

5th Episode

Family life, kids and adapting under lockdown

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.

.....

The pandemic disrupted school, family life and family dynamics. For many it meant more time spent at home. And with that came both opportunities and challenges for children, parents and extended family members. In this episode, we hear reflections on some of those experiences from Riverside residents Phil, Isha, Derek, and Helen Marie.

Phil

At the beginning, I mean, it was quite scary stuff going on. We hadn't seen anything like this on a national level, where they're trying to basically tell everyone to stay indoors or people are going to die. I mean, in a modern era, that's quite a scary thing to have. I mean, the way I worded it to my boys was "everything's just gonna get a bit smaller". So whereas before we could go to more places, our world's just gonna get a bit smaller.

I mean, so then, for them, it was just like, "oh, we're not going to go to the beach in the summer, we're just going to go to the park in the summer," and things like that. So it wasn't too bad. In trying to break it down I looked at a lot of stuff, purely just how to make my boys not feel so scared, everything was just like, let's just break this down in a much simpler level. But then obviously, there were other people, when we went outside, I mean, I felt sorry for some people. I mean, at the beginning, when we were only allowed out once, for like an hour, that was the guideline.

And my two boys, they're under the age of 12, so there's loads of energy. I'd take them to the park and they'd obviously go nuts. And then there's someone who's hour is... they've decided to sit by a tree and read a book. And then they've just got two kids who just unleashed chaos. I felt a bit bad for them. Because obviously, I'm trying to explain to my boys that this is their hour, and then they've got to go home like we have. So that was difficult.

Isha

So my daughter has gone a bit quieter because for a year and something she didn't get that opportunity to, you know, go out. But then at the same time, every time she asks when we can go, she now understands that it's not us as parents who are delaying it. It's just a natural phenomenon that's happened. So it's taken them a little time to understand that, you know, it's not us who's kind of doing it. It's just how things are at the moment. So I know that deep down they're both struggling... Like for example, I went to India in November, but they couldn't travel because India had not reopened the visas by then, and they don't have the Indian thing. They have the Pakistani passport. So they go to India with visas. So my daughter couldn't go. So now I think it's been over a year that we've had any trip whatsoever. And like I've seen how my daughter has gone into her cocoon because yesterday or the day before yesterday we went to Hereford for some work. And while we were coming back, my daughter's different personalities started to come out. When she was joking in the car, where she was talking quite a lot, where she was making random jokes and stuff. And like me and my husband were talking about it, like how much this probably has affected her - with just a little trip two hours away. Because before that even travelling to England wasn't allowed. You know, even like the two hours journey in the car, that became a big thing for my kids whereas my kids are kind of, you know, used to probably going to Turkey or India or Pakistan and that was the norm. Now that two hours car drive became such a big deal for them, because I remember, I told them, I said, you've just come from school, we literally have to go two hours, pick up something and then come back two hours. I said, Are you sure you guys want to go? Because most of the time, you'll be in the car and my daughter said, that'd be the maximum we'll end up spending in the car, going somewhere. Do you understand? And she started talking, she started joking around. So all these things I've started noticing.

Phil

My one boy now, he's 10, and my other one is virtually 8, in July. The older one he's a bit more head in the clouds. So if it doesn't affect him, within 10 seconds into the future it's not as scary, it doesn't seem to bother him, his head's miles away, daydreaming about stuff. Whereas my younger one seems to think a lot more. That was probably something I found out about him more in the pandemic, that he's got an old soul. He was thinking about things. Like there was one or two times where he'd have a little wobbler about the Coronavirus, he'd start shouting

