



**KEEP
CALM
AND
CARRY
ON***

* at least 2 meters away from each other

Life in North Wales during the pandemic year of 2021
The (not) secret diary of Rajan Madhok, age 66+

Jan 2022

For Helen Job

No words....

Forewords

In 'Life in North Wales during the pandemic year of 2021', Rajan documents his personal reflections on the year that surprised us all. It is a brave attempt, baring his soul day by day, for the historical record. But so important to document living history at such a momentous time. Rajan has already documented his life as an immigrant doctor for a history of the UK National Health Service, and the themes of an ambitious, skilled and successful doctor, who was never really sure if he should have remained in his native India, navigating and being buffeted by events, colleagues and the zeitgeist also come through in his diary.

As a friend and colleague of over 20 years, I do know something of the background that led Rajan to North Wales; to see the toll is disquieting as a friend, but it is inspiring to see how he has overcome his personal setbacks to be a valued part of a small Welsh community, gain a supporting partner and learn to love poetry and nature, and still contribute to the NHS.

In 'A Journal of The Plague Year', Daniel Defoe kept us informed of what it was like to live through such times. It transpires that Defoe's diary was really a novel, but this is not the case for Rajan's. While sheltering the identity of individuals, we get to know his friends as the year evolves. We also get to know the impact of the pandemic on the life of an individual, and his reaction to the politics that defined the national response to the pandemic. It is interesting, inspiring, tragic and above all a very readable history in the making.

Dick Heller
Emeritus Professor
Universities of Manchester, UK, and Newcastle, Australia
Sydney, Australia

Many, perhaps most of us, are tempted to read a private letter if left in open view. When of substance, such a letter provides a window on the writer's – and sometimes also the recipient's – world. It tells us both of the person who wrote it and of the current issue(s) in their mind. It is of its time. If the times are challenging the temptation to read is accordingly stronger.

A diary is, surely, a series of private letters both sent to and received from the diarist and has a similar fascination. That is what we have here. The year's candid daily entries describe the actions and reflections of a distinguished member of the medical profession through a year of the epidemic. He is facing, like others in their sixties, the difficult self-negotiation between a busy high-pressure, high-profile professional life and retirement, whatever that may mean. He is between one life and another. It is a not just a diary of one man's Plague Year but also that of all in the communities of which he is a member. These communities, medical, familial and social stretch from across North Wales as far afield as India, Australia and the USA.

For me, each day of the diary carried me forward with anticipation to the next. It leaves me with a vivid picture of the times and of the lives of those figured and - autobiography in a focussed guise - of its writer. I hope, and anticipate that the new reader will be equally rewarded.

Professor Emeritus Sir Robert Boyd FMedSci
Cheshire, UK

INTRODUCTION

There are two reasons for writing this account.

One, I have a longstanding interest in history of medicine and have been contributing to the 'NHS at 70 history' project including for their work on the Covid 19 pandemic, and two, I have an even stronger interest in reflective practice and have extensively documented my work and wanted to take it to the next level. The latter is also by way of a confession about the secret ambition to be a 'proper' writer, and with little imagination or ability I thought that if I started with a daily journal I might get some ideas, and anyway it would be good practice.

The following site has details of my journey through the NHS since I first arrived in the UK from India as a newly qualified doctor <https://www.nhs70.org.uk/story/rajan-madhok> ; and this one details what I am doing now a days: <https://www.ramareflections.com/>

Hopefully these two will give you some idea of where I am coming from.

I had been meaning to start a journal for some time and my 66th Birthday seemed like a good time (later in the year I came across May Sarton's Journal of her 66th year, some coincidence!). Now, everyone has a different approach to writing a journal, both in terms of content and presentation; I have not tried to capture things systematically except my observations on life and feelings that day, and I have my own style of writing- it suited me. Hope it works for you too.

Rajan Madhok

Llanbedr DC and Peniel, Denbighshire & Mumbai, India

Jan 2022

Dramatis personae

I have always wanted to say *Dramatis personae* which makes it sound so posh. The people mentioned are real, not imagined characters, and I am so blessed to have them in my life; and apologise for taking some liberties. Where necessary I have tried to protect identities.

Rather than list everyone here I will restrict to a (very) few key people where some explanation may be necessary at the start, others hopefully will be clear in the text:

Yours Truly/Curmudgeon:	Rajan Madhok, retired doctor
Herself:	Helen Job, a painter
BoJo:	Boris Johnson, Prime Minister
Drakeford:	Mark Drakeford, First Minister, Wales
Mattdoor/Hancock:	Matt Hancock, Secretary of State, Health
Starmer:	Keir Starmer, Labour Party Leader
The Saj:	Sajid Javid, Secretary of State, Health
Raman:	Brother, in Mumbai
Anita:	Sister, in Delhi
Niru:	Sister, in Mumbai
Ruchi:	Niece, in Mumbai
Simon:	Helen's son

AND

Most of the characters are (good) friends.

NOTE: Curmudgeon (Llanbedr) and Herself (Peniel), both in their 60s, had only just got together when the pandemic struck.

Abbreviations used:

AONB: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

BAPIO: British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin

BCUHB: Betsi Cadwaldr University Health Board

CGWM: Canolfan Gerdd William Mathias

GMC: General Medical Council

NAO: National Audit Office

NHS: National Health Service

RICE: Ruthin India Cultural Exchange

SAGE: Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies

SoMe: Social Media

19 December 2020 (Peniel)

The big day. Finally eligible for state pension – spend, spend, spend but on what!

Herself had arranged an outing to Anglesey to cheer the Curmudgeon up, and so trotted off – mutts in the back of car with picnic basket. Beautiful drive and what scenery, was a long time since was there – some good memories of visiting there when the kids were young esp laughing with attempts to pronounce Llanfair PG (as the village with the longest name is called)!

Sarnies overlooking Menai Bridge on bench, halfway scampered back into car with freezing cold, then to Beaumaris and Penmon on the beach overlooking Puffin Island, soaked with heavy downpour. So back home to cake and then lovely dinner, bad thing was whisky (can't really drink anymore) and chocolate, but what the hell, not everyday one turns 66!

Dad was dead at this age, and hence feel relieved to have got so far; somehow this milestone should be marked in a meaningful way, but what, and so just enjoy the day. It is important especially as had been resigned, with some foreboding, about possibly not reaching the milestone. Few years ago when things were really kicking off and life was out of control, had written the below poem

Living dead

He was sixty five
the usual suspects came
said the right things at his wake
as if it would have comforted
He may have survived to that age
but he did not live

Do you know who is alive
laughing, having fun
making the best of life and
who is just getting on
biding time, clutching at things
to give existence credence

Do you talk about life and meaning
with your friends and near ones
do you have any, do they tell you
or are we all lost in this farce
having more and more and
yet less and less

So safely across sixty-five (or should it be 66, as now enter the 67th year though 66 years old?), and time to get on; may be the answer is live, love and laugh each day – as Dalai Lama is supposed to have said about the two most important things in life: Keep breathing and Smile.

S**tometer***: 1/10 (chill all day)

*** The S**tometer scale was ‘developed’ during the first lockdown – please see <https://www.nhs70.org.uk/story/reflections-during-covid-19-lockdown-poetry-diary> for more details

Stometer (1)**

Six says he in the morning
on zero to ten scale
from chilled to suicidal
in fourth week of lockdown
Gonna be a bad day
so she gives him the red T-shirt
to remind her to leave him be
to work it through and
brings him a cuppa

NOTE: Higher is bad!

20 December 2020

Lazy day, surprisingly not that bad a start despite indulgence last night. But must be more careful not to make a habit- do want to live for a long time and get the pension, have really earned it! Pleasant, though much dampened, rituals of posting cards and taking gifts to friends – standing socially distant with careful handing over of stuff is so impersonal (sad), and dragging mutts for a quick walk – told off by Herself for not letting them do what they do, sniffing, zig-zagging between legs tripping Yours Truly. But hey ho, love me love my dogs.

BoJo accused of another policy U-turn with bringing forward lockdown in England; sympathy for him long gone because of his incompetence; everyone knows it's a difficult job with huge uncertainty so why make rash promises. Humility and himself are strangers. And with the new variant of Covid, panic starts with France closing borders at Dover. More will follow suit surely making one depressed at the thought of not being able to go to India to see mum and family – esp brother, the youngest of the brood, who shouldered all responsibility over the years; never a complain about deserting but does not stop guilt. From being agnostic about politicians- they are (all?) scoundrels anyway – getting irritated and frankly angry with them. Which planet are they from/on? Need to watch out - spread the mat quickly, breathing exercises and meditate for a while.

Good thing was a long chat with Son#1 after a long time – worry as working in emergency medicine, work situation tense with need to balance personal safety with patient care with no/poor supply of PPE at times. Says lethargic with a cold, but no other symptoms of covid – leave it with him as he is the doctor but being a father..... Say a prayer.

S**tometer: 2/10 (bit of a swing, recovered)

Covid update: The Welsh Government decided to go further than the Parliament agreement. Tier 4 or lockdown, was due to start after Christmas on 28 Dec but has started at midnight on 20 Dec; accused of breaking ranks with other UK nations but Drakeford insisted – better to welch (as portrayed by some sources) and care for the Welsh, my man!

Summary of restrictions:

- Non-essential retail, close contact services such as hairdressers, gyms and hospitality will close
- Stay-at-home restrictions will be in place from midnight
- Only essential travel is allowed
- People must work from home "wherever possible"
- A maximum of two households can form a support bubble and meet indoors or in private gardens on Christmas Day only
- House parties, events and gatherings are unlawful
- Schools using online learning
- Throughout alert level four, a single person household will be able to join with one other household

21 December 2020

Shortest day of the year– have been getting up later and later - 7:30 and still dark. The delivery man set the mutts off, anyway no need to go down and sign for the parcel. How do they do it – a 3 CD album (Chet Baker) delivered next day via Amazon, for guess- £3.94, the mind boggles.

Herself carries on with her Bharatnatyam dance practice and learning Hindi, with Yours Truly still making plans. Putting pressure- the stronger sex eh. Enough of procrastination, so here goes:

The Chrysalis

Wasted the last lockdown
still no book or piano
not more knowledgeable
about flora or fauna
the vege patch elusive
becoming more curmudgeonly

Will the story repeat itself
with the new lockdown
or will new, better, self emerge
full of colour and wings
spreading joy and life
Watch this space

Job done, plan made, so that is alright then. Earned a coffee and back to scrolling phone.

And then the news – flights banned by 40 countries worried by the mutation; excellent grilling of BoJo by reporters – squirming and waffling on why Overpromise and Under-deliver repeatedly and having made a pig's ears of things. Keir Starmer piling on pressure – PM in waiting?

Long chat with family in India – staying put for now, God knows when able to travel. Mumbai, Raman says, is back to its usual- crowds everywhere, life has to go on and for the poor it is a risk either way, starve or fall ill.

Talk already about lockdown going on for months. Walk on Prestatyn beach, swimmers in water!

Herself wondering about shortages after seeing the news and troops off to the supermarket; tell her not to go overboard and hoard, Yours Truly happy with lentils and rice and being a vege! One thing both do not need is loo rolls- being fans of bidets! Do wonder about our society anyway now

Sterner stuff

How did they survive
days, weeks, months, years
never ending struggle
to keep alive
scarce and scare
those folks during wars

Keeling over in lockdown
this spoilt generation
donot make them anymore
united and sharing
unlike us lot
polarised and selfish

S**tometer: 2/10

22 December 2020

Restless night – with elusive sleep. Guess was bound to happen after the 'work' meeting last night; old age is a double-edged sword- on one hand more tolerant and patient having seen it all and on the other unforgiving and impatient seeing the younger folk making the same mistakes. The annoying bit is when the buggers resort to playing games- double insult, as not only not doing their job but also trying to fool; do not realise Yours Truly has a PhD in Dilbert and sadly has seen lots of management games. Hey ho, one tries one's best but can only take a horse to water etc...; guess every generation has to learn the lessons for themselves. But is it Yours Truly or generally it is hard to get work done, the discipline and commitment seems lacking? Can almost hear (late) father now!

Get out on the hills soon as possible to clear the mind, and head towards Ystrad Valley and Dr Johnson's monument – he was a strange one, did not really like Wales: "*Wales has nothing that can excite or gratify curiosity..... I am glad I have seen it, though I have seen nothing because I now know that there is nothing to be seen*". Well, he is in good company with Stanley (the African Explorer) who denied his Welsh roots – "*They can not understand why I should not be proud of the little parish world of North Wales, and I can not understand what they see to admire in it!*" To be fair he had a rotten childhood but even so, bit harsh. Though a relative newcomer Yours Truly is partial to North Wales.

The incessant rain has played havoc and the river was full and fast flowing and it was a pretty muddy walk. The S**tometer had gone up somewhat- not easy when one's baseline reading is 2/10 anyway and so additional stuff piles up making for heavier steps as if weighed down but then lightening. Nothing like being in the nature.

Herself had planned more Christmas present drops – all socially distant and masked, and one birthday visit marked by outdoors singing of the birthday song from a distance; well atleast still here. Looks like there will be one BIG party next year, hope so. Managed to get one cuppa tea – not saying where and with whom - suffice to say a very remote farm and with all precautions especially to help a lonely friend. What a difference from previous years where these visits were the chance to catch up properly – not like put the pressie on the floor, press the door bell, step back 6 feet, and speak loudly.

