Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

"Life is now quiet and calm, during these days sometimes too quiet." A diary dialogue

Austria, Vorarlberg, 25 March – 27 April 2020

Who are we?

Johanna: *I am a 55-year-old qualified social worker and a professor at the Department of Social Work and Health at the University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg FHV in Austria. The county Vorarlberg is in the west of Austria, bordering Germany, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. This is a rural area, surrounded by mountains and the Lake Constance is nearby. I am living in the biggest town of the county Vorarlberg, (50.000 inhabitants).*

My adult children are living in the county as well.

I coordinated the Masters programme in Clinical Social Work for the last seven years. My teachings include history and theories in social work, case work, social diagnosis, reflexive learning and critical discourses. One of my particular research interests is autoethnography; loss, death and dying;

I am currently in my home office, teaching und supervising students in distance-learning, this is, without doubt, a challenging change. At the moment all contacts are virtual or by phone.

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Matthew Randall

Matthew: *I am a 48-year-old social worker, originally from the UK, living in Austria with my wife and two teenage children aged 17 and 14. My wife is a professor at the local university, the University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg, lecturing in Social Work. My children both attend schools in Vorarlberg. My work involves counselling refugees and I also teach Diversity, Gender and Social Work theories at the university, writing regular articles for academic publications in these fields. I am currently working at home, speaking to clients on the phone, participating in digital meetings and creating distance-learning material for my students.*

Wednesday 25th March 2020

Matthew:

Dear Johanna,

As soon as I open my eyes this morning and sense the subtle light changes through our heavy red curtains, I am aware of an anxiety, like a soft pain at the edge of my thoughts. It is later and brighter that my usual hour of waking on a Wednesday and a thick silence that leaks through the walls of my house keeps me anchored under the covers, unable to avoid my doubts with routine and action. The temptation is to reach up, eyes still half-open, to my bedside table where the shiny, smooth security of my phone is waiting, ready to divulge information, order, reason, explanation. I scan the apocalyptic headlines *Death toll in Spain overtakes China, and India locks down!* and let the sharp stab of panic that invariably follows extinguish any sleep that remains within me. Afterwards I push this all away, almost physically as I finally lift myself from the bed. These anxieties are like new waves on an old sea for I can have new rituals to replace those I can no longer follow. I know I will not see the slow gather of passengers on the grey train platform in semi-darkness, breathing their acrid cigarette smoke and listening to the repeating conversations of a working

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week. But instead I will exercise leisurely until 7am and begin my working day in bed with a laptop, coffee and my partner beside me. Later I will see men under 60 take an afternoon walk in the forest, my sons will emerge from their slumbers to greet their virtual classrooms and at 5 o'clock, just as the sun is beginning to set behind the mountains, I will be performing sun salutations rather than leaving my office in the evening gloom.

Media Source:
https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2020/mar/25/coronavirus-live-news-india-lockdown-italy-cases-restrictions-uk-us-outbreak-australia-china-hubei-latest-updates

Thursday 26th March 2020

Dear Matthew,

When I read your beautifully written lines yesterday, I could literally see you in front of me.

Today I got up out of a sense of duty and although it is not yet 6 am the day light seems to be too bright. I missed the transition from winter to spring, wasn't it yesterday when I practiced yoga at dawn in the morning? As I sit and write at the table, I look outside and watch two squirrels playing catch. Everything seems so peaceful and idyllic, but it is not like that, the world is shaken. The covid-19 virus determines the everyday life, the legislation, our behaviour, our thinking. It seems that all actions are subordinated to the virus.

I feel so privileged in this life, in this so-called corona crisis. My job is not endangered, I am already used to work from home, the children are alright, we are all healthy – at the moment.

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Matthew Randall

Today is the 11th day of the strict measures in Austria. In the future, the term *social distancing* will inevitably be associated with corona. Yesterday I read an interview with a colleague from Germany about the situation of nurses and caregivers. The federal government describes caregivers, besides other professions, as systemically relevant professions, but the salary is bad. Most of the nursing staff is female and mostly they receive rhetoric recognition like the public clapping hands in the evenings. She assumes that behind the clapping there is also the fear that the medical and caring system will collapse. And, seen in this way, the clapping can be considered to be cynical. Once again it is visible that the importance of carers has been mercilessly underestimated. And writing this down I am in the middle of the ongoing discussion of the gender pay gap, of equal treatment.

Good morning, there we are again. Before all these thoughts start to lie on me like a heavy coat soaked up with water, I will start my working day.

Take care, Matthew and enjoy the spring sun!

Johanna

Media Source:
https://www.zeit.de/amp/wirtschaft/2020-03/pflegekraefte-systemrelevante-berufe-unterbezahlung-corona-krise-ungerechtigkeit?wt_zmc=sm.ext.zonaudev.twitter.ref.zeitde.share.link.x&__twitter_impression=true 25.03.2020

Dear Johanna,

All about me the slow turn of nature is creating colour and growth. The spring sun was not warm today, but it gave the trees and the fields a stark, inevitable clarity that somehow helps me to walk my way through this situation that is everything but

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transparent or foreseeable. If, as you say, the virus dictates our lives so thoroughly, perhaps I am craving this seasonal sense of indifference. The sun and the sky and the bursting heads of the flowers in the forest. The only rebellion against this crisis. Or perhaps, not the only one as my body is rebelling too. I can feel my healthiness grow each day as we move on towards April and beyond. Morning exercises, yoga, regular walks and a deep daily dive into freshly cooked food are battling the sombre news stories of breathlessness, coughs and incubators. Is this my way of trying to regain some control? Do I secretly believe that the colds and light flu we all suffered in this house a few weeks ago were actually the Corona virus's best shot? Our ages have ceased to be a dull number plotting our family roles as father, mother and teenage son. My 48 years have become a mental vaccine against my worst fears of death and the loss of those close to me. But I cannot really relax. The media is littered with contradictory stories of young losses and a warning to my gender. *Men are much more likely to die from coronavirus – but why*? Do I really want to know the answer? I'm not sure.

Goodnight to this strange, beautiful and rebellious world!

Media Source:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/26/men-are-much-more-likely-to-die-from-coronavirus-but-why

Dear Matthew,

While reading your lines, memories of the time when I was faced with the finiteness of my life are awakened. This was 12 years ago. My life, and well, that's me – we were fragile and badly damaged, physically and emotionally. A tumor, the enemy within me, hit me and my best friend in the same year. While my dear friend and colleague passed away – I survived.

