

10th Episode

Creativity, and what kept us going

Welcome to Doorstep Revolution, a project emerging out of the heart of South Riverside in Cardiff and run by gentle/radical, an arts organisation based in the neighbourhood, and interested in connecting up culture, community, politics, spirituality, and healing justice.

Supported by a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, this sound archive was born out of the pandemic of 2020 and 2021.

We spent time knocking on doors, hearing people's stories and finding out how our thinking about the future might have changed under COVID.

From homeschooling to weddings under lockdown, from acute isolation, to finding new forms of togetherness, these conversations with neighbours reveal questions and profound reflections on recent times and how we might wish them to be different.

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Routines shifted drastically under the pandemic. And for many it offered time to explore creativity in new ways. A number of Riverside residents shared what they got up to to keep them busy under lockdown. In this episode, we hear from Tim, Jacqueline, Shanara, Rob and Helen Marie. And later on from James, Phil, Dylan, Aisha and Becca.

Tim

One thing I did do was, you know, because this is so unique, what we've been through was so unique, I did go around taking photographs, because I thought one day I might put all these together in just a kind of a memoir of the whole year. So I took photographs of things that we would never have imagined seeing, which was like, the lanes down Queen Street with the two metre distance rule, and little images of people showing you where you could walk and where you couldn't walk, face masks cast on the floor. Anything, anything that was kind of COVID related really I took pictures of, because I just thought, you know, this is such an interesting time, where the unthinkable has happened, you know?

Stephen

So was it, would you say it was a creative time for you, the time that you could use?

Jacqueline

It was because I couldn't go anywhere. So I basically spent a lot of time thinking about things. And also the work that I did was quite specific for that period of time. I did a series of flower paintings. Well, they're women, but I included flowers, and all the flowers I chose were actually poisonous. So it was a little bit like the world was poisoned, so I used that in my work. And I got, I quite got into it. So that was a very positive thing.

Stephen

You're very much reflecting on what..

Jacqueline

Yeah, on what was happening, you know, it was definitely paintings, you know, images, of that period.

Stephen

And how do you feel when you look at those now?

Jacqueline

Well, they're a bit gloomy (laughs). But they're still, you know, quite sort of interesting. Because they were done at that particular time, I think my palate's got a bit lighter now.

Shanara

I love the way nature has revived itself. And we've had one amazing year of really good weather. And this early spring, and just looking at the blooms and the insane blue skies, and reading about how nature has made a comeback, you know? And reading these newspaper snippets about these wild goats coming out into residential areas and eating off shrubs and bushes, and just nature has really seemed to revive itself. Just sitting on my porch as I am now, sitting on my porch and just feeling you know, everything's stabilised itself. And nature has been so stunning, I have taken the most gorgeous photographs of the scenes of Cardiff, you know, the natural scenery. And I found myself a hobby for life actually, nature photography, by just being able to experience it just sitting on your porch, and taking occasional strolls around the parks and the city... We don't have to be in Spain, or the Maldives, like, nature has been stunning throughout summer, has been stunning throughout the COVID time, and yeah, even now, it's great. I've shared the pictures around and people are like, are you a professional photographer? And I'm like, no, I just love what I'm seeing.

Rob

Having the time to really connect with cooking in a way that I really love was great. Being able to not feel guilty about spending... you can spend hours in the kitchen making stuff, planning stuff. Yes, it's something I'm really grateful for, and it's something I've carried on out of lockdown. Just like planning, planning a big meal and cooking, is something I enjoy. I feel like more than going out to dinner. I've been getting really good at fried chicken, fried chicken sandwich particularly. So yeah, I really enjoy... It involves making a 12 hour brine using pickle juice, buttermilk. And so brining the chicken and then frying it, but it becomes like a long process but it's worth it. It's something I enjoy, like tweaking each time and like building up and really perfecting this little recipe. There are a lot of dishes that my wife can't get here, American things. And so she has been teaching me a lot of Italian American cuisine, American stuff, and it's just really fun to kind of explore these areas, that sort of stuff I hadn't had or can't get here. Yeah, it's just been a really nice escape.

Helen Marie

I started lockdown, the first lockdown, as a size 8, and now I'm size 12. I had to go and buy a pair of jeans the other day, temporary, of course, a temporary pair of jeans, because none of my jeans fitted me. So I've been eating more, I've been relaxing about food more as well and allowing myself to put on a bit of weight, and going "I don't really care that much", to a point, because you still, I still want to be healthy. If the worst thing that happens to me in this pandemic is that I've put a bit of weight on, I'm living quite a good life, you know, and why not enjoy it a bit? So food wise, I was cooking a lot of homemade meals anyway. I tell you what we have had, we have had more things like takeaways and things like that than we usually would have. And I think part of it, with food, is we were looking for a little bit... where you might go out and meet friends or something like that, there was an element of food that brought comfort and something else to do, something like "Oh, let's get a takeaway!" because that will be something different from whatever, you know? But there was a few times where I really enjoyed like... I had the time to cook. I remember one time I did like a three course meal for Ian and then another time I made us all tapas and you know all these different sauces from scratch and things like that, which I just wouldn't have deemed necessary before because I would have thought I haven't got time for that.

James

Andy loves to eat, I love to cook, so that's worked out really well because I've been able to cook tonnes and tonnes and tonnes and tonnes and... I remember one day I spent two and a half hours making a sauce because I just enjoyed it. It was gone in 60 seconds... Did you even taste it? (laughs) but I enjoyed it...

Rabab

I want to know: what was the sauce? It sounds amazing. Can you take us through what was happening over those two hours?

