

7th Episode

Perspectives on Covid, health, and what our bodies have needed

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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The pandemic affected our lives in ways we could not have imagined across work, school, family life, and of course, our health. In this episode, we hear reflections on the impacts of the virus itself, from masks to social distancing, from getting COVID to getting over it, and how the pandemic made us reflect on the health and social care systems that support us. We'll hear reflections on a time of suffering as well as healing from Tim, Jordan, Hardev and Helen Marie. From Phil, Bob, Priti, James and Andy and from Bree Anne, Rich, Sandra, Gillian and Andrea.

Tim

I had a kind of an early experience of it in that I went to a wedding at the end of January, which was up in Yorkshire. If you remember, that's where the first case was identified, wasn't it? And I remember coming home from that journey, last day of January, I think it was, and there was this lady sat opposite me and she was just coughing and coughing and coughing and coughing, you know, like a really dry cough, which was just irritating. And I remember thinking but not really believing it like - you better not have COVID. Because in my mind, I just thought, well, it's one case, one case so far, you know, but then, later on, we learned that once the cases start appearing, it's been around for weeks, kind of brewing. And sure enough, a few days later, I went down with COVID symptoms, loss of my taste and smell which wasn't identified as a symptom back then. Slight headaches, slight temperature,

but I just carried on going to work, you know, because my symptoms didn't fit what were being described as warning signs then.

Jordan

I did actually catch COVID in December. So I lost my sense of smell and taste. But now it's come back like the last couple of weeks, coffee now smells like bleach and that's apparently one of the sticking points is that because your receptors are retraining themselves, I got this smell like poor coffee now that we'll never forget because... just it smells... like chemicals. It's horrible. I can't describe it. It's a cruel world isn't it (laughs)? Like my favourite thing in the world, coffee, it's gone! It tastes fine but it smells of bleach!

Helen Marie

I was sleeping a lot actually. I remember being so tired, really abnormally tired! And originally, actually, I had a sore throat as well as tired. So I was like, Well, you know, did I have COVID..? I don't know, because you can have very mild symptoms and have it. But I mean, I don't know if I did or not. I also think that from speaking to other people, a lot of people said that that beginning point, they seemed almost exhausted. And I think even if it wasn't any sort of illness, I think that's probably quite a natural reaction to have to everything that was going on.

Hardev

My granddaughter, she's only 10, and she knows I'm diabetic and she said to my son, you gotta go and leave me around my gran's cuz she's not well. She's got the virus, and I need to go and see her. She was telling her father "Do you know how dangerous it is for Boo Boo? Do you know how dangerous it is for her? I need to go and see her." And he said, "You can't go Mya, you can't." And she's very close to me and that, and she phoned every hour to see if I was OK.

Phil J

Initially, you'll see quite a lot of people without masks and I didn't know whether that was... to begin with it was quite hard to get what the mask... wasn't it? And then I think a lot of people probably didn't know how long it would be going on for, so you'd see people going around and, you know, I'd get worried for some people, especially because at work, you know, because the council they were trying to get us to be so careful. We were cleaning every surface, you know, every couple of hours and that kind of thing. So it was sort of like two different worlds where like in work, you had been ultra clean, as much as possible and then in the streets you'd see some people carrying on as normal.

Bob

Well, at first, nobody was using masks or anything, then. It was very important to use masks, of course. I was still doing my own shopping and everything. But I thought I could see people were very slow to understand about social distancing. It was important for me to go for a walk for my leg to keep my leg exercised, so I'd go to the park and people would come right

up next to me and in normal times, it wouldn't matter but I can see this was slow getting through to people.

James

Some of the behaviour in Tesco's I mean, I hardly ever want to go out shopping. The only reason I will go out shopping with Andy is if we're doing a bigger amount of shopping because he dawdles and we'll go down the baby aisle even though we haven't got any children.

Andy

I'm just nosy (laughs).

James

I just think "come on, I know exactly what we need" boom, boom, boom, "Let's go!" But being in there and then having people reach over you and stand next, too close to you, sometimes without a mask and I'm just thinking, move away. And I'm quite a vocal person, so I haven't actually been shy. Now I did say to this man in that dairy aisle, and you were just sniggering, because he was looking the other way, and the man was standing right next to me. And from the milk to the cheese it felt like he followed me. So I said, I looked at him, I said, "Are we married?" and he said, "What?" I said, "Are we married?" and he went "No." and I went "Back the F off!" and Andy couldn't hear and he was going (laughing/giggling action) and I'm thinking what are you laughing at and I'm getting wound up!

Priti

We have to try and focus on the positive which we could in the longer term. You know, maybe right now this is a short term thing. And we're coming out gradually, very, very slowly. But we could have another few bounces on the way with new variants, I don't think is going to be a straight line coming out a lockdown, far from it. You know, there's issues with a vaccine. I thought I was dying the other week when I had my Astra Zeneca and I wasn't, (laughs) because the press said somebody's got a blood clot on the other side of the world and I thought "Sods law it's got to be Priti hasn't it". If you've got a blood clot, it doesn't help at all, you know, me having my jab and the government said go get the jab. I'm thinking do I really want this jab, you know. So there's all sorts of things. I mean, we have been vaccinated, I think science will become more sophisticated over the next 6, 12, 18 months, these companies gonna find more sophisticated vaccinations, you know, the message being, as weird as it may sound to a lot of people right now, as a result of this pandemic and COVID in the longer term life in the UK could be a lot more sort of germ friendly in the sense it could be more hygienic and save lives from other... bugs that we wouldn't have been so mindful about protecting ourselves from.