UK being mocked internationally for handling of the pandemic, covid and Brexit combination seems to be too much together. What are the chances that BoJo will last the course or will he cry off now that he has found that top job actually means having to work; maybe as soon as he has helped his mates – announces more peerages to cronies. Democracy surely is the worst form of government, it seems. Feeling sorry for the lorry drivers stuck in Kent, unable to cross the channel – French teaching lesson or shape of things to come. They are calling it 'The Plague Island'.

I will be back

And so it is
once again unprepared
wasted time in lean season
why so hard, mind boggles

Need an inspiration/ some project – going to be a long winter.

S**tometer: 3/10

23 December 2020

Johann had recommended *Why we sleep* book – which does make for a good read; and feel more informed about benefits of sleep –in fact Matthew Walker, the author,

calls poor sleep the biggest public health problem; sad since have done most of sleeping it seems! Whatever can manage now a days is a blessing.

Relying on one of the main findings from the book, which is that the mind can solve problems whilst the body rests during sleep – hence the quote about ‘Sleep on it’ and seemingly the mind is at its most creative during the REM sleep! Sadly, the REM, as well as the NREM remained elusive, so still waiting for inspiration.

Dense fog - walk or not the big question - and just when changed to go and all wrapped up, it got worse; scuttle back in, undo all the layers/paraphernalia. The Ramblers group is in ‘trouble’ since a walker last week, on the last permitted walk, has tested covid positive – Yours Truly had not gone as feel that many people are incapable of social distancing whether age related hard of hearing or just forgetful. The touchy-feely, essential human contact, is sorely missed by most, and how does compromising by touching elbows rather than handshake square with the 2 meters ‘Space’ rule – how about ‘Namaste’ instead folk. The numbers of cases going up, another friend been in bed, coughing for last two weeks- fortunately not hospitalised and recovering now.

And whilst at it, seeing the silver lining with Covid, submitted a letter to the Guardian last night, as part of civic duty

“Dear Editor

May be the time has come to start using bidet showers to clean bottoms – a universal practice in many parts of the world? Hordes need not rush to shops to panic buy or hoard toilet rolls. Stop the spread and clean up your act, a win: win strategy, surely. “

Wait to see if gets published and noticed- fame eh! Hope some of the things covid taught will persist

If nothing else

Cured nose-rooting and bogey eating
 stopped spitting, clearing throats, teeth picking
 no standing close, unwashed wafting
 started handwashing especially food handlers
 saved from those phoney kisses
 limp, bone-crushing or forever handshakes
 Count the blessings

Promod also firing letters off to BBC and The Guardian suggesting humanitarian airlift for drivers stuck in Kent to enable them to visit families for Christmas; does not look the trucks are going anywhere fast.

In other news today, the video of the party hosted by Asia’s richest man, Mukesh Ambani, in Mumbai to introduce the new grandson is doing the rounds on WhatsApp – all the great and the good are there, most senior politicians and Bollywood celebrities and guess what. Hugging each other and not a mask in sight. Herself upset and says would never have gone to such an event, so had to tell her that it

was highly unlikely that will ever be in that position of refusing the richest man. And everyone knows about the super spreader events at the White House with that clown, whilst here the media is baying for blood after Nicola Sturgeon was caught with her mask off at a wake.

Herself finally brings in the tree and starts decorations and preparations, and of course as was to be expected rushes off to shops again for that Must Have essential. Anyway Lift-off: Christmas is coming.

Watched *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Society* film with Herself - the book had featured at their book club, except Herself had not read it. So, the book club where everything except the book itself is discussed!

S**tometer: 2/10

24 December 2020

Good sleep, after last two restless nights – nearly six hours uninterrupted, so bright eyed and bushy tailed this morning. Herself, the wise one, advises – forget the problems for a few days and do what can be done, as tucks into her morning breakfast with six oatcakes and liberal blood orange marmalade (from Morrisons); says that's what will take to her desert island; well, each to their own.

Definitely a good walk day, some blue skies and clouds slowly clearing, troop off to Moel Gasyth and get to the Trig point to see the views- lovely. Do the mental check list, all Christmas cards sent or not; actually, not physical cards, email has made life easier. Here is this year's message:

Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda*



The longest year on one hand
and where did it go on the other
rumblings from the east in January
soon arrived on these shores

with no sign of abating yet
 Isolation made bearable
 with thoughts and prayers
 walking in our beautiful hills
 not to mention the corny jokes
 poetry, photos, gardening tips
 cooking recipes and you name it
 all things that make life fun
 from friends like you
 So here is to your good health
 and better times in 2021
Thanks and best wishes

*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year (Welsh)

Wonder what would have happened during the pandemic if there was no IT; not a fan of SoMe, apart from WhatsApp for family and close friends don't use anything else. Had joined Twitter few years ago and used to wonder about the 1100 followers – who were they and why following Yours Truly, and then realised was spending hours on the phone; packed it in! Definitely a two-edged sword – man's ingenuity is only surpassed by their ability to abuse the technology, and getting dumber in the process. Give up, you can't win, they have got their teeth firmly into you.

Crotchety or wiser

Refusing social media
 Barely managing Whatsapp
 For close ones
 Less is more
 In all walks of life
 Including chatter
 Caring does not mean sharing
 Trivial and frivolous, non-stop
 Important stuff will always find me
 And I will be there when you need me

The state of the world remains same- Trump keeps pardoning his mates and here possible breakthrough in Brexit talks – will believe it when it is done and then face the consequences. What does all this mean for the state of Peniel, David happy so long as can get his mackerel; it's all about the fish, innit!

Sadly, numbers of deaths rising and another covid variant appears from South Africa so UK blocks their flights now; maybe Brexit was inevitable and it is time for self-reliant nation states and forget globalisation. Vaccine supply and delivery remains chaotic – so nothing new from the incompetent government then. Arvind in New York only one personally known to have had the vaccine, rest waiting..... and surprise, surprise Blair pops up with his scientific advice of giving everyone one dose- so give little to lots so nobody is actually protected? Wonder if he is involved with any of the companies benefitting from Covid? Jokey WhatsApp message about Drakeford

winning the Employee of the Year award from Amazon; Bezos and his ilk have certainly benefitted – which plays well into the hands of conspiracy theorists.

S**tometer: 2/10

25 December 2020

And so, it is Christmas; unlike any others both generally and personally. The NHS expecting its worst day and with lockdown and restrictions even the Queen is isolated – her speech was actually quite good, do not have much time for the Royalty but she is admirable, and there are lots of lonely and upset folk out there including the stranded lorry drivers, with some people having to contend with additional pressures like Julie whose heating has gone off. But it is not really Christmas, much as one should find ways to console oneself and look at positives including being thankful for being alive. Personally, this will be the first proper Christmas with someone in four years. Glad to see pictures of happy families from friends mostly with their grandchildren, though not something oneself is going to see. Herself has gone out of way to support but the S**tometer is wild, must make sure to get through the day and not spoil it. Tell her not to be too jolly, and stop Yours Truly from binge eating and especially drinking to avoid getting maudlin.

Spend extra time with the Healthy Minds app to get head in shape in the morning, and then off to Moel Gasyth for fresh air – not a white Christmas, in fact really dry, clear and sunny and can see all the way to the sea from the Trig point. Sit upstairs for breakfast, exclaims Herself on seeing the lone magpie and both then watch wondering if an omen and suddenly the partner flies in and the two start their 'magpie' dance and then take off towards the sheep further down the field – spirit lifted (One for sorrow, two for joy...).

Open presents and happy to see that these are really useful things like the much-needed bath mat and base layer for hiking from Herself who in turn got the muck boots and gardening gloves; others were not so considerate and had gone out of way and sent nice, and useless! presents. Let us see what happens when use the towel bags for the mutts; certainly, ran away when their present with bright dark blue bags was opened. Listen to Shabad Kirtan intermittently to stay calm, something magical about Gurbani and Kirtan.

Nothing would stop Herself from bringing over old, disabled and lonely friend to give her an outing and a proper meal – Liz was a fantastic guest, full of stories, and what a career she had interacting with the royalty, running own business and local politics, busy with her poetry now; failing body but active mind can be a burden but strong spirit does help. Lesson for self.

Herself had pulled out all the stops with meal, drinks, china, cutlery and crystal so no complaints in that department. Socially distant visit for port and nibbles from another lonely neighbour. Denbigh is a small world and between them they knew/of everyone and just soaked it up and was happy that Herself was enjoying.

And so, the day passed – until next year, though who knows what it will be like in 2021.

S**tometer: (6/7)

26 December 2020

Survived yesterday, woke up rested. Feeling guilty as Herself does all the house work – and by golly can she iron – and so offer to split tasks. Get out on the hills, trying to beat the storm, blustery wind and good walk to Soar and Nantglyn; few solitary walkers working off excesses of Christmas also– honestly only had 3 mince pies, Xmas cake with cream and a few shortbreads; man has to respect the tradition.

Happy to see that Raman managed to get away to his bungalow in Khandala and has taken Mum too- very kind of him as the logistics are challenging; hope they stay for a while away from the crowds and pollution in Mumbai. Herself off walking with Julie, two women three mutts and since school friends gave it a wide berth to let them do their girly chats.

Helped by the walk and fresh air, feel clear about the decisions that need to be made – have been putting off for a long time; both professionally and personally must get on with things. Time to practise and not just preach and recall own advice (written after stay on the Holy Isle in 2019)

Moving on

Hope and fear two dacoits
 on journey to joy
 hoping the other will realise
 afraid not to upset more
 robbing you in bad relationships
 Somethings are not meant to be
 clinging on makes it worse
 Let go and make new start

Finished reading about Stanley (of the Dr Livingstone, I presume, fame) – the discoverer of the Dark Continent, and boy is that a dark period with Leopold's Congo. But then most of the West is built on loot anyway. Western 'civilisation' probably the worst thing to have happened to humanity. Very interesting (*sic*) character, although from Wales Stanley denied his roots and despite that there is a statue of him in Denbigh; attempts were made to have it removed as part of the Black Lives Matter initiative recently, unsuccessfully – emotive subject for another day. Suffice to note another life lesson- Yesterday's heroes, today's villains, and vice-versa! Moving to Daniel Defoe's year of plague now, interspersed with *Other Men's Flowers* poetry anthology by Wavell.

S**tometer: 2/10

27 December 2020

Calm after last night's downpours and howling winds, courtesy Storm Bella. Floods in the valley and rivulets running down the road- not as bad as last year though when it was like roaring rivers.

Not pensive, just reflecting start to the day, wondering about the surreal existence; feels different to the first lockdown in some ways. Is it right to bring lonely people into the house – who else will look after the frail old women and is it right to stop neighbours from using the showers, given they have no running water? How much isolation can one do, how to preserve two meters distance at home and by the way if take their coat, given weather, has contact been made and virus passed? What if they or us get covid, will there be blaming? Somethings just can't be ignored and if the authorities find out even later in the year- can fines be retrospective? How to apply the rules to rural, small community Wales? Agree with Herself, only so far before lose own humanity, so cautiously interpreting the rules, and with utmost precautions. Life reduced to basics- not having been on train or plane, to theatre, cinema or restaurant and only a very occasional meal with friends – one of the most civilised ritual- since March, it's been a long time.

Bare Necessities

Where to walk
 which film to watch
 what to cook for dinner
 dare I have a drink
 where is that book
 tough decisions daily
 but surprisingly energising
 when life reduced to basics
 Could get used to it?

To get out of this mental loop, head off and discover that all the dog lovers were out in force on Prestatyn beach, however were lucky to get there earlier and by the time finished the walk on dunes and beach the car park was heaving. The mutts had good runs chasing seagulls and waves and hopefully will be quieter at night. Though sometimes do wonder about dogs:

Hound dog

And pray remind me
 why do you keep dogs
 as another tv remote chewed
 along with woodburner glove
 and running off in woods
 back eventually muddy and wet
 Swearing and cursing
 but forgiven and forgotten
 Bugger man's best friends
 more like slaves to them

No news from Arvind in New York, worried given his massive exposure to Covid few days – hope OK. WHO chief warns about further pandemics – unless integrated action not just on human health but animal health and climate change, so the One Health concept, but does anyone think it will happen, or more like the elusive peace, something to work towards but never getting there, more spin than substance and the world keeps going somehow. Agree with Dr Tedros but do wonder, and worry, about humans' capacity to fool themselves:

Homo Deus

From being one
with other life forms
to being The One
sheer arrogance

Struck by three things from Wavell's poetry anthology: one, he could actually remember and recite all these poems, two, he was a viceroy of India and three, most importantly the title- which as he states was borrowed from Montaigne: "*I have gathered a posie of other men's flowers and nothing but the thread that holds them is my own*". What a wonderful thing to say, how modest- sadly not many acknowledge that they stood on shoulders of giants. Not sure about his selection of poems – get few of them and challenged by others. Perhaps the fact that it was stimulated by Montaigne should have been a clue, could not get head around him, too much hard work to read Montaigne, like Joyce and Proust. Why does writing have to be dense-rant, rant.

