

NO.1332 · 6 - 12 APRIL 2020

DIGITAL EDITION £2

BIG ISSUE NORTH

THE INDEPENDENT STREET PAPER | WORKING NOT BEGGING

**STEPHEN
TOMPKINSON**
Suits all roles

**Global click
and collect**
ONLINE EVENT LISTINGS

**Britons in
Italy and India**
LIFE UNDER LOCKDOWN



COVID-19 UPDATE

Thank you for buying the magazine online, from a shop or subscription.

For the safety of our vendors and customers, we have made the difficult decision to temporarily cease the sale of Big Issue North on the streets.


If you would like to do more to help we have set up a hardship fund to help our vendors through the lockdown, details of how to donate are below.

1 in 3 of our vendors are currently homeless. That means that they cannot self-isolate, leaving themselves and others vulnerable to potentially fatal infection.

Vendors rely on foodbanks or soup kitchens to eat. As more organisations close due to COVID-19, these vendors could be left without food.

Vendors work hard to earn an average of just £60 per week, and many have no other source of income, meaning that losing that money could be devastating.

BIG ISSUE NORTH TRUST

A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a high-visibility yellow vest, is holding a white dog. A man with a beard and a black beanie, also wearing a high-visibility yellow vest, is standing next to her. The dog is wearing a blue and white patterned sweater. The background shows a brick wall and a blue door.

Thank you for your continued support at this difficult time

I want to support the Big Issue North Trust to help vendors like Alby

Please accept my donation of £5 ☐ £10 ☐ £20 ☐ £50 ☐ £100 ☐ Other

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Address

Postcode:

Telephone no.

Email:

I enclose a cheque made out to Big Issue in the North Trust ☐

Please contact me about making a standing order ☐

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Card Number:

Start Date:

Expiry Date:

Issue no: (Switch)

Security code: (Last three numbers on the back of your card)

Please sign here:

Gift Aid - Make Every £1 worth £1.28

If you are a UK taxpayer and would like the Big Issue North Trust to reclaim the tax on all donations you have made as well as future donations, please tick here ☐
You must pay at least as much UK income tax and/or capital gains tax (for the year of the donation) as the amount that will be claimed by us and any other charities and CASCs you donate to. Please remember to notify us if you no longer pay income tax (or capital gains tax).

How to donate

Post: Please complete this form and return it to: **Big Issue North Trust, 463 Stretford Road, Manchester, M16 9AB.**

Online: visit www.justgiving.com/BigIssueNorth.

Mobile: Text **HARDSHIP** to 70970 to give £5 Texts are free and all the money comes to us.

Telephone: Call **0161 871 2608** to donate by credit or debit card or to set up a standing order to donate regularly.

thank you for your donation

The Big Issue North Trust is a registered charity (number 1056041)

When you donate to Big Issue North Trust, we'd love to keep in touch with you to tell you about the difference you've made to our vendors. If you're happy for us to do this, please tick here. ☐

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 bigissuenorth

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Write to us **Letters, Big Issue North, Raven House, 113 Fairfield St, Manchester M12 6EL**

Email us **letters@bigissuenorth.co.uk**

Comment on the website **bigissuenorth.com**

Tweet us **@bigissuenorth**

Like us on Facebook **/bigissuenorth**

Please keep letters brief. We reserve the right to edit them for length.

Include your full name, town or city and phone number.

How to help our vendors

Donations have slowed as we seek to maintain support, reports **Brontë Schiltz**

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused upheaval across the world, with many companies forced into new working conditions. It's no different here at *Big Issue North*, but unlike many more fortunate people, our vendors cannot work from home.

They are self-employed, normally buying each magazine from our distribution offices for £1.25 before selling them on the street for £2.50. This offers an immediate route into work for people who may struggle to enter mainstream employment, for instance if they do not have a permanent address, bank account, phone or ID, or have no qualifications or previous experience. But it also means they do not receive sick pay.

When we made the difficult decision to cease the sale of *Big Issue North* on the street for the safety of vendors and customers, the 250 people who regularly sell *Big Issue North* lost what for many was their only source of income. Our staff have had to come up with new ways to support vendors at this difficult time.

Last week, *Big Issue North* went on sale in Sainsbury's and McColl's stores across the north, as well as online at sainsburys.co.uk, meaning that you can now pick up a copy for £3 during your weekly shop.

Half of our proceeds will go to our Covid-19 vendor hardship fund.

Members of the public have been incredibly generous in donating to the fund. In the week we pulled *Big Issue North* from the streets, donations averaged £1,000 a day. But donations are now beginning to slow, while the need for them increases daily.

Our frontline staff have spent the last fortnight contacting all our vendors to tell them they will no longer be able to work and that there is help available. So far, our fund has been spent on a variety of support – from securing accommodation for homeless vendors and covering the cost of rent and bills for those with their own homes to money for essential shopping to vendors whose foodbanks have closed. It has also enabled our staff to provide remote services, from translating information to assisting with bank, GP and Universal Credit registrations.

Even when a return to work is possible, there is likely to be less footfall on our streets, and it may be a long time before our vendors are again able to earn their usual level of income. This has caused great insecurity, uncertainty and anxiety for many vendors.



Elena usually sells the magazine in Meltham, West Yorkshire. Read about her in the vendor stories section of our bigissuenorth.com

To help us continue to provide vital support, there are several things you can do:

Make a donation to our hardship fund by texting HARDSHIP to 70970 to give £5, or visit easyfundraising.org/HARDSHIP to give as much or as little as you can afford.

Buy a digital issue for just £2, with £1 from each sale going directly to our hardship fund, at issuu.com/bigissuenorth. You can also take out a three month digital subscription for £24, meaning that you won't have to check back each week to buy a new issue.

Take out a three, six or twelve month subscription to *Big Issue North* at shop.bigissuenorth.com/category/subscriptions.

Buy back issues or merchandise at shop.bigissuenorth.com.

Subscribe to our new quarterly magazine, *The New Issue*, at newissue.co.uk.

Thank you so much for your support. ■

Wears all in this together

On 14 April, from 6pm to 7:45pm, Leeds-based pianist Nigel Wears will be livestreaming his Virtual Piano Bar from his living room via his Facebook page to raise money for the Big Issue North Trust. All proceeds will go to our hardship fund.

"I play requests and cheesy singalong tunes like *Sweet Caroline* and *YMCA*, just to get people happy and donating, and it works really well," says Wears.

A member of the *Big Issue North* team will also be present throughout the livestream to share some fun facts about our work and to answer any questions you have about how we're supporting our vendors through the pandemic.

Like Wears' Facebook page to access the livestream: facebook.com/nigelwears pianist.



ABOUT US

Big Issue North is a business solution to a social problem. Normally vendors buy this magazine for £1.25 and sell it for £2.50, keeping the profit they make. During the current Coronavirus crisis the magazine is sold online for £2 and in selected stores for £3, with at least £1 per issue going to our vendor hardship fund.

For more information about how you can help vendors at this time please see page 4.

FROM 10 YEARS AGO



At 24, gymnast Beth Tweddle was a veteran in a sport dominated by teenagers. But the Liverpool-based world champion told us 10 years ago this week that she had no intention of retiring as long as she was winning medals, embarking on her 2012 Olympic campaign with the European championships. Elsewhere in the magazine we predicted a population crash, spoke to bereaved families fighting for support and considered the pros and cons of bike share schemes in the north, which were growing in popularity, following Paris's lead.

'I have a YouTube channel and I'd like to reach more people. I hope they tune in'

DEAN, BOOTH, GARSTANG

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I'm 45 in May and I was brought up in Putney, London. That's my home town. But I'm staying in Blackpool at the moment.

How long have you been selling the magazine?

I was selling for about a year or so. This is the second stint. I was selling before, but then I got a job as a cleaner at Blackpool Pleasure Beach. The season came to an end and then I got a job in a factory but then that finished too so I came back to selling the magazine. I enjoy selling it and I have some great customers so I can't wait to return to Garstang when I can.

What jobs have you done in the past?

I've had a variety of jobs. I worked in a pub, I used to refit and clean aircraft. I've worked as a chef and I've been a cycle courier. I loved that. Selling the magazine came out of the fact that I couldn't find any other work and I needed the income.

How did you become homeless?

I split up with the wife. She had the flat before I moved in with her and so when we broke up I had to move out and the council wouldn't rehouse me. I was homeless for a time, selling *The Big Issue* down in London. Then I came up here and I stayed in B&Bs for a while when I could afford it, or slept rough when I couldn't. I knew Blackpool was a cheap place to live and I'd been up here a couple of times in the past. I'd love to move back to London but it's just too expensive.

How are you coping with the current coronavirus crisis?

Fortunately someone has let me stay at their flat. He's down in London at the moment and I'm doing him a favour being here and looking after his place and his dog while he is away. If I hadn't been able to stay here I would have been in a very difficult position. The B&B that I would normally stay in was planning to close and I don't know where I would have gone. The council didn't seem to know what would happen. I don't know how long I can stay here for or what will happen when the owner comes back. I'm just playing it by ear really. Fortunately I've managed to put some money aside to be able to get some food but I don't know what the future holds.

How are you spending your time?

I've been practising a few songs on the harmonica, learning new tunes. I have a YouTube channel ([youtube.com/deanportertv](https://www.youtube.com/deanportertv)) and I'd like to reach more people on it, so I hope they tune in. I'm in the process of learning a lot. I used to have a banjo as well but I had to put that in Cash Converters because I needed to borrow some money against it.



Hopefully I can buy it back at some point. I've always had a love of music, even if I couldn't play it. I like Bruce Springsteen, Rolling Stones and John Lee Hooker. I may not be that great at playing, but I don't think Jedward are musically talented and they seem to do well.

Do you have any family?

From my dad's first marriage there was myself, two brothers and my sister, but she passed away a few years ago. My brother down in London has a history of not looking after himself and he's in a high-risk category if he gets the virus, so I'm worried about him. Sadly both my parents passed away almost 20 years ago. I fell out with my mum about a year before she died and we never made up. Now I say to someone if you have an argument, always make your peace, even if you think you are right.

What was your childhood like?

I grew up in care but from the age of five. My father was somewhat abusive and my mother was alcoholic. I was lucky because I was put in a good place with this woman who ran the home brilliantly.

Do you have a message for your customers?

Remain calm, follow the advice and stay in if you can. Try and support the magazine and feel free to subscribe to me on YouTube!

INTERVIEW: CHRISTIAN LISSEMAN



BRITON STRANDED IN INDIA

Fear and panic as retiree awaits contact

Other European nationals repatriated

A British retiree has described her fear and panic as she waits to hear whether she will be repatriated from India while tensions in the country grow after prime minister Narendra Modi forced the country into emergency lockdown.

