

Lockdown diaries: James, co-founder of Devour Tours, on leadership and innovation in the food & tourism industry

There's nothing quite like being boxed into a corner to force yourself to become creative

James was launching food tours in cities across Europe just before the lockdown hit, so he and his team have had to drastically change course. Now they're innovating ways to keep sharing their passion for food and local culture with the world, and working together to get through this.

James Blick is the co-founder of [Devour Tours](#) and creator of hit Youtube channel [Spain Revealed](#), where he shares authentic culinary and cultural insights. In the days prior to the lockdown measures taking effect, I myself had the pleasure of taking the San Sebastian Pintxos and Wine tour led by Devour and visited Petritegi, James' go-to sidrería. It was truly a unique experience and provided an enriching window into the culinary offerings of the Basque Country.

As we wait for the tourism sector to bounce back, the team at Devour has been creating [online experiences](#) such as [live cooking classes](#) (yesterday James taught us how to cook a *tortilla* out of his own kitchen) and a digital cookbook: "[Recipes from the Devours Tours Kitchen](#)" with 52 recipes from cities across Europe, straight from local guides and chefs.

Here's James' lockdown diary.

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

In Devour, we were in full swing expanding our business by launching new tours in Paris, Rome, Lisbon, and London, and hiring new team members to help us to grow in these new destinations.

In my personal life, my wife and I had just bought an apartment in Madrid, and we were starting renovations. A week before we went into lockdown we were picking tiles and toilets. So, like for everyone, this virus caught us right in the middle of making plans for the future.

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

Massively. Tourism and hospitality were the first to feel this crisis. About 6 weeks ago we started to realise that this was a serious situation. But every day we made a plan (cut costs 20%, for example), those plans were out of date and not drastic enough by the same time the next day. The majority of our guests are Americans and when Trump announced the travel ban we decided to suspend tours until 1 May (and clearly we'll have to suspend them longer).

At the time it felt like a forward-thinking decision, but

within 48 hours of making the call, we'd gone into lockdown. It's been incredible how fast this thing has moved. Sadly, we've had to lay off most of our team. Ideally, this is a temporary measure, but with zero tours and massive amounts of refunds being processed, the company would have gone under in a few months if we hadn't taken drastic steps. For those on our team who didn't have access to unemployment benefits, they're working part-time during the lockdown so they can pay their rent and get by – and together we're working to create a foundation for the future.

As I mentioned, this week we've launched our [Recipes from the Devour Tours Kitchen](#) digital cookbook that the entire team worked on together. It's been a true team effort and labour of love – and it's packed with 50+ incredible local recipes from across our cities in Europe. All the recipes are from staff members, guides and vendors, including lots of dishes we try on our tours. Perfect for lockdown cooking! Sales of it will really help Devour have a better shot at getting through. If anyone is curious or would like to buy it, you can [check it out here](#).



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

I wish I had a better answer for that. A simple walk with my wife alongside Madrid's river would be lovely.

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

There is a videographer team we work with who creates YouTube videos for Devour. In the early days of lockdown, they sent us an unsolicited video they'd made that compiled footage of previous shoots with messages about all the things that we love and that bind us as a company. It was an inspiring video

and something perfect to share on social media with our guests (who we call Devourers).

More importantly, it was a striking act of generosity from them. They had work dry up so used the extra time to create something for free for their clients. It reminded me that this is an important time to slow down and think of the people around you who might need help and to reach out to them.

How are you coping?

I would love to have a day or two of the infamous Coronavirus lockdown boredom! I'm coping by getting on, but also there is no other choice given I work in tourism. Each day is filled with work to chart Devour's course through this and also I'm trying to pivot my [YouTube channel](#) (where I usually feature videos of me eating in bars) to more 'at home' content. I think a key lesson for me is that those who take advantage of this time to experiment and try new things will find those experiments pay off on the other side of this – there's nothing quite like being boxed into a corner to force yourself to become creative.

Probably the most important coping mechanism for me is an hour of yoga every morning. I use an app called [Yoga Studio](#), which costs about €2 a month, and there are a variety of classes I do. Also, I'm conscious not to eat crap or drink too much (or too early) – apparently beer sales in Spain are up over 70%!

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

Work-wise, my key goal is to navigate Devour through this. I'm sure the products and ideas that we create during this time will outlast the virus and the lockdown. We've just come out with a digital recipe book this week featuring recipes from all the team, and also kicking off a series of daily live online workshops and cook-a-longs on our [Facebook page](#) – everything from how to prepare a Madrid aperitif, to everything you needed to know about coffee, to me cooking a *tortilla de patatas* live.



Once we're giving tours again, I think there will be [online experiences](#) that we continue to sell. Also, I'm loving cooking (isn't everyone?) – I've been making cooking videos for my

YouTube channel, and I'm also looking forward to getting out the paella kit on the terrace once the weather warms up and figuring out how to make a damn good paella once and for all!

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

If your industry isn't financially impacted, or if it's financially benefiting from this, then certainly supporting small businesses who need help by buying their online products. When a business is struggling and needs cash, anything helps and all sales uplift spirits. Help doesn't need to be financial. In our building, people are offering to do shopping for elderly residents who don't want to risk going out.

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

With my wife, Yoly. We get on really well, so I don't feel like I have much advice to give. I guess keep a structure. If you used to have a date night once a week, find time to do that. It's easy to get lazy and wind up just eating dinner in front of Netflix each night. Set the table, eat a meal, talk to each other. And also, just because you're locked in together, doesn't mean you have to do everything together at all times. Don't feel guilty about needing "me time" – a good way to do this is to listen to a podcast and cook something, while your partner is in the lounge.

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

Provide some specific relief for tourism companies – debt relief or more flexible options for protecting your employees while also protecting cash flow. The measures introduced so far seem designed under the presumption that once the lockdown ends, all businesses will be able to open their doors at 100%. I'm sure they know that's not the case, so I just wish they would give support that reflects that reality. But international tourism is going to take 9-18 months to recover, or longer.

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

Auckland (New Zealand) has COVID-19 cases but a lot fewer, and its physical distance will help it control the virus more I would think. NZ's physical isolation was part of the reason I left, but it also has many benefits. I have no message to send – I just hope that people treat this seriously, and take precautions early, rather than only really taking notice when the death rates began shooting up (as happened to us here in Spain).

