

Since I've been 'trapped' in this apartment since March, I've really started to notice just how very loud it is here. Even while writing this I can hear the call of a raven outside my window. I don't much mind the sound of ravens though, they remind me of some of my favorite places. The sound of a raven can almost transport me to my daily run on the trail around the lake. I can almost smell the aroma of the lake, the forest, and the soil. I can almost hear the gentle lap of the waves along the shore and the rustle of the leaves around me. I can almost feel the breeze on my face and the warm sun on my skin.

Here though, here in Los Angeles I hear much more intrusive sounds than just the ravens.

I live in a quadplex apartment sandwiched between two other small apartment buildings like mine, barely an alley between us. We live on the top floor, a middle age couple lives below us, a single man lives next to us, and an older man lives under him with his adult son. Behind the building is the main street of the Riviera, housing bars, restaurants, and retail, many of which have moved outdoors to continue operation during the pandemic.

I always used to hear the sound of the bar down the street. I could hear drunk people leaving as they closed, sometimes yelling and laughing into the night. Around 1-2am I used to hear the employees emptying out their recycling with the clashing of empty glass bottles collected through the day as they hit the bin. It was like clockwork. While they're still in operation, they aren't nearly as full as they used to be and I no longer hear the crash of recycling nightly, nor do I hear as many drunken revelers.

I hear my neighbor's toddler screaming throughout the day, every day. It's driving me completely mad, but I also have empathy for the parents. I feel for the parents who now have to try and work at home while their children cry and scream and have trouble with distance learning. I've never wanted children of my own and here I am, stuck between screaming kids in my own building and the buildings surrounding me.

The couple that lives below us have two grandchildren that come by often. They used to come every weekend and they'd stay with them most days during the summer. They still visit, though they didn't for some time in the early months of lockdown. They used to have little 'happy hours' every evening with two of our neighbors. They'd sit outside and have some wine and talk about random things to unwind. Then one next-door neighbor moved and now they don't go outside as much as they used to. Weekends are still incredibly loud with the kids laughing and screaming and the parents having a good time, but at least they're happy.

Those neighbors also have two small dogs that never shut up. They start barking whenever they see anyone coming. We've lived here for 3 years and they still bark at us. It used to bother me a little bit, but now that I've been stuck in here for...how long has it been? 8 months? It's driving me insane. They're like an alarm bell for delivery people. Hell, they're an alarm bell for the neighborhood cat we affectionately call "fat cat" (his collar doesn't have a name on it – he likes to visit our cats through the living room window) and the birds that like to sit on the overhead wires.

Cars seem louder and more frequent. A group of motorcyclists come by around 12 - 1am nightly, loud enough that they usually set off a car alarm. There are usually a few cars that do the same throughout the day and night. I swear I hear that car alarm every. single. day.

Our cats also seem louder too. My little house panther gets very nervous when my SO leaves the apartment to go to the store now. She cries her fuzzy little head off wondering where he is or where I am until I come comfort her. She seems to be doing this more often than she used to, perhaps because now she's used to us being around 24/7. Our other cat is similar, she doesn't get as distressed, but she'll 'catch' and toy mouse and then cry until I say her name or go see what she's up to. She usually triumphantly brings me the mouse and drops it at my feet. I've noticed that when I'm upset, she'll bring me more toys.

Weekly, I hear a man in a van who comes by on the night before trash day to dig through the recycling bins. I hear the familiar clank of the glass and the hollow sound of empty aluminum cans as they crash into each other. I think about how these increased recycling collecting visits might be driven by the desperate need to make it through this pandemic. I worry about him touching all those things that have been in other people's homes, will he be infected in his efforts to remain fed and with a roof over his head?

I miss the forest. I miss being alone. I'm so very tired of being stuck in here with all this noise. I used to be able to go to the forest and just hear...nothing but nature. The gentle rustle of leaves and the calls of a raven here and there, but nothing like this, no bombardment of the senses. I could just truly be alone and that's the only time I ever felt at peace. I've had a tumultuous 32 years on earth and peace isn't something I come by easily, so I grab it when I can get it. I used to sit on a rock and just close my eyes and greedily take in all the sensorial beauty like I was starving for it. It's delicious and I miss it more than anything.

Now all I hear is screaming children, cars, the ratta tat tat of my SO's keyboard as he works, dogs barking, and maybe, sometimes, I can stand by the window and smell the incredible smell of the ocean in the margins of the day. It's fleeting. It's intoxicating.

I'd say I took these things for granted before, but I honestly never have. I've always reveled in the pure joy of the senses and moving to the city destroyed that joy and filled it instead with abject anxiety. I hate it here. I've never hated it here as much as I do now, 8 months into lockdown. My mental health has taken an extreme nosedive. Every little thing is augmented. The noise and the knowledge that I may be stuck in this noise for significantly longer is...unsettling. It's uncomfortable but I'd still rather do that than risk my life, my SO's life, or *any other person's life* by carrying on as if anything was normal. Nothing is normal anymore. Sometimes I wonder if I fell asleep a year ago and have been dreaming all this and one day I'll wake up from this nightmare, but that's obviously not true.

You might say, "go outside, you're allowed to go outside!" But the truth is every time I try, I run into far too many maskless people who refuse to give passers by the space to pass safely. There are far too many people who can't do the bare minimum to keep their fellow humans safe from this virus. There's no escaping other people here, there's always someone out there on the sidewalk or out by the ocean. The lack of empathy I've seen in this country since February is

just...astounding. I worry that I may never get to see my grandfather again. I worry for people targeted by racism, homophobia, and transphobia as 'leadership' encourages such behavior. I worry about the very future of the nation at all hours of the day. Obsessively scrolling through the news has become just part of my day now and I miss not having a cloud of existential dread over me with every waking moment.

So here I sit, in the middle of yet another heatwave, knowing I'm privileged enough to be in the position I am with a roof over my head and food to eat, safe in the knowledge that my SO has the money and employment to get us through this. So many people don't have that. I know what it's like to be down to your last \$1, and every day I think about the people who are struggling to get by. I got lucky, so many people don't.

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