Manage to deflect hints about sharing house work – surely Hoovering everyday is not necessary! As they say about presents: see the intent. But do help clearing up after meals with washing up: "Aqua thermal treatment of ceramics and steel", to keep the peace. Leave Herself to enjoy the ironing.

S**tometer: 2/10

28 December 2020

Woke up to dense fog outside, just sitting there, in the hope it lifts off later.

Watched *Death of 2020* last night on Netflix, with Samuel Jackson and Hugh Grant, with Tracy Ullman as the queen – satire does help; the best thing to happen for Jackson was that he now knew the number of steps from his sofa to the fridge! Apart from covid the other main reason for remembering 2020 would be as the year when they finally got Trump out – not sure about Americans as they have a record of shady leaders anyway but that jerk was in a class of his own. The Guardian has made a list of the 32 words to describe the Trump era- fascinating collection or to use one of his words Bigly, well done Guardian.

Digging into Defoe's plague journal and already see parallels:

“We had no such thing as printed newspapers in those days to spread rumours and reports of things, and to improve them by the invention of men, as I have lived to see practised since. (and boy we could tell him how, with our fake news and SoMe)”

“I now began to consider seriously with myself concerning my own case, and how I should dispose of myself; that is to say, whether I should resolve to stay in London or shut up my house and flee, as many of my neighbours did. I have set this particular down so fully, because I know not but it may be of moment to those who come after me, if they come to be brought to the same distress, and to the same manner of making their choice; and therefore I desire this account may pass with them rather for a direction to themselves to act by than a history of my actings, seeing it may not be of one farthing value to them to note what became of me.” (a reminder of what should be recorded to learn from Covid)

and the College of Physicians is praised for the services provided and the nobility criticised for abdicating their responsibility!

But the section that should have been mandatory, and it is not too late even now is:

ORDERS CONCEIVED AND PUBLISHED BY THE LORD
MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF LONDON
CONCERNING THE INFECTION OF THE PLAGUE, 1665.

The jokers in London have messed it all up, with their command and control, cronyism and using the pandemic to loot the state, shameful- central dictats and especially bypassing the local authorities and directors of public health. Glad that freak Dom Cummings is out of the way, though whether he was the architect (as he saw it) or the product (more likely, with dysfunctional politicians) of the shambles in government.

Looking forward to reading the rest of Defoe, slowly, to digest it and must make sure not to get too angry – Herself not keen on rants or platitudes, and says it like it is:

Covid 19

*A time for remembering.
A time for forgetting.
A time for renewal.
A time for goodbyes.
A time to love.
A time to bury hate.
A time to get annoyed
With all the platitudes
And stupid 'It'll all be lovely afterwards'.
No, it won't. We're human
And therefore frail.
Or even flaky.
But even if just some of us
Stop being greedy
Things might, might just change.
Small steps.*

*One day at a time.
Spread the love.*

*Stay safe.
F*** off!*

If I hear 'stay safe' or 'things will be better' one more time I will not be responsible for my actions. Grrrr.

Note to Herself: profanity is unlady like, though sometimes it helps to get things off the chest. So allowed but do not make it a habit.

Helpfully fog lifted and managed to get out, for mutual safety and sanity. Joined on the walk by Simon, her son, coming to see, and exchange presents with, mum for Christmas. Ankle deep mud in fields after storm Bella and so slip slide for some time esp with mutts pulling – can't be let off because of sheep (why do people have dogs!). Snow on hills all around, with sun out and all very picturesque. Get lucky (*sic*) with another useful book on growing vegetables- suspect there is a conspiracy between the two to get self to pull the finger out and work on the allotment!

Play Boggle in the evening, no interest in watching tele, and so reading – finishing Mervyn Peake's *Mr Pye*, get into discussion about what it means. Diary of a manic depressive or about good and evil in society?

S**tometer: 1/10

29 December 2020

Use the cloudy weather as an excuse and stay indoors in the morning; after a late and leisurely breakfast – the love of oatcakes and orange marmalade runs in the family so Simon tucks in as well - decide to do some work. Megan, his partner, due to join later on. Catch up on the Charity issues – bit of turbulence in the system and using all the mental energies to make sure of a good outcome; will take some more time and effort. Note to self: avoid getting personal and look for the positives.

Herself busy creating designs for modifying the Llanbedr bungalow – can't seem to stop and has to be doing things, looking for a real project to get teeth into. Pulls in Simon as ally to design – but smart chap so restricts to bland comments! Suggest that maybe time to get into the studio instead and do some proper work, and duck in case the coffee mug comes flying!

Health workers back in the eye of the storm and looks like a very nervous NHS, rather worrying situation. Arvind from New York finally rang, due to get his second dose of the vaccine next week. Early days with K says he, another casualty with broken marriage, was hard for him but did manage to have some contact with children. Says NY covid running rampant with full hospitals. Get talking about reunion trip of the three amigos with BL to Chile and Patagonia in 2022; chomping at bits to get going, anywhere, somewhere.

Note that the Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage, feels more optimistic and is blending music, dance and words into a film tracing the pandemic – must look out for it, in time; unlike past pandemics, future generations will not be short of stories including personal experiences. The question, however, is how they will make sense of all the stuff- must be gazillions of tweets alone – and whether they will learn from the past, or is mankind doomed to make same mistakes – Ground Hog Day? Yours Truly also adding to the growing material as have requested friends to write short pieces about their assessment of 2020 on the lines of Grandpa/Grandma, you were there in 2020 tell me what happened! Let us see what comes back. Dick's brother Tom and his wife, Lisa, had covid with her getting hospitalised and he has already shared his experiences – the one message coming out so far seems to be that people are kind and caring and will support each other despite the clowns running the system. But is not that the problem, by making it work somehow, society emboldens these clowns – parallel worlds, dystopia. Stop there right now and get a grip –self admonish.

Get out after lunch; self turn to cook tonight and have received specific requests for the signature Baingan Bhartha and Gobi Aloo, will try, pressure! All worked out well, enjoyable meal, and Herself and Megan spend the evening trying various sarees – Sukhdev had given away all the clothes from his late wife when he was moving and clearing out his house, and herself was the main beneficiary, some really beautiful stuff there.

Not so good news re poor Mair, stuck in Glan Clwyd and now in Colwyn Bay community hospital since August, and not feeling well; waiting for more test results. Cefyn upset – he worries about her constantly; amazing women, so full of life at 87 zipping around on her scooter and getting ready to record Welsh hymns for the NE India link project, until recently. Susheela also joins in prayers for Mair.

S**tometer: 1/10

30 December 2020

Frosty start to the day, snow on the hills with brief snow showers at breakfast time but clear otherwise. Simon and Megan off to Liverpool with bags of goodies – come with one set and go with another, commercialisation of festivals but thankfully some sense prevailed with selections of presents.

Good news about Oxford Astra Zeneca (OA) vaccine – approved and so now the logistics of delivering it at scale never done before starts, talk of one dose to everyone ASAP to get some immunity going. Still puzzled and wonder whether science is being used to fit the practical world – what exactly does one dose do, and how much protection– OA vaccine another example of serendipity providing a breakthrough with inadvertent reduction in dose during trial, and anyway so many unknown questions about the final benefits and ofcourse no one knows about longer term side effects. Fact being vaccine or not, the non-pharmaceutical interventions of Hands, Face and Space are here to stay for a while. Anyway, await further news, at least some things are being done. Moods lifted, folks excited about light at the end of the tunnel.

Thinking of positives, reminded of latest, Whatsapp message, about the changes delivered by Corona, apart from global co-operation on vaccine;

1. Responsible for Global Digital Transformation and fast-tracking.
2. Reduction of Global CO2 emission.
3. Millions of jobs "restructuring".
4. Global Hygiene initiatives: Ensured 100% compliance on washing hands leading to collateral reduction of other communicable diseases.
5. Made global industry shift to Work from home - saved exposure and costs.
6. Reduction in global noise pollution by making everyone keep their mouth shut (while masked).
7. Taught cooking, vegetable shopping, housekeeping to many.
8. Highlighted the importance of governance, adaptability and long term planning, by all sectors.
9. Spiritual contribution - Provided ample time to all egoistic and self-centered people to contemplate their moral nature.
10. Taught the family values and values of life.

Time will tell how many of these changes stick. Technology certainly here to stay and saved the day for most people with work and personally. Interesting video from BBC on funny Zoom moments when things did not go as planned with cats and kids wandering in. Why not - meetings can be too stuffy. As someone who spent most of professional life in meetings, fully endorse the need to keep them short, focussed and as much as possible fun – really had to imagine the paycheque to keep going during many of the meetings for meetings sake.

Wonder what historians will make of the fact that WhatsApp and Zoom kept people going during the pandemic – ofcourse there are other media.

Mair seems to have bounced back – she is a phenomenal woman, do admire her resilience, surely some lessons from her life.

Highlight was the news about how Rory Bremner saved John Major's bacon, by impersonating Major on phone calls he persuaded Eurosceptic rebels to back off: *"Bremner, who made the calls in September 1993 for his new Channel 4 show, has since said he had no idea he had helped to thwart a rebellion 27 years ago.*

He said: "You think you're being satirical but the reality is even more farcical.

"Honestly, who'd have thought that without a spoof phone call, a group of Eurosceptic backbenchers might have forced the prime minister to resign and taken us out of the EU. What are the chances of that?"

Cameron should have learnt from it, and maybe BoJo did – who knows how these guys work, completely insane world of politicians.

Great walk in snow, magical when it is still pure snow before the ice and slush, hills covered and poor sheep at a loss, went up to the Tir Mostyn Windfarm- almost surreal, like a scene out of the armageddon films.

Start on James Rebanks book: *English Pastoral: An Inheritance* whilst dipping into Defoe. Honestly, did play the keyboard for a while yesterday; hate people who are naturally talented or disciplined, Yours Truly still stuck on F chord!

S**tometer: 1/10

31 December 2020

Atleast the weather is good, blanket of snow and blue skies.

Seeing the news about honours list reminded of the poem in 2018 when congratulations poured in after mistaken identity:

Chimera

Messages on the phone
 Congratulations for the honour
 Leaving me puzzled
 As frantically finding stuff for hike
 In North Wales, itching to get out
 Then the phone rings and clarity
 'Rajan Madhok' got an OBE
 But it aint me, its the other one
 Mistaken identity
 Ephemeral joy and fame
 Wonder if real thing lasts longer
 Not likely to know but
 Thanks to the well-wishers

(The Real) Rajan Madhok N (o) OBE

Good to see some names- deserving ones especially for dealing with Covid, though remains a mystery why some get it and not others.

Yours Truly was not going to get the gong after turned whistle-blower – and the same folk who were pushing for it turned against. Others rallied and including XXXXX who wanted to nominate (nice friend and feel bad about upsetting him for refusing to be considered at this stage, he had gone out of his way) as scheme started by Honours Committee which asked its members to help make up for oversights. Strange how things work- when wanted the recognition did not get it and when do not want the gong it was being suggested. Herself comes up with another explanation: Overtaken By Events (OBE).

Put on a brave face to see the day through, just could not shake the black dog off, joined in the Zoom Quiz party and let off few left over, from Diwali, fireworks, and then the year ended.

S**tometer: 6/10 (31 Dec being wedding anniversary)

Strike this one out

Some days nothing works
 You try and control that monkey
 but mind is all over the place
 Just have to fill the time somehow
 till night and hope for best next day
 Is there another way
 What do you do
 Grief, anger, happiness, peace
 so many feelings but
 can you choose what to be or
 do they choose you
 and you are stuck till the next one
 Oh God, what a mess

1 Jan 2021

So here it is – the new year, actually the new decade; hard to believe how time flies, 2021 already, it seems only yesterday when talking about Y2K and then 2020. Be afraid, very afraid – relentless march of time.

Happy New Year

And its the first day
 Of another new year
 Time to make lists
 Of promises to keep
 To show resolve to
 Finally doing things
 Not tackled in past
 Sainly, disciplined, focussed
 The new (wo) man
 But.....
 Surely we need a treat
 If only a small one
 For a good start?

Start with getting the S**tometer down after the difficult day yesterday – say the magic words F**Kity, F**K, F**K three times; Herself did well to put up with Yours Truly (curmudgeon par excellence), so thank her. Does not say don't do it again, as knows will happen and so life will go on till new balance. Generally, and reinforced by pandemic, the new year's day has no significance - all days are same and resolve to live each fully. Off to Ashley's cottage later to take her birthday present, must follow all rules – after the liberties last week agree with herself to take it all seriously esp as NHS bursting. Do one's duty.

Horrific news coverage last night with TV scenes from London NHS- staff imploring people to follow rules with one going as far as saying rulebreakers have blood on their hands. Numbers of cases and deaths both rising, London sending acutely ill

patients out to other regions; have not heard about opening Nightingale Hospitals yet, but the key problem is staff anyway. Feel sorry and grateful to NHS staff; Son #1 had his first dose two days ago and ofcourse changed policy means 12 weeks before second dose. Umesh also got his done in Leicester, being a GP, and clear that can't lower the guard- corona is clever and may take 2-3 years before its virulence is acceptable, till then regular testing including antibodies and top-ups of vaccines. Be interesting to see how these services will be provided at the scale needed – obviously big bucks to be made in diagnostics and vaccines, both manufacturing and services, there will be winners and losers.