Nita Lal, 68, from Macclesfield, is currently staying in a guesthouse in south Indian state Tamil Nadu, where staff have told her they are planning to close the business, and Lal has been warned food shortages will soon be a problem in the area.

Lal, who has been staying with other European guests, is currently the last person in the guesthouse waiting to hear when she will be repatriated, while other French and German guests have already been flown home by their respective governments.

Tensions are growing in India after the country, which has a population of 1.3 billion, was put under lockdown

on 23 March with less than four hours notice in an attempt to slow the spread of coronavirus.

Total ban on leaving

Announcing the lockdown, Modi said there would be a total ban on people leaving their homes for 21 days – including a ban on domestic and international flights until mid-April.

Modi appealed for people not to panic, but crowds mobbed stores in major cities and correspondents say it is not clear how people will be able to access food and other essentials.

At the time of writing (3 April) India has 1,860 confirmed cases of coronavirus, but experts warn the real number of infections could be far higher as the country has one of the lowest testing rates in the world.

Lal, a former teacher, was due to fly home on 6 April from Chennai Airport but the airline cancelled the flight after Modi's announcement, and as of 3 April she is yet to hear when she will be repatriated. She said: "I'm the only British person here that I know of. The guesthouse

I'm staying in has been very helpful but they want to close – we are the last guesthouse that's open. Management aren't telling us everything but they look panic-stricken.

"I can't go out. I can't leave the guesthouse. The police are beating people in the street with sticks. We've got enough water but it's getting more difficult by the day to get food. There's only one supermarket in the whole area. There are a couple of cafés that are going to do takeaways, but we don't want to be going out in the dark, so we'd have to get it in the daytime.

"Money is difficult as well. There's no money in any of the banks. We've managed to draw out 2,000 rupees a day, around £20, if we need it, but we need money to get back. Getting to the airport is another worry, especially if I'm on my own. It doesn't feel safe, and it feels less safe because everybody is leaving."

Lal has been warned nearby farms may soon face problems supplying food, and she is concerned about the prospect of needing medical treatment.

She said: "We're only at the beginning in India. There are only a few cases and that's

why Modi has taken action, which I think is really great, but we don't know how it is going to escalate. It is one of the most densely populated places in the world. People have been talking about the poor state of Indian hospitals as a result of overcrowding."

Mass exodus

In the past week India has also experienced a mass exodus as millions of workers fled shuttered cities and walked hundreds of miles back to their villages – turning them into refugees overnight. Speaking to Radio 4's *Today* programme, author and activist Arundhati Roy likened the chaos in India as a result of the emergency lockdown to the 1947 Partition.

Last week the government announced it was partnering with commercial airlines to repatriate stranded British travellers on charter flights, but Lal is yet to hear when she will fly home.

"I want them to communicate with me. I would like some form of reassurance. I want to know that my name is on the list, that they are aware of my existence. I would like a flight and safe passage to the airport.

"I feel utterly alone, overlooked and neglected."

Foreign secretary Dominic Raab said in a statement: "We've already worked with airlines and governments to enable hundreds of thousands to return home on commercial flights, and we will keep as many of those options open as possible. Where commercial flights are not possible, we will build on the earlier charter flights we organised back from China, Japan, Cuba, Ghana and Peru. The arrangements agreed today will provide a clearer basis to organise special charter flights where Britons find themselves stranded. Our priority will always be the most vulnerable."



Nita Lal, 68, a retired teacher from Macclesfield, is on lockdown in a guesthouse in Tamil Nadu, south India

SASKIA MURPHY

RALLYING CRIES



Left: Old Bank Digital Residency. Above: wellbeing coach Lee Chambers

BANK ACCOUNTS

The Old Bank Residency in Manchester is running free digital activities, ranging from ceramics demonstrations from local artist Joe Hartley to a reading club, recipes to create a great dhal and DJ sets for kitchen dancing sessions. The Old Bank Residency is a building in Manchester's NOMA development, managed by Standard Practice, which offers free to use civic space for community and charity groups. Manager Neil Greenhalgh said: "Everyone is welcome to take part in this new digital version of the Old Bank Residency, whether they have visited us previously or not." See oldbanknoma.com.

MAKING HISTORY

Museums and galleries in Leeds are calling for members of the public to start documenting their experiences during the coronavirus pandemic. Museums are collecting items such as help notes posted through neighbours' doors, images of life in lockdown, and diary entries. Posting on Twitter, the official Leeds Museums and Galleries account said: "We want to start documenting your experiences around the coronavirus outbreak. We hope that by doing this, people can learn from us in the future – how we reacted to it, what we've struggled with, what living in Leeds during this time has been like."

To take part in the project members of the public should email museumsandgalleries@leeds.gov.uk.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR NHS

A group of counsellors and psychologists are providing free phone and video support sessions to NHS workers working on the frontline of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Set up by wellbeing coach Lee Chambers, from Preston, the group, Covid-19 Counsellors, allows local NHS staff to access support by matching qualified therapists to individuals working in hospitals and clinics in the north.

Chambers, who runs Essentialise Workplace Wellbeing, said: "If we each gave a few hours' free therapy to a few NHS frontline staff members, it would mean they are better placed to impact the health outcomes of the hundreds of patients they deal with day to day."

"That means each of us as a single therapist can help thousands of people just by supporting a few NHS employees."

Chambers' group is part of a nationwide effort to look after the mental health of NHS workers during the Covid-19 pandemic. All NHS workers are eligible for support. For more information visit frontline19.com.

SOCIALLY DISTANT DANCING

A street in Frodsham, Cheshire, has become the new dance floor of the north after footage emerged of residents dancing on their doorsteps while keeping a safe distance apart – as advised by the government. Twitter user Elsa Williams shared the video, which shows neighbours in the street meeting at 11am for a daily session of socially distant dancing. The footage shows people of all ages swaying to Tom Jones's 1965 hit *It's Not Unusual*, while another clip shows the neighbours dancing to The Beatles' *All You Need Is Love*.

Led by local fitness instructor Janet Woodcock, the sessions are held for 10 minutes every day.

Williams tweeted: "Nobody is dancing in time. We know we're not very good. Ultimately, it changes nothing. But for a few minutes every day, our little corner of the universe feels a bit less alone. That's something"

CRACKING GOOD FOOD

Manchester-based social enterprise Cracking Good Food has used donations from its Covid-19 response fund to provide nutritious food to vulnerable people in the community.

Using food donations from restaurants affected by closures as well as donations from Unicorn Grocery and Fairshare Greater Manchester, the organisation delivered nutritious home-cooked meals to people living in hostels, as well as delivering a gallon of organic soup to NHS staff at the MRI/Children's Hospital.

Cracking Good Food aims to support vulnerable communities impacted by the global coronavirus crisis.

To donate visit crackinggoodfood.org/donate.

HAND REPAIR

Liverpool Hope University has launched a new scheme allowing members of the public to gift hand cream to nurses working in the intensive treatment unit wards at Royal Liverpool and Aintree hospitals. The initiative allows people to donate bottles of hand cream via a new online store following concerns excessive hand washing leads to dry, cracked skin. The donated hand cream will be delivered directly to hospital wards.

Lisa Mottram, data analyst at Liverpool Hope, said: "We want to do something positive, and to do something nice for those crucial frontline workers."

To make a donation visit store.hope.ac.uk.

SASKIA MURPHY

Send more information on help for the community to kevin.gopal@bigissuenorth.co.uk

SHELF LIFE

An anonymous supermarket employee offers a glimpse down the re-stocked aisles

“Good afternoon, this is a customer announcement. Could you please try not to kill each other? And us while you’re at it.”

But first, the good news: we’ve managed to fill a few shelves. More than a few in some cases.

When I wrote last week’s piece we seemed to be teetering on the verge of something catastrophic. Anxiety over coronavirus looked like it was mutating into a general social panic, and specifically one about food supplies. There’s a saying that any country is nine meals away from anarchy. Retail workers were getting a sneak preview of what that anarchy would actually look like.

Fingers crossed, but that particular fever seems to have broken. The retail experience is in no way normal – more on that in a bit – but what seems to have happened is that rules have been set, whether at national level or down at the local superstore. It’s not that people like being told what to do or how to shop, but a sense of structure has replaced a sense of chaos and people are responding to that. A week ago, customers looked tense and worried. You folks still look a bit concerned, but also, as far as I can see, a bit relieved.

And we have the time and space to do our jobs. I’m here to tell you that while it will take a good while before stores are operating with shelves full to bursting that there was bread yesterday, there is bread today and there will be bread tomorrow. Bread and a whole lot of other stuff you might need. Basic food availability should not be amongst your many worries right now.

We’ve also got hand sanitiser on offer. Don’t all rush at once. No, seriously, don’t.

I would put most of this down to the rules set in place by the supermarkets themselves. These are generally strict, but vary from place to place. Some of the

smaller outlets seem to have a strict one-in-one-out policy. You can tell these places by the way in which an orderly queue staggers round the car park, each person in a specially demarcated safe zone, each stepping into the next zone as the person at the front is allowed in. The effect as a whole is of pawns in a massive game of car park chess.

Superstores like the one I work at have too many visitors to be able to do that comfortably. Instead we operate behind a screen of security guards – who seem to be people redeployed from

incoming shoppers into queues and make sure no one goes into the store without gloves, a splash of hand sanitiser and a wiped down trolley.

You’ll see those lines stretched at regulation intervals all over the shop floor. Thing is, you’re supposed to stand behind them. This is especially true at the checkouts, where managers are detailed to police the queues and will make that point forcefully to people who insist on leaning over and breathing into the faces of colleagues on checkout. It’s a different picture in the rest of the store,

A sense of structure has replaced a sense of chaos and people are responding to that

event management companies, now that these no longer have any events to manage, except inasmuch as half-price hand sanitiser is an event. These folks help separate incoming and outgoing customers, sort

where the staff just aren’t available and people tend to wander around picking things up and putting them down.

In normal times, we want you to do this. Supermarkets are set up so that you, the happy shopper will stroll around in a daze while we, the obliging retailer, try to tempt you to buy a little more than you originally intended. These days we want you to be disciplined, focused, alert to the danger to staff and fellow customers, to know exactly what you want to buy and keep your hands off everything else. We want you to be in and out of the store quickly and, if you’ve got any sense, that’s what you want

too. But while in the store we want you to be patient and co-operative.

So how are you doing? It goes without saying that all our customers are wonderful human beings.

But as a general philosophical observation, it’s also true that even idiots need to shop and that there are enough of them to go round. From what I can see, the wonderful human beings are getting the edge. When supermarkets adopted the new rules, it took a bit of assertive rule setting to get them to stick. Now, self-discipline and a kind of moral pressure seem to be operating, a collective effort to get through this without harming each other.

