



FIVE THINGS I LEARNT DURING LOCKDOWN



by Carolyn Spring

It's been a year since the first lockdown and for all of us the world has turned upside down. Here's five things that I've learned over this year of pandemic.

1. SKIN HUNGER IS PHYSICALLY PAINFUL

During the first lockdown, I went 69 days without being in the same physical space as another human being. It impacted me deeply. I couldn't at the time put it into words: a daily scraping sound in the soul, like fingers down a blackboard, a sensation that I couldn't locate or quantify. Eventually I realised how much I missed the bodily humanity of others.

Living alone during lockdown I could count on one hand the number of times

I physically touched someone. I'm not a super-touchy-feely person at the best of times, but skin hunger is real, and skin hunger hurts. Over the last year we've been trained to think of people's bodies in terms of contamination, of keeping our distance, of not touching, of risk. And yet it's as if my skin is reaching out for them, rebelling against the directives of social distancing, and the compliance of my front brain. There's a yearning, a longing for human contact, for the warmth of skin on skin. It's lonely and painful to never touch another human being. It hurts – physically.

2. I USED TO DO AN AWFUL LOT OF THINGS I DIDN'T ENJOY DOING

I know this because there's a lot of things I'm not looking forward to starting up



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again after lockdown ends. Life has been a lot less manic. I enjoy the quiet, thrumming peacefulness of an evening of solitude. I don't want to rush out again, to fill up my diary, to bustle and hustle and do things I didn't really want to do. There are so many things that I do miss but I feel almost panicky at the idea of my time and spaciousness being squandered by the activities of duty and social nicety. My life has become simpler, sleeker – less cluttered with unwanted activity. I don't want to lose that. I've used lockdown as a proxy for saying no. As we emerge from our cocoons of solitude, I will need to learn the art of an active boundary again.

3. LITTLE LIFTS ARE MORE RESOURCING THAN I'D REALISED

People-watching in Starbucks, mirror-chatting with the hairdresser, folding fajitas with friends in Chiquitos, the wonderful waste of a weekend in IKEA ... It's not until you lose these things that you realise how much they reset your mood. I'm not naturally prone to boredom – certainly my mind never is – but my body is. I don't need much, but I realised how much I appreciate the energy shifts that come from a shift in environment. Monotony is draining. Over decades I'd learned the skill of oscillating back into my window of tolerance, back from the too much of amber or the too little of red, simply by a change of scene, by social engagement at a comfy and controllable distance. A

year without little lifts has strained my resilience.

4. WE CANNOT PREDICT THE FUTURE

We never have done, but we like to believe otherwise. Like most people, I had plans for 2020, none of which came to fruition. The beginning of lockdown felt like starring as an extra in a slow-motion disaster movie: an apocalypse of lack – of loo rolls, of hand sanitiser, of paracetamol, even of pasta. I'd always assumed that having delivered 170 training days by March 2020, I would in the remainder of the year deliver 20 more. Life looks so different now to 365 days ago when Boris said so sternly, 'You must stay at home.' Did he really mean for nearly a year? I'm glad I didn't know. It's easier to grieve the losses when they drip slowly away. Here we are a year later, hopeful but wary, knowing now perhaps more than ever that we cannot predict the future.

5. IT'S OKAY JUST TO SURVIVE

I used to assume that to survive I needed to thrive. That last year has shown me that surviving on its own – no frills, no extras, no side dishes of accomplishment – is enough. I didn't die of Covid. I didn't die of loneliness. I didn't die of collective trauma, or the grief of shattered dreams. I didn't die of bewilderment at this world turned upside down. I'm still here, and I'm grateful. I've been learning Spanish (339 consecutive days and counting) –



not because I ever imagine I'll use it, or because it makes me a better person, or because it's the epitome of thriving. I've been learning Spanish because in the midst of chaos I simply needed something to aim for. I won't change the world with my language learning. It's

just something that has helped me mark the passing of days, the achievement of survival, another tick and 'ta-dah' of triumph that today I spent ten minutes doing something that I did yesterday too. It's okay not to do great things. It's great that I'm alive. *It's okay just to survive.* •