Same stories from Arvind in New York though life in India seems lot more open (and some would say dangerous) – old mate Lalit comments on Indian Government approach to the pandemic. Dick in Australia says very localised in Sydney, and ironically in affluent area, and rest of city is open but not taking chances so off to Wagga Wagga, closer to daughter.

Not sure what is happening in North Wales and Mair still stuck in Colwyn Bay, presumably to get moved to a nursing/care home nearer Ruthin soon. Still not been able to see her- not sure why the staff can't wheel her out and allow friends to atleast look at each other through glass doors; very inhumane, and can't be so short staffed. And if true then why not use volunteers, own offers to help the health services have not been taken up. And then the GMC sends letter saying Licence restored so say thank you but no thank you, as no one wants Yours Truly – but politely as always liked Una Lane who looks after registration there now.

Triumphant BoJo got his Brexit Done, just in time and now it's all real; better check passport and travel insurance not that going anywhere yet. Guess will be a while before clear what it all means and whether good or bad. If it was not serious it would be funny as BoJo's father, a staunch Remainer, is going to take up French nationality. Who needs reality TV when there are politicians?

Good to hear from some folk after a long time- guess one advantage of New Year's day with remembrances; particularly happy to hear from the Holy Isle Group – would love to get back there for a retreat, such a peaceful island near Arran.

Nice walk towards Llyn Brenig, snow on the hills but roads clear, Herself picks up after few miles and then drove into Clocaenog – forest beautiful with snow but roads icy and slippery so retreat and back home to tea and cake – well, earned it after the walk.

S**tometer: 3/10

2 January 2021

“What will our descendants say of us, years from now? How will we be judged?Will the future know us as the generation who pushed everything too far, on whose watch the world began to fall apart, who had so little courage and wisdom that we turned away from our responsibilities?”

Could be written about the state of the world and to some extent it is, but it is from James Rebanks' book and who goes on ..."Will they stand in the dust of a scorched and hostile world, surrounded by the ruins of all that exists today, and think that we, who could have saved the earth, were thoughtless vandals, too selfish or too stupid to turn back?"

Very thoughtful book about farming practices, driven by corporate greed and globalisation which are destroying the earth. Have ordered his first book: *The Shepherd's Life*. Although aware and concerned about nature, interest had grown since coming to North Wales and especially after joining the Clwydian and Dee Valley AONB Board:

Countryside living lessons

Lambs bleating, sheep baaing
occasional neigh with horse rider and dogs
woodpecker on tree, sparrows chirping, and the cockerel
the distant drone of tractor and the muck spreader on the fields
and the list grows as she keeps pointing out on daily permitted walk
never realised how 'noisy' the countryside is, but isn't that lovely
senses being woken up uncluttered by the city sounds
Tomorrow's lesson will be local wild flowers
walking through 'primroses lane'

Whilst going through notes in Rebanks book reminded of Wendell Berry's poem which resonated when first came to live here

The Peace of Wild Things

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

It should be compulsory for city dwellers to spend time (not as vandals and tourists) in the countryside. Friends nod their heads as bend their ears regularly, and been going on to niece with her two years old, stuck in Mumbai to ensure he gets to see the different, and real, world in all its glory.

And as happens, one thing led to another while following links on internet, and ended up finding the *Tools of the Trade: Poems for New Doctors* project in Scotland, what a fantastic idea. Ofcourse there are other initiatives like the Hippocratic Poetry Society and frankly the more the merrier.

Nature, poetry, simple food heaven. Well looks like need to work on the last one, too much trifle last night, will need extra walk today- weather looking OK, some snow flurries and for a while storm clouds which passed quickly – very interesting to see the fast moving weather front.

Delyth, the girl mutt, chewed up another biro (why do people have dogs) and so in the dog house (not really, her soulful eyes let's her get away).



Ifor and Delyth in their Christmas presents

Herself came across the video of the train between Ruthin and Mold in 1960s and went into dreamland, remembering mum had taken her, as a young girl, on the last train in 1962; as newcomer hard to believe there was railways here – progress eh!

Not the dog, but Yours Truly in the dog house; poor Herself, trying best to reconfigure the house for the intruder but can't seem to sort it fast enough for the Curmudgeon, complaining when can't find things easily. Thankfully Brian offers to meet up for a walk; so, get out, ankle deep mud in places, overgrown paths and broken stiles- more an endurance and limbo dancing walk but hey ho, atleast did not fall down. Cake and tea to finish off with Brian and Herself who gives him another knitted hat and lots of womanly advice – story for another day. Yours Truly tries chick pea and rice pulao for dinner to appease, though suspect will need more than that.

Vaccine delivery plans being criticised amidst growing anxiety about rising rates, and whether to reopen schools still being debated- nightmare for parents, and ofcourse teachers. So same old, even though new year.

S**tometer: 3/10

3 January 2021

Drat, had forgotten to send contribution to the Poetry Group, theme chosen by Kay, whose turn, is Hope; thankfully Jean, who holds it together, reminded. Use these monthly sessions to read new stuff and so start googling – there is so much stuff out on the internet - and something that resonated with own thinking caught the eye; had not heard of Derek Walcott before

Love after love

*The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,*

*and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you*

*all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,*

*the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.*

The central message is well known and often remember Rumi – about spending time with self or Hafiz- about knowing that one is enough, but Walcott has put it well. Live in hope that it will sink in; Go in not out, peace lies within.

Wonder whether should use part of the lockdown and do intensive 'Vipassana' – maybe not a bad idea? If not now then when? Maybe a modified one, given all round anxieties?

Not much evidence of peace out there, as teachers and policymakers fight about opening schools and Trump supporters mount another challenge in USA (WTF). New poll shows BoJo will lose his seat and majority as public lost trust, but what does it mean as critics would point out that Guardian would ofcourse say that; funny thing as read BBC and Guardian news on phone every morning (and afternoon and

evening.....) and notice their different coverages and views! Sadly, use of antidepressants going up – people’s mental health is really suffering.

Herself wonders about driving to Harlech to see another ghost town with closed shops there, and then feel guilty about breaking rules about travelling, so it will be another day of pootering, walking, reading/writing, eating Could be worse. Joke: Man goes to the optician for annual eye test. The optician puts the contraption on him and asks what can he see. “I see empty airports and football grounds and closed theatres, pubs and restaurants”. That’s is perfect, you have 2020 vision, concludes the optician.

Pam came along to walk with Herself and the mutts, accompanied them for a while, duty done veered off to Soar and Nantglyn, stayed on roads today. Richard the local weatherman says Feb was the wettest month and May the driest and there is more rain now a days- been recording for last 32 years.

S**tometer: 1/10

4 January 2021

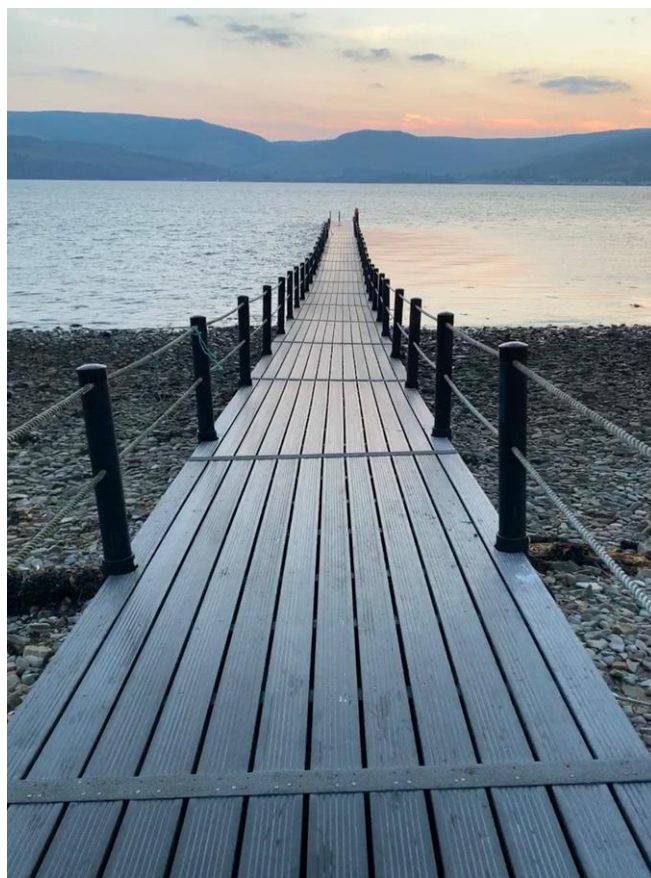
Buzz with the start of Oxford vaccine – today’s leading story – Brian Pinker, 82 years old, first person to get the jab from nurse Sam Foster in Oxford; Margaret Keenan, 90 years old, was the first for Pfizer from May Parsons in Coventry on 8 December. How do they decide who is first? Herself is in category 7 of the priority group whilst the curmudgeon is ahead of her in Cat 5; though no idea when turn will come, many a slip betwixt cup and lip.

In the other world, Bitcoin has reached the high of £24850, personally unable to comprehend what this means– another scam and how does it help the poor? Applaud Dan Price, boss of a card payments company in Seattle who took a pay cut of \$1m and put his 120 staff on minimum \$70k (to cover cost of living there), need more of such people not the schemers and currency manipulators creating global shifts and spreading misery. BTW Jack Ma, the Chinese billionaire, has been ‘disappeared’ – do not poke the party leaders, it seems. May be there is hope as ‘Generation Z’ (in teens or early 20s) getting more politicised according to a Guardian survey: “*The Government has abused its position and its coercive powers..... There is a pattern with this Government.....*” . Let’s hope they can channel their ‘anger’ – it will be interesting to see what happens with the elections in May including in Wales and the London Mayoral and Assembly elections. The thing that sticks in the craw is politicians saying things like could not have seen new variant; hello, which planet are you from: Is not anticipating potential scenarios part of planning? Did you read Taleb’s book *The Black Swan*, or just swanning around?

Low mood today, the black dog crept in somehow, hate the f***ker. Thought had finished it off at the retreat on Holy Isle but with second year of pandemic, bounced back.

Goodbye black dog

Lugged him all the way to the top
 weighed a ton, bending me double
 but then I got my own back
 throttled him and to make sure
 threw him off Mullach Mor into sea below
 then danced down the mountain
 with spring in my steps, much lighter
 and to be safe took the boat out of the island



Enough of the state of the world, focus on the state of Peniel which looks fine with clear skies and high visibility all round. Not sure good thing as sets Herself off about the wind farms blighting the hills – distract her with plans to revamp the garden. The challenge being to fit large garden room, log stores, tool shed, raised deck and not to forget a decorative pond- hoping planning it will keep her busy for a while. Help clear out the garden, cutting down the Hawthorn tree and other bits for a start.

Folk getting back to work after the Christmas holidays, though as Paul said it means opening up the work laptop! Used to be fascinated by colleagues who are able to demarcate work and leisure time, Yours Truly mixed it up, hostage to blackberries and then phones – in fact at peak (of lunacy!) took pride in a clean inbox and

response times of 10 minutes. No wonder eh! Herself thinks might last 3 days on Vipassana, and a compromise may be needed with some allowance for contact – can't have it both ways, does not work. So, another decision postponed.

Look at the To Do List and start prioritising, enough to earn a coffee. Tomorrow will actually start the work, gotta take it easy. Golf club remains closed. Talk to Cefyn re Mair – still no news about her move to a care home, all round fed up, being helpless. BoJo indecisive, Scotland shuts down, little news re Wales but guess not due for review for few more days.

Going to finish reading Defoe's journal today – more later, though the bottom line may already be obvious: Man (non-sexist, historically all the stuff was by men, about men, sadly) does not learn!

S**tometer: 4/10

05 January 2021

So, England shuts down too; BoJo on TV last night and finally catching up with other UK nations, looks like till February school half- term but who knows. Not sure when further update on Wales due – Gething said North Wales numbers going up. Reacting to numbers does not seem right- what was low earlier is higher now and vice versa, so a more universal approach; sink or swim together?

Looking at the poetry group submissions – used to meet at 2pm on first Tuesday of the month, and tradition carries on albeit remotely now – found the usual suspects on theme of Hope: Maya Angelou – Still I rise, Yeats- The lake Isle of Innisfree and Emily Dickenson – Hope is the thing with feathers feature along with some new poems. Really enjoyable contributions and have learnt a lot from fellow members. Not good to single out any particular one but given the Zeitgeist, Michael Rosen resonated:

Looking for someone to head the enquiry...

*They'll be scouring the country for another peer
who they can pretend is uncontaminated
hoping that people betrayed and humiliated
will be cowed and passive before power,
will accept the assurances of grandees
schooled since birth in the art of domination.*

*Panic is spreading. For one brief moment
the suits and robes look tattered,
the velvet curtain has parted, we have sight
of the cogs and wheels which hold our rulers
aloft, seemingly forever triumphant.*

*Before it closes and they reappear glossed
and strident, let's hold that picture in our heads*

*for when they order us to have less
while they take more, when they take what's ours
and give to those who already have.*

*They are only what they are: people pumped up
by pumped-up people; people paraded before us
as wiser or cleverer or worthier than us.*

*They are none of these things. They are just people
who hope that we are too tired or too afraid to
get rid of them.*

Too true. In addition to his poetry, like Rosen generally and was interesting when he came to Corbyn's defence re antisemitism.