Helen Marie

Ian did loads of things in the garden in lockdown and he actually, bless him, he broke his ribs doing DIY. We have these stories of lots of people doing things and with DIY and hurting

themselves, well Ian was one of them, bless him. He's fine now, and he was fine. So when he was doing the gardening we had an old bench that... where was it from? Oh he just picked it up on Gumtree I think for a fiver or something like that, but it was really tatty, so he decided to, like, take all of the wood out and just try and remake it almost and then cut new wood for it. But there was... so he had to press the screwdriver against his chest, because there was all like the rusty nails and things you couldn't get... so you had to really force... So he literally was pressing the screwdriver into the chest against the bench, and then he just heard the crack. And he's actually pressed so strongly that he broke his ribs. I'm laughing, it wasn't funny at the time, obviously, but it's funny now. But I remember him coming in and just being like, I think I... this is not the first time he has broken a rib either so like, not again.

Hardev

The COVID, the pain was awful. It was... it was awful, it was... so painful. You know, one minute, you feel, you're thinking I'm getting better and all of a sudden you get shooting pains. And that was, oh my goodness, it was enough to kill you. That's how bad it was, the COVID.

Bree Anne

So I had to go to the University Hospital of Wales for a pre-surgery assessment. This was probably, I want to say June of last year. So things were still in this really weird state of we had come out of lockdown. We weren't wearing masks, but a lot of countries weren't wearing masks. And so the week leading up to me having to go for this pre-surgery assessment was probably one of the scariest weeks through the pandemic for me, because I hadn't been going anywhere and doing anything really, that involved other people. And so, I went to the hospital, and it was terrifying. There was, no-one was wearing masks, except for a few of the staff because the government wasn't telling people to wear them yet. And yeah, it was very, it was daunting and scary and very overwhelming. But once I got there, the professionalism of the people that work there is just so overwhelming at times, like how they can just hold it together and be so calm. Like I said, if I had to see 30 people a day, I would be a mess. But these people... even without even what seems like any anxiety... just doing what they need to do. I still felt very lucky and I had surgery in the middle of this pandemic and I don't even know how that happened. You know, you just get a phone call and they're like, you're coming in and I'm like, I didn't even think you were doing these right now you know. So again, there was a deep feeling of gratitude that despite the fact that it felt like the world was falling apart, the hospitals were still rolling. They're still doing surgeries, they're still getting done, probably not as fast as they were before but they're still there and they're still doing it and it ended up being a comfort in a way, when it was all said and done, that this is still happening like this is still rolling. Like we may... a lot of us might be home not allowed to go out but the doctors and nurses and allied health care workers are still out there, still grinding, still getting stuff done. And my anxiety turned... almost comfort to know that it's still rolling you know?

Peter

The images of exhausted healthcare staff, you know, with blisters on their faces from masks and kind of... there's some photos of those, just kind of hit home about you know, what is actually... I have not experienced anybody who's died as a result of this particular plague. Yeah, there are very powerful images from the people looking after the dying.

Gillian

I wasn't expecting so many people to pass away through it. I never thought it would have that effect. Never. I gotta be honest when I read in the paper, the man who had done my heart surgery, and he passed away through it. I was gutted!

Sandra

People like them working in a hospital, all the NHS staff, all of them who have died. And we rely on them. So let's be fair it is sad, very sad!

Helen Marie

I've told you my mums got MS. So she became quite ill, deteriorated, I suppose quite a lot, her condition after... say from November time 2020. And then really after Jan, after Christmas, really needed a lot more support and care. So she went into a nursing home about three weeks ago. So it's been really tough, challenging this second lockdown and I've got a lot of grief around that because she's only 59, so she's young to be going into a nursing home. So but also, it's... I say there's grief around it. I also am very relieved, she's somewhere safe and being really looked after. I was visiting her in her flat and she had carers coming into the flat, but nobody could provide the care that she needed anymore. So she's a lot safer now and she settled in. So one of the things I'm missing though, is just being able to see her when she needed me and also just pop in with some nice things. So although she's in the nursing home, she had two weeks having to isolate and now I can only visit her once a week. So that's hard, because I want to visit her more than once a week, but also I don't want to necessarily go - OK! Like yesterday, she phoned me up and she said that she was in pain, can I come over? But you can't just turn up at the home and they've got procedures, you know... rightly so to protect the residents. But it's really hard then because I have to say to mum, no I can't come over because we haven't arranged for it to happen. So I miss just being able to pop in.

Hardev

My daughter-in-law and my son, they had it for about a week and they were fine. They were fine. Mine carried on for quite a bit longer. I would say at least over two weeks. I found it very, very hard. I really did. I thought it's not going to go away in the end. But it did, and you know, perhaps, I was stronger than I thought I was. And then they looked after me and my son and I had my son bring (I've got another son) and he used to bring the shopping and leave it on my front door. And then he just knocked the door and go and I was... that was really hard. He's my baby. I know he's 38 but he's still my baby. And he dropped it and he'd go and I feel upset then as well because I haven't seen him. But obviously he had children to go home to and a family, so he needed to look after himself to look after his family.

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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.