



THAT'S CAT. My feline friend and I have been putting in some of our Covid time relaxing in the garden hammock

# Covid has changed my thinking – hopefully for the better

Alex KANE

**T**HIS time last year I'd chosen the hammock as my place of refuge. The cat chose the same refuge: which was actually quite reassuring, given my tendency to fall out and require a soft landing. Lockdown was still a bit of a novelty. The sun was shining, baby birds were bouncing around the garden and I was looking forward to a few weeks of catching-up on reading, films and having the children around for most of the day.

Then the worries set in. I was pounced upon by Mr D (my old and always unwelcome companion, depression), who decided to kick me around the place until I was almost helpless. I found myself worrying about everything, particularly the children. I'm an older Dad (they're 22, 11 and 3) and always knew I'd have less time with them than most other Dads; but I wasn't prepared to be greeting the Grim Reaper so soon.

I also found myself fretting about how much time I'd wasted and how little I'd got done. The best-selling novel; the award-winning performance in a Broadway/West End musical; my own radio show; the quirky television documentaries I

wanted to make; a walk-on part in *Neighbours* (it's a long story); and finally making sense of the Eurovision Song Contest scoring system.

To take my mind off all of this I embarked upon a garden project: but too much time was lost on falling off ladders, whacking my head with the rake (even with the spade on one occasion) and not being able to tell the difference between a real plant and a weed. So, a year later the garden looks fairly much the same. As does the house, because plans to paint and decorate were put on hold after Indy's sudden obsession with drawing on walls and preferring to pee wherever it suited him, rather than on the potty or toilet.

I got my first vaccine ten weeks ago and felt upbeat and optimistic afterwards (two descriptions which will surprise regular readers). I'm getting the second one this evening. I've been told it can be a bit rougher than the first (when my only side effect was a desire for tumblers of Baileys), so I'm preparing to hide in bed for the weekend and watch any old nonsense going.

But I've also been reflecting on the past year. The realisation how much friends and family enrich my life. How often I've taken almost everything for granted. What lessons can be learned from how I previously lived

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my life and how I should try and live it now. Like most people I believed that life would just rumble along on the same tracks (with the occasional detour) and, barring illness or war, there would be few restrictions on how I lived that life. Covid changed my thinking. More important, I hope it has changed it for the better.

Right from the start I knew that panic would be a pointless, self-defeating response. We humans are a hardy, tough, inventive, wanting-to-survive species. Coronavirus would be a problem and an enormous one, but it wasn't going to be the end of the world. Life went on. Life goes on. The horrific scales of death were contained, although every death from Covid had a huge personal impact on the families concerned. It may be a few years before life returns to the previous 'normal' but we will cope. We will carry on.

The other thing that struck me was the increasingly divisive line between social media and reality. For most of the past year Twitter and Facebook have been awash with people complaining about the 'assault' on their liberty, their rights, their freedom of movement and the ever increasing powers governments were taking upon themselves. Many described it as the great reset and saw the hand of sinister globalists in every new turn and regulation. But it doesn't seem to have stopped most of them – including previous cheerleaders of dissent – from getting the vaccine and agreeing to vaccine passports for their own convenience.

An expert on civil dissent noted last summer: most people who use social media to vent their wrath do so in an echo chamber but rarely, very rarely in fact, can be bothered to take a 'real life' stand where it might actually mean something. The likes of Rosa Parks would never have thought a tweet was enough. These people do. Which is very useful for governments, of course, because they're no more problem than the 'sheep' they accuse others of being.

All in all, a victory for peace, common sense and sheep of all kinds.

## ON THIS DAY

APRIL 16 1921

### Train Goes Missing

THE train from Stranorlar to Glenties (County Donegal) was held up yesterday at Fintona Station by masked men carrying rifles and two mailbags were carried off. The railway officials were threatened and all the railway and post office telegraph wires were cut. The manager, Mr Forbes, hearing of these incidents, ran a special train on the line before allowing the ordinary train to proceed. He found the railway line near Ballinamore Station had been unfastened and diverted in such a way as would cause a serious accident and perhaps loss of life.

Yesterday morning armed and undisguised men held up a goods train carrying the mail at Falcarragh. Taking over the train, they compelled the driver to proceed in the direction of Burtonport. Since then, the railway company have heard nothing of the fate of the train as when it left Falcarragh, the wires were cut. This is the ninth occurrence on the company's lines within the present month when trains were held up and mails seized

### British Commander Shot Dead

THE following report was issued by Dublin Castle last night: Major MacKinnon, MC, Officer Commanding the H Company, Auxiliary Division, RIC was murdered while playing on Tralee golf links at 4 p.m. today. He was playing a round of golf with a companion, who is a Cadet in the same company, when fire was opened on them by a party from behind a hedge. The officer's companion returned fire but Major MacKinnon fell wounded in the head and back and died later. His companion was uninjured.

### 'Specials' on Rampage in Omagh

FOUR Special Constables, who were under the influence of drink, went down Castle Street in Omagh singing, 'Dolly's Brae' and shouting, 'No surrender'. A Catholic ex-soldier then shouted, 'Up Dublin' and he was immediately seized by the Specials who attempted to bring him to the military barracks. However, a number of civilians intervened and released him. The Specials then drew their revolvers and threatened to fire but the arrival of a number of RIC men put an end to the disturbance.

### 'Belfast Boycott' Still Enforced in South

TWO shops in Mullingar (County Westmeath) were recently raided by a number of armed and masked men who said they were in search of Belfast goods. The shops were searched and a quantity of cigarettes, matches, jam, etc were taken away and thrown into the river. (During the War of Independence havoc was wrought on the Irish rail network. The IRA made frequent attacks on troop trains and often held up trains to seize the mails or destroy Belfast goods bound for Southern destinations.)

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