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You and me, we did not know each other then, but I know that you read the autoethnographic article I wrote about this terribly challenging time in my life. In retrospect, I am grateful for everything that fear, pain and loss have taught me. The biggest lesson was and is still to learn, that life is finite. A little sentence has accompanied me in my life since then: loving means letting go.

Indeed, early research from China prove that men are much more vulnerable to die from coronavirus, this difference in mortality is creating anxiety and your words touch me. I do not want to think about anything else tonight other than 'we will get through, we will survive'. We will meet when it is over, not virtual but real and we will look each other in the eyes, hug each other and we will drink Prosecco – deeply relieved and full of joie de vivre.

With tears in my eyes I go to bed, good night!

Johanna

Friday 27th March 2020

Dear Matthew,

A restless night, I rolled back and forth, confused dreams chased me. I got up with the desire to be held, I miss physical contact with loved ones, the little daily hugs and touches.

But I am living by myself AND we have to keep distance. It feels so strange to keep distance, especially from my beloved one, my children, my siblings, my friends. But also the closeness with my neighbour kids, when we meet outside our homes.

I hardly meet people on my daily walk, but when it happens, we behave strangely. Some people are wearing a mask, some are friendly and do greet, some are hostile.

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Inspired by your lines I focus on the spring, consciously I fill my lungs with the wonderful cool fresh morning air, with the wish that these heavy thoughts and feelings will pass. But this morning I feel infinitely tired and heavy. I cannot yet get rid of the dull feeling of an impending danger, of an avalanche that is already on the way.

I will take a refreshing shower and focus on my work. I have a couple of meetings on MS Teams and an online lecture. In this sense I will meet people, at a distance that hopefully protects us from a situation like the one in Italy.

Always look on the bright side of life ;–) and stay healthy and confident!

Sunday 29th March 2020

Dear Johanna,

The weekends have become unfamiliar now, like a coat that has lost its shape. The weekly focus of work has receded and yet the days feel strangely bereft of their purpose. We have now been two weeks at home.

The silence today at 8am is so intense I feel a need to break it, to rise loudly from my bed, to call out to my sleeping family, stomp loudly up the stairs and holler from balcony. If I had done this, I would have noticed something missing in the street below. The usual frail line of elderly churchgoers slowly walking down the hill are nowhere to be seen. From my place under bedcovers I almost miss their loud Sunday greetings cutting through the birdsong and the toll of the bells.

A lounge, a relaxing sofa, a glass of good wine. Time to talk and share our days with each other. During the week we stumble in, tired from people, social dynamics and the responsibilities of our jobs, and these things are our solace. Now they are

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omnipresent and becoming like a cage and we are thirsty for the world outside. Yesterday myself and my partner cycled down to Lake Constance, passing throngs of couples and young families with similar needs and goals. We were struck by how everyone was perpetually moving, avoiding each other like the repulsion of magnetic poles. Some people had retreated to their garden allotments, secretly meeting friends and consciously avoiding the accusing stares of those riding by. As you mentioned yourself, some greet profusely, others retreat as if offended by your presence, some use humour to laugh off the faint awkwardness of it all.

I am struck by our privilege too. To be four people in such a large house, space to walk out on a balcony, a forest laid out before us. We talk things through as a family and try to find ways of keeping sane. I am learning Delta blues guitar with a strange intensity and will that might have been lacking without this situation. My youngest son continues his obsession with computer games while the oldest slips out at night for clandestine trips to his friends. My partner waits to watch the news every evening, but I sometimes dread its heaviness and the repetition of messages I have already read on my phone earlier in the day.

Monday 30th March 2020

Dear Matthew,

Sunday greetings to Matthew, but actually it is already Monday and I am on my way to go to bed.

You won't believe, it was probably six weeks ago that I read a book from Francesca Melandri, the author of the letter to the UK in the Guardian. The title is 'Über Meereshöhe' (above sea level) and I was deeply impressed and moved how Melandri can grasp highly complex and contradictory situations and dialogues in a few

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thoughtful words. While you read her words, you nearly can feel the thoughtfulness.

I drift away, trying to remember the words, that touched me – directly in my heart.

I feel how tired I am after this weekend, after doing intense sports to get rid of the permanent presence of the virus. The body is exhausted and longs for sleep, but not the mind. It feels like being in a hamster wheel, I am not yet sure how long it will take till the mind will be tired as well.

Nevertheless I convince myself to rest now and sleep will come and for a couple of hours the mind-hamster will stop to run.

Monday evening

Whatever I think, plan, do and talk is shaped by the 'presence' of the virus. The danger hovers in the air, a permanent invisible presence that cannot be grasped by any of my senses. But when we perceive and feel it, the virus has already taken root. However the perfidious thing is, that we do not notice it either AND the virus is still in us. We may feel fit and healthy, but we are contagious – a wandering unsuspecting virus slingshot. Am I one? Therefore we have to follow the measures, social distancing will be the term of the year 2020.

In this way all everyday experiences are shaped by the corona virus. I and millions of others perform and behave within a couple of days completely differently than before. Isn't it amazing and worrying how quickly we adapt? How we accept that basic rights are curtailed, with no doubt that this is for our own good, at least for the time now.

I just think out loud and try to express myself from inside out. I stumble as English is not my first language, but in times like this I dare to use the vocabulary I have, I dare

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to make grammatical and linguistic mistakes, I dare to expose myself to linguistic limitations as time is limited, and the corona virus throws me back to the limitation of life. I do not fuss about perfectionism, not now.

The Austrian chancellor said in the evening news “This is the calm before the storm” and I saw the seriousness in all eyes of the present politicians. I felt cold on my neck.

From the day after tomorrow it is mandatory to wear a nose-mouth-protection in supermarkets and the next step will be, that we will wear them whenever we leave our home. Will it still be allowed to go for a run? With a mask? Well, isn’t this a five-star-problem?

Concerning my work at the University: I asked myself how can we follow the agenda as if nothing had happened? Just simply switch to e-learning? Friday last week I decided to talk with the masters students I supervise and to listen carefully, to provide time and space to share experiences; just right now – in the field of Social Work, the circumstances of living, the student’s worries, concerns, needs and joyful experiences. We had a delightful seminar, deep conversations and all of them were thankful for the possibility to express in what situation they are and how they feel. I as well shared parts of my situation with them and we laughed together, every one of us at home in front of the screen.