- Follow James on IG: [@jamesblickspain](#) and his YouTube channel [Spain Revealed](#)
- Also follow [Devour Tours](#) on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) to stay up to date on their [online experiences](#) and upcoming tour dates
- Check out the [Recipes from the Devour Tours Kitchen](#)

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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!

<http://lemonstreetpress.com/quarantine-anthology/>

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Lockdown diaries: Valentina, bringing communities of people together online and keeping spirits high

Continue supporting each other and your community members and we will come out of this strong and ready for what is to come next.

Originally from London, Valentina Ruffoni is a community consultant and events manager who's has been living in Madrid for over three years. She's also a food lover and the founder of the nearly 7,000-member Facebook group [Eat Out Madrid](#). Due to the lockdown, her sister group [Eat In Madrid](#) has become the place to be for community members to share all the recipes they're cooking up at home these days. Check it out.

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

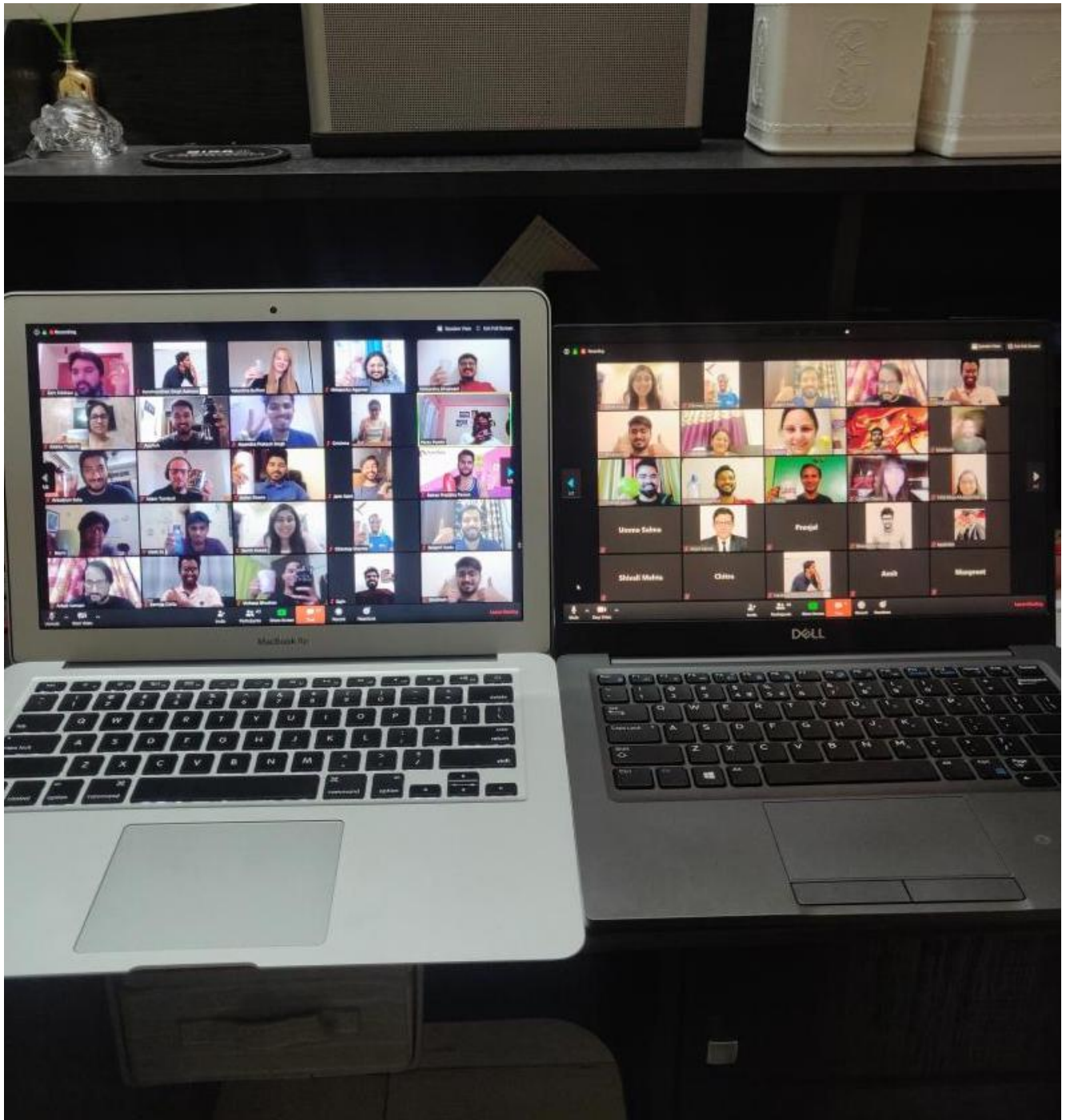
Before the lockdown I spent most of my time organizing and hosting in-person events and speaking in front of large audiences moving all around the city. Now the closest person I have been in contact with is my husband, so for a very extroverted and social person this has been challenging.

I'm cooking more than ever (before this we used to eat out a

lot) and working from home. I'm also hosting several events online and being very active in my online communities, as there's a clear need for social interaction on the internet right now. Providing a place online for people to come together and share their recipes, dishes and favorite eateries to order from seems to be helping a lot.

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

Unfortunately, the main industry I work in, the events industry, has been severely affected, forcing us to explore ways of doing things online. However, this has been a great time to adapt and come up with creative ways to bring the in-person experience digitally.



“How to care for a community in crisis” online event with [Community Folks](#)

The community industry has also seen a huge increase in interaction and support which has taught me so much about my members and what they want and need. It is during this time that we must remember the importance of ourselves as community managers, how we manage our time and interact with our communities, to keep spirits high.

People are craving the in-person connection more than ever and unfortunately with most of us inside we rely on online platforms to communicate. Continue supporting each other and your members and we will come out of this strong and ready for what is to come next.

And teaching has seen a rise in students taking classes online and has acted as my safety net when I'm not able to make an income through organizing events.

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

As the founder of [Eat Out Madrid](#) and [Eat In Madrid](#) I'm a big advocate of supporting the food and drink industry especially during this time. Many businesses are still open offering delivery of their products or even gift certificates for future visits, so I always encourage people to reach out to their favorite places and help where they can. Other ways you can help is by simply leaving a review within the community or on their dedicated sites which helps attract future customers and when this is all over, we can go and enjoy their amazing offerings once again.