“There’s always one”, as they say, and quite often there’s more than one. But in general we’re doing OK. Let’s keep it up. ■



LAST WEEK

100

The number of critically endangered sea turtles that hatched on a deserted beach in Brazil. The hawksbill hatchlings are usually greeted by crowds of people but this year made their march to the sea almost unnoticed due to coronavirus restrictions.

30

The number of years in which our oceans could be restored to their former glory, according to a major new review by scientists around the world. University of York professor Callum Roberts, part of the international team, told the *Guardian*: "One of the overarching messages of the review is, if you stop killing sea life and protect it, then it does come back."

122

The number of Kashmiri mountain goats that carried out a peaceful takeover of Llandudno while its human residents stayed indoors under lockdown. "They are curious, goats are," town councillor Carol Marubbi told the BBC. "I think they are wondering what's going on like everybody else."

Spud boss



An employee shared a hilarious screenshot of a Zoom meeting during which her boss managed to turn herself into a potato. Lizet Ocampo, political director at People For The American Way, applied the spud filter by accident but couldn't figure out how to remove it, so carried on with the meeting regardless.

HE HAS ISSUES

Draconian enforcement is no breath of fresh air, says Roger Ratcliffe

Meeting my friend Stuart in Leeds is always arranged by text, so I was surprised when he called my mobile. "Let me put this out there," Stuart said. "How about taking off for a walk in some remote spot where we're not going to come within two miles of anyone, never mind two metres?"

No, I had to tell him. The fresh air Gestapo are mounting spot-checks on cars heading into the Dales and Pennines. We'll be lucky to cross the A1 if we try for the North York Moors. Then there's those Derbyshire Police drones ready to swoop down on us in the Peak District. Better stay local.

Which is what we'll do, even though the single outing for exercise we are permitted each day involves constantly side-stepping others who have no choice but to take a walk in the same open spaces. Another friend who has a serious health condition and lives not far from Roundhay Park in Leeds tells me he doesn't go there because of the large numbers of people, and wonders why he can't jump in the car and exercise somewhere that is completely deserted. It seems crazy.

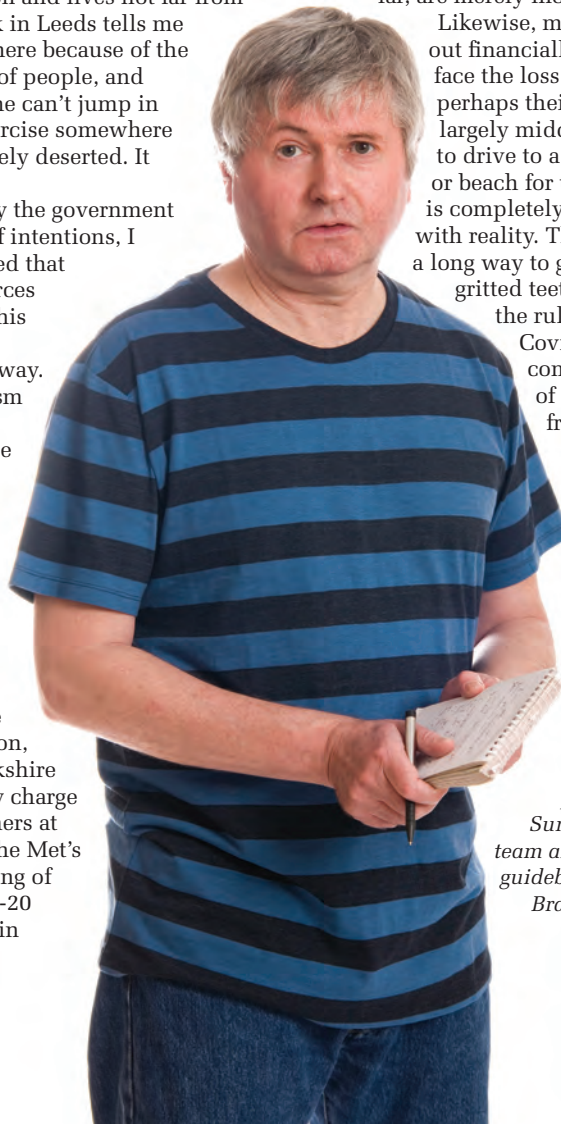
Conceived by the government with the best of intentions, I am not surprised that some police forces are executing this lockdown in a heavy-handed way. Authoritarianism was never far from the surface in the attitude of many high-ranking bobbies I met as a newspaper journalist. Left to interpret a command they will choose the draconian option, like South Yorkshire Police's cavalry charge on striking miners at Orgreave and the Met's infamous kettling of students and G-20 demonstrators in London.

The widely condemned drone sent over a Derbyshire beauty spot to finger people taking a walk is especially ominous. Leaving aside the irony that it was in this very landscape that the 1930s mass trespasses established our legal right to walk in wild countryside, the use of a drone to track people is pure Orwellian.

There is also a sinister echo of East Germany's notorious Stasi in some English police forces like Humberside and Greater Manchester encouraging the public to grass up their neighbours if they suspect them of flouting the lockdown rules. Then there's the apparent ban on selling Easter eggs because they're not essential food items. All of which moved former Supreme Court judge Lord Sumption to warn the UK was in danger of becoming a police state.

In my view, police forces should under no circumstances be allowed to devise their own ways of applying the lockdown. But I'm also clear that in this, the most serious emergency in my lifetime, life just cannot go on as normal. I'm certain that those people whose family or friends become part of the grim daily rollover of accumulating deaths and confirmed infections will take a very different view from those of us who, so far, are merely inconvenienced.

Likewise, millions are losing out financially. To those who face the loss of jobs and perhaps their homes, the largely middle class craving to drive to a deserted hillside or beach for their exercise is completely out of touch with reality. This crisis has a long way to go, and with gritted teeth I'm observing the rules and praying Covid-19 doesn't come to the doors of my family and friends. ■



Roger Ratcliffe has worked as an investigative journalist with the *Sunday Times Insight* team and is the author of guidebooks to Leeds and Bradford. Follow him on Twitter @Ratcliffe



East, west and all points in between

Stephen Tompkinson has just moved back from London to Whitley Bay but he grew up on the other side of the country in Lytham St Annes. The star of *Wild at Heart* and *Drop the Dead Donkey* tells **Andy Murray** why he believes the north is nicer – and how it's a privilege to be starring in a now re-scheduled theatre production of *Educating Rita*



Over the course of more than three decades, Stephen Tompkinson's acting career has taken him to many different places, whether appearing in major theatre roles or starring in various hit TV series such as *Drop the Dead Donkey*, *Ballykissangel*, *Wild at Heart* and *DCI Banks*. Last year, though, he relocated from the London suburbs to Whitley Bay, nice and close to his birthplace of Stockton-on-Tees.

"I wanted to get back to my roots," Tompkinson says. "I've still got relatives up in the North East since my mam and dad have passed on and I've wanted to get back for about 10 years. Now I've had the opportunity and I absolutely adore being there. It's beautiful – because it feels like home. I always felt like I was a kind of guest in London, because it's so transient and so fast-moving. It's just lovely to feel at home, where I belong."

Big Issue North speaks to Tompkinson just before the coronavirus crisis shut down the luxurious surroundings of Blackpool Grand Theatre, where he is appearing in a 40th anniversary touring theatre production of *Educating Rita*. The plan is to re-schedule the rest of the production. Blackpool has a very particular place in Tompkinson's heart.

"Most of my growing up was in St Annes," he says. "I moved here when I

of art and this theatre is so beautiful. It's gorgeous – you feel like you're in a dream sometimes. Everyone says Blackpool's quite crude, 'kiss me quick' hats and all that, and there is an element of that, but it's married with some proper beautiful Victorian architecture."

In *Educating Rita*, Tompkinson has been starring as frayed-at-the-seams university lecturer Frank opposite Jessica Johnson's eponymous mature Scouse student. Tompkinson's own memories of the piece date back to his teenage years. "I used to rehearse this play in about 1982 in my mam and dad's garage with a school friend of mine, just because we liked reading it. To actually be doing it and to be the right age is lovely. It is a little bit of a shock first of all when you realise you're in your mid-fifties. But I understand Frank very well. I don't agree with everything he does – the solace that he seeks in various bottles – but it's just a beautiful story beautifully told. We're very lucky to be performing it."

Indeed, Willy Russell's estate is closely guarded. Having won permission to perform the play, Tompkinson and Johnson found themselves being joined in rehearsals every week by the playwright himself. "To have Willy on board as much as he's been and to be so hands-on has been incredible. He's not been at

**"I used to rehearse this play with a school friend.
To be doing it and to be the right age is lovely."**

was six and I was here until I was 18. All my schooling was up here. My mam was a teacher in Blackpool and my dad was a bank manager at the St Annes branch of the Yorkshire Bank. It's a second home.

"Blackpool's a hoot. It's had a bit of a kick in the teeth over the last few years, but it's still a unique place. It's a great working class place and there's something so magical about it – and peculiar, beautifully peculiar. It's still packed when it's freezing and the wind's blowing a gale but it's got so much. The Tower and the Tower Ballroom are just works

all precious about taking the scissors to it. He's trimmed about 20 minutes out because he said audiences have changed since he wrote it. He's been brilliant and so supportive, but Jess and I have both been starstruck. I mean, he is a bit of a legend. We've both said the same – that this is a voice that represents you. It's rare to feel represented, I think, especially when you come from the north. I think it should be screamed loud and proud that Willy represents the working class and gives them a voice. That's why he's lasted 40 years."

© Peter Catoni/CARE/2018



Gloria's stall helps her pay for her children's education



■ Raised: £265.00
■ Needed: £622.10

© Peter Catoni/CARE/2015



Vor Thoun's farm will provide jobs for her local community



■ Raised: £640.00
■ Needed: £572.48

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Having done a fair amount of TV and theatre jobs in his day, how does Tompkinson feel the two fields compare? “If you’re doing one you’re missing the other and it is a completely separate set of acting muscles. To get the privilege of telling a story from beginning to end and it just being you, with no safety net – there is a real thrill to live performance. It’s a lovely shared experience and theatre gives you a lot more feeling of control.”

For many, Tompkinson first came to prominence during the 1990s, playing over-eager TV news reporter Damien Day in Channel 4’s barbed satire *Drop the Dead Donkey*, written by Andy Hamilton and Guy Jenkin. From the perspective of 2020, the show’s approach actually seems pretty gentle.

“Oh gosh, yeah. And, well, the news is all a bit too scary at the moment. Of course, as soon as anything major happens, people still say: ‘I’d love to see *Drop the Dead Donkey*’s take on this.’ But TV news has changed so much. It’s more constant, obviously, because you’ve got



Top: with co-star Jessica Johnson in *Educating Rita*. Above: As news reporter Damien Day in *Drop the Dead Donkey* (1990-1998) and with Dervla Kirwan in *Ballykissangel* (1996-2001)

It’s just testament to Andy and Guy’s brilliant writing that those characters were so believable.”