about it like “then this is happening, and that's happening, and this is going on and that's going on” and it's like yeah, but mate we're only ever out within a mile. So like you're looking at things on the news, that are happening halfway around the world, we can't even affect something that's happening in Penarth. So, yeah, there were little bits and bobs like that where he was, yeah, he seems to be the thinker of the two, my younger one, which I did find out. And then obviously, I did find out that my other one, he's away with the marshmallows, he hasn't got a clue what's going on, which is nice in a way because things like this then don't really break him down. The only thing for him was he's a really social boy. So it was just that, not seeing people. And if we did see people over the field, he'd want to go over and talk to them. And you didn't know how their parents were taking it. Like if they were terrified of the pandemic, they may be like “oh no, stay away”. Or they might be eager just for them to have a conversation with someone. But that was tough, when we saw some people during the first lockdown, not knowing how they were going to react. Like I didn't mind so long as they were sensible. You could have a conversation. But I mean, there was one time where we were walking through the fields. And there was like an elderly lady coming the other way, and my older boy, as usual, was away with the fairies, not watching. And he kinda stepped towards her because he was doing some weird pirouetting. And she almost jumped into the road, just to stay that two metres away. And I had to tell him off, but it was because in his head, it just wasn't that bad. But for her, she was obviously really worried about the whole thing. But I was trying to explain to him that it's like some people are really stressed about this. We're not because we're being sensible, but other people, depending on what they read. I mean, depending on what you decide to read about the thing, you could be terrified to leave your bed, never mind go outside. It was a weird one.

Derek

I think the family support is important. Having a family that, you know, supports your ideas as well. And I think personally my family, we do talk quite a lot. Even before the pandemic, we are always quite close knit, you know. I think you have to, isn't it, being a foreign family coming over, you need that otherwise, you know, you just break up.

The things you discuss about, about the pandemic and all that and the current issues about Bitcoin because my kids are really into it, you know, that kind of stuff. And of course it's good for them to try, you tell them “when you're younger, that is when you need to give it a go. Of course not all your life savings into bitcoin, but whatever money that you are not really needing to use. So putting the savings which don't earn you any interest anyway, give it a go and see what happens.” Yeah, for me, obviously, it's a bit too late.

Helen Marie

I've realised that there's a couple of core people in my life that are just so important to me, obviously my daughter and my partner, but I was also caring for my mum, she's got MS, so I was caring for her. And she wasn't having many visitors, all for obvious reasons, because people were scared, they didn't want to give her anything, because she was quite vulnerable, I suppose. I think you just realised, obviously, she's so important to me as well. But like, I've got my cousin. She's almost like a sister really. We've been really supporting each other throughout, really, and just, I think it's made us closer, in some ways as well. We've reconnected a bit, we were always close anyway, but we connected to some other parts of our relationship that maybe we were relying on other friendships for before. And then they've been brought back a little bit more now. So it's like I always say, she's like my big sister. And I feel really looked after and have done throughout these lockdowns. So I feel like she's always looked after me. But I do feel like, yeah, it's brought that home that she really does look after me. And I'm really grateful for that.

Phil

Even now I mean, we joke about it, I mean, we'll sit there and be like God, you know what we need? We need to spend some quality time together. Like I don't think we've seen enough of each other. And that's like the in-house joke now. Because obviously with a year, we spent so much time together. It's just, it's almost funny. It's like there was too much time now. It's just funny, it's as if we spent too much time together. But yeah, I think the tolerance for each other during the lockdown was hard, very hard. I coach, either one, like I coach football for one and rugby for the other. So we were seeing each other quite a lot anyway. And the reason I did it was to spend time with them because I was working. So then the second this all happened. It was just, it was just too much. I mean we were messing around playing with numbers the other day and I said, well, on an average week before when I had a full time job, we'd see each other 24 hours in a week, total. I said I've done that with you now, in three days. So in a year, technically, man hours, if you consider Dad's job as man hours I've done three years worth of dadding, and that's just crazy when you break it down.

Helen Marie

What about all of the people whose houses aren't a good environment to be staying in, so children who are being abused or people in domestic abusive relationships, and I really struggled with that, I felt it so viscerally. I thought back to my childhood. And I thought that - God - if I had to stay in the house, in terms of how my childhood was, and the lockdown was happening then, I would have hated it, because of my conditions within the house. So that really, really was a massive thing for me at the beginning of lockdown. And luckily, obviously I'm in a lovely home. But there's many people that aren't, that had to endure, maybe things like school or going out to work, all of these things where we can go out of the house, were actually

an escape from the house, even if it was just an hour... So that's something that I thought about quite a lot. And I had to kind of really recenter my thoughts around that and have more hope-filled, loving thoughts about that in the end, rather than feeling very upset for those people in those situations and children in those situations.

.....

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.