How are you coping?

Mondays seem to be the worst day, I'm not sure why because half the time I have no idea what day it is. I'm a big food lover, but surprisingly not a fan of breakfast, however I've learnt how important it is to get into a routine and start the day off right with good wholesome food and continue throughout

the day. It has definitely helped me curb my temptation for snacks throughout the day.

One other thing I would highly suggest is getting dressed. It is so easy to sit in your pyjamas all day, but I've found myself become way more productive by doing this. Plus you never know when you may need to jump on a video call with friends, family, clients or anymore for that matter. #alwaysbeprepared

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



The 8pm daily routine of clapping for the medical staff that others have mentioned has been especially uplifting. One of our neighbors has a speaker and disco lights and plays *Resistiré* by Duo Dinámico followed by *I will survive* by Gloria Gaynor, it is a great way for the community to come together even though we may have never met each other before. I hope that when we can come out and socialize in person again we can celebrate that we made it through the situation and our residential community can continue to support each other.

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

We moved into a new apartment in February and I'm determined to finish unpacking my stuff out of boxes. I keep looking at them and saying tomorrow... I really have no excuse. I have also started a little herb garden so I hope that soon I'll be able to enjoy some fresh oregano, coriander, parsley and basil on my food. I just hope the rain holds off so they don't drown outside.

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

I think the first thing would be to take a long walk, I am very fortunate to have a large Carrefour literally 2 minutes from my door but that means the walk isn't so long. I miss the change of scenery and seeing people and cars around going about their day.

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

I am in quarantine with my husband. This situation has come at a somewhat good time for us as he works away a lot and we often don't get to spend much time together. We're enjoying being able to live together, cook and support each other during these uncertain times.

Something we've been doing is trying to avoid listening in and watching the daily news constantly as we can easily be overpowered by information which can only lead to panic. For others quarantined in couples, take this moment to enjoy each other's company and take each day as it comes together.

- You can connect with Valentina on [LinkedIn](#)
- Join Valentina's Facebook online communities [Eat Out Madrid](#) & [Eat In Madrid](#), as well as [CMX Connect Madrid](#)
- Also read Valentina's article on our sister publication The Content Mix: "[How I grew multiple online communities and became a thought leader in my niche](#)"

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Lockdown diaries: Amy, unethically evicted by her landlord during quarantine

Be gracious with others. People are very anxious for numerous reasons right now... what we are living through is clearly not normal.

Amy's landlord made the decision to terminate their rental agreement at the end of February, giving Amy a month to find a new abode. When the state of emergency was declared and attending apartment viewings was rendered unfeasible, Amy's landlord aggressively insisted that these unprecedented circumstances changed nothing and that she had to leave by April 1. Luckily Amy's co-worker, who's staying with friends, has offered Amy her flat to live in during quarantine, for as long as she needs.

Amy is a California native who has been living in Madrid for 3.5 years as a teaching assistant and also sings in a Gospel Choir in her spare time. Here's her lockdown diary.

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

I was running through life “a cien” as they say. Apart from work, private classes, and some other activities I’m involved in, my landlady had just given me 30 days notice that my rental contract was ending on April 1, so I was looking online and visiting rooms all over Madrid. My anxiety level was really high but I don’t think I even realized how elevated it was. Today, after 2 weeks of being forced to stay at home, sit still and live less hectic of a life, I’m so grateful because I couldn’t have continued at that rate much longer.

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

Once the state of alarm was declared in Spain, it became nearly impossible to go out and look for flats. In spite of this, my landlady became increasingly insistent that my stay there would not be extended, which meant staying in my flat was turning into an emotionally exhausting and anxious experience. When sharing this with friends and family both here in Madrid and other parts of the world, I was flooded with words of support, anger on my behalf, offers to solicit legal advice, advice on how to act going forward, and plenty of sympathies.

However, the greatest act of kindness I’ve received during this time of need has been a co-worker of mine who, as she is staying with friends during the quarantine and in recognizing that it was essential that I get out of my flat, offered me her house to stay in as long as I need, a much needed and invaluable respite.

How are you coping?

I've been talking with friends and family both locally and abroad who I wouldn't normally have time to in my "pre-lockdown" life. In particular, a friend of mine created a group on the video chat app Marco Polo which helps me to fill the time and feel connected with people who are on the other side of the world.

Apart from that, I've been doing virtual dance and workout classes, limiting the amount of TV I watch and stretching to pass the time. Another thing that has been so critical in coping has been taking time to say or list the things I am grateful for – a grateful heart is a satisfied one.

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

Now that I've successfully moved out of my previous flat and am in more of a mentally safe space, I'd like to take time to process this whole experience – think about it, cry about it, be angry about it, accept it, or whatever.

I'm lucky because I haven't lost my job and am in a safe place to pass the quarantine so I want to take advantage of this time to care for myself and my mental health. I'm also wanting to get back to studying C1 level Spanish and who knows, perhaps even be able to do the splits!

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

This pandemic has come in a moment when few schools are ready and properly equipped to teach online. Many aren't which means some language assistants churning out videos, online resources, games, projects, and activities for their students while there are others like me whose schools are still fighting an uphill battle in figuring out this whole online learning thing, much less communicating on how to incorporate their eager language assistants into it. Then, of course, there are people who have gone home and unexpectedly lost their jobs here.

This is an unprecedented time in education and we are on just as steep of a learning curve as our students.

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

That day still seems somewhat far off. I'll probably go for a walk or maybe even a run in the park, hopefully with friends! Just before the lockdown, I was getting really into running as a way to manage anxiety but when this finishes, the thing that I might be most yearning for is to see people in the flesh. Maybe we'll skip the run and just have a good-old picnic to catch up and enjoy being in each other's physical presence.

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

Be gracious with others. People are very anxious for numerous reasons right now – they don't know how they'll make ends meet. Or they or someone they love is in a high-risk group. We don't know the lives and hearts of the people we interact with at the pharmacy, grocery store, or even those we share a house with; but, we can be gracious and willing to retract justifiable blame, anger or frustration under normal circumstances given that what we are living through is clearly not normal.