I am deeply convinced that we are able to share personal vulnerability in professional settings in an appropriate way. We are even considering writing a collaborative paper about this semester: while the corona virus is raging students are working in the field and on their master thesis and struggle with much more than students usually do while working on their thesis. It will emerge …

Like you, Matthew, I love music and the last two weeks I practiced saxophone from Monday to Saturday. While I am practicing I cannot think of anything else but reading notes and breathing. I feel highly concentrated and thoroughly satisfied,

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well, occasionally I admonish myself, but that's part of learning by yourself, student and teacher in one person.

It's time to go to bed, it is good for me to share our daily conversation, thank you for this journey.

Tuesday 31st March 2020

Dear Johanna,

The last two days were simply exhausting. Between them was a broken night with disturbing dreams that I could only shake off by listening for the returning steps of my eldest son as he slips in the house at 3am. Without an immediate return to sleep my thoughts skip round the room, as if they too desire an escape from these walls. I think of all the teenagers like my son, with their hopes and fears for the world, their loves and friendships, hidden dreams, their sense of their own strengths and weaknesses, their need to feel bright and optimistic about the future. What goes through my son's mind when he cycles home in the tight, small hours of the morning, taking routes by the river and the trees to avoid police cars patrolling his tiny, peaceful village?

And then I thought of the papers I had received back from my own students yesterday, thirty biographical journeys landing in neatly regimented digital folders, holding so many of those circumstances of living you mentioned. We are studying the social learning of gender and I am inspired by the interest and intensity my students bring to this subject when the heavy, shifting events of a world pandemic would seem to crowd out the nuances of power and discrimination. Before I drift back off to sleep, I have a troubling vision of students sitting before me in a lecture hall, unrecognisable behind their white masks.

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In the early morning I sit in my home office with red kites circling the sky outside, oblivious to our concerns so far below through the still, cold air. In the next four hours I make over 40 calls to refugees on my mobile phone. They are all clients who were studying in various courses before the classrooms were abruptly shut and everyone was sent away. I ask them whether they have a computer at home and if they are struggling with the digital tasks they need to complete. I am given a variety of answers, but they all seem somehow happy to receive a call, some are very formal in their replies, others asking how I am and how my family is doing. Only one complains of loud parties in his accommodation and asks how he is expected to work on his subjects.

Later when I sit with my partner in front of our expensive MacBooks, trying to grapple with the slick buttons of Microsoft Teams, splitting and sharing screens, blurring backgrounds and muting our voices, I remember again some of the voices from the morning. An African mother had told me her son's computer takes half an hour to start up and that sometimes the screen dies on them. The short, dignified sentences of a young man from Afghanistan as he described the cheap Samsung phone he used to complete his assignments. I don't need charity, he had said.

I wonder what this crisis means for many of these people who have experienced nothing but uncertainty for months and years, whose days have been a waiting cage of experience for much longer than I am anticipating being kept in my house away from my usual routines.

So many thoughts! But that one was the last to make this entry. Goodnight!

Wednesday 1st April 2020

Dear Matthew,

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As I read your lines tears roll down my face. Your linguistic expression, ability and sensitivity to put moments, experiences into words is extraordinary. Your words are partly like 3D pictures imbued and topped with a deep emotional layer.

While you describe your elder son how he searches little known routes to ride home, and then sneaks into the house, I follow him literally. Your words generate pictures in my head and heart of your service users in their accommodations, of you and your partner sitting side by side on the desk in the kitchen. And, to be honest, in a certain way, I envy you. I miss my children deeply, even though they are grown up and living by themselves for years, I would love to have them by my side now, at home. We are in contact, but I miss those little routines we have had before the pandemic. From time to time after work they popped in, for a chat, a glass of wine or a gin tonic and a shared meal. Every now and then we went for a hike, skiing, we shared parts of our life by being together, face to face.

I do not want to look at the situation with pink glasses (does this saying exist in English? Etwas durch die rosarote Brille betrachten), knowing very well how demanding and exhausting children in their puberty can be. My life is now quiet and calm, during these days sometimes too quiet.

Like you, I have partly bad nights. I was dreaming of a seminar with students I did not know at all. I have never seen them before and actually it was not my class, but still I had to work with them and all they presented was rejection and resistance. I felt stressed, overwhelmed, helpless and stupid. When waking-up I remembered the nightmares many years ago, when I started my work at the University. Fear of failing and no control. It was dead silent and dark, I troubled to let go of the feeling of anxiety and tossed and turned in my bed, and finally I started to read and calmed down.

I break the silence at home by all the calls, video meetings and video teaching, but also with my singing, playing the saxophone and listening to music and news. But I

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miss personal and private face to face conversation. Talking to myself in front of the mirror is somehow weird – I am getting older ;–)

Yesterday I realized that I dislike that all the professional communication take place in my private rooms. I cannot prevent that all these conversations somehow imbue and penetrate the atmosphere in my home. This is different to the home office situations I had before, I worked partly at home before the corona pandemic. Although I primarily work in one room and I don't spread my documents all over my home, it is in the air.

But what I wanted to share with you this morning is an advertisement in the "Dornbirner Gemeindeblatt". This is a traditional weekly magazine of the town, most of the villages and towns have something like that in this region. It is distributed every week, you can buy it from Thursday to Saturday for 70.- cent. I felt like I was beamed back to the last century reading and seeing this:

…. I have to do that later, I forgot the time and have a meeting now.

It is evening after a day with a lot of conversation on the computer and phone. I am tired, but not in a bad mood, just tired after a working day and a wonderful refreshing walk in the sunshine at lunchtime: spring is exploding and the chirping of the birds is uplifting.

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RATHAUS

HOCHZEITEN MÖGLICHST VERSCHIEBEN

Da das Rathaus derzeit bis auf weiteres geschlossen bleibt, werden nur in dringenden Fällen bereits geplante Hochzeiten durchgeführt. Neue Aufgebote werden nur in äußerst wichtigen und dringenden Fällen angenommen. Bei der Trauung gelten besondere Hygienevorschriften: Lediglich das Brautpaar und die Standesbeamten – mit entsprechendem körperlichem Abstand – sind zugelassen. Feiern, sowohl im Rathaus als auch außerhalb, sind untersagt. Die meisten Trauungen wurden von den Hochzeitspaaren bereits verschoben. Ab wann ein regulärer Betrieb wieder möglich ist, kann derzeit nicht gesagt werden.

