

Same Storm, Different Boats

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18 months ago, the rumours of a virus spreading in China seemed a million miles away from our shores but here we are, three national lockdowns later, a world heartbroken, families wrenched apart and life irreversibly altered. The worst public health crisis for a generation, no part of society has been untouched and we’ve all had our own experiences. Through all the suffering though, there have been golden moments; stories of bravery, tales of hope and laughter through the tears. During times of fear and uncertainty, the very best elements of human nature can prevail.

We spoke to some local Epsom & Ewell residents whose stories exemplify the wonder of the human spirit, no matter the journey...

PAULINE MOSELEY, 51, is a teaching assistant at Epsom Primary School

Covid hit me hard at first.

When the virus began to spread around the world getting closer and closer to home I was in disbelief but I remember clearly when it hit me; it was my daughter’s 10th birthday, just five days into the first lockdown. Usually, my whole family get together or she has a party with her friends but this time, birthday wishes were by text or phone call. I cried, she cried. That was an extremely emotional day.

It’s the strength of others that carry us.

On the 6th April 2020 I sadly lost

my favourite Aunt to the virus. Her words stay with me, she would always say, “Don’t worry, it’s alright.” I carry those words always, even at work; the keyworker children that came into school were so resilient but we also had children who were so worried and confused; some, sadly, had loved ones pass away. Being there for them, to give them strength and support helped me deal with my own thoughts.

“NOTHING TRIED, NOTHING DONE.”

We are lucky really.

During the last 12 months, I have been so blessed to have the technology that we have - new ways to communicate, whether it’s WhatsApp, video messaging or Zoom; we can always talk. I have worked all the way through so

maintained a routine but I didn’t give being a key worker a second thought - I just went into work and did my job the best way I could; following the rules to keep myself and others safe and just got on with it. In some ways going to work kept everything ‘normal’.

We kept things basic and just took one day at a time.

I’m a positive person but it’s important to acknowledge how you are feeling. If I wanted to cry, I cried, if I wanted to be alone, I would make it happen. I listen to uplifting music, sing and dance with my family. We bake and try different foods and I started to make things such as cushions. We’d go for walks and bike rides discovering some beautiful parts of Epsom but ultimately, it’s my family, my amazing husband and my faith that gets me through.



CAROL BURRAGE, 78, lives alone in retirement housing



It's important to always take one day at a time and never take anything for granted.

My beloved husband Eric passed away eight years ago and a few months later I was offered a house here in Ewell, where I live alone. I try to stay positive; I always chat to Eric as I know he is still with me – I can feel he is there sometimes. I keep his photo close which gives me strength but, if I'm struggling, I look at his picture and say, "Come on Eric, give me a kick up the arse!" Tough times come and they go.

This last lockdown was the hardest for everyone.

Last year we had glorious weather

and spirits were higher; maybe people thought that the virus would be over afterwards. I spent a lot of time in my garden, which obviously, we couldn't do this time. I spent Christmas by myself for the first time but it's important to remember that you must learn to live with difficult times.

"WHEN THERE'S RAIN LOOK FOR RAINBOWS, WHEN IT IS DARK, LOOK FOR STARS."

My friends and my family are what keep me going.

My children are not local now which is very hard as we are such a close loving family but I speak to them

all the time and I'm an expert at Facetime now! My granddaughter lives close by and I have lots of lovely neighbours so I know I am not alone but I'm delighted things are easing up now; I have been getting out with my neighbour for regular walks and we like to pop into the village for a cheeky slice of cake now that the cafés have reopened.

It's important to keep busy.

I love to garden and I am an avid cross stitcher and knitter which takes me to my happy place; I really lose myself in it and am never without something to do.

ROD GREEN, 60, is a writer and sold up to move three generations under one roof



I thought Covid would be something that affected other countries - not the UK.

I assumed that the stories from abroad were exaggerated and that catching it would be a bit like the flu, a sniffle and a cough. How wrong could I be and how I wish I'd been right.

The first lockdown didn't immediately change things for me personally.

I'd already been working from home for a while and loved not having to do the soul-destroying daily commute. Then my wife, Krystyna began working from home too – she hasn't been into her London office for well over a year now.

Covid and lockdown inspired us to take a massive step.

We had been doing the weekly shop for Krystyna's elderly parents (her father is 93 and her mother a youthful 83) as they had to isolate. Lockdown though made us appreciate what they'd been saying for some time – that their house was becoming too much for them to manage. The upshot was that we all agreed the best and only way forward was for us to sell both houses and buy a place where we could all live together - along with our son when he's home from university – all three generations under one roof.

Not a decision to take lightly.

We had lived in our home for over twenty years, had built many happy memories there and never considered moving. We'd watched our son grow up there and had lovely neighbours. It was a huge change, but we knew one that just had to happen.

We did it!

Selling two houses and buying another should have been a near impossibility but despite the restrictions, everything fell into place and we all moved into our new house in February this year.

NEMIA LABERGAS, 49,
is a ward manager at Epsom
General Hospital



At first, we thought it was just a seasonal virus.