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

I was in quarantine with my landlady's daughter and her boyfriend (who I was never really consulted on about him joining us during confinement). They stuck to a pretty set teleworking and work-out schedule. My roommate's boyfriend was silent on all of what was going on regarding my pending eviction but my roommate was notably concerned that I wasn't looking (or rather, couldn't look) for places and would be unable to move out by April 1.

Now, however, I'm alone in my friend's apartment. It is the first time in my life that I've lived alone so I'm interested to see how it goes.

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

I would probably thank them for not cutting my job and those of the many language assistants who chose to stay in a foreign country amidst a global pandemic because their prospects here are better than what would have been if they went home. In that vein, I'd tell them to consider the lives of people whose studies and practicums have been interrupted through all of this and make reasonable and doable provisions for them to be able to complete what they need to.

I'd ask the government to be creative, to listen to what educators and students need when making decisions about how to proceed, and be open to new and formerly unconventional ways of getting things done.

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

From what I've heard and seen, my hometown is about a week behind Madrid in terms of ordering people to shelter in place and mandating that businesses shut down. My message to them would be to stick with it. Now is not the time to bury your head in the sand or invent conspiracy theories as excuses for not complying.

- If you or someone you know is being evicted in Madrid right now, you can contact the [Sindicato de Inquilinos](#) (Madrid tenants' union)

- Also read this article by Madrid No Frills which explains more: [Madrid's anti-eviction warriors](#)

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Lockdown diaries: Ignacio, firefighter on duty & Spanish national lacrosse captain

The people in my town are making handmade masks to help doctors, nurses, policemen, and firemen. I got one customized from my neighbor and it made me so happy and has made me feel safer at work.

Providers of essential public services are working round-the-clock to maintain order during the COVID-19 crisis. Ignacio, a fireman, reported that his team of firefighters is taking extra precautions to protect their health while saving lives.

Ignacio "Nacho" Farjas Gómez is a 26-year-old Madrid-native

working as a fireman in Huesca and during peacetime acts as captain of both the Spanish national lacrosse team and Madrid's local lacrosse team, the former of which has granted him the opportunity to travel for international competitions in locations such as Gloucester, Massachusetts, and Netanya, Israel. While walking his dog in the vacant streets of Huesca, he befriended a stray kitten that followed him home and joined his family. He named it Covid.

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



I used to live in Madrid before the lockdown. As a fireman, I work 24-hour shifts and then I have 4 days off, so I was able to live in Madrid and commute to work in Huesca, up in the Pyrenees. I used to workout 4-5 times a week and play lacrosse

with my club team (Madrid lacrosse) twice per week. I also had tryout weekends with the national team.

Now everything has changed, I relocated to the countryside with my fiancée to be closer to the fire department where I work because commuting between Madrid and Huesca would be impossible during the lockdown. I adapted a room in our new house into a gym so I can keep fit for my job and for the lacrosse championships. The upcoming European cup was supposed to be next July but it has been postponed.



How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

I continue to work, as firemen have to be constantly prepared

in case of an emergency. The current situation makes our already high-pressure tasks even more complicated. At the fire station, I have to be a safe distance from my colleagues so we don't get infected from each other, so we feel lonely during the shifts. During car accidents, we have to try to save people's lives and at the same time protect ourselves from potential coronavirus infection.

On a particularly rough day, we got a call from social services saying that a woman, who was diagnosed with the virus, was on the verge of suicide. When we arrived at her building we saw the woman in her window, on the phone with her psychotherapist.

We were told that she wanted to jump off the window because she could no longer cope with isolation and the symptoms she was suffering. We covered ourselves with protective gear and were prepared to quickly scale the facade from the roof to the window in case the psychotherapist was unsuccessful in her attempt to persuade the woman not to jump.

Police got in position inside the building to give us access. The psychotherapist bought us a lot of time but ultimately informed us that she couldn't calm her patient so we had to act. The intervention started with the psychotherapist distracting the patient while we descended from the roof. When we got close to the woman we pushed her inside of the apartment, at the same time the police broke down the door. We left her to continue speaking with her psychotherapist, the police, and other doctors.

Afterward, we disinfected our equipment in the street before returning to the fire station. It was a challenge to

coordinate this operation with everyone involved, as everyone's faces were obstructed by masks.

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

The people in my town are amazing. They are making handmade masks due to their shortage to help doctors, nurses, policemen, and firemen. So I got one customized from my neighbor. It made me so happy and has made me feel safer at work.

During the lockdown, I was walking my dog and I found a kitten that liked us and followed us back home. My fiancée and I adopted It and we decided to name It "Covid."

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

I will keep up with training and studying as I want to get promoted. It is important to remain focused when spending the entire day at home. I like to have a routine and stick to it.

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

My fiancée and I will have pizza at Lisanderella, our favorite Italian restaurant in Madrid. Then I will play lacrosse to

burn all the extra calories I have been eating during the lockdown.

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

Try to keep in contact with friends and family via Skype. Help your eldest neighbors with the groceries. Try to cheer everyone up from your window or balcony with music, dancing or playing bingo.

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

I am using this opportunity to have quality time with my fiancée and go deeper into our relationship. We have plenty of time to plan our future wedding. I highly recommend spending this time to plan future trips and events to avoid overthinking.

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)

Food4Heroes: Madrid restaurants come together to cook and deliver free meals directly to hospitals

We're an open platform with over 90 partners among restaurants and brands. We cook and distribute food for free, to support our health care workers in the fight against COVID-19. Because our heroes wear white coats and our motivation is born from their effort – Food4Heroes

We all know that Madrid is one of the hardest-hit cities in the world right now, and restaurants have had to shut their doors to the public until further notice (sans delivery and takeaway). But that hasn't stopped them from opening up their kitchens and doing their part to make this situation better for all.

Today we'd like to give a well-deserved shout-out to the volunteer-based initiative [Food4Heroes](#), in which over 90 Madrid establishments have come together to prepare meals and deliver them daily to hundreds of medical professionals in hospitals across the city (and the country) – especially to those working in ICU and ER.

Food4Heroes started on March 13th when the CEOs of the

restaurant group [Grosso Napoletano](#) sent a WhatsApp message to all their contacts so they could deliver pizzas to Madrid's hospitals. It went viral – hundreds of messages from medical professionals came in from dozens of different hospitals – which motivated even more partners to volunteer and join forces to show their support.