Informationen für Brautpaare:
E-Mail standesamt@dornbirn.at
T +43 5572 306 2300

Media Source: Dornbirner Gemeindeblatt, Nr. 123, 148. Jahrgang, Friday, 27.03.2020 p. 31. Image by Johanna Hefel

I translated the text, I am convinced you would do a better job:

As the town hall is closed for now, planned weddings are only carried out in urgent cases. New line-ups (in German: Aufgebot) are only accepted in important and urgent cases. Special hygienic regulations are required for the wedding ceremony:only the bride and groom and the registrar – with appropriate physical distance – are allowed. Celebrations, both in the town hall and outside, are prohibited. Most of the marriages have already been postponed by the wedding couples. We are not able to tell you when regular operation is possible again. I was laughing out loud reading these lines and especially about the picture, knowing the tradition of the Gemeindeblatt that this is

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not meant as a joke, but deadly serious. First the picture is so wonderfully old fashioned and second, one has the impression that the couple is separated. Look at their facial expressions! What could be an urgent case? Regarding the time of the picture probably a pregnancy? Well, I just wanted to share with you this advertisement at the end of March 2020, but you could definitely find this a hundred years ago in the Gemeindeblatt as well.

Sunday 5th April 2020

Dear Johanna,

The sun has brightened the whole room, my partner is lazing in the hammock and the birdsong is loud enough to obscure the conversations in the gardens below our house. It is Sunday afternoon and the atmosphere is one of undiluted Spring. We have just returned from a cycle to Bregenz and a walk up through the forest to Gebhardsberg, a buttress of rock that overlooks the Rhine valley. At the top we joined a few families, each moving in their invisible field of social distance, to look down on the strangely empty strip of motorway that leads to Lindau, Germany. Later we walk back down to our bikes through the tall trees and the intense white of wood anemones winking out from the green of the undergrowth. We try to avoid the circular debates of virus and infection, but all the themes of our talk betray its imprint. As always, the children are often at the centre of our focus.

Our youngest son sits behind a blue curtained window, his hood pulled up to hide the gleam of his unwashed hair. Unlike the rest of us, he lives for this virtual world of headsets, screens and breathtakingly fast fingers drumming on a small segment of his keyboard. We hear his voice all day, so full of animation, only half of an intense exchange with friends we have never met. I sometimes visualise them all at once, a multitude of staring eyes, the collective frantic hammering of their hands, a series of

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backs turned away from the reality of the world. Such is the plurality of response to this time and, even within our small family of four, we are all so different. As the initial excitement of avoiding the nightly curfew has faded, our eldest son has begun to comprehend the unusual deadness of an empty calendar. No gigs, parties, festivals, not even a private skate on a sunny afternoon such as today. Today would have been the first day of a long-awaited Easter holiday but instead we have a drifting continuation of a strange, new normality. I have cancelled my leave next week and will continue to work for Caritas and the University. Those evasive professional conversations you described so well will again be seeping through the air of this house in the days to come.

A few days ago, a good friend of ours celebrated her birthday for the first time in her life with a digital party using Zoom. It was a welcome distraction and I looked forward to it as if we were really driving off to Amerlügen, close to Feldkirch where they live. When we all blinked into existence in that familiar sudden way, eight distinct families, couples and some living alone, we had all prepared in slightly different ways. Some had wine already poured, glasses in hand, eager for company and the simple pleasure of a celebratory toast. Our friend and her sister were sitting in separate houses each enjoying a paella brought to them by their mother earlier in the day. Another friend in Vienna sat with a bottle of Campari carefully placed before the camera, a drink we all immediately associate with this occasion. A couple from Feldkirch had decorated the wall behind them with balloons and streamers. Of course, we all wanted to sing happy birthday and we began impulsively, forgetting that the microphone would just leap randomly to the loudest singers, the bright rectangle around our video images beginning a chaotic dance that matched the patchwork of the song. Later, after various glasses of wine, beer and Campari we almost made the same mistake, thinking we could recreate a camp-fire sing-along with guitars. In the end we had to admit that some things are not yet possible and perhaps that is a good thing!

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Sunday, 5th April 2020

Dear Matthew,

What different lives we are leading. I knew about the birthday party and it sounds wonderful this unique digital celebration with friends.

This week two dear people passed away, not due to corona, they both have been over ninety years old and it was just time to go. In this way death did not come unexpectedly. One is my confirmation godmother (Firmpatin), a good hearted woman and the only friend of my mum who died seven years ago. We, my family, knew her our whole life. She was the very last one of this generation from my mum's side. The other person is my ex-partner's father. I really appreciated him. It hurts me deeply that I will not be able to be at the funeral tomorrow with those close to me, due to the measures. By law it is not allowed, maximum 10 persons have the right to attend a funeral. Besides talking on the phone and writing, there is no way to personally express my sympathy, to be together is only possible mentally; but not at the cemetery, no touch, no hug, no eye contact and in this way no words in real life, but so much distance despite being close, this makes me deeply sad. The knowledge that most of the family is not allowed to be at the funeral, nieces, nephews, grandchildren – they have to stay away, although the cemetery is quite a large area, this causes resentment and deep regret. I must admit, I have a hard time accepting this and I have doubts about proportionality. The tradition of the funeral, the last farewell in the family circle, with friends means a lot to them and to me, too.

For three weeks I have accepted all the measures, I do not meet anyone besides, after two weeks of keeping distance, my children during the weekend. We do not hug or touch each other and keep distance. I do not visit my disabled sister, nor my other siblings, their families and no friends. I take care not to get too close to

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anyone, I do not want to infect anyone, just in case I could be positive. To be honest, I am not really worried about myself. But I am absolutely clear that I will be with my children, my siblings, my family if they were seriously ill. I feel resistance paired with regret and grief thinking of the measures concerning people who are at the end of their life, of funerals and women giving birth without anyone beloved at their side.

This was the third week, overall I am fine, my family and me – we are in good health, we are privileged, not having any existential concerns, living in beautiful surroundings.

Different to you, Matthew, I decided to work the first two days of the week and then I will take three days off. I do not have any lectures this week and I have the impression that distance will do me good. I have the option to step out for some days, another wonderful bright side of my life.

Tuesday, 7th April 2020 Johanna

Good morning, Matthew,

It is 5 am, I woke up at 02:30, the almost full moon (this night will be full moon) woke me up, shining directly in my face. Whatever I tried, I could not fall to sleep any more. Different strands of thoughts and tasks kept me awake. Finally I gave in, went upstairs to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. The moon's light floods the room, it is almost like a floodlight that aimed directly at my home. I flee into my sleeping room, close the shutters, something I rarely do. The last hours I could not stop myself from thinking about my work, about the funerals I could not attend, about this strange and yet so familiar life.