James

It was with duck and I thought I want to do a cherry sauce but with a twist, because I thought I don't want to go back to the mid 80s with my mum. Let me try and do something different here. So I bought these cherries, and I had a chutney, and I had some jam that I bought specifically for this sauce. And I'm in that sauce, reducing it with red wine, tiny bit of ginger and a tiny bit of cinnamon, lots of white pepper and lots of black pepper, but it was all about the reduction and getting the consistency perfect, that's perfect, that's why it took so long. And I couldn't have put all of those things all in at the same time. Oh, honey, I put in there as well. And I had to keep tasting it to make sure it wasn't too sweet. So that's why I kept adding a lot of white pepper to it, because black pepper can make things quite bitter, so I wanted white pepper because it just gives a different sort of flavour. And just, you know, with a sauce like that, and reducing it you can't just put a lid on it and walk away, especially when you're dealing with jam and honey and things that will burn. So you've got to constantly keep your eye on the heat and constantly stir. And I loved it. I had the radio on, on the one side, and I had a book I was sort of flicking through on the other side. And I think there was some sort of sport on and I'd resigned myself and closed the kitchen door and I'm just gonna stay here until it's all over.

Phil M

I'm an artist photographer. But I've not had the space to do my art, if you see what I mean. Whereas lockdown gave me a load of headspace where I could start thinking about my artistic production again. So it was kind of reduced to a hobby. Because after I graduated, I was doing freelance work, I was doing lots of big weddings, getting work published and exhibited. But eventually, I wasn't earning enough cash to go fully freelance, I had to get a full time job. And that meant all my freelance opportunities were taken away from me. So a lot of the time, I still have to do my personal work at the weekends and stuff. Yeah, so in that respect it's been really good.

Dylan

I'm really interested in films and TV. And I've done a few short films in the past, kind of filmed them, the latest one I filmed on my phone, and just got a couple of mates involved to create this three-and-a-bit-minute short film. And then kind of in between, or after work or whatever, when I was back in the office, over the weekends, that kind of thing, I'd write feature film screenplays, thinking that one day if I become a writer, or director or XYZ, then this is the film I'd make. And during furlough when I didn't have a job to go to any more, for the time being, I would spend a bit more time on that and managed to get a fair bit done with some of them just

supporting ideas. And the more films I watched and the more TV I watched, the more inspired I got. And I think my writing, a little bit arrogant to say, but I think my writing did improve slightly during the furlough periods and that was enjoyable as well.

Aisha,

I'm a co-host of a podcast with another sister, we call Muslim ladies, we call each other sisters. So yeah, I co-host a podcast with her. So we put out the first episode, I think November. And like I said it was somebody who I met here. I mean, I had spoken to her online on Facebook, you know, I was doing my due diligence before I moved and all that stuff, tried to make connections. And she's very active within our community and I'm very similar, I have very similar views and stuff. So we put our heads together and came up with the idea of doing a podcast which we just recorded on Zoom, it's quite simple. And then we put it out once a month because we're super busy. We don't have the time to record that many. And that was obviously during COVID and COVID is still around now. So yeah.

Mary Anne

Well I'm very curious to know what it's about and maybe even what it's called?

Aisha

It's it's for the Convert Muslim community. Yes. So it's called Converts Unplugged. Yeah, I came up with that. So yeah, we just record online and we have different topics and different guests on. It goes out once a month, online.

Becca

Yeah, sources of comfort during this period. That's tricky. And then it's probably some of the things I've described already in embracing the time that I had. So comfort in knowing that I had time to do things because I couldn't go anywhere else.

The other thing that I really enjoyed and brought me a lot of comfort and also going back to the fact that other people enjoyed it as well, was photography. So I'm a really keen photographer, not in any way remotely professional at all, but I take a lot of photographs, and I do a lot of walks. So I started taking my camera out with me when I went for an ordinary walk. And I explored Canton and Riverside and Pontcanna and Llandaff and Splot and Roath and you name it, I went there, Grangetown, the Bay, Penarth, and I took my camera with me, and I took photographs of my walks, and I found interesting things. So I'd like to spot unusual stuff. So it could be a grill on the floor, or it could be a door knocker, or a particular colour or even some graffiti or, you know, whatever it might be, the shape of a bridge. There's a fabulous bridge along the Ely Trail, and you walk underneath it, and it's sort of like a flyover and you just get this shape and these shadows and columns. And that type of thing... structural stuff. Taking

photographs and sharing them. And it was enjoyable for me. But also, other people enjoyed it as well and commented on the fact that they really enjoyed seeing Cardiff and actually talking about comfort... This is a story - I have friends who live in Rome, I've known them a long, long time, since I was in my 20s. And they have two children and the oldest girl went to Cardiff University, she started during the pandemic. And she also has a sight problem as well. So she manages it extremely well, but they obviously had concerns, mainly because of the pandemic. And I had this really lovely comment from her mother saying that "Seeing the photographs of Cardiff makes me think it's a beautiful place and it makes me feel happy knowing that she's there," which was really... It's making me feel emotional now, it's really such a nice thing to say. And it made me feel really good that just taking my camera and taking photographs made her feel happier, more secure, about her daughter being in Cardiff. So that was nice. Obviously, I didn't take photographs of all the grot spots, but you know Cardiff is an attractive city. There's lots of interesting things to see and I will hunt them out and I will find them and I'll take a photograph of them. So that was nice that the word comfort comes to mind actually with that, with that thing that happened. Yeah, it was lovely.

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We hope you enjoyed hearing from some of the voices in our community. Doorstep Revolution is an ongoing project. So if you're a Riverside resident, and want to get involved, do get in touch with us at gentleradical.org. In the coming months and years, we'll be continuing to build a resource of stories, perspectives and dialogues, exploring the realities, as well as the dreams of people living on our doorstep.