

Lockdown diaries: Ryan, juggling restaurants, university teaching, two books and a baby

It feels like Groundhog's Day

Ryan's goals are to write as much poetry as possible, become a confident video lecturer because lord knows when we'll be back in the physical classroom, and teach his son the names of the colors in English. Also, as someone in the restaurant industry, he explains that for a lot of small businesses, staying closed two months will be like giving up 5 years of profit.

Timothy Ryan Day (Ryan for friends) has been living in Madrid for 14 years. He teaches early modern literature and ecocriticism at Saint Louis University. He is a founding partner of [Grupo Bang Bang](#), a popular restaurant group run by his wife Claudia, comprising The Toast Café, Roll, Slow Mex, and The Village Tap Room. He has books forthcoming with Routledge and Adelaide Books, and you can find his poetry collection at [Lemon Street Press](#).

What was your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?

Before the lockdown I dropped off my son at daycare each morning on my way to teach at St. Louis University. I would usually write for a couple hours in the morning as I am trying to meet deadlines for two books. In the afternoon after I picked him up we would go to see his mom at one of our restaurants. She does all the hard work keeping the businesses going! Then the three of us would go to the park together for a little while. In the evenings I would grade, edit, make dinner, and put him to bed. Somewhere in there I try to squeeze some exercise, some meditation, some reading...



These days, I wake up, make breakfast, take the dog out, record a video lecture or answer posts on blackboard, make lunch, put my son down for a nap, watch the news, watch youtube videos of children's songs, do some exercise, make some bread, cook dinner, play guitar, write for a bit if it is at all possible, talk to a friend or family member on zoom, take the dog out again, watch the news, drink some wine... There is not a lot of variety in that order of events... It feels like

Groundhog's Day...

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

Well, this is a two-part answer for me. First, the University has closed, so we're teaching online. I think both students and professors have been really flexible and things have progressed in as productive a manner as possible. We've moved things online, and I personally have learned a lot about the technology of online teaching. I think this experience will make me a better teacher.

Second, the restaurants. It's been devastating. Restaurants are low-margin businesses in the best of times. I'm talking 3 or 4% profits if things are going well. The only way for most small businesses to get through this is going to be to take on a lot of government backed debt. So, for a lot of restaurants, staying closed two months will be like giving up 5 years of profit. And they probably already have debt! So, my guess is that a lot of places don't open again...

How are you coping?

How does one know that one is coping? Hah! We'll see when this all comes to an end. In the beginning, for the most part, I just relied on the kinetic energy of a routine. After the first two weeks I began to realize this may be a sort of pathological behavior that I had dragged along with me into quarantine. I think mindless motion keeps a lot of us moving through life, covering up anxieties and staving off

vulnerability.

This has been an opportunity to stop, breathe, realize that it is okay to just feel frustrated and even a bit sad, and look at whatever piece of the sky you can see from your window, bask a bit in the existential crisis, and pray that we come out of this as a wiser species that can keep this planet in livable condition...

Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?

With a baby and a dog there's lots of comedy. The dog is being very patient with a child who has just discovered he can be used as a small horse. There's a fly outside the window that's been keeping the dog occupied. That's been a source of comedy. The politics would be funny too, if they weren't so tragic...

What goals are you hoping to achieve as our time in lockdown continues?

I want to finish my two books, build a better (less passive) relationship to food, teach my son the names of the colors in English, write as much poetry as possible, and become a confident video lecturer since lord only knows when we'll be back in a physical classroom...

Who are you in quarantine with? Any advice for people in your similar situation?

Wife and child. Love them. Talk. Cook. Be vulnerable. We all need a little extra right now...

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

Bring my son to the park. He's starved for the outdoors.

Have you noticed any acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

The clapping is about the only daily interaction I have outside the house! So, I'll rely on that as my vision of kindness... I have also noticed a generally kinder tenor to Twitter! But, that may have more to do with the fact that I primarily follow Shakespeare scholars, ecocritics, and bakers... Maybe also just the glances from the balconies and windows across the road. Everyone smiles. Everyone's grateful for just a little eye contact. That is nice.

Do you have any tips for how we can help those in need?

Just be supportive of local businesses! I see the lines outside of Carrefour and Mercadona... Bring that business to your local fruit and veg market. Buy bread at local independent bakeries. Go to the wine shop instead of the supermarket. And buy some local books. Most little presses sell online.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

Putting businesses in debt right now is going to aggravate the problem when we get back to a weakened economy. Provide support to PYMES and autonomos. They aren't the enemy. They want to help. Also, please learn from this... We always hear that we can't do anything about global warming without massive damage to the economy. And, that's true, but we are also seeing that we can indeed shut things down and make painful transitions when it's in our collective interest. The system is just a story we tell ourselves, and we can tell a different version of it.

What's going on in your hometown and would you like to send them a message?

Big shoulders, Chicago! You'll be fine.

- You can find Ryan's restaurant group's info at [Grupo Bang Bang](#)
- You can read Ryan's poetry work at [Lemon Street Press](#), a local publishing house which is also holding submissions

for a new charitable project. More info just below.

Call for submissions!

If you're a writer, photographer, poet or artist currently living under lockdown in Madrid, we encourage you to submit your work to the Madrid Quarantine Anthology which will be printed by Lemon Street Press. All proceeds will go to charitable organizations in Madrid. Submission deadline is April 30th!

[Madrid Quarantine Anthology](#)

Check out all [Madrid lockdown stories](#)

If you'd like to get involved and share a compelling story from this ongoing chapter of history, reach out to Daphne Binioris (daphne@veracontent.com) and Daniel Catalan (a96039@aup.edu)