I am disgusted and embarrassed by the content of some twitter posts and touched by differentiated critical ones. It seems that we are on the way to flatten the curve,

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another significant mantra since the last three weeks: *stay at home – flatten the curve*. But staying at home and following the measures by social distancing raises not only the risk but the fact (proved by recent research) of domestic violence. While I am cuddled in my bed, with a hot water bottle in my back and a cup of tea, starting this early morning with writing I feel in peace and completely safe. It comes to my mind that at the same time women and children are lying in their beds, scared of the day, scared of a family member or probably more than one.

Although the day has not started yet, it is already somehow dirty and has brought some guilt. But nevertheless, within the next hour the sun will rise and another spring day full of hope finds its way. My thoughts wander back to my work, thinking about ambiguity tolerance, a central element in social work and my leap of thought is not a coincidence.

I force myself to let go of the work, it is far to early. The tea is finished, I am completely awake and will practice yoga, this is one of the best ways to stop the mind carousel.

Tuesday 7th April 2020 Matthew

Dear Johanna,

I wondered what had kept me awake last night and now I know! I also couldn't sleep but I was unaware of the moon finding it way to fullness. In the evening before going to bed I had watched a disturbing film from a different time and I couldn't prevent my thoughts chasing after each character, picking through their stories, voices, how they were dressed. My partner and I watch films most nights and they distract me enough to forget Corona for a while. But I often find that when times are insecure, sad or threatening in the real world about me, I am oddly vulnerable to this artform.

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

A simple story of love or loss can leave me hollowed out and I struggle to leave it behind. These are the moments I lie next to my sleeping partner and trace out all the desperate possibilities of life. But eventually, and that is the beautiful simplicity of who we are, I am asleep myself, I race through my dreams, the morning arrives, and it is full of promise again.

The frustrations you have felt at the social corset we all have to wear at the moment are very vivid in your words. I have had intellectual debates on these themes in the last few days but your personal experience with exclusion from mourning and ritual has brought this into a painful private light. Such meetings at the end of a life are like old, precious stones, heirlooms of our times together. To be denied their touch at the moment of departure cannot be right, even in this heightened state of crisis.

Today was the first day of the year that felt like it was summer already. I was mostly in my office, talking to clients and colleagues on the phone and it wasn't until the evening that I managed to leave the house. The restrictions have meant that I turn left in the direction of the forest far more now than turning right, the path down the hill to the village, people and a previous normality. My youngest son described his trip to the supermarket this afternoon as being the most horrible atmosphere he has ever known. Masked faces were staring at other masked faces, pairs of eyes left alone to interpret each other, conversations dying moments before they began, mistrust and insecurity thick in the air about him. How different to the mood later this evening when my partner and I were surprised by two courageous deer barely ten metres from us on the lonely forest path.

Thursday 9th April Johanna

Good morning Matthew,

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

Yesterday was my first day of from work, to be honest I worked till lunch time, but then I generated an out of office email and closed the computer and sighed – holiday! Looking outside I was amazed about the peacefulness of the day, the bright sunshine, the chirping of the birds – knowing, that this is on the surface – Corona rages contemporaneous.

One positive side effect of these days is that my daughter and I have more time together: she is on a furloughed working model and I have holidays till Monday. So we went for a lovely hike. It still hurts me that I should not hug her, to walk in distance mode side by side, but I am deeply happy we are together and share parts of life in this crisis. We have both been separated for three weeks from anyone besides my son, her brother, and I went for a walk last weekend with a neighbour. Our hike started in one of the villages in a valley nearby, the road winds up to a wood and there we both felt like two girls in wonderland. The wood turned into a gorge, huge masses of rubble and stone blocks piled up to mini mountains, on which trees and bushes grow. Many trees are uprooted, covered with moss. Again, and again caves open and the air is deeply fresh and cool. This is such a wild and untouched wood, although I am living nearby, I have never known about it. Back home I felt deeply happy and thankful, with an inner peace.

Reading the experience of your son in the supermarket I know why I decided not to go food shopping unless I absolutely need it. It is an interesting experiment to create dishes from what is available at home. I have not yet been once in the centre, and I must admit I do not miss it, so far. The idea and wish to go and meet someone in a coffee shop, or to browse in a bookstore are on a five-star level and it is easy to let them go.

You know that there are doctors and nurses in my family and among friends and there is an increasing lack of protective suits and masks, and it is quite interesting what you hear or see in the news and what the people involved tell. This reminds me of the theory-practice-transfer or gap we often discuss concerning teaching

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

theories and methods in social work. My thoughts wander back to work … and I stop them.

I am looking forward to this day, I feel somehow uplifted to know that there is no video conference, online seminar, phone call, emails, teaching, marking, etc. – no work on the computer at all but just time for what appeals to me right now.

I do wish you will find a time window just for you as this is much more challenging with four in the house. Take care!

Friday 10th April 2020 Matthew

Dear Johanna,

Today is Good Friday or *Karfreitag* as we call it here in Austria. As I work for a Christian organisation I am also officially on holiday until Tuesday. However, the subtle welding of home and work in the last few weeks means I cannot completely let go of the responsibilities I know will surface again very soon. My teaching at the University continues next week and instead of merely photocopying the handouts and a quick review of my lectures, I have to somehow continue digitalising the process of dialogue and debate that I had planned. Some students have already rebelled slightly against this, finding the video conversations irritating and unsatisfactory. The pressure to be dynamic and entertaining in addition to more traditional didactic skills has not lessoned in the time of Corona, if anything it has increased. We can all be very hamster-like in our reactions to changing situations, chasing this bright, new wheel of Zoom and Teams and sharing screens with such fervour that we can tend to forget the simplicity of reading, reflecting and talking through the themes of social work. All these glossy tools can reflect our attention away from the essence of study; diligence, dedication and a passion for the subject. A

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

desire to learn.

But today is a holiday! I can hear you telling me that! We have already been out today, shopping again for a muted Easter celebration on Sunday. We stood with all the other masked customers (at a suitable distance of course) and looked critically at the greatly reduced selection of chocolate rabbits, a hasty presentation set up in the middle of the shop. I find your experiment with food at home a wonderful idea, but I am aware of hungry teenagers whispering over my shoulder: Crisps, chocolate, sugar drinks, special sweets, particular yoghurts they can't do without. All these things get piled up in our trolley which I guiltily place in front of the cashier. She is, of course, oblivious to my thoughts and greets us warmly despite the clinical covering over her mouth. Occasionally I can step back from all of this and watch us all trying to adapt to new rules and bizarre situations. At certain times it can be quite funny, like today in the supermarket, when we were sliding back and forward with our trolleys, flattening ourselves against shelves and apologising for the multiple physical misunderstandings that happen when a group of people are not allowed to go close to each other. It reminds me of some pedagogical exercises I have carried out with students whereby groups have to retain equidistance, a clumsy dance that shows how one movement from an individual can impact on a collective. Throw twenty people into the vegetable section with a 2-metre distance rule and you have a similar effect!