Joke:

Knock, knock.

Coronavirus: Who's there?

Corona vaccine: Vaccine.

Coronavirus: Give me a minute. I am changing.

Started reading John Pearson's book on Sitwells: *Facades*, and have ordered a few from the World of Books, cheap used books, good value; used to rely on the Ruthin library but since pandemic have not been there; has good selection and the staff are excellent and so may be a visit? Must check how the system works now.

Mair not well- some sort of infection and so moved to a room for isolation; really worried about her, and upset with the medical profession – a basic toe infection in an elderly and five months in hospital; too much medicine and not enough common sense or patient care.

Herself taking down the tree and decorations, donates extra boxes of biscuits/sweeties to local charity – though suspect will end up buying again in a few days, but good cause. Chores day and chop up the Hawthorn tree and general tidying up of garden, and then retire to bed with book to calm the monkey, tea brought up.

S**tometer: 3/10

06 January 2021

Been thinking about Defoe's Journal and trying to get head around the So What question; no doubt that lessons have not been learnt with bottom line being that crisis brings out the worst and the best in mankind and somehow new balance is restored, until the next one. All the issues identified then are as relevant for the covid: using the basic framework of the bug (agent), the victim (host) and transmission (vector) the pandemic also had many unknown unknowns for all three

and as with the plague clarity only emerges gradually. Surely that makes it all the more relevant to have the right approach with science and transparency with ethical decision making and the right leadership; if only there was the equivalent of the Lord Mayor of London during plague at the helm, may be things could be different now.

To paraphrase the quote in the early part of the Sitwell's book just started reading, about The Golden Horde, based on Byron's

Society is now one polish'd horde

Formed of two mighty tribes, the Bores and Bored

it seems that the present-day equivalent is the failed (leaders) and the scared (public); the former failing to learn the basic lesson of "For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple and wrong".

This is the Great Leader on the situation yesterday:

"Provided we do not learn anything new about the virus that we don't yet understand, there is not some new mutation that we have not currently bargained for; provided the vaccine rollout goes according to plan; provided the vaccine is as efficacious as we think it is; but above all provided that everybody follows the guidance now".

So, boys and girls it will all be your fault; BoJo has done all that he could do. Mr PM what is Plan B by the way, and do you know that you are not helping the public who are getting more scared, the handling of schools has been another mess, jobs disappearing, rising loneliness.... Stop the soundbites and jingles – vaccine alone is not the answer, not that they have the supply sorted or the delivery challenges, not to mention that the WHO has not supported the single dose policy with 12 weeks delay for second dose.

Sign the Change.org petition to stop the 12 weeks policy, only because do not know as the policy has not received the scientific scrutiny- maybe it is right but then why not share the evidence, and chip in a donation- glad there are still folk out there, not caving in and pushing back. Decide to check out the situation with Food Banks in Denbighshire – part of Trussells Foundation, a new year promise to self.

Joke: *"When we go into the lockdown just train all the Amazon delivery drivers to give the vaccine. Entire population vaccinated by Saturday, Wednesday for those with Prime".* Aha, but will Amazon be able to do all the necessary training including stage 1 of training to prevent radicalisation – the mindlessness of bureaucracy has even turned off the professionals from volunteering, can't afford hours and hours of training required. A dentist recently published a list of requirements and the mind boggled; the Government response – take a guess (and deep breaths).

The worrying thing is that there is no end in sight yet, remember the Black Plague in London was followed by the Great Fire the next year – so the crisis is definitely not over yet, the misery will go on for a very long time. The public needs trust and confidence.

Having now read Philip Ziegler's account of *The Black Death* between 1347-50, Samuel Pepys relevant diaries for the plague in 1666 and now Defoe, wondering

what to make of these and how to add value? Already have co-authored a paper with Roger and Dick on ethics of policy making during the early part of the pandemic; so maybe talk to Stephanie about some summary and comparative analysis of handling of plague in 14th and 17th century and pandemic in 2020? But what will it achieve- the usual hard question, and may be better to focus on getting through the day?

Over in the USA, Georgia senate results awaited with Trump inciting violence, bosses earn 115 times the average workers salary, and China denies WHO entry to Wuhan; so, all is well with the world today.

Enough of this, light snow with clear skies outside, mutts restless with not having had the walk yesterday, Herself had a bad night and finally gave up early morning, had horrible doom and gloom dreams says she and so Yours Truly need to get a grip- both can't have high S**tometer at the same time. Try to cheer her up with offering to cook- Beans Aloo and Tarka Daal (sorry for Herself, proper Welsh carnivore and dairy girl and now living on rabbit food) and go for a leisurely stroll with digressions to see more paths around Moel Gasyth- some good ideas for proper walks with mates when possible, meantime each in their own orbit, Tony sends picture of walking in snow on Minera mountain.

S**tometer: 2/10

07 January 2021

Oh boy, how the last evening turned out. Glued to TV with unfolding stories on the election in USA and Covid in UK. Could spend hours ranting about USA but restrict to two observations: the scenes with storming by armed mobs of the Capitol were entirely predictable – they created the monster and monster has done what is in its basic nature, so have no sympathy for the Republican Party grandees who are now hand wringing, trying to distance themselves and suggesting gentle slaps on the wrist; and Joe Biden is a Hero – give him the Nobel Prize for bringing back some democracy; was, and still, puzzled about comments about his 'style' and 'charisma' – for F**k sake, see what that gets you. The guy is 78 and worked like a Trojan to save the country. Seriously worried though as this is not the end, with the evil progeny around to keep fuelling the divide. Agree with Herself that chances of Trump goons finishing off Joe Biden are remote since that will make Kamala the President and the combination of Black/Asian and woman is not something this right wing, gun carrying, mob wants to see, in any case that will definitely lead to civil war. Watch the next two weeks till 20 January. No mention of the biggest threat facing USA, hello are you awake, what is happening with covid! The greatest nation – bastion of democracy, my a**e, global thug more like. Have a bet with Herself about how long before Melanie dumps Trump.

Poems written on 15 Oct, awaiting elections

3 November in USA

Baited breath

surely be fireworks
but civil or armed?

Selfish gene

Corona was not defeated
when let Trump and ilk recover
for who better to finish
what it started

No credit to grandees here either – Farage and BoJo among others popping up with their mild rebuke of Trump; sorry not good enough, should have been there when needed. Heart breaking scenes of hospitals and staff dealing with Covid, another entirely predictable scenario making it hard to generate any forgiveness/ sympathy for the Government (sorry to be failing the meditation teachers, empathy not always easy). Good Question Time session with Rachel Clarke (Overpromise and Under delivery BoJo) and Mark Walport (Government getting nothing right, between covid, education and economy) and others not pulling punches; Nadhim the minister tried his best, felt sorry for him, not easy. Sadly, too much of analysis and blaming and hardly anything on what next- so from now on can there be clarity, honesty, responsibility; qualities currently in such short supply, just like vaccine. UK had over 1000 deaths yesterday, as much as all the deaths during the Pandemic in all of Australia – shameful record. Enough doom and gloom and so to lighten, and lower, the tone – did you know that Fiona Bruce who hosted the QT had won the Rear of the Year award; not that this was on display last evening; honestly yours is better tell Herself.

Woke up to frost on the hills, with the state of the world surprisingly putting own problems in perspective and getting to focus on living in the present. Submit a proposal to The Lancet on starting a discussion on racial discrimination in the NHS – not happy with the current approaches which are perpetuating the divide; let us see how they respond. Is consensus possible in the increasingly divided world – rather have lose: lose in mindless pursuit of win: lose rather than win: win. Yours Truly is truly getting old.

Herself comments on the empty roads, not that there is much traffic in Peniel anyway and one comment led to another:

Who is paying

Schools closures
no mad mothers
dashing on the roads
but are there bad mothers
bashing locked down adorables
or sad and terrified mothers
walking into doors

Herself does not like sad or violent things, and the imagery in the poem too much. On the other hand, also does not like the Clap for the Heroes initiative- starting tonight at 2000 hours; the hills will be resounding with shows of appreciation, or will they, will find out later. Personally ambivalent, as important to give thanks but also an empty gesture, so discuss with Herself how to help practically.

Thanks to Ruchi, rediscovered the Brain Pickings newsletter – weekly or twice weekly digests - by Maria Popova; which along with the Daily Stoic and Tiny Buddha messages, help get through the days. Such rich pickings in Maria's last newsletter, and one that struck was the quote from Bertrand Russell about Fruitful Monotony -

“The pleasures of childhood should in the main be such as the child extracts from his environment by means of some effort and inventiveness... A child develops best when, like a young plant, he is left undisturbed in the same soil. Too much travel, too much variety of impressions, are not good for the young, and cause them as they grow up to become incapable of enduring fruitful monotony.

I do not mean that monotony has any merits of its own; I mean only that certain good things are not possible except where there is a certain degree of monotony... A generation that cannot endure boredom will be a generation of little men, of men unduly divorced from the slow processes of nature, of men in whom every vital impulse slowly withers, as though they were cut flowers in a vase.”

So do nothing with nobody all alone by yourself. Very apt for these times. Certainly, monotonous days and hopefully will extract some pleasures to keep going for now. Good walk, went down the ravine, over some frozen ground to Nant Glyn and then towards Brenig in chill wind- snow on the way says the farmer, before getting picked up by Herself on way back from the bread and baccy drop at Bwlch Du for Dean.

S**tometer: 2/10

08 January 2021

Not a good night, Herself had a gyp in the hip and could not get comfortable, physical compounded by mental as had some not good news re Mair. Mair had scan and it does not look good, possibly a few weeks. Frantically trying to find more info including on whether can see her- its 5 months and no one has laid eyes on her. Previous requests to allow waving across the window not granted. Finally managed to speak to the staff and now that Mair is in a separate room a 15 minutes visit is allowed. and so hopefully soon can go and see her in Colwyn Bay Hospital. Did a Google Duo video chat with her meantime, still the lovely Mair- the practical, strong woman, does not want fuss, love her.



Also had a long chat with Ruchi last evening about Mum who is going downhill, forgetful and anxious, and then gets quarrelsome with her maid. Physically struggling too given her weight and mobility – stressful for them, on top of all the other covid pressures. Glad they had some time together in Khandala recently.

Guess rubs off on to Herself also. Discuss how and when to get to India and spend some time there. All in all, a rather morbid evening, sitting with Herself, both reflecting, lost in thoughts.

Coming home

And now its personal
 need to reconcile
 practical and medical issues
 decisions to be made
 when close ones affected
 sages, books, advice help
 but finally upto you
 Will be tested like never before
 only way is day at a time
 and staying strong
 physically and mentally

Anyway, new start today, with whiteout and snow still coming – picture postcard views. Herself goes out in muck boots and fills the birdfeeds, lights up the log burner; getting ready for the indoors. Counting oatcakes, making sure enough supply in case not able to get to shops, snow ploughs do not get up this far though the farmer may clear the road. Agrees with Herself to stop brooding – this is how it is so suck it up.

Nice email exchange with A, poor P has been in care home with dementia for some time now. So stressful for her, but she seems to be picking herself up- always admired her, wonderful human being and a great doctor. Must see her as soon as possible- been a long time. Too many folks struggling, and equally marvel at how they keep going.

Wales lockdown to continue and schools shut till February mid-term unless rates drop miraculously, the vaccination rate in Wales lowest of UK nations so hard to see that happening. Moderna, the third vaccine, approved in the UK but may not be available for a while and meantime logistics of delivery still a problem though politicians keep making noises and promises. Hard to take them seriously as Mattdoor turns up at the GP surgery to launch Oxford/AZ vaccine but the surgery had not received it. How do they do it – self goals must be a pre-requisite to be a politician? Just like over the pond, Trump campaign to challenge election result started in Four Seasons – not the hotel but a landscaping company next to a crematorium and sex shop; guess that just about sums up the guy. Most of American Presidents end up setting foundations and libraries- be interesting to see what he does.

Talking of other Trump news, or maybe not today, take a break. Chad said he had stopped watching TV news six months ago, and is busy snow-shoeing and having fun in Minnesota. Makes sense. Perhaps try sledging here, plenty of snow outside, gritter and trucks reversing outside as can't seem to get up the road towards Paul's.

In another news, Elon Musk replaces Bezos as the richest man, mainly because Bezos, due to hanky panky, had to pay off his wife; but the mind boggles as Musk is only selling dreams whilst whatever one's views Bezos is providing a (useful) service. Musk is no Tesla, who was a true genius though Musk much better business man than Tesla whose genius was financially exploited by others (and not acknowledged by Nobel Committee, not sure any one is anywhere close to Tesla in solving the meaning of the Universe).

Herself catches up with friends, long chat with Mike, great guy and really interested in nature and both abhor the blight caused by windfarms on these beautiful hills, had lost his lovely wife recently (was a great hostess with tea and cakes after the Ramblers walk last year) – his last image is when she was being taken away in ambulance.

