

MY COVID-19 DIARY

When the Covid-19 broke out in China in November 2019, I was disinterested by it with a complete unwillingness to comment on the subject as if it would have disappeared by not addressing the issue. A typical attitude when the problem does not concern you directly followed by a lift of shoulders (ooh well, poor them). I firmly believed that it was another catastrophic event happening in the world, so nothing was new!!! In early February, the deaths count became alarming, but my attitude did not change maybe because I thought that being unable to afford any international travel therefore the virus was not a worry. Forgetting those travelling back and forth would become the worst carriers.

I still remembered a family friend expressing her fears about losing thousand pounds to a restaurant. She was also concerned about the wedding cancellation which I thought was ridiculous because, I did not believe that would happen. I concluded that she was fretting unnecessarily until she corrected me by saying it was not a laughing matter (rightly so!) The same week in late February, I ventured into a restaurant in London called Angus Steakhouse during the lunch hour. I ordered steak with fries but what struck me was that this Central London restaurant which should be teeming with people was not packed during this lunch hour. I related the lack of customer to either the cost of the meals or, because of the latest food trend where people are now swapping meat for plant-based food. (Or most people were already conscious of the virus!)

Although I had taken the decision of not going to classes that same week, my behaviour was highly controversial especially sitting in a restaurant in central London. I had secretly agreed with a classmate to boycott classes because we were worried about the risks of infection. I received an email from my university cancelling all classes with immediate closure due to the pandemic. This news came as a

surprise because the week prior, the university officials had reassured everyone that it was business as usual and that all its facilities would remain open.

I resumed my relentless attitude as someone who sees silver lining at the face of adversity. Or, was it the famous British ' Keep Calm and Carry On ' I had inadvertently acquired whilst living in England that was taking effect? Looking back, I can honestly confess that I was a "Covidiot". By not respecting the health advice.

I fully came to term with the virus after walking into Waitrose weeks later hoping to purchase some packets of my favourite corn kernel snacks. It was then I realised that I have been careless with my life and to those around me. I was utterly dismayed to find almost empty shelves and even more shocking, I noticed that essential commodities such as flour, pasta, corn kernel, etc.... had vanished. I remembered confessing to a fellow shopper whilst looking at the devastating appearance of the shelves that "I have just woken up". To that she replied, "me too and stay safe".

After that eerie experience, I rushed home and scavenged the internet for any essentials presuming Britain would have gone for an advanced lockdown such as China.

At the beginning of April, the numbers of people dying from Covid-19 was spiralling out of control in London. For someone who enjoyed being outdoors I was forced like everyone to go into self-isolation. As a result of this, I spent six weeks indoors: cleaning the house from top to bottom which included a mixture of bleach, Dettol and various antibacterial although we were battling against a virus and a clever one I may add! Thus, having sprayed the house up and down including cleaning the carpet, I somehow felt at peace somehow or I could put it down to survival mode. Either way without realising it, my brain had switched into fighting mode.

Unfortunately, there were some negative effects on my personal health during our ' new normal '. For instance, my sleeping mode was destroyed as I began to wake up during the night watching various news channels from around the world. Thanks to the internet, the world is at arm's reach so I fed my growing fear with online news programs from Spanish editions such as: Telemundo, RTVE, and RT. That deluge of information brought me many doubts on the origin of the Covid-19, and how it was affecting other people around the world. During this period, I was able to see how other countries were dealing with the pandemic especially how to contain the virus. In addition, I was extremely concerned about the British Government's lackadaisical attitude toward the virus especially the cabinet's refusal to adopt drastic measures which other European countries like France and Italy had taken as far back as to reduce the spread of the virus.

In addition to the alarming death figures due to the Covid-19, this pandemic has raised new challenges. Especially those suffering from mental health, whom have been affected by the loneliness of social distancing. And those who have become reluctant to socialise yet again. Furthermore, I belong to an affectionate culture where we are used to closeness such as: hugging, touching and kiss on a cheek. It describes a warm custom but I have been wondering if we will lose those qualities?? Or perhaps after the dust settles, will we get back to our lovely normality??

By Christelle Pene.