Tonight, we will grill the food we bought on our balcony, the sun will drop its burnt orange disc into Lake Constance, and I will also sense that jarring incongruity you mentioned when you woke yesterday. Such beauty, peace and a sense of timelessness would have given me a deep happiness in any other time of my life, but this is April 2020 and the world is staggering on through the next stage of this pandemic.

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

Sunday 12th April 2020 Johanna

Dear Matthew,

I did not write since Thursday because I did not open the computer, reluctance and resistance are the reason. I felt drained of all the digital work. I can share and reassure your experiences with the online teaching and all these programmes and possibilities. I have been teaching for nearly 20 years and in my personal perception and experiences students are more and more shaped by consumerism. We should teach bit by bit in bite sized portions, the surrounding should be stimulating, easy and fun, especially fun seems to be important and content must be easily digestible. To be challenged is rather not desirable. Especially reading seems to be 'out of fashion'. I would like to emphasize that I do not want to judge the students, but highlight the influence of a consumer-orientated society and socialisation, students as well as Universities, well the whole society. And this is really a challenge for us now with zoom, ms teams, whereby, skype and all the programmes.

I had quite similar experiences in the supermarket as you described, and if you are not part of it, it is quite interesting to watch. Actually there is so much potential concerning research … again I am in the middle of work on Easter Sunday evening.

Just now I see and hear the helicopter fly by. The hospital is nearby and the last days, probably the last two weeks, every day the helicopter was flying. Usually I am not aware of the frequency of flights, because I am not at home 7 days a week. But in the meanwhile I am 24 hours a day at home, for four weeks. On Friday I asked the retired neighbour (for whom I do food shopping and other necessary purchases) about frequency and she told me, that she is living here more than twenty years and the frequency was never like the last weeks. But the latest numbers tell us that all the measures have a positive effect. We will see, more and more critical voices are heard.

I have seen examples in the local tv, they showed how two police fined persons. Both

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times the people were clearly foreigners, one person was sitting alone(!) on a bench and the other example have been two young men. I considered calling the tv channel, I felt angry about this everyday racism, reinforced by acts and pictures like these. Why do they not show the flower shop nearby, where people have not at all the required minimum distance. It is not allowed to use public transportation to maintain a supply of fresh air, to go for a walk. What does this mean for those families in cities not having a car? There are so many questions and it is difficult to think out loud, as I call it. Corona polarises very quickly.

Unlike your home it is quiet here, it is just me in all my facets. Yesterday when I finished my saxophone exercise my neighbour called me on the phone and asked me to look out of the window. She and her 4-year-old daughter were cuddled up under a blanket, sitting in the garden on a bench. Her daughter asked her to sit under my window “because Johanna sings so beautifully.” Isn’t this delightful? While I am a little ashamed and ask several times whether they are not annoyed, the little one seems to enjoy my beginners’ exercises. During the last four weeks I have daily contact with this family: over the balcony, outside with the required distance, via whats app. I bake Zopf (an Austrian traditional sweet bread) and they bake cake and we merely share them. All these little encounters that are now possible, enrich my life.

I am aware of my happiness in this unstable time, today doubled with a Sunday brunch with my children. We shared our experiences during the last weeks, our thoughts and a lot of food, cooked and baked with love. When I said goodbye to them, accompanied them with my eyes until they turned the corner with their bikes, I sighed loudly and felt happy to the very last fibre of my heart. A deeply moving poem from Hilde Domin came to my heart and mind, called *Bitte*. The first sentences are:

we are immersed and washed with the waters of the deluge

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

we are soaked down to the heart skin…

And with this deep emotion of being blessed with happiness, I am looking forward to my last holiday-day tomorrow.

Wednesday 15th April 2020 Matthew

Dear Johanna,

It has been a few days since I last wrote, the weekend has become a distant thing and the week has already been full of so many voices, faces, conversations, debates, frustrations, odd, funny moments, flickers of anger, tears and laughter all filling the spaces in the day between preparing food, eating meals, cleaning, washing up, walking through the forest, drinking wine and falling asleep. And always watching screens, talking to screens, writing on screens, checking screens, joyfully turning off screens shortly before sleep, eagerly turning them on again a few hours later… Even now, I am on a screen, writing this to you. I am tired this evening and our family is feeling the strain of the days without normality, routine and distance from each other. My youngest son told me today that we are all on edge and he is right, all four of us have become tense players in a game in which we lack experience and motivation. How different to your savoured moments with your son and daughter set against the long stretches of time you spend with your own company!

I also sense a growing dissatisfaction against the increasing sense of disproportion in our policies against Corona. Today in Vorarlberg it is possible to browse through the aisles of small shops for unimportant items while those who share a life together from separate flats are still forbidden to visit each other. There are no relaxations for teenagers starved of their social oxygen, yet large garden centres suddenly need to be the first to open their doors. What are we prioritising here?

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

Dear Matthew,

Exactly the same here: I am upset, actually more than that, I am not sure whether the meaning of being angry is stronger, nevertheless I have these feelings. There is no proportionality. How ridiculous is the re-opening of stores not bigger than 400 m^2 and in the news bunches of people were shown shopping in garden centres. It is about money, economy and more and more I worry about our rights. We gradually turn into a surveillance mode, day by day our brains learn how important it is that we obey all the measures, although they are so difficult to keep, it is about health, even more, it is about death.

The main sentence we hear is protect yourself and others, stay at home. In fact it is the fear of a situation like in Italy, the fear that the medical system will collapse, but it did not. The discourse is shaped by fear of death and loss, fear of losing beloved one, by anxiety and insecurity. In fact the words we use, the words we hear and read every day are full of power and isolation. Thinking literally it is not about social distancing, we are still social beings – it is about the closeness of bodies. The police should be "dein Freund und Helfer" your friend and helper, in this meaning a civil police, but not an institution we learn to be afraid of. It is deeply terrifying to realize how our thinking and behaving is shaped and influenced by the measures, the news called information.

Increasing I hear that youth and young adults are fined while they are sitting somewhere, alone – not in a group. The fine is usually 500.- Euro. Have you ever before heard about fines set at this high amount? My impression is that this is a conscious use of fear coupled with the need for security, a prime example of political framing. It is indispensable to read Elisabeth Wehling again!