We thought the virus would last just a few months but suddenly, the hospital was overwhelmed - it happened so fast! I've been a nurse all my life and have seen so much in that time but nothing has ever come close to this. The memories will stay with me, forever.

I consider myself incredibly lucky.

I caught Covid myself last March. Working in a hospital you'd think your immune system can counter everything but we were shocked at how many of us caught it. Luckily, although some of the staff were seriously ill, we were blessed to have no deaths.

Knowing how much I am needed, keeps me going.

It's been unbelievably hard but seeing so many sick people with no one able to visit them, you become not just a nurse but their family. The phone never stopped ringing and

talking to the patient's relatives, reassuring them, consoling them, you realise how small your problems are compared to theirs. You do it for your patients. It is your job to look after them.

I worry for others.

I have my wonderful family here - my husband and two daughters - but I also have my family back in the Philippines, who I have not seen for two years now. Their death rate from Covid-19 is dangerously high and the country is really suffering. I speak to my overseas family all the time; to tell them I love them, to advise them and try to reassure them but it's hard being so far away and with no prospect of seeing them.

Other peoples' kindness helps us keep fighting and for that I am so grateful.

People have been so kind to us; the Clap for Carers, the banners and signs to support the NHS, people sending gifts to the hospital and

giving us priority in the shops and discounts. It is my job at the end of the day and I have a duty of care so these wonderful gestures really helped morale, not just for me, I know my colleagues feel the same. It has made me feel so proud to be able to help.

"HARD TIMES DON'T MAKE HEROES. IT IS THAT DURING THE HARD TIMES, THE HERO IS REVEALED."

I have learnt so much but mainly how important my family, friends and neighbours are.

I realised how many people didn't have family to support them. We have even set up a WhatsApp on my street to make sure that everyone has someone they can call on - nobody should be alone. I didn't realise how adaptable and resilient I could be; juggling working full time with home schooling and parenting is tricky, but we are all doing fine. We have to stay strong.

LEE MCSWEENEY, 39, is
deputy manager at David Lloyd
and became a dad in lockdown

The first lockdown was a total shock!

I remember being at the gym listening to the Prime Minister's announcement and the next moment we were shutting the doors for the last time. I thought it would be for a few weeks. I was SO wrong.

My partner and I are very career driven, to not work was out of character.

Clare and I met later in life, so I had never considered much else outside work. Our jobs are both full on, long days, and always with the next step

on the ladder in mind. Then it all changed; first with the lockdown itself and then, in April, Clare fell pregnant. By the time we returned to work, everything for us as people, had changed.

We were so happy to finally have our own family.

During the pandemic, no one was allowed into the hospital, so when Clare had an appointment, all I could do was drive her there, sit in the car and wait. She's a strong person but I wanted to be there by her side, see our baby, listen to the heartbeat, talk to the doctors with her, but I was helpless. As an ex-soldier, it was so hard to accept that I couldn't do anything.

I was worried about being a father and a good partner...

When we locked down again on

December 19th, Clare was overdue and then, almost as if she knew it was time, our beautiful baby girl Ellis Mae arrived on December 20th. And weirdly the best part is that being back in lockdown meant we could spend the most unforgettable 13 weeks together, which I know would have never happened under normal circumstances. Ellis is such a relaxed, happy baby - we really think it was the fact that we had no work stress - perhaps she could sense the tranquility...

I have learnt to appreciate today.

I used to work all the time, even when I wasn't on duty. Now, when my shift finishes, I am out of the door. Whether it is the first time Ellis rolls over, to her first smile or wobbly step, it's precious and I don't want to miss a thing.



SHELLY WIECZOREK, 40, is a pastry chef and founder of Epsom & Ewell Freebay on Facebook

We saw COVID coming but like most people, we didn't think it would affect us.

Life changed dramatically last year; I'd just left my job to take a short break but haven't been in a professional kitchen since! I was literally stuck at home and had a sense of needing to give back at a time when, finally, I had time on my hands.

The hospital staff were working double shifts and I knew I could help.

My idea was 'Baking Mad.' The shops were closed, half the country was stuck at home making sour dough and banana bread, so I thought I could help get the fuel to the engine rooms - so to speak. It seemed simple at first but I reached the point where I was coordinating over

250 'bakers' and then six hubs to quarantine donations, doing twice weekly deliveries, heading to all the local hospitals, from Epsom all the way to Headley Court.

"WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND."

Preventing food waste and waste in general got into my head in a big way.

My house became a depot and every few days I was filling my car to the ceiling with food for local hubs and families in need. The excess, I laid out in my front yard so people could pass by and help themselves. I then had my second lightbulb moment and started the Facebook Epsom & Ewell Freebay site - which is a simple way for the community to re-home,

for free, unwanted things rather than just dumping them.

Freebay allows me to raise awareness for those in need.

I use it as a platform to raise awareness of people and families in crisis. We are all vulnerable to loss. You can't see it coming.

Asking for help is the hardest thing you can ever have to do.

When someone has been a provider or care giver and they find themselves in need, reaching out for help is like crashing through a wall. I feel so honoured to have had people turn to me. There are great people all around us who care and will help.