Managers of [Grupo Larrumba](#) restaurant group, one of the participants in #Food4Heroes

Now, Food4Heroes has become an open platform with a simple format: health care workers contact the group by email (info@grossonapoletano.com) to tell them what they need. The group collaborates with its partners to make it happen, and then they create WhatsApp groups with the health care workers to coordinate time and place of delivery. The food trucks drop off the meals outside the hospitals, normally near the ER doors, and the health care workers go out to pick it up.

It's incredible that through WhatsApp and solidarity, hot meals are being delivered to hospitals daily. As we can see from Food4Heroes, despite all the hardship that's going on, there's a lot of good that's happening as well. This is one of the many heartwarming ways in which the city is expressing its admiration and appreciation towards hospital workers, such as the citywide clap every evening (with the designated hashtag #aplausosanitario).

I found out about Food4Heroes from a member of [Grupo Larrumba](#), one of the participating restaurant groups, who also sent me the images in this article.

Follow [Food4Heroes](#) on Instagram to get to know more about their partners and initiatives, and to show your support!

(Source: [Food4Heroes' social media](#) & [Profesional Horeca](#))

Do you know of any other initiatives helping to make this situation better for all?

Get in touch with us at daphne@veracontent.com and

a96039@aup.edu

See stories from our [Madrid Lockdown Series](#) here

Lockdown diaries: Helen, at home with 8-month-old baby and DJing partner

We've been having a daily dance party with my partner broadcasting a live DJ set for our family and friends.

Daily dance parties, taking care of the “sprog” (UK term for child), running up and down the stairs, ordering local beer, yoga, checking the news only *once* a day... Helen offers a lot of coping techniques to help us stay positive and active throughout this quarantine.

Helen Macrae, originally from Birmingham, has been living in Madrid for 12 years and spent the last 8 years working in educational publishing. She's currently off work looking after her 8-month-old baby. She's also quarantined with her partner, from New Mexico, who's an educator and DJ providing [live mixing sessions daily](#) online so you can even join them!

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



I was away in the Pyrenees with my partner and our 8-month-old baby as it had snowed recently and we wanted to go skiing! When things started kicking off we considered staying up there, but when they shut the ski area and shortly afterwards announced the lockdown, we decided to drive back to Madrid.

I'm currently on *excedencia* (unpaid leave) so luckily I don't have to juggle working from home and childcare, which I know a lot of people are struggling with right now. My partner works at a university so he's teaching all his classes online, which he's actually pretty awesome at as he just finished a masters in Instructional Design. As for the baby, she's delighted to have both parents around all day.

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

The general level of positivity, creativity and concern for others has really impressed me – it gives me hope for the

human race! Also, we ordered beer from [La Virgen](#) so we could support a local business and it arrived in under 12 hours, so that was pretty uplifting.

Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?

The sprog (*UK term for child!*) is an endless source of entertainment, particularly as she's recently discovered growling.

How are you coping?

Only checking the news once a day has been a massive help in reducing stress levels. Looking after the baby gives us a sense of purpose and forces us into a routine, plus it's actually nice to have the distraction of a tiny person who's oblivious to how weird this whole situation is.

If procuring a baby isn't a realistic goal for you right now, having a routine is definitely helpful. We try and do [Yoga With Adriene](#) each morning (she's great, plus her dog is AMAZING), then at 18:00 when our energy levels are at their lowest, we've been having a daily dance party with my partner broadcasting a live DJ set for our family and friends. If you're at a loose end and fancy throwing some shapes around your living room, join us at [twitch.tv/djstayinschool](https://www.twitch.tv/djstayinschool)!

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

Ha, it's been difficult enough to find time to write this in amongst all my usual activities (changing baby, feeding baby, cleaning up after baby, playing with baby, worrying about baby, trying to persuade baby to go to sleep, etc. etc.) so I have pretty low expectations. Having said that, I love baking so I've been doing a fair bit of that in my spare time. Then to mitigate the baking calories, attempting to get my 10,000 steps in by dancing (see above), pacing around the flat like a madwoman or running up and down the stairs in the building. Not sure what the neighbours are making of that.

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

Thankfully things at our company seem ok for the moment, but I'm sure the next academic year will be tough as this has happened right in the middle of the sales campaign. I also own a flat with my partner which we rent on Airbnb, so our earnings for that have gone down to zero for now.

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

Run out and roll around in the flowers. NATURE! Oh how I've missed you! After that, we'll go on a really long walk followed by a visit to the play area so baby can have her second ever go on the swings. Perhaps go and see my awesome

hairdresser/spiritual advisor to get my mop chopped and put the world to rights. Beers in the sunshine with friends would round things off nicely.

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Lockdown diaries: Lauren, from long distance to lockdown

My advice to anyone under lockdown with a significant other is to try to understand that this is a scary time and you're both sure to experience a range of emotions.

Lauren Bonheim is a globe-trotter, digital marketing consultant and the founder of [Lauren on Location](#), a travel site that has taken a huge hit following the outbreak. Lauren has been living on and off in Madrid for the past six years, but recently moved back in January to join her boyfriend who was relocated to the Spanish capital for work. Madrid is Lauren's true happy place and no matter where her adventures

abroad take her, her heart always leads right back here.

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

I officially moved back to Madrid just a little over a month before the Coronavirus came to Madrid and the lockdown was announced. I work remotely, and so I had just set up my home office and was getting used to working from the quiet comfort of my new home, in my loungewear sans make up. After almost a year of nonstop travel, I was loving the alone time to focus in on my work and catch up on delayed projects.



Police checkpoint outside my apartment

Then the lockdown happened. My once solo working environment is now shared with my boyfriend, who is also working from home. He works in sales and is constantly on the phone. All. Day. My once calm and quiet sanctuary has been invaded by ringing cellphones and noisy conference calls. It's been extra hard to concentrate, but we're working together to find

solutions, like using headsets for calls and designating separate work spaces.

Before the lockdown, I also left my apartment at least twice a day. I usually start my mornings early, either by going on a run or attending a workout class. I also work from a [coworking space](#) or a café once a week, and have Spanish classes first thing in the morning twice a week. So, being stuck inside involuntarily, without the option to go for a walk, or meet a friend for coffee is obviously much more restrictive than before.

Even as someone who's used to spending immense amounts of time within my apartment, these 12+ days in home quarantine have been extremely taxing.