Generally Tompkinson’s been associated with playing decent, affable types but he suggests that there are still all kinds of roles he’d like to have a bash at. “Oh, there’s millions – I’ve hardly



opportunity was absolutely brilliant. My brother said it was as good as playing James Bond. That was our growing up – me and our kid going down the Odeon here in Blackpool which is now [burlesque show-bar] Funny Girls. We watched all the Bond films there several times. One day we actually stayed in and watched *Diamonds Are Forever* four times in a row.”

Having made the move back, then, can Tompkinson attest that it really is nicer up north? “Oh gosh it is, so much it is. The people are nicer. They just have more time for one another and the humour’s different. You’re allowed to laugh with people, not at them. It’s not done in a cruel way, whereas I think down south, they do like poking fun at people. It’s more aggressive and not as welcoming, I don’t think.”

Tompkinson laughs, saying: “Blimey, I’ll never work down south again! But I don’t care. I’ll stay up here, thanks, it’s lovely.” ■

“When anything major happens, people still say: ‘I’d love to see *Drop the Dead Donkey*’s take on this.’”

things like Sky News on 24/7. It’s also a lot more transparent, I think. We were able to burst the bubble a little bit and reveal a lot of dirty secrets. I used to try and do a bit of theatre in between making the show, and whenever we’d go to interviews in local news rooms, there were always people saying: ‘We know who Damien’s based on – he’s here in the office.’ There were all these weird clones up and down the country.

scratched the surface of this acting malarkey. It’s limitless and I’ve been so lucky, being able to mix and match the mediums and the different types of roles that I’ve played. The variety of it is what keeps me going.”

Towards the end of 2018, he starred as Scrooge in the Old Vic’s production of *A Christmas Carol*. “And what a treat that was,” he says. “I adore Christmas and part of my ritual is to watch Alastair Sim do Scrooge every year, so to get that

NOT NORMAL BUT NOT STRANGE

Clare Speak has endured three weeks of lockdown in southern Italy while also reporting on it. Life is a mix of Skype conversations with officials about bureaucracy and nervous scarf-clad trips to buy food

We've run out of milk again. Despite my attempts to use as little milk as possible, I'm drinking more tea than ever before under quarantine. Putting the kettle on is a nervous habit.

We're also out of eggs, which we usually get from my in-laws' farmhouse in the Puglian countryside. We can't go there anymore, as it's too far outside the city, and "picking up some eggs" is not on the very short list of government-approved emergency reasons for travel. If I get stopped at a police roadblock, that explanation won't go down well. Since the fine for breaking quarantine rules went up to 3,000 euros I'm almost too scared to leave the house at all.

But I'm going to have to go out, since we're running out of nearly everything. Food shopping is one of the few reasons we're allowed to go anywhere, and food shops and supermarkets some of the few businesses still operating.

I still get nervous about the prospect of being stopped in the street and questioned by police, who are everywhere now. Even though I can speak Italian, being in a foreign country adds an extra layer of complication and uncertainty to an already difficult situation. And I have to go alone. Only one person per family is allowed to do the shopping, the government says.

But first, I need to fill out my Modulo di Autocertificazione – the document we must carry explaining ourselves

whenever we go outside. We have to download it, print it, fill it out (in Italian) and make sure we don't forget it.

The government keeps releasing new, more complex versions of this form, full of wordy sentences and haughty citations of specific laws and decrees. It's a recipe for anxiety. What if you don't have an internet connection, or a printer? Apparently the police will give you a form. What if you don't understand Italian, or know what you're supposed to write? Too bad, apparently. This form has become a far bigger part of my life that I would like it to be; I've repeatedly translated it into English and written articles about how to complete the thing every time the government comes up with a new version.

Famously baroque, Italian bureaucracy is living up to its reputation now more than ever. No one's completely sure about some of the quarantine rules anymore, as regional authorities impose their own tougher laws and local mayors throw their weight around, each trying to appear tougher on quarantine-breakers than the next. Can we go for a run? It's probably not worth risking it. Can we go and sit on the bench outside for a bit? It really depends. Police officers each seem to be interpreting the rules in their own way.

As a reporter, I spend all my time trying to get the facts on the endless new rules, law changes and regional differences, and then trying to explain them to English-



speaking readers. Like all journalists I'm used to writing about difficult topics, and to working long hours when there's a big breaking news story. But I've never experienced a breaking news cycle that goes on day after day for over a month, or reported on something that's completely changed my own life.

But journalism under quarantine is, like everything else, a bit strange. If I can ever get hold of an official, we talk about statistics and law changes over Skype as their kids get up to mischief in the background. I question my neighbours about their lives through locked apartment doors.

I hear from all kinds of people about how quarantine has affected them. Every one of them is anxious and stressed. I get countless emails daily from readers asking if they can go to the post office to pay their Sky bill. If they can travel to visit their sick grandparents. How they can pick up their residence permit. I try to answer them all, but this often feels futile as the official answers change so often.

On my form, I write that I'm going to do the shopping and sign the bottom. I leave



The eerily quiet promenade in Bari in Puglia, southern Italy, normally "a riot of car horns and motorbike engines". Photo: Alessandro Garofalo/PA

the date blank, hoping to be able to reuse the form if I'm not stopped. I tie a scarf around my face, sling a big bag over my shoulder, slip out of my apartment and sneak down the stairs, looking and feeling like a fugitive.

The road outside, usually a riot of car horns and motorbike engines, is silent in the blinding midday sunshine. From windows and balconies on either side, bored neighbours look on, no doubt wondering what my reason is for being out. People have been reporting their neighbours for assumed quarantine-breaking. I try to ignore the feeling of eyes on my back and walk quickly towards the supermarket.

I pass a row of shuttered shops, my favourite café, a family-run restaurant. All have been closed for weeks. I'm worried about their owners and staff, who I feel as if I know but don't really. Here in southern Italy, poverty was already a major problem before millions suddenly lost their incomes to the shutdown.

It's no big secret that a lot of people were working unofficially. Self-employed

workers and small business owners have been hit hard, too. Many are now left with nothing, and people are getting increasingly desperate. Those who were living on their savings during the first weeks of quarantine now say they're running out, and government help isn't

Those who were living on their savings during the first weeks of quarantine now say they're running out

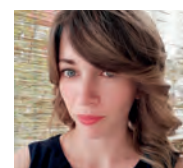
reaching them. The mafia is circling, ready to take advantage. Italian mayors warn that society could "implode".

I'm grateful that I still have work, and that I can't relate to social media posts about the crushing boredom many of my friends are experiencing. Although, like everyone else shut indoors under quarantine, going outside to empty the bins has become a major highlight of my day.

We all hoped quarantine would be nearly over by now, and that we might be able to start getting back to normal. But the government on Wednesday announced the current rules would stay in place until mid-April. We'll get back

to normal very gradually, the prime minister says. The data shows the contagion is slowing, but health officials warn there could always be another wave – the big fear is of a major outbreak here in the poorer south, where hospitals wouldn't cope.

We're all getting used to our mundane daily lives under lockdown. It doesn't quite feel normal, but it no longer feels so strange. After three weeks of it, I don't really think about the fact that I can't go out for a coffee, or for a run, or to meet a friend. But with no end in sight, everyone's becoming far more uneasy about the bigger picture. ■



Freelance journalist Clare Speak is the editor of English language news site *The Local Italy* (thelocal.it)

What's eating them

With people suffering from eating disorders getting younger and younger, experts agree that early intervention is key. But as **Saskia Murphy** finds, it's a much more complex process than simply blaming it on social media

Jane* first noticed her son looked thin when she met him for dinner in Manchester. Joseph*, then 14, was a full-time boarder after winning a scholarship at a ballet school, and as he stepped off the train at Manchester Piccadilly, Jane handed her son a doughnut she had bought him at the station. Joseph had never had issues with food, but that day he devoured the doughnut so quickly it was "as though he'd never seen food before".

That night, the family went for dinner at a pizza restaurant, but Joseph didn't seem himself. "He didn't eat much at all," says Jane. "I kept saying, are you eating? You're getting very thin, darling."

What followed was a confession. Joseph broke down to his mother, telling her he had been restricting food in the belief that the less he ate, the better he would perform.

"I have a very close relationship with Joseph, and I had no idea," says Jane. "It was unbelievable really."

"I hadn't noticed because he was eating at home and he was growing, so it was really difficult to spot."

Jane went to the school with her son that night to speak to the housemaster, but she says there wasn't much support.

"The housemaster just said: 'Right, OK – it's just a case of you eating, Joseph.' He was very young and not capable of looking after Joseph really. The problem with ballet schools is that they see eating disorders as a weakness in a dancer."

"There wasn't a nutritionist on site, and there was no-one looking at what they were eating. I think his ballet teacher did have his suspicions, because Joseph told me he'd questioned him about what he was eating. [The teacher] would never admit that, but he did."

As Jane started to realise what her son had been going through, there were more confessions from Joseph. He'd started getting ill. On one occasion he'd turned blue in a ballet class and had to be taken to the school's medical centre, yet the school hadn't notified his parents. Joseph

also told his mother he'd started coming down with colds regularly and his hair had started falling out, yet the school had failed to pick up on the symptoms.

Jane sought help from private counsellors and a nutritionist, and Joseph was diagnosed with relative energy deficiency in sport – also known as RED-S. Most common in athletes, the British Medical Journal describes RED-S as "the result of insufficient caloric intake and/or excessive energy expenditure", with consequences affecting metabolism, menstrual function, bone health, immunity, protein synthesis, and cardiovascular and psychological health.

"If you think about anorexia specifically, often the girls who display it are hyper-smart."

Thanks to a four-pronged approach including hypnotherapy and support from a private nutritionist, Joseph is now in recovery, but Jane says if it hadn't been for him acknowledging something was wrong and speaking to his mother when he did, he would most likely have been hospitalised.

Joseph is one of the lucky ones. Recent figures from NHS England show hospital admissions for eating disorders have risen by 37 per cent over the last two years. The most common age last year for patients with anorexia was 13 to 15, while a quarter of admissions in 2018-19 were for children aged 18 and under – at 4,471. There were also 10 cases of anorexia among boys, and six among girls aged nine and under.

If there's one thing experts and those who are in recovery from eating disorders agree on, it's that early intervention is key. Research by eating disorder charity Beat shows it takes nearly three and half years for someone to get treatment after first falling ill with an eating disorder, and the largest part of this delay – almost two years – is due to them not realising they have the eating disorder. There is often then a further wait of more than a

year before they visit a GP. Then there's what happens when people do finally attempt to get help.

Rose Anne Evans first started showing symptoms of anorexia when she was 15. After starting to cut out food during school lunchtimes, Evans managed to hide her disordered eating for a while, but friends eventually noticed she had started to isolate herself and urged her to get help.