Sad day all round. Listen to Kirtan- Bhai Harjinder Singh Ji Srinagar Wale. Day of reflection, remembering, letting love flow. Strangely S**tometer down, guess seeing life in the raw makes it easier? Offer, again, to volunteer for the vaccination programme in Wales – surely can do something.

S**tometer: 1/10

09 January 2021

Slowly peers, playing peek a boo dance, on the hills and valley, and then bursts through and covers the peaks with bright sunshine, very pretty though imagine will become slushy later as snow melts – for now sit fascinated looking out the windows from upstairs sitting room over breakfast.

Robert sends an update from Tiree, and guess what- it is the same as for last few months since went there – up, swim in the sea, bake bread, read, write.... but happy, thanks to neighbours says he and Meriel. Sends pictures of house by the sea- lovely.

Watched *Hope Gap* last evening, a film with Anette Bening and Bill Nighy, mainly for the latter as like him- did not know he was among the 50 best dressed men, with his suits. Interesting, though well-worn theme, of dead marriages and relationship issues till one decides to do something- in this case after 29 years, but then better late than never; as his new lover says, there were three unhappy people and then there was one. How does it help, do wonder, to see such films, Herself, being action oriented, has little time for sad stories; says been there, and whilst sympathetic, people need to move on. Anyway, agree that there are different tastes, and each to their own. Peace. But must look out for a funny film for next time, or else!

Will he resign, forced out or be impeached – the most watched reality show in the world continues across the pond; video of the clan, shot by Trump Jr, celebrating the shocking scenes outside Capitol Hill going around. Never thought US will become a Banana Republic says BL from New York; Barbara in South Carolina still can't figure out how it all happened- the nightmare of last few years. Can't understand the mentality of Republican politicians- should dump the Trump, he is not the party and forget claims of his 78 million supporters. Personally refuse to believe that they will condone what has been done in their names, they can't all be dumb. It is not a divided nation, unless you let it become one- the small minority of Hardliners will never change so stop appeasing that base. America must make an example of Trump if it is to regain any modicum of respect on the world stage. Twitter suspends his account permanently, but the poisonous influence of SoMe still there, waiting to be exploited by another tyrant.

Started reading Brian's letters to his parents during his travels to the East in 1971-72, went on a road trip overland to India and beyond, and all his letters back home were preserved by his parents. Sadly, not theirs to him. He had given a talk on his travels last year at our regular RICE meetings, which was fascinating. His account brings back memories, the plan (aha, along with all the others) is to put his story together, subject ofcourse to his approval – so far, he is OK. Despite aspirations, still no further with writing, and keep reading and waiting for inspiration; maybe rather than think it all out, just start? Inspiration through perspiration, and as one writer at the Jaipur Literature Festival said last year – treat it like a job not a hobby – set proper time aside - and accept that some days will be rubbish at writing. Yann Martel said took him years before he got it right for his bestseller – *Life of Pi*, and that too after his sojourn in India.

Danger of becoming blasé about Covid- raging out there, with over 1300 deaths yesterday, England's CMO, Whitty, asking public to behave as if they have the virus, in further attempts to get them to take it seriously. OECD Chief says lockdowns to continue for 9-12 months despite vaccines. Surgery in Ruthin starts vaccination next week but has received a very small amount. Guess the most important contribution one can make is to keep safe and fit, physically and mentally- to avoid adding to the NHS pressures; become selfish and rude almost, harsh but may be necessary? But enough nutters out there still, flocking to Moel Famau, stretching police and health services – 'Covidiot'- go home and stay there! Promod gets his jab- AZ first dose.

Herself resumes Bharatnatyam dance lessons with Meena in Chennai, stiff after two weeks break says she. Internet playing up with snow presumably, so poor

connection. Lunch – make savoury Powa and sweet Seviyan, to compensate, and go out for a walk in the snow.

S**tometer: 1/10

10 January 2021

Oh dear, the walk yesterday was a bugger; lfor ran off and chased a poor sheep down the ravine and Herself had a tough time catching him. Looked for the sheep and finally saw her down below, thankfully standing not moving so may be recovering. Wonder if she will abort. Coming days after Delyth ran off and killed a pheasant, Herself starts wondering about the future with the mutts; says never had any difficult to train before. Never come between a woman and her dogs, so keep counsel. Otherwise, picture postcard winter wonderland; compare pictures with Tony on Minera and Brian on Hiraethog, all out walking. Happy.

Got new year presents for Herself; books on 52 things to do while you poo – on average people spend three years of their life in loo so should use the time, and the wit and wisdom of Highland Cows given her farming history. Yours Truly likes cows – lovely beasts (nothing to do with being Hindu and sacred cows) though not sure of bulls since being chased once, and had penned this in summer:

Communion

Large field to roam
 plenty of fresh grass
 mates around romping
 healthy specimens
 coming to keep company
 watching me labouring
 getting field ready for planting
 Something passed between
 both curious and happy
 looking at each other
 man and cows jointly in nature

Started reading Robert MacFarlane's *Mountains of the Mind* – do like his books, and this is the first, fascinating so far – “*Yet there is also something curiously exhilarating about the contemplation of Deep Time (own upper cases), you learn yourself to be a blip in the larger projects of the universe*” and how the insights came from geology supported by microscope- getting deeper and telescope- getting higher, and man is suspended between that space and time. How humbling and also liberating.” By the way had bought the book, as a used one from World of Books, and which has a dedication inside- certificate on inside cover saying was given to Mark Gooden for Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award on 21 May 2007, at Dulwich College. Try to google and find many people with this name so not sure which one, will take too long so give up the idea of finding him- but wonder did he (may be lost the book?) and why did he let go of this prize etc? Reuniting the book with the owner seems like a good story, but hard work for now.

The Queen and Prince Philip get their jabs yesterday, and sadly rest of the covid story same- more staff sicknesses, busy hospitals, ambulances waiting outside..... Going to see Mair later today- allowed one person for 15 minutes since she is in a separate room; feeling anxious, and then wonder about her anxiety- can't imagine what is going through her mind knowing that the end is near, and no one around, all alone in the room.

Better run the car today, and so take a trip to the bungalow to make sure all ok there, long overdue Xmas card from Ruchi finally arrives! On the way some shopping – Herself gives a list, not much use as not familiar with Morrisons and any case the stores keep changing layouts, will blame shortages/empty shelves in case forget! And did, and God help us it was the oatcakes.

“You have got to stay silly” say over 70s in the news item, to find joy. The 92 years old is never happy if she crosses the line under 100mph during drag racing, or the 73 years old pole dancing for charity. Hard to change habits of lifetime, and shake off Don't be silly and behave are ingrained lifelong admonishments. But maybe, watch this space. Herself is always game, and usually too much, need to catch up with her.

S**tometer: 1/10

11 January 2021

Turned out to be a mixed afternoon yesterday- went to see Mair and spent just under an hour in her separate room in the community hospital; part sad and part glad. Sad to see her bed bound now, not even allowed to sit in chair, suffering especially with some bodily functions, knowing that it is now a matter of time. Glad that managed to spend time with her, remembering, giving thanks, and mostly in admiration of her stoicism – is fully accepting of the situation, has spoken to the people she needs to including friends and past pupils, sorted out her affairs. Her faith gives her strength and she quotes Psalm 23: *“Yes, though I walk through the valley of shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”*

Clutching the soft cuddly monkey toy Cefyn gave her – to manage the internal mind monkey- she smiles, looking at my face, and tells Yours Truly about the music for her funeral. She is interested in Hindu philosophy about reincarnation, and relationship between the soul – timeless and consciousness and the body- time limited and the I being akin to clothes worn for an occasion. Tell her that Yours Truly unlikely to achieve Moksha, and be free of the cycle of birth and rebirth yet, and she says will pray.

Spend the evening at home, sitting and reflecting, taking it all in – the ephemeral life and how to be a good person for whatever time is there. Write self a note:

Life is not fair

One chance not enough
should be a dress rehearsal
sadly when know what to do

and what not to do finally
 the time runs out
 Well, stop wishing otherwise
 and looking back
 still time, start now

Woke up to clear fields outside- overnight the snow has gone, where is all the water?
 Clouds gathering and wind picking up. Breakfast with Herself, trying to make sense
 after yesterday; interesting combination of wisdom and practical approach, having
 plumbed the depths and got back out, so comes up with suggestions, as always
 sensible.

Wales to publish the vaccination plan today though worry about the silver bullet trap;
 it is not going to be over any time soon vaccine notwithstanding. Interesting to see
 the procedure at the hospital yesterday, the nurse, not masked, hands over plastic
 apron, gloves and another mask (but she has touched all these) and anyway could
 not talk to Mair through the mask.

Talk to Herself about what should have happened to manage the pandemic – as feel
 strongly that certain basic principles were not followed, suggests should write out on
 the lines of “If I was the PM/SoS Health”. Do not rush in, too many pundits already
 there – but may be? Both have hospital appointments – radiology – next week and
 wondering whether to attend or cancel; not urgent.

In the news is the privacy policy of Whatsapp – going to become real big brother;
 who is using whom now. The public have become the commodity and pawns.
 Personally don't use SoMe but Whatsapp important esp with family, so guess will
 procrastinate till forced to make the decision- and guess it will be to accept and take
 one's chances. Bitcoin drops in value – authorities warn folk; guess what, not losing
 sleep over it. Admire Pelosi in USA and wish her luck with her fight to hold Trump
 responsible – deranged, unhinged and dangerous President says she, spot on. Feel
 Pence should move fast and sack Trump, to secure his place as the front runner
 next time – don't pander to the minority of ignorant Trump followers but appeal to the
 majority of committed republicans, not that Yours Truly is a Republican, and frankly
 agnostic to parties.

Drive to the Bungalow, to sort out stuff, walk over to Llanbedr Hall, let the mutts off
 and before you know it Ifor has gone like a rocket, across the river to distant field,
 half a mile away and worries the sheep again – stony silence for the rest of the
 evening. Herself torn what to do, may be Ashley who trains dogs can advise. Say
 nothing (why do people have dogs?).

S**tometer 2/10

12 January 2021

BoJo goes cycling, out of area – do as I say not as I do accusations, reminder of
 Dom's trip to Bishop Auckland. Don't know the exact circumstances but seriously
 though, think it's an over-reaction – not that have much sympathy for BoJo, and yes,

it is important for him to lead by example especially as fines being imposed on others but apart from complete lockdown and strict curfews for 2-3 weeks to starve the virus (if it works medically) some outdoor activity with social distancing is OK? Feel more frustrated with the overall handling of the pandemic- goes against everything was taught about managing complex projects and then practised. Worked on the challenge set by Herself yesterday and wrote out how Yours Truly would have handled the pandemic – and sadly, when it is written out it seems so basic that one wonders why it was not done. May be need to start a Citizen's movement to ask for explanations- not wait to do a post mortem when over but now, as still some way to go.

Sun is out, snow all gone, green grass everywhere, reminded of poem about coming home from India:

Home

The car turns off the motorway
 bringing me back from the airport
 down winding minor roads
 and before long the hills appear
 overlooking home down in the valley
 the heart soars, tiredness of journey gone
 pelting rain only adds excitement
 oh, how do I miss thee
 the green green Vale of Clwyd

and all is well with the world this morning; apart from what is not alright. Supermarkets enforcing masks but police won't challenge non-compliance, something more must be done, say the pundits but what not clear. What is clear is that people are suffering financially and mentally, and need more support. Get in touch with Denbigh Food Banks, again, to see how to help; between bureaucracy of volunteering with all the checks and Covid restrictions, hard to do anything practical, so offer funds rather than pasta/beans. Welsh vaccination plan published – over 70s by mid Feb and over 50s by spring (but what is spring – anytime between March and May), so watch the space.

Leaving aside Facades, which though interesting and informative – all the big names in literature and art come alive in the book, continue with MacFarlane's account of mountains. Tend to have 2-3 books on the go at one time, and keep flitting between them. Remembering own hikes in Patagonia - more touristy than adventure, sleeping in refugios to the sound of moving glaciers, amazing views; wishing was younger. Did some hiking when in college in India but did not keep up- fell into the success trap – and resumed only recently, largely due to Arvind who dragged friends to South America, USA national parks and the Dolomites. Totally get MacFarlane, both physically and metaphorically - there is something magical about being outdoors

Hill walking

Physical and mental
 Joys of walking

Making me fit
 Keeping me sane
 On hills and moors
 Alone often
 Company sometimes
 Pounding miles
 Breathing deeply
 Thinking clearly
 Talking infrequently
 Just being
 With elements
 The call of outdoors
 Hard to resist
 Mother Nature's bounty
 Get out there
 As long and as often
 And feel for yourself

Graham's birthday today, so raise a glass over the phone, says likes the silly presents Herself sent – what else could he say! But yes, good to be silly, as not much else can be done; Fruitful Monotony only good some of the time, otherwise boring. Another day of pootering, reading, walking; Herself spoils the mood with list of jobs to be done and do not forget turn to cook. So, a normal day eh.