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

The travel and tourism industry has taken a huge hit following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Many of my friends and family who work within the industry have had their salaries reduced, been forced to take unpaid vacation time, or even been laid off. My travel site, along with many other bloggers I know, is seeing a major dip in traffic, and most press trips and sponsored collabs have been postponed until further notice.

Do you have any tips for how we can help

those in need?



Takeout from [Mazal bagel shop](#)

While this situation is affecting everyone, there are certain industries and small businesses that are really suffering

right now. Their business's cash flow has been abruptly cut off and if they're going to make it through this, they need our help. If it's allowed, order takeout or delivery from local restaurants. And if you can afford it, reach out to your favorite small business owners like your yoga teacher or physical trainer, etc., and offer to buy a gift certificate or front them the money for a future service like a yoga class.

Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?

I'm very fortunate that my partner is a total clown and keeps me laughing daily. Even when things get stressful, tense or scary, we've been trying to combat the negative feelings with silliness and laughter. We've realized that since this whole situation is out of our control, all we can really do is focus in on our happiness and make it a priority in the coming weeks. Whether that means an impromptu tickle attack or Twizzler war, or blasting reggaeton and dancing around the kitchen, our plan is to keep on laughing.

How are you coping?

I'm taking my lockdown day by day. There are days I wake up energized, motivated and ready to crush my to-do list. Other days I wake up feeling fatigued, anxious, and can hardly muster the motivation to get out of bed. It's been a real emotional rollercoaster.

The best way I'm finding to cope through this quarantine is to listen to my body and not judge my feelings. I'm trying my

best to be nice to myself and to others. When I'm feeling productive, I work my way through this list of [100+ home activities](#) I created last week, and when I'm feeling low, I let myself rest.

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

I have such a long running to-do list of things I'd like to accomplish during this lockdown, but my main focus is to simply maintain my normal routine of exercising, working and eating healthy, the best that I can. My other goals include developing my meditating practice, getting some major spring cleaning done, and spending quality time with my boyfriend (although that one's kind of been forced on us!)

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

Go for a run. The first thing I will do is throw on my running shoes, plug into a good podcast and take a long run around the Canal track. Running is my "me time" and what allows me to clear my head and combat stress. Being pent up inside, and not able to run, especially now, has been extremely taxing.

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

situation?

I'm currently in quarantine with my boyfriend. We recently transitioned from being in a long-distance relationship (*him here in Spain and me in NY*), to living together. And now we're under lockdown. It's been quite the interesting adjustment, but for now we're fairing the abrupt contrast pretty well. We've made a list of things we'd like to do together over the next few weeks, from recipes we'd like to try, to home improvement tasks we'd like to tackle, and are trying to use this time to connect on a deeper level and get to know each other better.

My advice to anyone currently under lockdown with a significant other is to try to understand that this is a scary time and you're both sure to experience a range of emotions. It's important to be patient with one another, support each other during both the high moments and the low moments, and give each other space when needed.

Another thing I've found helps a lot when it comes to working from home together, is to discuss a plan and set boundaries before things start to get tense. Doing things like designating separate work spaces and setting daily working hours, will help you stay focused, motivated, and on the same page as your partner.

Follow [@laurenonlocation on IG](#)

Check out all [Madrid lockdown stories](#)

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Lockdown diaries: Melanie, international advisor and co-founder of Volition

As an owner of a small business working with other small businesses, it's been 24/7 crisis management and creative ideation mode, while also transitioning to working in a shared space and making sure to take care of my health. It's been quite a learning experience!

From journaling every morning to actually turning FaceTime *off* at times, Melanie shares ways she's learned how to cope with the drastic life changes most of us are experiencing right now, as well as how we can help those in need. And her message to her hometown of Vancouver: please lock it down!

Melanie Ewan is originally from Canada and has been living in Madrid since November 2018. She's a Co-founder and Managing Partner of [Volition](#), an international advisory firm that works with startups and entrepreneurs. She's also Lead Researcher for [Women in Tech World](#), a Canadian nonprofit dedicated to supporting and advancing women in tech.

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

While I have worked 100% remote for almost two years now, my company, business partner, and our team are all based in Western Canada, and while I often work with clients remotely and launched a virtual masterclass in January, most of our services and events are held in person. In fact, I had a Women's Pitch Night Madrid booked at Google for Startups Campus on March 11th, right when things were starting to ramp up here in Madrid.

There are two main ways in which my life has shifted since the lockdown (and even right before). Firstly, I am now sharing my workspace with my husband, who is working remotely for the first time in his life. More on that later... But secondly, there has been a major shift in my work life.

How has the lockdown impacted your industry and work life?

Given that we work with entrepreneurs and small businesses, mostly in-person, COVID-19 has added this extra layer of work and anxiety that permeates my workday. While we have been shifting and pivoting quickly over the past two weeks, today I finally sat down and drew out our response plan, including everything from stating who we want to be as a business during this time and what we want to bring to the community, to how I can support my team at this time.

The first thing for us to address was moving all services and events virtual, and how to communicate this to our communities across Canada and Europe. We had never held our signature event, our Pitch Nights, virtually, so this created a steep learning curve for the entire team. The next step has been to figure out our longer-term communications plan and how we can adapt and mitigate the effects of COVID-19 both for our business and the businesses that we work with and support.

I do feel incredibly fortunate to still have work at this time – many in my life no longer do. That said, as an owner of a small business working with other small businesses, it's been 24/7 crisis management and creative ideation mode, while also transitioning to working in a shared space and making sure to take care of my health. It's been quite a learning experience!

What does the street look like?

To be honest, the neighbourhood that I live in, Moncloa, is always pretty quiet relative to most other areas of Madrid. The most noticeable difference is that everyone is walking around solo with a distinct air of quiet determination – they are on a mission to get to and from somewhere as quickly as possible. And there are no kids, no random bursts of childish laughter or chatter from students on their way home from school. All you see are adults and dogs.

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



As I'm sure others have mentioned, the 8pm balcony applause is always incredibly heartwarming – it makes you feel like you're a part of something, that you're a little less alone in all of this.

Also, our rooftop area – which we can see from our window –

has been the scene of a few uplifting moments, such as an elderly couple using the space to get in their steps for the day, or a family setting up chairs to be entertained by their kids, who had seemingly concocted a mini dance show for the occasion.