By the time Evans went to her GP, anorexia had her firmly in its grip. Her eating disorder was affecting her energy levels, mood and mental health. But when her GP told her to step on the

scales, Evans was told her BMI was too high for her to be referred to other services.

"My weight wasn't low enough in the GP's eyes and I was sent away," says Evans, who has now been in recovery for more than four years.

Evans says the GP's decision that day "fuelled" her eating disorder. Eventually she was hospitalised in an in-patient unit for eight months before being transferred to a day unit. When Evans went to university in York she became an outpatient, but she says spending so much time in hospital meant she had to learn to adapt to the outside world again once she was discharged. She now campaigns for early intervention.

"The more we can support young people at home rather than having to go into an in-patient unit like me, and also the earlier we can get these young people treatment, the better chance they have of making a recovery and flourishing and being able to live their life without an eating disorder," she says. "The problem with hospital is it can help to a certain extent but then when you come out you've got to learn to live in the outside world again."



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Rose Anne Evans campaigns for intervention

Psychologist Natasha Tiwari agrees. Tiwari, who runs private education and wellness company the Veda Group, specialises in supporting children and adults with anxiety-related disorders including stress, phobias and past traumas. Most of the clients Tiwari sees with eating disorders are teenage girls, but she is noticing more younger children being referred for help, and says early intervention is “everything”.

“As time goes on we are seeing it with younger and younger children,” says Tiwari. “We don’t label it in the same way. We wouldn’t describe a seven year old who is restricting her eating as having anorexia, but what we might notice is that we have a seven year old who has serious anxiety and it is manifesting in the fact that she is restricting her eating.”

Social media might seem like an obvious place to point the finger, but Tiwari says eating disorders were an

are restricting your body from having most of the things that you need in the assumption that you are going to be starting from scratch. These messages are so confusing for adults, let alone kids, and these conversations are framed around wellness, which is also very manipulative.”

But despite the external factors that can trigger eating disorders, Tiwari says the changing standards of beauty and the nature of the media can’t be ignored.

“It’s age-old but they give all people a sense that the unachievable is possible. But the difference is that usually for an adult who is reasoned and know images are manipulated, they are able to regulate their emotions. We are able to say to ourselves: ‘Yeah, I don’t look like her, but she probably doesn’t even look like her.’ But I would say even kids as old as 17 to 18 aren’t able to process that.”

“Kids these days have only ever known the world with access to this kind of information. You’d have to be around 25 or above at the moment to imagine or remember a time when celebrities looked like ‘normal people’ – when they didn’t have plastic surgery, or had all the things you do to have a Jessica Rabbit-style body.”

Eating disorder charity Beat offers training to school staff so they can help spot the signs of eating disorders in pupils and refer children and parents to local support. Recently rolled out in the North East and Yorkshire and Humber, the charity is aiming to eventually have one staff member in every high school across the country trained in this way.

Tom Quinn, Beat’s director of external affairs, says: “My understanding is that levels of prevalence are pretty equivalent across the country. There is this

often the girls who display it are hyper-smart. They are really bright girls. If they don’t want to be found out they are bright enough and able to manipulate the adults around them for as long as possible into believing that they are eating.”

Evans admits her eating disorder was a “secretive” illness, but thanks to teachers tentatively asking about her welfare when they noticed things weren’t quite right, she felt she had somewhere to turn when she was ready.

“Teachers did ask me if I was OK and they did say they were noticing certain things, but there are stages, and at the time I was in the denial stage.”

“What does help is those teachers coming to you and asking if you’re OK. I know Beat use the term ‘opening the door’.

“One message I always try to get out is that eating disorders are more of a state of mind than a state of body. You can still be what’s classed as a healthy weight, but it is a mental illness so you can be mentally unwell with it.

“Obviously if you’re not able to open up the first time, just knowing that there’s someone to go to when you are ready is really helpful. It often just takes a bit of time to be able to accept help.” ■

** Not their real names*

Joseph had been restricting food in the belief that the less he ate, the better he would perform

issue long before Instagram came on the scene in 2010. Instead, she says eating disorders, particularly in children and teenagers, are often triggered by factors that exist outside body image.

“There are so many reasons why it is happening more now compared to 20 years ago,” says Tiwari. “I definitely think schooling [is linked]. Kids are so aware of the fact they are being assessed and that they are constantly competing against their peers for higher grades.

“There’s also just a lot more toxicity in the environment. We are hit with information about food from all angles and it’s really hard to discern that which is good from that which is unhelpful.

“The language around food has also changed. We say things like food is clean, food is dirty, or we will say things like: ‘I’m on a detox.’ A detox only means you

stereotype that [eating disorders] only affect young, white girls who are middle class, but that’s absolutely wrong. It can affect anyone from any background.”

But Tiwari says successfully spotting the signs can be complex.

“The challenge with eating disorders is that they are so deeply intertwined with anxiety. A lot of children with eating disorders don’t always lose weight really fast, so it’s hard to know what you are looking at. People find it hard to distinguish between what is teen angst and what is somebody acting up because they are actually going through something psychologically and from a neuro perspective things are going a bit wrong.

“What’s also key is that often the person who is suffering from eating disorders doesn’t want to be found out. If you think about anorexia specifically,

Nod of recognition

A new support group based in south Manchester aims to bring women in recovery from eating disorders together in a bid to share advice and reassurance.

Founded in January, Seeds of Hope invites women to meet once a week at Withington Fire Station.

Co-founder Helen Bourne was inspired to start the group with friend Eleanor Shiers after the pair lost a close friend to an eating disorder last September.

Bourne says: “Obviously no two eating disorders are the same but there are common experiences. We meet once a week and it’s a chance to give and receive advice, share ideas, inspire and motivate each other, and offer reassurance and hope.

“The main aim is to bring people together and provide a safe space where others understand. There’s something really affirming and reassuring when you say something and somebody nods as if to say ‘yeah, I get that,’ and I can see that happening in the group.

“Mental illnesses can be isolating and you can feel like you’re the only person [going through it], so I can see it in the group when somebody says something and someone nods. It reduces that isolation a bit.”

See facebook.com/pg/seedsofhopemanchester

London



The House of Fine Art presents a VR experience of **Nova**, an exhibition by Zhuang Hong Yi, featuring his lush flowerbed paintings, created by folding pieces of rice paper into blossoms. (thehouseoffineart.com)

Sydney



Piano Day is an exclusive broadcast from the Sydney Opera House featuring Jon Hopkins, Joep Beving, Margaret Leng Tan, Nils Frahm and more. It's part of a catalogue of cultural performances being made available on demand alongside a weekly programme of full-length performances, live recordings and never-before-seen footage from the Opera House archives. (sydneyoperahouse.com)

London



Beloved children's author **David Walliams** is reading chapters from his *World Worst Children* series daily at 11am. (tinyurl.com/rh3swc7)



Huddersfield

Opera North is streaming Wagner's epic **Ring Cycle** in full online. The marathon of music runs for a total of 15 hours and took place over four days in 2016*. Modelled on ancient Greek dramas, *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* can be viewed separately, but lockdown gives little room for excuses not to watch them consecutively. (operanorth.co.uk/the-ring-cycle)

THINGS TO DO ONLINE THIS WEEK



London

A live recording of children's musical **The Wind in the Willows** is streaming from the Palladium. Viewers are asked to make a pay-what-you-can donation. (willowsmusical.com)



London

The National Theatre at Home is streaming a recorded performance into living rooms across the country every Thursday night. This week (9 April) is Sally Cookson's adaptation of **Jane Eyre**. In a 2017 review we said: "Like the heroine herself the stage show is unadorned but there is nothing plain Jane about it." (nationaltheatre.org.uk)



Andalusia

The Arts Society Connected is a new online platform being launched this Tuesday by the UK arts education charity. A series of fortnightly lectures will begin with an examination of the 1656 painting *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez, given by art historian and linguist Jacqueline Cockburn. (connected.theartsociety.org)



Edinburgh

Flip between panda cam, penguin cam, tiger cam, koala cam and pockhopper penguin cam on a **live remote visit to Edinburgh Zoo**. (edinburghzoo.org.uk)



TELEVISION

THE GREAT BIG DIG

More4, Thursday 9 April, 9pm

Fans of sorely missed archaeology show *Time Team* will be forgiven for a sense of déjà vu when they settle down to watch this new series, in which an actor best known for comedy turns presenter and accompanies a gang of soil-covered scientists as they look for evidence of ancient structures. It's Hugh Dennis in front of the camera, not Tony Robinson, and the archaeologists are somewhat younger and less eccentric than *Time Team*'s lovable rabble, but the effect is still the same: gently fascinating and reassuring telly. Just what we need right now.

There is one key difference in the format however. While *Time Team* largely concerned itself with fairly elaborate digs in fields, farms and other open spaces, the focus here is on the history literally beneath our feet, as every episode involves ordinary streets and back gardens. For this first episode that means Florence Road in Maidstone, where a Roman settlement may have once stood.

Thankfully, the show doesn't get too bogged down in the logistics. There's some knocking on doors, polite requests to dig up lawns and they're off – albeit with a warning from one long-term resident not to disturb the remains of her pet chinchilla.

The domestic location means that the larger target of the search is ultimately less important – to the viewer at least – than the smaller discoveries made on the way down: the Victorian toys and other ephemera lurking just beneath the topsoil. There's just something very calming about watching ungroomed experts going about their business, so even if it feels like we've seen this all before, it's not an unwelcome return.

There are aspects that don't quite work. Dennis is a curiously subdued host, lacking Robinson's obvious excitement for the subject matter and drifting in and out, rather than getting his hands dirty. But maybe that's OK. Although it would be nice to have a little more nerdy energy on display, by focusing on suburban streets there's also a lovely sense of community as families and kids join in (one even makes a spectacular discovery while digging on her own) and it all culminates with neighbours united in fascination at the shared past below their flower beds and shrubbery.

Heck, right now, just seeing people out and about, interacting with each other in balmy British sunshine, feels like a tonic. There's nothing wrong with TV comfort food right now.

DAN WHITEHEAD



ON DEMAND

THE INVISIBLE MAN (Digital Rental)

21 BRIDGES (DVD, Blu-ray, Digital)

COLOR OUT OF SPACE (Curzon Home Cinema)

One of the many impacts of the virus lockdown is that several movies that were in cinemas have had their home release yanked forwards, so viewers can catch them at home instead. This means that if you missed the chance to catch the latest film version of **The Invisible Man**, you can now do so – and you absolutely should. Written and directed by Leigh Whannel, this update bears very little resemblance to the HG Wells original or any other screen adaptation. Elisabeth Moss stars as Cecilia, who we first meet fleeing her abusive and ridiculously wealthy tech-bro boyfriend, Adrian Griffin. As she pieces her life back together, she receives word that Adrian has killed himself – and left her a small fortune in his will. That's when things get weird, and unusual events start to happen around Cecilia.