All the measures and regulations and the appearance of the police should provide

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Matthew Randall

this, promising security. “Discipline and Punishment” written by Michel Foucault comes to my mind.

I am tired of screens as well, my head aches more than usual and my neck is stiff, although I do exercises. But it is morning, the next lecture, the next meeting, the next phone call are scheduled, and we will stay in this mode till end of the semester. In my perception not good news, even if I personally can cope quite well. But thinking in a broader perspective this is not good news.

Friday, April 17th 2020 (Johanna)

I am tired, the fifth week has nearly ended in this way of living. But today was one of the best days I had so far. My children came for lunch. I bought a metal closet and both of them are skilfully crafted and took the Friday afternoon off to fit up the closet for Mum. After a coffee I waved goodbye with the sentence “I am going to work” and went downstairs for a seminar via MS Teams. While I was working with the students they were upstairs, reading a complicated instruction with 25 pages and putting together all those parts. Both are patiently doing work like this. My first break was a delight: I went up with the words “hi, how are you doing. I have a break, what about you? Do you want a coffee or anything else?” For a couple of minutes I watched my beloved ones, working hand in hand, they are such a good team. My heart burst nearly from love and I had to tear myself away. With the words “I am going back to my office, students are waiting” I stepped downstairs to my students, well they seem to be somewhere behind the screen. These breaks were repeated several times till the evening. I must confess I loved to walk up the stairs, first I heard them, then I saw them and I was aware of how much I miss them, how much I miss us as a family spending time together in an everyday mode. We finished almost at the same time. I felt sorry for them, knowing that they thought it would take less time. But both calmed me down, “it’s alright Mum, it needed a bit more time, but we

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wanted to do this for you." I had to fight with myself, I had such a deep desire to hug them both, I resisted and felt strange, just for a moment I remembered the scent of my kids. The feeling that still lasts is a deep love and gratitude for this day. A perfect emotional coverage for tonight.

Saturday April 18th 2020

Dear Johanna,

I have just read your vivid description of such simple actions, taking a break, walking the stairs, feeling love, pride and gratitude. In fact, it is the first thing I have read this morning and it gives me an instance feeling of peace and acceptance. I am very grateful for that, for your honesty and this journal we are creating together.

I am still sitting in bed, despite the flawless blue of the sky through the bedroom windows and the increasing sounds from the neighbourhood. Once Spring has been fully announced our street has an audial ritual on every Saturday when the sun shines, the air is warm, and all the windows are cast open. Like an orchestra tuning up before its audience, the first hints of this performance form through disjointed calls and the clang of machines being tested in the explicit silence of the early morning. I often wonder what goes through the mind of the first individual who strides out at 7:30am to feel that wonderful stillness in the air, to barely detect the faint patter of the leaves, to sense the dipping flight of the birds far above. Most of us are still sleeping and those of us that are not are sitting on balconies or in gardens with fingers curled around hot coffees, greeting the beginning of the day. And in that moment, this man (it is always a man) makes his decision and reaches for his circular saw. The first screech of metal on wood is like a signal for the rest of the orchestra to begin. As if woken from a spell, lawnmowers and high-pressure hoses ease their way into the symphony, a welding torch begins its own fugue almost tentatively, later

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developing steadily into a full-blooded intensity. A motorbike engine provides an irregular baseline and the chorus of shouted greetings above this collective noise completes the audial landscape. “Wie hoscht’s? Ghörig!”

I can sense the waking desire for normality in this region which places so much value on the re-enactment of tradition and daily ritual. But there is an underlying anxiety in all of us that is not easily repressed with the bustle and bluster of habitual action. My friend wrote to me from England: “*the fear is real and fear is dangerous.*” Perhaps that man with the circular saw was not quite as sure as he seemed, maybe his hand hesitated just for a second before he ripped through the fragile silence of our street on a Saturday morning.

Tuesday April 21st 2020

Dear Matthew,

I imagine you sitting in bed and how the cacophony of a traditional Vorarlberger village disturbs the peaceful Saturday. You are describing this scene so detailed and lively, I can almost hear the lawnmowers and the circular saw. Particularly the “wie hoscht’s? Ghörig!” Reading this, I thought how long it might have taken you to get the complexity of this regional cultural expression of “ghörig”.

Today I slept in, I had a cruel bad night, tossed and turned, felt my body, roused from a nightmare and I do feel shattered. The last days I felt disappointed by the measures, by the proportionality, by the way how politicians inform us, speak with us. It seems they are clear about the economy but what is about schools? I was aware of my aggressive tone and you might have read it in or between the lines in some entries. But this power has sneaked away, almost overnight and today I feel exhausted – although it is morning and I have not done anything else other than

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

taking a shower, answering 5 emails, drinking a coffee and writing. Well, I am just stepping in this day in a slower mode than usual.

I wonder how the situation will develop over the next 3 weeks, if the feared second wave will come. The hospitals and intensive care units seemed to be prepared now and also the additional facilities. But I know from friends that they are on a waiting list for urgent surgeries being postponed, there is clearly sand in the gear, in mine as well.

Wednesday April 22nd 2020



Photo by Matthew Randall

Dear Johanna,

Tonight, I am feeling happy and, in some way, oddly positive. Not because of any change in the international news that drifts over us each day like some heavy

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Matthew Randall

snowfall, or because my daily routine has altered radically from its steady cycle of sleep, computer and feeding the family. Most of today was like any other in the last five weeks of lockdown. No, my happiness came instead from a spontaneous decision to ride out this evening together with my partner and leave the trailing tasks and projects behind the closed door of our house. It came through our arrival at the shores of Lake Constance in Bregenz and the palpable sense of relief passing through me when I saw the slick figures of teenage boys swimming in the glittering water, when I heard the laughter and lightness of the young people with their backs against sun-warmed concrete and their eyes full of each other. It was being able to buy a Dürüm, despite the required mask and the speakeasy atmosphere of the Turkish snack bar, and then to eat it just a few minutes later, fingers dripping yoghurt and purple lettuce, with our legs stretched out watching the strong beams of the sun dazzle the lake in front of us. It was the wind on my face, the single sail boot angling its way to the water and the sense of being together again in one space with people who were not moving, not exercising, not rushing to return home, but merely sitting in community, content with the lake, the sun and being free.

Such simple things, that we miss only when they are not there. Simple enough to make me happy tonight.

