

LOCKDOWN MEMOIRS

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January 2020.

I was moving out. 17 years old and packing my bags the day after New Year because my safe space, my home, was no longer mine. I was a child who believed in fairy tales because I could relate to the main characters. In this case, Cinderella and I were looking far too similar. At least I found my escape and moved in with my aunty and uncle while my step-father's reign continued in my childhood home. I didn't understand at first why I was moving out as opposed to him. He loved it though, waving goodbye from the castle as I threw my bags in the boot and drove away from the gates.

My stay was supposed to last a couple weeks, a month at a stretch. Exam season had begun and I was in a new, healthy environment. My grades were going up, my enthusiasm to learn had clawed itself into the light and I had a feeling of absolute contentment. In terms of academics anyway. Socially I was exhausted, my best friend thought I hated her and my boyfriend at the time, well I think I hated him... rather, I should have. He was the type of guy who refused to accept that people can be better than him, whether academically or morally. Despite being someone who was finally reaching my full potential, I was not celebrated but seen as competition.

Mocks were over, I got A*s in my coursework, I was rehearsing for a dance show and planning my 18th birthday. My life was nowhere near perfect but definitely a big step away from where it could have been.

March 2020.

The UK was joining the rest of the world in a lockdown. 'Don't worry though, it'll only be for three weeks, then life will go back to normal'. I watched every news conference. Then, just as I feared, exams were cancelled. My birthday was cancelled. Prom was cancelled. My teachers were emailing saying what a pleasure the last few years had been but this was goodbye. The air felt thin and tears were streaming from my eyes. I spent the next two weeks in bed. Wallowing in self-pity and trying to recuperate from the chaos. Finally I realised maybe this is a blessing in disguise. I have always been someone who has kept going, and going, and going with no rest, no breaks for air between everything life throws my way. I had the time to do whatever I wanted without feeling guilty because I'm not studying or with friends.

While others were using this time to learn new skills or get into shape, I sat at the table completing 1,000 piece puzzles and snuggled up with a fluffy blanket and a bowl of popcorn every night. For me, lockdown wasn't about doing 100 new things to build some kind of resume so I was bright and shiny when we came out on the other side. It was about giving myself time to do nothing but heal. I didn't learn how to cook but I started eating three meals a day. I didn't learn a new language but I reached out to my best friend and built on us. I didn't party with strangers on my 18th but I sat in the garden with my mum and sister on the opposite end, in the sun and enjoyed spending time with my family.

I wasn't surrounded by the vicious cycle of overworking, undereating and insomnia. I was happy on my stroll to healing. Having strawberries in my cereal, cuddles with the dog, walks that lead to nowhere, drives in the countryside, claims that I am the one and only jigsaw master, cutting a fringe, tying back said fringe, bike rides, watering the plants and on and on and on. It sounds like the simplest list of things and it is just that. Things you'd expect to do regularly, maybe even everyday, but it's a list of things you don't appreciate until it's all you can do. That's what I came out of lockdown with, an admiration for gestures I had come to see as a chore but actually became reasons as to why I got out of bed in the morning.

July 2020

I moved back home. Lockdown was lifting and there was a light at the end of the tunnel. I had spent 6 months living with my aunty and uncle, learning to love life again. My step-father had been banished from the castle and I was ready to walk back through the gates. While I never saw it as a competition in the way he did, I'd like to think I won. He had the chance to reflect, see what he was doing wrong and make it up to his family but he wasn't able to. I left as one person and came back as another, healthy, happy and unburdened; that's the real win.

I started going on picnics rather than to the pub. Went on walks every day, finding new places to explore. I went back to dance and to work surrounding myself with new and familiar faces. Lockdown gave me a fresh start, an opportunity to become better, healthier. The lessons learnt are some that will stay with me for a long time.

Of course, life has hit me with some pretty big kickers since then but, that's a story for another time.