The cause, of course, is given away by the title but the story still manages to deliver a few solid twists and reversals all the same. It's also seriously creepy, conjuring feelings of dread from every empty corner of the frame, lest an unseen stalker is waiting there. It's this aspect that makes this version of *The Invisible Man* far more than just another remake. Whannel has taken the concept and used it to dig deep into the ways men manipulate, bully and gaslight women, as Adrian makes Cecilia fear for her sanity more than her life. Smart, scary and substantial, it'll make you look twice at every empty chair in your living room.

Also available now is **21 Bridges**, a throwback thriller in which Chadwick Boseman plays a hard-nosed detective tasked with finding two cop killers at large in Manhattan before dawn. He does this by closing the entire island down, and then "flooding the city with blue". It's the sort of film that Lee Marvin might have made in the 1970s, and while it lacks the grit that era would have offered, it's a solid and punchy movie that stands out amidst the more fanciful fare that dominates screens these days.

Of course, fanciful fare has its own charm, and in **Color Out Of Space** none other than Nicolas Cage gets gloopy in this HP Lovecraft adaptation about an extra-terrestrial force that mutates everything it touches. One part over-the-top splattery horror, one part psychedelic wig-out, it's a feast for the senses – if you have a strong stomach.

DAN WHITEHEAD



MUSIC

DUA LIPA

Future Nostalgia (Warner)



One consequence of the coronavirus pandemic is that nearly every major album planned for April and May has been postponed until later in the year when artists can promote them.

Credit then to Dua Lipa for bringing forward the release of her second record to keep fans happy during lockdown. The fact it had already leaked online almost certainly influenced her decision, but that inconvenient truth doesn't detract from a welcome burst of musical sunshine in these dark and gloomy times.

"You want a timeless song, I wanna change the game," sings the 24 year old on the effervescent title track, introducing the fusion of contemporary pop and retro disco-funk that characterises *Future Nostalgia*.

By and large, it's an approach that works extremely well, with songs like *Levitating*, *Don't Start Now* and a shimmering synth-driven *Cool* borrowing elements from Prince, Donna Summer, Jamiroquai and *Can't Get You Out Of My Head*-era Kylie, and updating them for modern ears through innovative production techniques and a sprinkling of feisty 2020 attitude.

The Daft Punk-esque *Break My Heart*, built around a sample of INXS's *Need You Tonight*, and pulsing pop perfection of *Physical* showcase the album's rich blend of influences and sounds at its sharpest.

RICHARD SMIRKE

PEARL JAM

Gigaton

(UMG)



"Whoever said it's all been said, gave up on satisfaction," defiantly declares Eddie Vedder at the start of Pearl Jam's first studio album in seven years. A few songs later he's yelling "Much to be done" over and over again. The singer's renewed fire is matched by his bandmates, who make several bold departures from the veteran group's classic rock sound within *Gigaton*'s largely gripping 57 minutes. A loose and freewheeling *Buckle Up* carries shades of Elbow. *River Cross* is set to mournful pump organ. Most startling is *Dance of The Clairvoyants*, a brilliantly jerky punk-funk cut clearly inspired by Talking Heads.

SKEPTA, CHIP & YOUNG ADZ

Insomnia

(SKC M29)



A surprise release from three of the UK's leading MCs, *Insomnia* has the kind of woozy, low tempo sound that would make the perfect soundtrack to laidback summer parties with friends. Thankfully, its appeal also extends to self-isolation conditions with the soulful *Golden Brown*, MIA-sampling *St Tropez* and joyful *Mains* some of the sweetest moments. The grime-style *Waves* and a saxophone-featuring *Traumatised* represent the album's darker, paranoid side and showcase tight rhyming skills. Trap beats, skittering snares, deep bass and icy synths underpin their smooth flow.

IN THIS MOMENT

Mother

(Atlantic)



Just when you thought things couldn't get any worse along comes California metalcore band In This Moment to remind us that a new barrel-scraping nadir is always lurking around the corner. The nicest thing that can be said about *Mother*, the group's seventh album, is that it's over in under an hour. Few other positives can be found within this inspiration-free mix of grinding riffs, pounding drums, pulsing electronics and the wailing vocals of Maria Brink, who co-founded the band in 2005. Unnecessary covers of Queen's *We Will Rock You*, Mazzy Star's *Into Dust* and Steve Miller Band's *Fly Like An Eagle* compound the sense of pointlessness.



CINEMA

STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

Set in early 1980s South Africa, **Moffie** (available from 24 April, Curzon Home Cinema) is based on an autobiographical novel by André -Carl van der Merwe. Nicholas Van der Swart is, like all young white men of his age, conscripted into military service and sent to a remote boot camp to be trained to fight. Once there, he must survive the brutality of day to day life, while navigating his own secret sexual desires in a world where homosexuality is not only outlawed but where gay men are seen as enemies of the state.

This gripping film by writer-director Oliver Hermanus is pacy and unrelenting, exposing not only the damage the regime did to gay men but to all young white men exposed to its brutality and nonsensical white supremacist ideology. With its jarring, unnerving soundtrack by Braam du Toit, it's clear from the off that this is going to be an uncomfortable watch.

Kai Luke Brummer is excellent in the lead role, charting Nick's growth from teenager to young man with heart-wrenching restraint. There's no room for kindness in the hyper-masculine world Nick finds himself in, let alone love and intimacy. The merest touch between him and fellow recruit Stassen, who he develops feelings for, is infused with dreaded tension. They know that any discovery of "deviant behaviour" could see them beaten to near death and sent to Ward 22, a military hospital where LGBT people underwent horrific treatments in an attempt to "cure" them. Clearly no one is going to come out of this experience scar free, especially emotionally, and ultimately this is a film about survival.

In other news, a new initiative has been launched by distributors Modern Films (modernfilms.com), where viewers can watch their latest releases online and support independent cinemas at the same time, including Home in Manchester and Showroom Workstation in Sheffield. Recently added is the drama **The Perfect Candidate**, in which an ambitious young doctor working in a small-town clinic in Saudi Arabia has to earn the respect of male colleagues and acceptance from her patients every day. But when a bureaucratic mix-up leads her to stumble on the application for her local city elections, she decides to run for office.

CHRISTIAN LISSEMAN



IN THE FRAME

Sarah Jane Moon

Sarah Jane Moon is reframing portraiture away from the male gaze. **Diana Souhami**, author of a book about lesbians' influence on Modernism, asks her about her work

"My work is about people, who happen to be mostly women and mostly from the LGBTQI+ community," the portrait painter Sarah Jane Moon says.

Moon takes the classic art of portrait and figure painting into the arena of gender diversity and portrays lesbian, butch, trans and queer individuals. She shows their attitudes, hairstyles, fashion statements, t-shirts and tattoos and talks of striving for connection with each of them through her painting.

All wait to be depicted, inviting interpretation. They are posed, usually seated, mostly alone, some with a partner. All are light years away from the reclining nudes, befreckled

daughters and family members of nineteenth-century male portraiture.

None of the people Moon paints are subjects, or apologists – most of them she knows, either as friends or as contributors to the queer community. They are artists, performers and writers.

"I am here, reckon with me" might be a caption for each. "I aim to celebrate those who I admire and respect and who are uniquely themselves," she says.

"Portraiture can be a terribly loaded genre, historically often used to convey notions of wealth, class and privilege. Frequently it has been employed to prop up societal and heteronormative ideas of the nuclear family.

My work consciously and deliberately seeks to expand the genre and provide more ways of being."

Brought up in a small New Zealand town, Moon unearthed and lived her lesbian identity in London. "I found a load of brilliant women who were doing amazing things," she says. Her community inspires and connects with her. She supports Stonewall, the Terence Higgins Trust and Pride in London.

Moon is a lesbian painter in so far as she is lesbian. For the rest, with her concentration on technique, detail and form, her vibrant use of colour, her focus and energy, she is an ambitious and dedicated artist, alone with her muse.

I find myself reading the titles of the books on the shelves in her paintings, seeing a host of references to notable feminists, but also a wave to John Berger, Gustave Courbet, Matisse, Hockney. She pulls her community from visual oblivion, celebrates their diversity, parades their difference, even as she crafts



them into abiding art works and takes them into the wider cultural world.

Her allegiance is to feminism. Her painterliness, technique, discipline and concentration are mainstream and for all time. She has an art theory background, knows her history and her contribution to its changing path. Though contemporary, she wants her work to last. She speaks for all women when she says: "Culture is saturated with male voices and male paintbrushes, images by men that reference the world from a male standpoint."

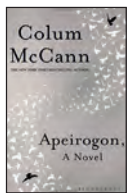
Moon hopes this year's BP award exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery will be postponed rather than cancelled. In it she has a huge portrait of the New York lesbian photographer Lola Flash, whose work celebrates the lives of queer people of colour. Lockdown or not, Moon has plenty of exhibition opportunities, past accolades, commissions and work in hand.

In more recent paintings a shift is discernible to a freer style, less distraction from the central character, a challenge to herself to rescind control. Her gallery of people grows. It will be intriguing to see how far and fast that happens and how her work evolves.

Diana Souhami is the author of *No Modernism Without Lesbians* (£25, hardback, Head of Zeus)



Main photo: New Zealand-born but now living in London, Moon with her portraits at her exhibition *Queer Portraits*. Top: Bird La Bird (Threesome). Above: Lee And Roy. Photo: Holly Falconer



Author Q&A: Colum McCann

APEIROGON

(Bloomsbury)

Rami is Israeli. Bassam is Palestinian. Rami's daughter was killed by a suicide bomber. Bassam's daughter was killed by the border police. The two men become friends in this traditionally epic but formally innovative novel by the award-winning Dublin-raised writer, who now lives in New York.

***Apeirogon* is based on the real-life stories of Rami and Bassam. Could you tell us how you met them and how this led to the idea of the novel?**

Almost six years ago I went on a trip to Israel and Palestine with my non-profit, Narrative 4, a global story exchange group. There was a big group of us – activists, artists, musicians – and we had an incredible trip. We got to meet with all sorts of people: Palestinian musicians like Tamer Nafar, Israeli writers like Assaf Gavron, former soldiers, security experts, theologians, historians. We were invited into people's homes in Ramallah, in Tel Aviv. It was an incredible trip and it really cracked my head open. And then, on my second to last night we went to Beit Jala, just outside Jerusalem. A cold November day. Dark and a little rainy. We walked into this little office, up a rickety flight of stairs. These two men were sitting there and they introduced themselves as Rami and Bassam. Ordinary men in an ordinary place – or so it seemed to me at the time.

And then they began to tell me about their daughters, Smadar and Abir, both of them lost in the conflict. And that was the real headwrecker, the heartwrecker. It seemed to me like it was the first time they had ever told the story. Of course it wasn't. They had told it hundreds of times before. But I was deeply moved and forever changed. I asked them if they would let me tell their story and they said yes. I don't think they quite knew what I was going to do. But they trusted me. And I trusted them.

