off until it settles. I am definitely not going to get into any conversations about the NHS app for fear of starting a verbal sparring match, with the divisiveness this whole situation seems to generation. Those I have spoken to are polarised into it being great to its Big Brother getting in by the back door to track what you do in your life.

So I suppose we are stuck with, Hands. Face. Space for the time being.

22nd November 2020

I have moved house, again. First in 2019 and again at the end of October this year, 2020. I am beginning to see this unsettled feeling my my life as part of the pattern of the world during the Covid pandemic. The outer and inner worlds mirror each other very closely. I feel like they are too close right now and the degrees of separation are blurred and impossible to pin down.

OK, if that is how it feels what can be done about it? I don't know or think or feel there is a one size fits all answer that will click into place in this jagged jigsaw that

2020 is. What seems to work well for one person doesn't for another. Where mindfulness really helps one person, another person will be driven crazy by it because the now has no centre of stability or surety or security to hold onto in the 'now'. I will own that as my experience and for me it is reading or writing about other worlds, far away or space travel that gives me my hope and security. For others it may perhaps getting lost in a boxed set on the TV whilst wrapped up warm on the sofa is the way to deal with the 'now'. Or another way is going out into nature and reconnecting with the world of surety and the cyclical nature of life. Perhaps exercising gives that centre.

This is reminding me of William Butler Yeats's poem 'The Second Coming' particularly part of the first verse:

"...Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity."  
(Thank you to WB Yeats)

So I think and feel that each of us have to find our own centre, our own solidity and stability in ways that work for us during this time of Covid. For me it will be my reading and writing with a little bit of nature and keeping up with friends on Zoom or Skype. My cats are great distractions and I do love my cups of tea.

One thing I do feel is that it is not heading towards Christmas. I have no expectations nor am I looking forward to the 'festive' season at all this year. I'd rather ignore it altogether. I admit to always being abit 'humbug' but I'd rather know that we were winding down to an ending of the pandemic with the new year and spring a new opportunity to 'do different' in the world but I have a deep unease that nothing will really change when we emerge from this and we will have wasted an opportunity to reconnect with other people. My fear is that humanity in general will be so relieved to be able to 'get out and do their own thing' that the natural world will recede back into the distance and be ignore so it slides back into obscurity and continues to fade away. We can make a difference to the world and to each other.

Remember, we are made up of the same molecules as the stars and everything else in the universe.

Think about it. "We are star stuff. We are the universe made manifest." (with thanks to J M Straczynski)