Thursday April 23rd Johanna

Dear Matthew,

How marvellous your description and the picture, by reading your lines I felt like being part of your trip to the Lake Constance.

I, on the other hand, feel quite exhausted, tired and sad. The workload is high and increasing, my mood changes in the other direction, feeling low. I had several

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meetings today and my screen-tiredness grows exponentially. I thought I have to flatten the curve ;-). I went for a walk just here, you know I am living near the recreation area, but it was not the right thing, I felt worse. So this is just a bad day, too much of really bad news, work wise but especially private wise within two days. A close friend has a cancer relapse, a family member has severe health issues and a woman I have known for many years has cancer as well. We are not friends but there is an acquaintance lasting many years between us. But the most difficult situation is of a dear colleague: both children are in surgery – one donates a kidney to the other.

Well, this is the circle of life, the older we become the more fragility increases. I am quite good in coping with the finiteness of life, with loss and bad news. But today all this news dropped on a tired, drained and literally translated out of round (German: unrund) Johanna. These are the moments when it hits you living by yourself AND following the measures of social distancing.

I will take your so beautifully described emotions of feeling happy in my heart, thank you for this present today!

Sunday April 26th 2020

Dear Johanna,

Sometimes we both write like a seesaw in a children's playground, we feel bright with a spring-like energy and then we feel drained and exhausted, we smile in our happiness and then we are riven with moments of anger and frustration. We write on different days, in different situations and what we drop onto these pages reflects the emotions that dance within us during this time of uncertainty and interruption. You say you are normally good at coping with the finiteness of life, but the world is anything but normal. I appreciate your description of being out of sync, out of

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Matthew Randall

balance, having rough edges? (“unrund”). For me this is a fitting word to pinpoint how we all have become, lacking the usual familiar rituals of work, meetings and the sense of achievement returning home at the close of the day.

Today is Sunday and two days ago my oldest son turned 17, a wonderful, bright, vivid age, trembling on the edge of adulthood. Looking back I can remember myself at this stage and I can even recall some of the chaotic passages of my life then; my fragile friendships, the dark, heavy baselines of my music, my love of romantic literature like a meta-narrative over my youth, the taste of cigarette smoke and endless crawls through the city pubs. The sense of breaking out into an intense, real world, full of love, passion and mystery! Even boredom was full of a vibrant tension, everything had meaning, the words of a song or a novel could cut into me for days.

How would I have reacted back then to the artificial restrictions of a virus I can neither see nor perceive nor even fully believe in? I cannot know, but I think I too would have left the house like my son has done almost every night of this lockdown, swinging his leg onto his bike and dropping down our hill with a youthful speed, meeting his friends under the shadow of trees high up the riverbanks where the police are unlikely to find them, sending coded messages to each other to avoid detection, bottles clinking in his rucksack as the stars begin to show in the pre-summer sky. Later they will crouch together in the moonlight and do what seventeen-year olds have always done. They will drink, smoke and revel in their own youthful intensity. They will dissect the ideas, loves and passions of their time. They will listen to the music that speaks to their lives.

I know these times are long gone for us, but a small part of me is still sitting there under those dark leaves, breaking rules and letting my adult self spell out the poetry of my youth.

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

Monday 27th April (Johanna)

Where have the hundred weeks, month, years, actually the decades of years gone? Reading your description of the life of your eldest son, I started to count the years, my son will celebrate his 33rd birthday in two month. He has nearly double the age of yours. But truly I remembered him and my other children at the age of 17: a bulging age, full of hope and keen to explore life, living in the moment, exceeding limits, in the here and now, but also the rollercoaster of emotions within 5 minutes and of course all the striving discussions with parents.

This is one of the many reasons I appreciate deeply our collaborative writing, we are inspiring each other and this time you inspired me to reflect about the youth of my children, about mine. I started looking at old photo albums, do you remember these albums? Yesterday night I lost myself and forgot the time by turning the pages of several albums and travelling back to these years then, long ago. I felt a little wistful, but also deeply happy and my rough edges (thank you for that expression) felt a little more polished.

I still watch the news every evening, the ZIB 2 and listening to the German virologist Drosten I became thoughtful and concerns aroused. No one really knows what the future will bring, this is something we seem to struggle a lot: uncertainty and unpredictability; How will life be if we probably have another lockdown in autumn? I felt disappointed hearing that we will continue to teach, meet … work online till the end of the semester, I miss the 'real' world of my work. But this is just my little personal concern out of a secure existence, just a personal interest. But what about all the children, having probably again no access to school, kindergarden, sports, meeting friends, what about all the people who have lost their work?

A poem of a German novelist and poet comes to my mind, called Mut – courage. I usually read it out loud to the students at the beginning of the Masterthesis seminar.

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

It is a wonderfully reduced text, limited to the essentials and the last sentence is “Dem Gehenden schiebt sich der Weg unter die Füße”. This text and especially the last line accompany me again and again, like other poems as well and I want to share this with you. Courage for all of us to find our ways, step by step!

Mut

Mut gibt es gar nicht. Sobald man überlegt, wo man ist, ist man schon an einem bestimmten Punkt.

Man muss nur den nächsten Schritt tun. Mehr als den nächsten Schritt kann man überhaupt nicht tun.

Wer behauptet, er wisse den übernächsten Schritt, lügt. So einem ist auf jeden Fall mit Vorsicht zu begegnen.

Aber wer den nächsten Schritt nicht tut, obwohl er sieht, dass er ihn tun könnte, tun müsste, der ist feig.

Der nächste Schritt ist nämlich immer fällig. Der nächste Schritt ist nämlich nie ein großes Problem. Man weiß ihn genau.

Eine andere Sache ist, dass er gefährlich werden kann. Nicht sehr gefährlich. Aber ein bisschen gefährlich kann auch der fällige nächste Schritt werden.

Aber wenn du ihn tust, wirst du dadurch, dass du erlebst, wie du ihn dir zugetraut hast, auch Mut gewinnen.

Während du ihn tust, brichst du nicht zusammen, sondern fühlst dich gestärkt. Gerade das Erlebnis, dass du einen Schritt tust, den du dir nicht zugetraut hast, gibt dir ein Gefühl von Stärke.

Johanna Hefel
Matthew Randall

Es gibt nicht nur die Gefahr, dass du zu viel riskierst, es gibt auch die Gefahr, dass du zu wenig riskierst.

Dem Gehenden schiebt sich der Weg unter die Füße.

Martin Walser (1927 in Wasserburg, Bodensee, deutscher Schriftsteller) Aus: Lektüre zwischen den Jahren.*