The book then goes on to mix real-life events with fictional ones, in ways similar to your previous novels *Let the Great World Spin* and *Transatlantic*. What does this allow you to do and does it present any special challenges?

I would have to say that some of it is imagined but all of it is real. I suppose story-telling in any form, fiction or non-fiction, should breed understanding. It broadens our sense of the world. Maybe "a story" is the best way to describe it but I realise that that becomes sort of problematic as a word too. I sometimes describe it as a sort of hyper novel. And this is the question de jour. Fiction, non-fiction. Truth, post-truth. The relationship between fiction and truth has always been complicated but even more so nowadays. I have always said that facts are mercenary things. They can be manipulated and shipped off to do whatever work you need them to do. On the other hand, or maybe the same hand, they can work miracles. I prefer the idea of "texture" to fact: the small anonymous moments in conjunction with the over-arching epic ones. I don't privilege the poet over the journalist, or the fiction writer over the essayist. On a very simple level it's all about story-telling. Can you tell a good story that is honest? Can you tell something that sends a shiver down your own spine? Because, let's face it, not everyone in the world has a spine these days.

***Apeirogon* has had much praise for its daring form. Did the story dictate that form or did it come about from a desire to take risks and be adventurous?**

Honestly I can't really remember when I hit upon the structure but it was fairly early on. I wanted to try to write a book that disrupted some of the accepted narrative around Israel and Palestine, and, I suppose, try to disrupt the accepted narrative form as well. We all know that nothing is ever new under the sun, but I'd been thinking for a while about writing a novel that echoes some of the ways the internet has shaped the way we



think and feel. And when I came upon the story of Rami and Bassam I had to admit that I was confused by the politics of Israel and Palestine. And I wanted a form that would simultaneously embrace and undermine some of that confusion. The novel is confusing at first. And I wanted the reader to say, that's all right, I'm confused, but I get it: this is a story about two men who should not be friends, but they are, somehow, through the force of their grief, and through this they bring about a sliver of hope.

And I wanted to tell a story that anyone who knew nothing about the conflict could understand, but at the same time write it for people who absolutely understood the nuts and bolts, the areas A, B and C. So it was an all-embracing form. And I felt it had to be musical. I began to feel like the conductor of an orchestra.

Why are there 1,001 chapters?

It's a direct reference to *1,001 Nights* or *Arabian Nights*, as it is sometimes called, which is essentially a book about how to stave off death by story-telling.

In your creative writing teaching, do you stress character, plot, structure and so on, or do you take a more personal approach?

It's all about language for me. The sound of it. The music. Music to me is more important than meaning. You want to make your reader feel things. You want them to be in the pulse of the moment.

Are there any parallels between the Irish Troubles and the Israeli occupation?

I think that having spent a lot of time in Northern Ireland was very important to me. Also, having seen the Irish peace process in close-up was helpful in my understanding of what was going on over there. And so when I went to Palestine, I could recognise the grief. And I could recognise the force of language as a weapon. Walking through a checkpoint was not the same as walking through a checkpoint in Derry when I was eight, nine, 10 years old, but it did bring back particular feelings that I tried to capture in the book.

Many people believe Trump's proposal in January for an Israel-Palestine peace plan was a non-starter. What's your take on prospects for the region?

I don't know if it's my place to talk about this. I'd rather let the stories of Rami and Bassam speak to it. They believe that through the force of story-telling they can put a crack in the wall and eventually, if you can put enough cracks in the wall, it will fall. It has happened in other places. Ireland for instance. But, okay, I can't throw away this question. Let's be real: Trump's "peace" plan is a joke, a tragic joke. Imagine having a peace plan announcement to which the Palestinian representatives weren't even invited. How can that make any sense at all? Try explaining that form of "peace" to an alien.

KEVIN GOPAL

OFF THE SHELF POWER IN ALL ITS FORMS

JEN CALLEJA

It was only after I'd picked the final 13 stories to go into my debut collection that I realised that the link between them was power dynamics. I mainly write from a place of grappling with a political or social question – often about gender inequality, institutions and those in positions of power – and how external factors like personal or wider history affect our agency as individuals and how we're treated by others. Perhaps the most influential collection of short stories I read when I was younger was Angela Carter's **The Bloody Chamber** (Gollancz). Reading Carter's reworkings of fairy tales for the first time was like someone revealing that the foundation of everything I thought I was sure about was no longer real. It was genuinely shocking to now see fairy tales as programmes to inhibit our will to resist power in relationships and within the family unit, especially as girls and women, but also as children, right from our toddling years.

One of my favourite novels of last year was **A House in Norway** (Norvik Press) by Vigdis Hjorth, translated from Norwegian by Charlotte Barslund. At the centre of the novel is a fascinating contradiction – a left-wing artist called Alma who makes tapestries about suffragettes and workers' unions, but who is an indifferent, verging on cruel landlord to her Polish neighbour, who is a victim of domestic abuse. The descriptions of the artist's bohemian life and her ruminations on how good she is juxtaposed with her cold text messages to her tenant are central to Hjorth's critique of liberal feel-goodery.

A novel I'm currently translating from German by Austrian author Raphaela Edelbauer, called **The Liquid Land** (forthcoming from Scribe) in English, also focuses on the power of the individual in the face of social justice. Ruth is a theoretical physicist tasked with understanding and helping slow the gradual sinking of a town into "the hole". Ruth begins to become suspicious when her research seems to suggest a cover-up to do with the hole during the Nazi era – by both the people of the town and the slippery Countess. The novel, like Hjorth's, looks at how evil triumphs when no one dares disrupt their own comfort and sense of being a good person, choosing to ignore and forget what troubles them.

Jen Calleja's short story collection **I'm Afraid That's All We've Got Time For** has just been published by Prototype



OFF THE SHELF

YOUNG ADULT BOOKS FOR ISOLATION

BEN OLIVER



Reading was always an escape for me, a hiding place from bullies, teachers who thought I was stupid and seemingly never-ending boredom. Without books, my teenage years would have been a much darker place. That's why I choose to write young adult fiction; I try to write worlds for struggling young people to escape into. Sounds a bit pretentious, but it's true! I'm trying to write the book that the 14-year-old me would enjoy more than any other book.

And now, in this strange and unprecedented time when schools are shut, we are all isolating and social distancing, books are more important than ever, and we could all use an escape from time to time. So, with that in mind, here are five YA books to read in isolation.

The Loop by Ben Oliver. Did I put my own book at number one? Yes. Am I ashamed? A little! But this list is in no particular order so ... *The Loop* is a young adult sci-fi thriller set inside a juvenile death-row prison that is run by artificial intelligence. Life is one boring repetitive cycle for Luka Kane, until things start to go awry and the inmates realise they must escape.

The Falling in Love Montage (Andersen Press) by Ciara Smyth. This one doesn't come out until June, but who knows where we'll be in June? You should pre-order this beautifully written rom-com about two girls, a cynic and a true believer, as they go on movie-worthy dates throughout the summer and try not to fall in love.

The Good Hawk (Walker Books) by Joseph Elliot. Set in a mythical version of Scotland, Agatha (who is looked down upon by some members of her clan due to the condition she was born with) and Jamie (a reluctant hero) must embark on a dangerous journey to a land of forgotten magic and terrifying creatures to save their kidnapped clan. One of the most engaging books I've read in a long time, it's like *Game of Thrones* for a younger audience.

The Hunger Games (Scholastic) by Suzanne Collins. Look, I know that you already know about *The Hunger Games* but, come on – it's so good! Plus, the prequel novel, *A Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, is coming out in May, so this is the perfect time to re-read.

Queen of Coin and Whispers (O'Brien Press) by Helen Corcoran. Another upcoming novel from a fantastic writer, this one is a young-adult fantasy about a Queen and her Spymaster. Political intrigue, murder and romance with some of the most vividly written characters you're likely to read this year!

The Loop by Ben Oliver is out now, £7.99



LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

NOEL CLARKE

Actor and director, creator of *Kidulthood*, aged 44

At 16, I didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't know what you could do. And I didn't see a lot of things that I could achieve. I grew up in what was, at the time, a very rough area opposite Grenfell Tower. It is still an underfunded area. I guess I thought I would have, like, 10 kids with 10 different people. I was mostly thinking about what girl I was going to chat up. At weekends I worked at the sports centre in Ladbroke Grove as a waterslide attendant.

I knew I wanted to act but the industry felt closed. It was inaccessible, it was improbable, it was an impossibility. There was no way we could afford drama school and no one we knew was an actor, so I couldn't ask how you accessed it. There was a book called *Contacts* in WH Smith. It said if you rang the agents listed inside you could become an actor, which was horseshit because no one got back to you. I bought it every year.

I have always had a fight in me. The 16 year old me was very like the person I am now, who is always saying: "You ain't stopping me." When my friends were dealing weed to get money, I was cleaning the sports centre. I didn't judge them – they're my friends. But I was busting my ass cleaning sweat off the machines and dealing with poop on the walls. The next morning, they were spotless because I was like: "I'm going to be the best damn cleaner there is." That's always been my mentality. When I started acting, my attitude was to be the number one black British actor. When I was announced as the most prolific black British actor in the business [by the BFI in 2016], I didn't relax. As they were announcing it on stage I thought: "I'm not satisfied. Now what?"

Someone telling me I could do this was massive. And my younger self was naïve enough to think if your teacher said you could do it, you really could. I was talking about *Pulp Fiction* with my media teacher and Mr Jones said: "You can do whatever you like." It blew my mind. I still speak to him now. I watched American indie films as a teenager because at least in those films I was seeing black people. So I'd watch *Boyz n the Hood*, *New Jack City*, but also Kevin Smith's *Clerks* and *Mallrats* and Larry Clark's *Kids*.

My younger self was unaware of the battles he would face. He thought he would be treated like everyone else, because if you wanted to make films, you can make films, right? I'm glad he was naïve. Going through this industry as a person of colour, there is a lack of respect and opportunities. You have to achieve 10 times more than other people to be considered near their level. I have won awards that would open a shitload of doors if I fitted the cookie-cutter mould. I'm glad my younger self didn't know, because if he had the knowledge I have now, it might have stopped him.

I got into this business very luckily. I was working in the gym and met a director who let me audition for a Channel 4 pilot called *Metrosexuality*. I got the part and it became a series. But within months I realised I wasn't going to get where I wanted to. I got offered auditions for *Thief #1*. But why couldn't I get the audition for Joe? "Oh, he is blond with blue eyes." It started getting my goat, so I started writing.