S**tometer 1/10

13 January 2021

Finger pointings everywhere. BoJo's handling of the pandemic under increasing criticism- George Monbiot's column coming down hard about lack of any plan and gross abuse of power with support for cronies and even Lansley wades in, both in the Guardian today. Unlike most of the commentators, personally was partly supportive of Lansley especially with his Mantra of No decision about me without me and giving power to doctors BUT he was clueless about how to build on these organising principles, and ended up creating chaos. Sad for the NHS- used by politicians in opposition (or score points, with Lansley, Hunt and Burnham becoming holier than thou) and abused in power. As Barbara mentioned in the email – the crisis is caused by “public school boys with a surfeit of arrogance and very little practical intelligence”. Main story last evening was the excess deaths in 2020, highest since WW2 – this covid is serious stuff.

Not that USA is doing better, either with the pandemic or otherwise – Barbara is equally critical of USA though feeling a bit better since Biden got in. The rats are leaving the ship as allies desert Trump who remains defiant, and Melania plays the victim. The job is not done and Pelosi has a way to go yet, with the fence sitters Republicans and Pence still enthral of Trump.

Roger suggested Paul Waugh's – The Waugh Zone – from Huffington Post, as a digest of main issues, so have subscribed. Always nice to see good journalism still though not sure more of these report and analyses about how much is wrong in the world is good for own health. Tragic story of the mothers and babies scandals in Ireland – things done in the name of religion.

To compensate, finish off Macfarlane's book and pledge to keep hiking up the hills, for as he says "... visitors to altitude.. would be rewarded both with farsight and with insight; that mindscapes as well as landscapes would be revealed to them." Do like both genres, reading about mountains- another recent favourite was Nan Shepherd's – *The Living Mountain*, and about great adventurers having recently finished reading about Stanley, Mallory and race to Antarctica. Herself laughs off proposal to walk upto the Trig point on Moel Gasyth every morning to get inspiration through perspiration – says not to have ambitious targets, better to list 3 doable things every day. Her list: clean cupboard, walk dogs and change beds; Yours Truly: breath, eat, shower; atleast provided reason to laugh, the best medicine for stressful times. Realise that things are not going to be sorted anytime soon, and so stay calm. Does not stop from ordering two more books on pandemics: *Pale Rider* by Spinney and *The Pandemic Century* by Honigsbaum, got to remain angry; rage, rage.....

Must ring around and check on friends not spoken to for some time – all one can do, and given news re overflowing hospitals with staff under stress and being drafted into covid duties, cancel both appointments for diagnostic tests. Ask the clerk to remove name so not counted as being on waiting list- do not want to add to the growing numbers as can be misused. Will take our chances, more important things to worry about. Hoping that Mair will get moved to St Kentigern today- Susheela says very good place and Herself says mother was well looked after in her terminal days.

But first some work, stop procrastinating and avoiding what must be done – so talk to Dick about plans for the Charity, both need a break and to be relieved having done it for 15 years.

Walk later, cloudy skies though not raining – the beast from the East predicted next week. Herself got the bit between teeth about training mutts and stop them from running off and especially worrying sheep, so carrying a rolled-up newspaper to smack them on the nose when disobey. Pam joins and so easier to stay out of Herself's way – in case the newspaper finds other uses. AONB offering more online courses, not sure about recording fungi or moles but the one on wildlife of dark skies sounds interesting, so book for it; in the good old days had gone on a night walk to see the stars with the rangers up Moel Famau and which was fun.

S**tometer: 2/10

14 January 2021

True to form – Trump broke all the rules and becomes the only President to be impeached twice, and there are still 5 days to 20 Jan as the sore loser won't be attending the inauguration. In any case, the repercussions will go on for some time and tie Biden down; apart from general mayhem he will have to deal with two toxic

issues: Trumpism and Covid. Closer to home, BoJo struggling to answer question about his support for the nomination of Trump for Nobel Peace Prize in 2018, kept on waffling. Certainly, no responsibility for reaching the grim milestone of over 100000 deaths from Covid, after USA the worst-case fatality rate globally. Paul Waugh uses the NHS consultant's quote from the news the other day and wonders if BoJo has blood on his hands - terrible indictment but perhaps deserved, Keir Starmer can't get any direct answers, reminds one of BoJo's own quote about Blair-trying to pin jelly onto the wall, well PM you have perfected it. NHS waiting lists sky rocketing – 100 times more patients waiting compared to start of the pandemic. What does one do with people who have no shame?

What you do is to find distraction to avoid getting angry, says Herself. But what you do not do is try to make IKEA furniture, when not calm. No doubt IKEA stuff is good but can be very frustrating, end up putting one of the pieces of the cupboard upside down and had to dismantle. Guess what, happens again with the next piece- not upside down but by bugging the door hinge which ends up unhinging your truly and which then winds up Herself; so, silence reigns.

Mair in St Kentigern but bad day today- having lot of waterworks problems; trying to get hold of clinical staff to understand what is going on, though puzzled why could not be better managed. Really upset with her care throughout – classic case of forgetting the patient and treating the symptom, massive waste of resources, with rather poor care at Glan Clwyd. Not sure if will complain afterwards; sad part is that having been around such issues in the day job, it probably won't make any difference. The NHS (many times) is just not patient centric. Talk to Cefyn few times, poor chap, had to go and get Covid tested yesterday but thankfully negative. But still won't be able to settle given Mair's condition – says unable to concentrate and work. Well, one good thing is that she is at Kentigern which everyone rates highly, and according to Cefyn her room is nice.

No chance of walk today, dense fog outside, so atleast IKEA kept busy. Herself busy sorting kitchen now that got her new cupboard. No energy left so start on Rebanks first book – *The Shepherd's Life*, easy and enjoyable read, and wait for the day to be over. Can't win them all.

David B got in touch to say himself and family had covid and were ill in Colorado after return from Italy, not an experience he wishes on others.

S**tometer: 3/10

15 January 2021

Wait for the hospital consultation – remotely – in the morning; helpful surgeon though not much to say/do since could not examine physically anyway and there is not much to say about a hernia. Atleast not urgent or life threatening unlike many cancer patients who are not able to get the care at present, and then get out for a walk. Not having been out yesterday and after another restless night, really needed it. Herself pointed out the high S**tometer at night, says she can tell by twitches/expressions even though self not aware and thought was calm; guess that email just before going

to bed had set the monkey off, another decision that needs to be made- why continue 'work' no longer enjoyable. The more important decision may be to stop the iphone addiction, and certainly not at night. And whilst on that subject restrict fluids also to avoid getting up at night.

Good walk, frosty with icy roads in parts, but clear and warmer as got going. After reading Rebanks able to see the countryside differently, the farms and mainly sheep farming being done around here, well the cows are indoors anyway and have much more respect for the farmers. Really hard life, talk about 24/7, 365 – animals need care, Xmas or not. Don't test Yours Truly on the types of cows yet, or indeed much on nature despite Herself's attempts to educate since the start of the pandemic. Good to see school age children out walking, as part of their PE lessons says their mum, so home schooling is working OK.

Mood also lifted after the chat with the consultant from St Kentigern who patiently and comprehensively explained Mair's condition – sadly no going back and have to deal with the situation now and the Team there certainly have thought it through and are on the job. Debrief Cefyn and both thank God that she is at last in a safe and caring place. Cefyn also 'happier' about Mair's plans to donate her Harp to Khasi Hills and already planning how to build on this wonderful gift; Herself starts crying when told of this gesture, finds it very moving, and together wonder whether something more should be done to celebrate the Wales North East India links- can't wait to travel there, feel very restricted with the pandemic.

Talk about bizarre stuff- Man offers Newport Council £50 million if it helps recover a computer hard disk he threw away few years ago; seemingly there is information on it about bitcoins which is worth £200 million. Symbolic – money is rubbish after all, and especially these cryptocurrencies. Well certainly different to the other stories like the Brazilian variant and care homes worrying about insurance for covid patients which is also of concerns to student nurses who can't afford life insurance; something more positive about Welsh rates slowing with the planned review on 29 January and may be offering some relaxations. Happy to see Trump not paying Giuliani for being his hench man – another falling out, what makes these guys think they can trust each other, at all.

Walk with mutts to Denbigh to pick up her car after MOT; another good walk, just as well Rebanks is not around these parts otherwise would have been good bye jack russels; Herself says agrees with Rebanks, loose dogs in country side menace to sheep and should be shot. Bump into her cousin, funeral director, who says 10% fewer deaths this year – not just him but others too, difficult to reconcile with excess deaths figures in the news? Catch up with various folk on the phone whilst waiting for Herself to finish shopping in Morrisons - only one to go in, and Yours Truly not complaining!

S**tometer 3/10

16 January 2021

Raman's birthday in Mumbai today, will miss this year- after joining in the celebrations for last ten years. Apart from the occasion also a good time to be in Mumbai, away from the winter. Something magical about sitting on roof terrace in the evening under the stars in bustling Mumbai, eating, drinking, laughing with friends and family. Missing India – rootless and restless first generation immigrants. Anyway, managing to do a Zoom call with them and Herself could meet Aneeta finally – do a virtual cake cutting.

Brotherly love

Mock fighting, teasing
 the usual childhood pranks
 born of refugee parents
 living in extended family
 surviving but enjoying
 getting on with stuff
 slowly and steadily
 Over the years
 watching each other grow
 celebrating, commiserating
 following the unspoken rule
 not to let history repeat itself
 Give thanks and pray
 Happy Birthday, Pintu

Well, looks like Modiji gave him a birthday present as India started the world's largest vaccination programme today.

Good chat with Barbara in North Carolina last evening– update her on the personal front, a very wise woman and a dear friend. Talk about politics also, shared loathing of Trump and Trumpism, her daughter now a Green Party Councillor in Essex, must admit if there was one party worth supporting that would have been the choice- had long chats with the then Party Leader, Natalie Bennett on the Jarrow March. Don't believe in the regular parties- all charlatans; apart from ofcourse David down the road who stood for the Conservatory Party (sic) and managed to get 600 votes (honestly, not a joke, this led to changes in law about names of parties); maybe the Literal Democrats need supporting too! Or let us have the Monster Raving Loony Party.

Got to have a laugh and so join the Nantglyn Reading Group Zoom, for a social last evening- not book reading session, just to catch up, get things off chest and put the world to right.

Applaud the Montreal restaurant, run by Feigang Fei, with its 'brutally honest menu' – "I am not a big fan of American Chinese food and its your call" says on the menu re orange beef item. Wonderful. Feel like that about lot of the Indian restaurants in the UK, sad and angry about what is being passed off as 'Indian' – would not touch the stuff with barge pole. Good rule is follow the natives – see where they go to eat.

Otherwise, the news remains depressing as UK shuts down all travel corridors, delays in getting Pfizer vaccine supplies being manufactured in Belgium, and large numbers of BAME people not confident about vaccine- the 'fake news' media by conspiracists is clearly having an effect. Even the usually blasé Dean who does not see any one at all, except Ashley when she comes over at the weekend, as their social bubble, is getting anxious.

Dry outside, sun and clouds dancing – now you see me..... Get out for a walk around Gasyth, the default route, leaving Herself to do her dance lesson with Meera. Saw Jim up on his farm house, as usual working - never stops doing jobs around the place, says habit of lifetime since childhood, can't sit down, even though over 70 now. Moved from the Wirral 39 years ago, with reluctant to move wife who was completely enchanted and would not consider leaving the area later on. Sadly, she passed away few years ago. Basic needs and what matters is happiness not money, though not short of it either, says he. Going to show the ferrets one of these days, will video for Rey in Mumbai; the little one is learning about nature. Jim's son, Steve joins in- like father like son, always laughing; lovely, uncomplicated, people.

Videocall with Mair via Cefyn, slipping fast, self not allowed to visit, only one named next of kin can see her, feeling sad. Atleast he is able to visit, it's going to hit him hard.

The Bird Woman

Striding with walking sticks
 zipping down on mobile scooter
 rain or shine had to be out
 lunches, cafes, shops
 knitting, crocheting, sewing
 already enough of music but
 renewed by Khasi Hills links
 making special harp recordings
 keeping busy and cheerful
 life is for living and fun
 so much she taught me
 and when needed most
 my dearest and loving friend
 thank you for everything, Mair

S**tometer: 3/10

17 January 2021

Start the day with a chat with Dick, who is back in Sydney after a holiday (what is that!) and talked about the new partners in the venture; the North Americans' ways are challenging. Won't be easy, as both acknowledged, so will need energy.

Herself getting frustrated with Hindi lessons – impossible says she about the fourth most spoken language! Remind her she is doing better than Yours Truly, who has not advanced much from the basic hello in Welsh, and that is when the sounds are not that hard given that Hindi also has tongue twisters. Must work harder, so not much has changed since school reports!

The strong wind during the night seems to have died down and looks dry though cloudy outside. Go down to see Mair, and Cefyn only allowed to go in but staff allow others to look through the glass door, and speak through part door openings. Mair seemed comfortable, even managed to wave and smile; feel very sad as recite the poem to her from a distance. Happy that could tell her personally- she seemed to hear it. Cefyn also very emotional. Now know what so many families have gone through during this pandemic, not being able to touch/comfort dear ones (and find peace for self) at the end.

Herself looks around the place as St Kentigern on site of HM Stanley Hospital where Simon was born, and ofcourse her mum passed away there. Now the area is a massive housing development.

Son#1 sends pictures of snow in The Peak District and says his second dose of the Pfizer vaccine has been delayed till March – and he is really in the front line with his hospital work. Started reading Honigsbaum's *The Pandemic Century* book. Tom introduces another forum The Conversation with their daily newsletter with news and analysis from academic experts – looks great so subscribe.