How are you coping?

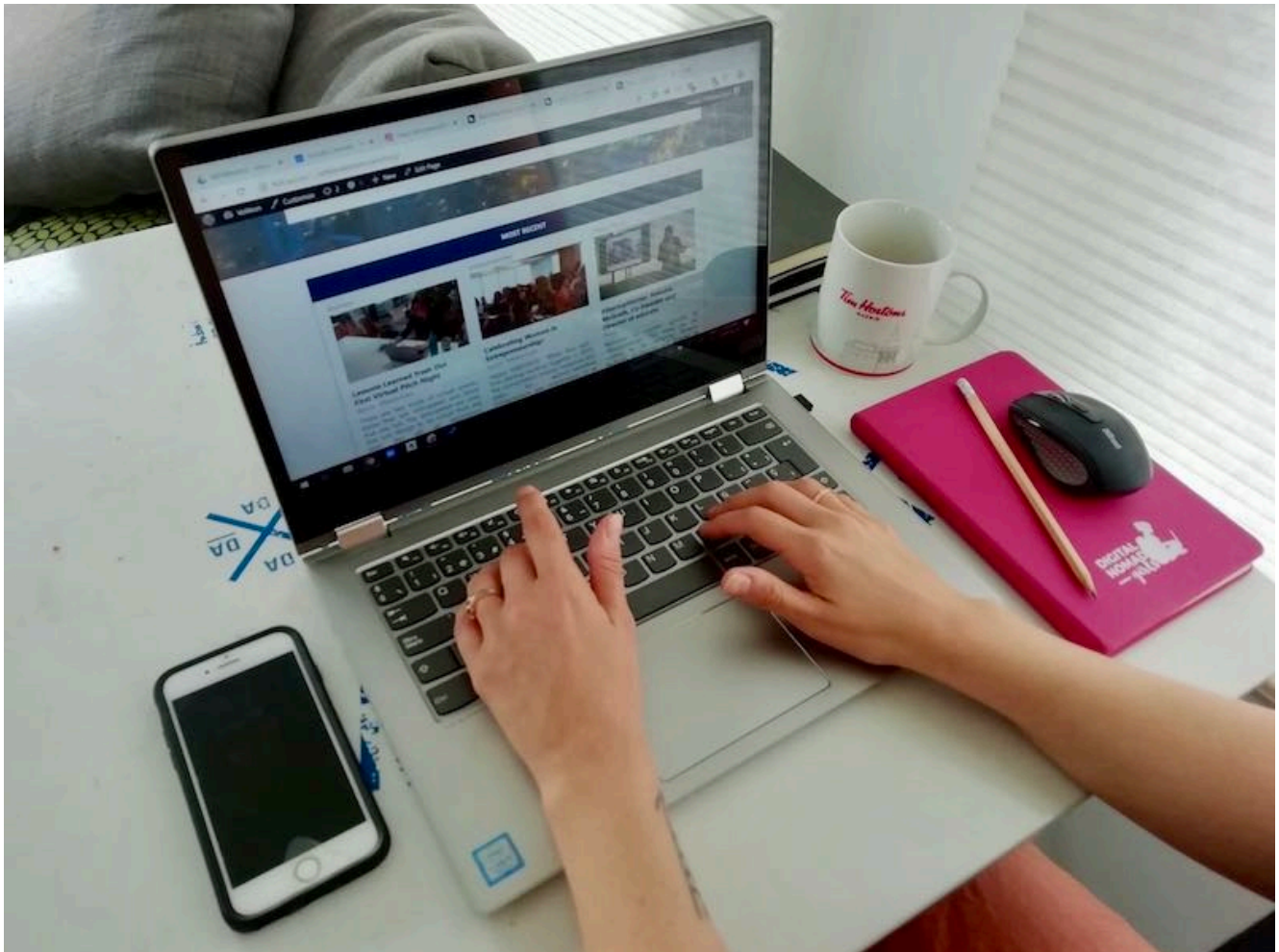
COVID-19 has made my life 10x busier, so for me, that has meant being more intentional than usual about my wellness routine (10-30 mins of yoga using an app, journalling, and 10 mins of reading). The journal prompts that have helped me include: what am I feeling, what do I want to feel, what I can control, what I can't control, and my intention for the day.

As an introvert, carving out alone and quiet time has also been important this week, which seems funny to say during a lockdown. Thing is, in addition to sharing the home space 24/7, my phone has been buzzing continuously, and with daily meetings and virtual events throughout the week, by day 7 of lockdown I was so tired from 'facetime' that I canceled as much as possible, stayed off the news, and curled up in bed by 8:30pm.

Whether you're an introvert or not, I highly recommend carving out personal time in your schedule – a time where you do something just for you, without guilt or judgment.

Who are you in quarantine with? Any

advice for people in your similar situation?



On the topic of sharing space, while I can't imagine what it must be like to be a caregiver at this time, I can provide some insights on the couple's front. The moment we knew that we would have to share the space (barely a 1 bedroom flat), we sat down and compared our daily schedule. We revisited our habits and needs for space, times we were likely to have meetings, and how to work with our very different eating schedules. It took compromises on both sides and a commitment to respecting each others' space and not being offended by the need for alone time.

We agreed on some ground rules, and have also talked through how we can support and motivate each other in ways that we need. Each day we talk about what each of us wants to achieve that day and what our schedule looks like. We also have a food plan in place so that we don't have to think much about that – on the food front I admit I am super lucky as my husband loves to cook and food, tea, and wine just magically appear by my side 2-3 times a day. I had to adjust my eating schedule for this, but was more than happy to make the “sacrifice”!

The key thing for us was to lean into our individual strengths and then just communicate, communicate, communicate. **Earplugs and random dance parties have also helped.**

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

Go out for food. Even though we don't eat out that often, we have already been dreaming about our favourite restaurants and just lounging on a terrace in the sun, wine glass in hand. I have a list of all of the places that I want to visit as soon as we can, and I'm also foreseeing lots of picnics.

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

That's a good question. When everything first started happening I really struggled to find resources in English that clearly captured what was going on in Spain and what the government was recommending. While I have been learning

Spanish, it's not up to snuff for situations like this, so this gap caused some anxiety for me. Even now my main source of information is [El País English](#) (Twitter account). Thankfully, I have good friends here who have sent me the most urgent news, and Google Translate for Twitter is fantastic.