Writing and acting wasn't encouraged at home, but not because my mother wasn't supportive. It was because it was so alien. She came from Trinidad in 1969. How do you tell someone who went through god knows how many hardships, then had people asking if she'd lived in trees in



Trinidad, and who wants to give her son a better life, that you are going to be an actor, which doesn't guarantee any wage whatsoever? It's not understandable. When I got offered £1,500 a week to do the soap *Family Affairs*, my mum was celebrating because she was a nurse earning much less saving lives. Yet here I was, a buffoon, a clown, a jester, saying I don't want the job. It is no slight to anyone that did it – Idris Elba was in it and is now the biggest black star in the world. My mum couldn't understand it. She was upset for ages.

The film *Notting Hill* was one reason I wrote *Kidulthood*. Because even though I lived five minutes from that blue door, I did not see anything that represented me. But I didn't understand the importance of *Kidulthood* at the time. I just wrote a story that was real to me about things I had seen in the area. Consequently, the message was that if you behave like this, you could get caught up in stuff and you might die. I saw what happened to friends of mine.

I grew up with people who were affluent, people who were dirt poor, and people like myself who were in the middle. Next to the council estates were £6 million houses and the kids went to the same school. It shaped me massively because it was very multicultural. *Kidulthood* was not a black film. The kids are mixed, because that is what I saw. All Saints Road, which now has some of the trendiest restaurants in London, was called the front line. If you were white or a policeman, you would be better served not to go down there. If you told people you were from Ladbroke Grove, they stood back. It was a badge of pride we wore as young men.

The amount of stuff I've had to do to even get a modicum of respect in this industry is crazy. People forget I have got an Olivier Award, I was in *Doctor Who* playing Mickey Smith chasing Billie Piper down corridors, I was in *Star Trek*. I have done a multitude of roles. My younger self would be so proud of *Bulletproof* – I watched *Beverly Hills Cop* and *Lethal Weapon* so it is exactly what that younger version of myself wanted to do.

I would tell my younger self you will meet this girl and she is the one. Just stick with her. I was working in the gym when we met. Iris is going to hate me for saying this, but before that, I was a shagger. We have been

I'm glad my younger self was naïve. If he knew the battles he would face it might have stopped him.

Shutterstock

together 20 years now. So if I could flash a message up when he was sitting in the gym and this girl brings him sandwiches, I would just say: 'That's the girl!' We have three beautiful kids. I go home every day and I'm chuffed, man.

Fatherhood made me more focused. I want to achieve as much as I can so they don't have to bust their arse the way I did. I want them to know how to work hard, but I want them to have enough to go to university or put down a deposit. Fatherhood calmed me as well. There are times I would have kicked off if I didn't have children but, in the age of the internet, they will have to deal with the fallout.

My mum lives opposite Grenfell Tower and I was there hours after the fire. I was supposed to go to an X-Men audition but my mum texted me to tell me Grenfell's on fire. I lived opposite it for 20 years and saw fires before. The fire brigade would come and spray it out. I got up at 6am, saw it on the news and raced down. Fuck the X-Men audition. I was there for two days, doing beds in the sports centre I worked in all those years before. I'd worked with two brothers – one of their daughters died in the fire, another friend was the first firefighter on the scene, Dave Badillo.

I try not to get involved in politics. I am more interested in how we make women feel comfortable in the workplace and young black actors feel comfortable. Politicians are going to do what they want. I was a Labour supporter because my mum was a nurse. As you get older, you start drifting right because you start protecting what you have, but I am still very left.

I don't bullshit, I don't mess around, and that makes you very polarising. I would tell young Noel to be who he is but understand people are not going to like you. They will love you or hate you – that's how your life is going to be. You just have to deal with it.

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INTERVIEW: ADRIAN LOBB

Series two of Bulletproof is airing now on Sky One and Now TV on Fridays at 9pm

Please help us find

Gemma MacLeod - Northampton



Gemma was last seen in Northampton on 1 March 2019. She was 39 years old when she went missing.

Gemma is urged to call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support, including the opportunity to send a message in confidence.

George Sutherland - Dumbarton, West Dumbartonshire



George has been missing from Dumbarton since 8 March 2020. He was 45 years old when he disappeared.

George, please call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support, in confidence, whenever you feel ready.

Matthew McCombe - Amsterdam



Matthew went missing from Amsterdam on 14 March 2020. He was 21 years old when he was last seen.

Matthew, we are here for you when you are ready; we can listen, talk you through what help you need, pass a message on for you and help you to be safe. Please call or text 116 000.

Igor Da Silva Correia - Haringey, London



Igor has been missing from Haringey since 13 March 2020. He was 36 years old when he disappeared.

Igor, please call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support whenever you feel ready.

Xhuana Gjoshi



Xhuana has been missing since 14 February 2020. She was 23 when she disappeared.

Xhuana, we are here for you when you are ready; we can listen, talk you through what help you need, pass a message on for you and help you to be safe. Please call or text 116 000.

Marques Walker - Croydon, London



Marques has been missing from Croydon since 27 February 2020. He was 14 years old at the time of his disappearance.

Marques, we are here for you when you are ready; we can listen, talk you through what help you need, pass a message on for you and help you to be safe. Please call or text 116 000.

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It's free, 24hr and confidential

Missing People would like to thank *The Big Issue* for publicising vulnerable missing people on this page.

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*Texts cost £5 plus your standard network charge. Missing People receives 100% of your donation. Obtain the bill payer's permission.

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BRAINWORK

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	1						4	
9								5
	3	5	7		9	2	6	
		6				8		
	4	8	2		6	9	1	
3								9
	6						7	
		9	1		4	6		

Complete the Sudoku puzzle so that each and every row, column and region contains the numbers one to nine once.

The solution to the last Sudoku is shown on the right.

4	8	3	5	2	6	1	9	7
5	9	7	4	3	1	6	2	8
2	6	1	7	8	9	3	5	4
7	1	5	3	9	4	2	8	6
8	2	6	1	7	5	4	3	9
3	4	9	8	6	2	7	1	5
6	5	4	9	1	3	8	7	2
1	7	2	6	5	8	9	4	3
9	3	8	2	4	7	5	6	1

CROSSWORD 1332

1		2			3		4		5
					6				
7			8						
		9							
	10								
11						12	13		
					14				
15			16					17	18
							19		
20									
					21				

SUPPLIED BY PANTHES

CRYPTIC CLUES: ACROSS

1. Preserve with cold breeze, batting out for more volume (6)
6. Cut year after positive response in German banger (6)
7. First five to be ill will not pass (4)
9. 8dn can crushed by queen at university (9)
11. In the middle somehow, it typifies comic (5)
12. Flume for water or fire by the sound of it (5)
15. How to get off your high horse? (5,4)
19. Advance capital to left extremity (4)
20. Left right with everyone else underfoot (6)
21. Volunteers fall into lake wearing plaid (6)

CRYPTIC CLUES: DOWN

1. Pipe going from Edinburgh to Dundee (4)
2. 6C in the Spanish badness (4)
3. EC jet in difficulty, what does pilot do? (5)
4. Misfortunes associated with millstone (4)
5. Copious supply when fast in strange pay (7)
8. Endure most recent shape for cobbler (4)
10. Camel, say, working on i.e plan B (7)
13. Who goes out to long bay? (4)
14. In our times inclined to modify (5)
16. King may be trapped here, have Brazilian tea (4)
17. Amphibian found at recent junction (4)
18. Paradise for Carlisle banker (4)

QUICK CLUES: ACROSS

1. Turn to ice (6)
6. Old car (6)
7. Get weaker (4)
9. WW2 aircraft (9)
11. Humorous (5)
12. Waste disposal tube (5)
15. Retreat from a previously held position (5,4)
19. Allow temporary use of (4)
20. Arch of foot (6)
21. Scottish fabric design (6)

QUICK CLUES: DOWN

1. High pitched military flute (4)
2. Wickedness (4)
3. Expel, disgorge (5)
4. Troubles (4)
5. Galore (7)
8. Final (4)
10. Early aircraft (7)
13. Cry like a wolf (4)
14. Alter (5)
16. Friend (4)
17. Eft (4)
18. Ecological project in Cornwall (4)

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

ACROSS: 1. Restore, 5. Ant
7. Crave, 8. Title, 9. Toe, 10. Anarchy
11. Epitaph, 13. Pea, 14. Occur
15. Reiki, 16. Try, 17. Leeches

DOWN: 1. Rock the boat, 2. Stale
3. Over a barrel, 4. Extra charge
5. Attic, 6. The Pyramids, 12. Itchy
13. Phish



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News from the Intrepid Shepherdess

Unintended Consequences and Co-Lateral Damage

With the world focusing on the coronavirus and hunkering down in the wake of the Chinese experience, the consequences are already becoming apparent. But how many have thought about the co-lateral damage?

One of the first signs of things beginning to happen were a scree of telephone calls from advertisers who we have worked with in the past to promote our Southdown wool bedding. Suddenly they were all offering me bargain basement advertising rates in their various magazines. Clearly to fill spaces recently vacated by others, as retailers began, at very short notice, cutting back on their marketing campaigns.

I was not surprised, but maintain that cutting back on marketing is exactly what a retailer should not do right now. And this applies even more to the companies that support this publication. Given the business model of the Big Issue, through which the vendors earn a living off the sales of their magazines, now is the very time to remain supportive.

Yes, there probably will be less people on the high streets of the UK and ergo the vendors will sell less magazines while this virus plays out. Hard-headed business people would conclude that money spent on advertising now is wasted. But this is not how I see it, for better or for worse, my heart rules over my head.

Firstly, my word is my bond and if I commit to an advertising campaign, I will not suddenly renege and let my account manager down. This applies to anything I commit to – you just don't let the side down, not ever.

Secondly, it is in the face of adversity that we all need to pull together, stand shoulder to shoulder and support each other in every possible way. So that is why this particular blog is appearing now – it is in special support of all the Big Issue vendors, in the hope that they can continue, in good health, selling their copies and that these sales go some way to making their lives easier in these unprecedentedly trying times.

And if you are reading this, I say a very sincere thank you, because you too have stepped up to the plate in support and between all of us, we are doing something to prevent the Big Issue vendors from becoming co-lateral damage.



southdown duvets

Jessica





You can help end avoidable blindness today

Set up a regular gift today to help end avoidable blindness.

Life with cataracts has not been easy for three-year-old Leah, living in East Africa. Unable to see, every morning she sits on an old car tyre, hearing the sounds of her brother and cousins going to school.

She feels left out and alone.

Leah's mother is heartbroken that her daughter is needlessly blind. She knows cataract surgery to restore sight can take just 45 minutes, but many families like hers in low-income countries cannot afford the £95 surgery.

No child should be blind just because they are poor.

You can change this by setting up a small monthly donation to CBM today. Public donations will support CBM's work transforming lives wherever the need is greatest.

A regular gift will help restore the eyesight of children like Leah and help them to attend school and play with their friends. Please help us give sight to children in the world's poorest places.



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