I know that offering translations of official announcements, updates and recommendations is not at the top of the priority list, but it is important to ensure that all those in your country are informed. I also know that this has been an issue in many countries – my home country of Canada was just called out for not providing sign language translations of urgent announcements. Just something to consider to ensure that urgent communications are accessible for all.

Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?

Of course! These days I seek out moments of laughter, and my partner often has *The Tonight Show: At Home Edition* or *Trevor Noah at Home* on during our lunch break. My favourite comical moments are the random things that we end up doing in our daily life. For instance, recently I started hopping around the kitchen (because, why not) and Tom decided to start copying my every move...it turned into a ridiculous game that took up a good 5 minutes, got us some exercise, and left us in a pile of giggles. It made no sense, but that was the beauty of it.

Do you have any tips for how we can help

those in need?

There are so many ways! First off, ask what you can do to help – ask your community, ask your friends and family, and truly listen to what they say. If you can't directly help, often someone in your network can.

I recently reached out to my community to see what they needed help with, and learned that what many need most is access to a support network and resources to overcome unexpected burdens – financial, childcare, mental health. [Here is one resource I wrote up](#) to give back to my community (Canadian startups and entrepreneurs).

You can also help small businesses and brands by showcasing them on your socials and blog, buying gift cards, providing opportunities to continue to network and learn, and giving them reviews and testimonials.

There are so many other ways to help those in need. I am very aware of those who are being locked in with abusive partners, for instance, as well as those who are struggling with their mental health at this time. Research and share local resources for these people, and check in with everyone in your network.

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

Honestly, now that we're in lockdown here in Madrid, my daily dose of anxiety comes from my hometown of Vancouver. I worry

for my friends and family as they aren't yet in lockdown and many residents aren't taking social distancing seriously.

My message is for the provincial and municipal governments – please lock it down! And make sure that support is in place and accessible for those who are in difficult situations with their work – if both parents are 'essential service workers', find a way to ensure childcare is readily available so that grandparents aren't taking on that burden. Make it easy for employers and employees to make health a priority. Learn from others' mistakes!

You can connect with Melanie Ewin on [LinkedIn](#) & [Twitter](#)

Check out all [Madrid lockdown stories](#)

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Lockdown diaries: Terry from Desperate Literature Bookshop

The amount of love the bookshop has got from the community is really sustaining. Lots of messages and lots of people ordering stock. Thank you everybody.

Terry Craven is a bookseller, painter and writer who runs [Desperate Literature](#), a community bookshop that has opened its doors every day for the past six years in the heart of Madrid. It's been tough to close, but they've also received a lot of love and support. Terry thinks that solidarity and finding gratitude during this time is very important, as are Zoom meetings, dancing, dressing like you're going on a third date...and having a cat.

Desperate Literature is now shipping books during the quarantine and you can enquire [here](#). They also run a [literary prize for short fiction](#) running until March 29th, so spread the word!

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

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

I think finding gratitude is pretty important in such times, right, so yes, today I heard a few conversations between neighbours, over the streets we were talking to the *correos* (mailmen). People who, in all likelihood, have never spoken before. Solidarity in these times is very important and it shakes me out of The Fear, absolutely. I got a big rush of happiness hearing those folks talking. A blackbird has started visiting us in the shop, and stealing my cat's food, too (I live in the same building). That's pretty joyful. Honestly, though, the amount of love the bookshop has got from the community is really sustaining. Lots of messages and lots of people ordering stock. Thank you everybody.

Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?

My hair is getting pretty comical. That said, I think the Mad Max meets the 1980s German footballer look is probably a shoe-in for early summer.

How are you coping?

Dance every day. Dress like I'm going on a... mmm... third date maybe. Zoom meetings with anybody and everybody. Reaching out to people who might be in need of community or help. Trying to have a rhythm. Turning off my computer around 10pm. Calming the nervous system (without booze), because I have a tendency

to be in fight or flight in order “to survive”, but that doesn’t help.

Be kind to myself when I fail to do the above, which is every day.

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

Honestly, I’m a tiny bit weary of being too goal-oriented during this period, both personally and politically. Sure I’ve a few books I’m working on and the real goal is to keep the bookshop alive, but otherwise if I can stay calm and try to be present then I’m doing ok.

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

Enormously. So many booksellers I know have been fired, not to mention folks in publishing just deathly anxious about their positions. Any of us bookshops built around community, especially those of us without an enormous online retail presence, well, we’re both financially and emotionally isolated. But I can see across the board, over in the UK as well as here in Spain, that indie booksellers are adapting. The folks at [Burley Fisher](#) in London are doing an amazing job (their podcast has the best jingle I’ve ever heard, not to mention the rest of the work they’re doing).

Of course we (Desperate Literature) have a very specific problem: so many of the anglophones of Madrid have gone home, meaning that even when we open it will be interesting to see who's left. There's a lot of questions to be asked about the sustainability of teaching programs that can benefit from folks travelling across the world to teach, who are signed into temporary contracts with very little security and promptly dropped when things get tough.

It's a problem of precarity across the board and the whole point of working with community is to fight against it. If nothing else, we at Desperate Literature can ask ourselves how we do better, now and after. So yeah maybe that's also a goal for something to come from this period.

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

Sit in the sun, reading. Hug my friends. Hug my friends in the sun.

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

I don't know any more than anybody else, but I'm just trying to call around and make sure we're all doing ok. If you're part of a community, there's the question of how to build up financial backstops, how to come together to stop evictions. Talk to people, I suppose I'd say. But as I've hinted, that's tough because the main thing I personally have to fight

against is my own desire to hide away and worry.

Who are you in quarantine with? Any advice for others?

At home: my cat.

My advice: get a cat.

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

Stop rents.

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

The UK has just entered a full lockdown, and the only thing I'd say is that it has taken me 11 days to start to get to stability, so stick with it. That and I love them.

- *You can follow Terry on [Instagram](#) and find all of Desperate Literature's social media channels and info on [their website](#)*

- *Also read my previous article about [Desperate](#)*

[Literature: So much more than a bookshop](#)

- [Please share their Literary Prize for Short Fiction](#) across all social media channels and spread the word to anyone who you think would like to apply. The deadline is March 29th, two days from now!

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