The problem with reading all these is that whilst becoming more knowledgeable, the ability to do anything to reduce or stop the destructive juggernaut is very limited. Another report in the Guardian, quoting the work by Turchin who interprets the worsening social unrest in the 2020s as an intra-elite battle for wealth and status: *"The elites had a great run for a while but their numbers became too great. The situation becomes so extreme they start undermining social norms and there is a breakdown of institutions. Who gets ahead is no longer the most capable, but the one who is willing to play dirtier"*.

This is almost the same conclusion that Young had made when he told off Blair for misusing the term Meritocracy – which was a satirical term coined by Michael Young for his book *The Rise of Meritocracy* and a warning about what may happen to Britain between 1958 and the imagined final revolt against meritocracy in 2033. Satire or any appeal to common sense or humanity was wasted on Blair, and sadly these trends are now global.

Maybe just as well that moved to North Wales and old enough, though do feel sad about and responsible for the failure of own generation, bequeathing a worse world than inherited. Book for the Jaipur Lit Festival, all online. Online is good but must watch the growing midriff, even Aneeta noticed it on the Zoom call yesterday. Watch it.

S**tometer 1/10

18 January 2021

Very interesting evening yesterday- somehow drifted into watching snooker and got hooked; Betfred Masters finals between John Higgins (age 45) and Han Bing Tao (age 20); talk about quiet and strong type the youngster was so cool and won the match. Long time since had watched snooker, the most memorable one being the 1985 final which was decided by the final black ball between Steve Davis and Dennis Taylor (with the funny glasses). The other reason for remembering that one is due to the fact that it was in Oswestry when watched it, as attending a course there and had been taken to Ruthin Castle for a medieval banquet, and now full circle. Herself also glued, both trying to recognise and remember names – all looking old now, could not recognise Steve Davis and missing the old colourful characters like Hurricane Higgins and Jimmy White or the gentlemanly Ray Reardon. The sport has become too professional, not like the old days eh; no pints on the tables, what has the world come to. Used to enjoy playing and had the pool table in the home basement; maybe should have got the folding one for the bungalow.

Stayed up till the end, past bed time and made the mistake of checking emails again and sleep vanished and Yours Truly banished to spare room. Agree with Herself, confiscate phone from 8pm in the evening; time will tell if enforceable or too much bad mood and sulking!

Good weather, dry and great visibility all the way to the coast (dotted by windfarms), breakfast watching nature, identifying birds with sheep strip grazing in the field on swedes.

Delighted to see Corbyn back in action, challenging Murdoch and asking for free and accountable media, along with mobilising communities esp for food banks, campaign for a green new deal, and speed delivery of covid vaccine in developing countries. Did like the guy and sad more did not, the chattering classes do not realise that they have become complicit in the game played by elites. Biden, perhaps similarly minded, going to overturn most damaging Trump policies.

In covid news NHS delivering 140 jabs a minute according to Stevens (fascinating this school of reporting with numbers etc) though not sure what it actually means. Susheela said Plas Meddyg had not received enough and after starting the process have paused. Australia may not open for travellers in 2021, and Raman says New Zealand also; no idea what UK plans for the medium term. Whatever the case get ready for the long haul- read up about how astronauts cope with isolation. The problem is not knowledge, more to do with action.

Brian says has become more of a hermit on his farm house on Hiraethog – oh dear sorry and so need to ‘bump’ into him on a walk soon for humanitarian reasons. Tony getting fed up with home schooling- not easy with a 5 years old.

Pam sends a wonderful poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

What is Success?

To laugh often and much;

*To win the respect of intelligent people
and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty;
To find the best in others;
To leave the world a bit better, whether by
a healthy child, a garden patch
or a redeemed social condition;
To know even one life has breathed
easier because you have lived;
This is to have succeeded.*

Looks like work to do to succeed!

Wondering about today's walk, Herself suggests Groes and Cae Shed, put the gaiters as muddy. Herself offers to make soya (not meat) chilli in the slow cooker, can't object!

S**tometer 3/10

19 January 2021

Strom Christoph has arrived- though not as bad as elsewhere according to the weather man (or woman!), rain and wind outside. May be not a bad thing as planned to take stock after one month of starting this journal. What is the purpose and is it working? Will it be personal only or become public at some stage? Have May Sarton's book on order about her 66th year, and may be that will give some ideas but meantime....

Looks like the project has been successful in giving some structure to the day- with discipline of writing including making time; strange that even though the day is a loong time it can still run away without having done anything! Too early to think about writing itself, one of the reasons is to practise and develop writing skills – being a writer still an ambition, but not bad in own view so far- work in progress and practice makes perfect. Herself reads some entries and comments; not sure she is unbiased as likes it! The bench mark remains *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* not Tony Benn or Pepys. Been experimenting with interposing verse with prose, some borrowed from others and own 'bad' poetry. Still trying to find own style. Feel it is useful also for recording the Covid experience, not in any structured way- far too much already out there and in fact wonder how the future historians will make sense; but as one voice amongst many if it ever comes to light.

The (own) jury is out in terms of whether working as 'therapy' – will the 66th year become the defining one, with closure of the past and start of new life? Hard to put some things down on 'paper', not out of sensitivity but fear, given that once given voice words become real and not easy to take back. And ofcourse that monkey being very clever, and untamed, seizes on the words and uses it to pull down. The wise saying Do not say (or think) anything unless it is positive or helpful is there for a

reason. Definitely not on top of controlling the restless mind, in fact lately seem to have gone backwards – meditative and music practice in shambles, not having done either for a while with loss of accompanying calm and peace. For the first time sleep becoming a problem, even at the peak (depth) could fall asleep, in fact was the only way to quieten the monkey. Trying hard to reduce stress points and worried that may be making wrong decisions and giving up things like work that may actually be useful. What would peace look like and how much in own control still remain the exam questions. Time to move on- the easiest thing to say but difficult to enact. Keep counting blessings including friends and ofcourse Herself. Do need some structure but maybe moderate the goals, breathing some days is enough. Atleast stopped sweets and sugar few days ago and though restless managed to sit for meditation last two days. Guess the pandemic is not helping, especially as the main vent, escape to India, is gone.

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

— Rainer Maria Rilke

In other news, Trump’s last day in office- still able to do lot of damage with his pardons; here the debate is about whether the government can afford universal credit support whilst spending billions on needless and wasted covid measures, Drakeford pilloried by point scorers for making comments about vaccine roll out- in any other business he would have been applauded for being sensible about managing resources. So, nothing has changed.

Speak to A in XXXX, terrible situation when partner with complex dementia in care home. Share old stories from time together there and catch up including about mutts, she is a dog lover- another couple who made such a difference to Yours Truly, really grateful to them. Feel blessed to have had some really good people in life. Sadly, can’t meet but atleast there remotely.

Listen to Carnatic music and read.

S**tometer: 3/10

20 January 2021

Interesting stuff on TV last night, with a dog training show- very relevant given the mutts, and Ben Fogle on living in the wild with the chap on Rathlin Island off N Ireland; feel the pull of Shetlands again after seeing that landscape.

Joined the Sheffield Community Contact Tracers group for their regular meeting- what a fantastic initiative, led by volunteers; feel more angry with the establishment with Dido Harding leading the work nationally at a cost of £22 billion; used on things like 900 Deloitte consultants at £1000 a day. Had interviewed John Newton who was

the original Track and Trace Czar as part of the NHS at 70 Covid Project and wondered how it would have gone off the record. Feel grateful for the people like the Sheffield team and admire them for going despite the system. The system having no moral fibre, with BoJo abstaining from briefing on the day UK reached another grim milestone – over 1600 deaths in the last 24 hours period, the highest since it all began. It must be really bad when even Teresa May criticises BoJo for lack of moral leadership globally; pot and kettle.

Susheela and Phil have a date for their job – on Saturday, write again to Plas Meddyg offering services to support covid, no response from the national team or Betsi Cadwaladr, feeling inadequate and helpless. Relook at the paper written about managing the pandemic, and still struggling to see why not more uproar and change in the system; what a shambles, tried to get others interested in the analysis and start some action, with no luck.

Terrible pictures on TV last evening from the London Hospitals with stretched staff. Herself rants about lack of privacy and dignity shown to staff- how does it help to show them breaking down? Whose interest is being served? Ofcourse it is mayhem, with years of neglect of the NHS, put your money where your mouth is and give NHS staff decent wages and support, not just bl**dy claps.

Fundamental problem of lack of accountability in democracy now; across the pond Trump pardons the crooks, what kind of system is that with absolute power to one man and why do Americans put up with it? Anyway, good riddance. Watch Biden inauguration, Trump remained a twit till the last minute, what a farewell speech – we will be back! and what a contrast from Biden – whose speech was so statesman like. Can't believe that people do not get him, anyone who has been through what Biden has deserves an applaud. America is so lucky to have him, especially at this juncture.

Parents wedding anniversary – would have been 72nd though dad long gone, speak to mum but do not mention it, was not an easy marriage.

Wet, wet, wet with Storm Christoph – coming so soon after Storm Bella, atleast gender parity in naming them, floods in the valley. Phone lines down. See if there is a window in the weather, not sure when as likely to turn to snow, to get out to stretch legs. Stuart comes to fix plumbing in the house, essential service, and with weather he is in demand, fortunate to have found him, not easy to get a good plumber locally. Looks like another day of reading and pootering....., may go down to the Bungalow to check esp as expecting parcel from Arvind. And then the day stopped- Cefyn rang to say Mair is no more, RIP.

S**tometer: 5/10

21 January 2021

Thankfully the external storm abated and woke up to some snow and no rain. Given the raging internal storm snuck out for a long walk soon after the work call about the Charity.

Trying to make sense of the loss of Mair – end of a chapter in the new life. People may remember her as a great musician, principal harpist at Liverpool Phil for over 40 years touring and performing the world over and a great teacher and she was all those things but she was something more personally. She was a friend- and a dear one, who adopted this stray, never asked anything but was there, like Piglet.

"Today was a Difficult Day," said Pooh.

There was a pause.

"Do you want to talk about it?" asked Piglet.

"No," said Pooh after a bit. "No, I don't think I do."

"That's okay," said Piglet, and he came and sat beside his friend.

"What are you doing?" asked Pooh.

"Nothing, really," said Piglet. "Only, I know what Difficult Days are like. I quite often don't feel like talking about it on my Difficult Days either.

"But goodness," continued Piglet, "Difficult Days are so much easier when you know you've got someone there for you. And I'll always be here for you, Pooh."

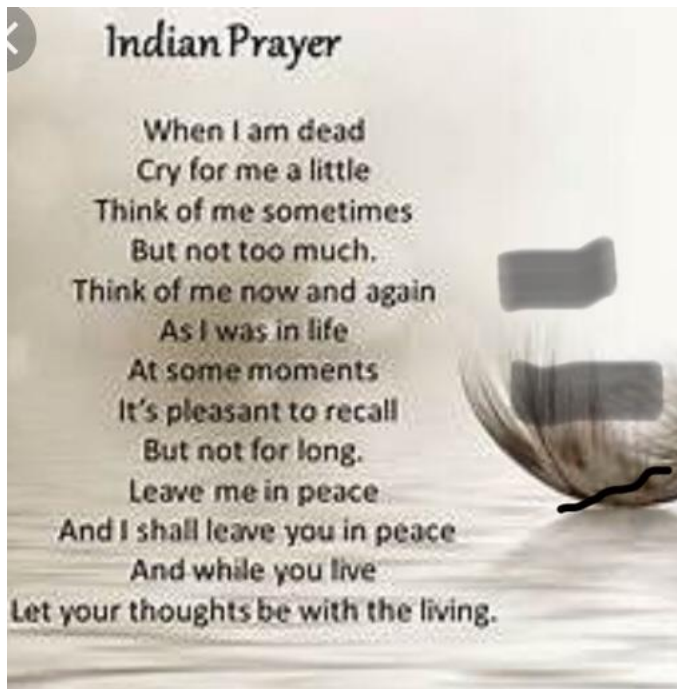
And as Pooh sat there, working through in his head his Difficult Day, while the solid, reliable Piglet sat next to him quietly, swinging his little legs...he thought that his best friend had never been more right.



(Thank you to the producer of the above, found on internet)

And so would sit with her and Cefyn in his studio – all trying to control own monkeys, together, making it easier for each other. Every now and then giving glimpses of the rich life she led, the stories of concerts and personalities, often irreverent; though took her work seriously never took life too seriously – was for fun and for living; sad how life turned out and left with no family but not letting it overwhelm her. Good to see that near the end she reclaimed herself and reverted to Mair Jones (not Roberts anymore). Feel sad at letting her down, she should have had better care at Glan Clwyd, had felt impotent at not being able to talk/plan care with professionals, something is very wrong with medicine. Though she finally got to a good place in St Kentigern.

Spoke to Cefyn last night, knowing how hard it is for him; what does one say, are usual cliches enough? Find solace in the Indian Prayer, knowing that is what she would have said and wanted.



(Thank you to the producer of the above, found on internet)

RIP Mair, and turn to the living. Could be better but still lot to thank and live for; do another session with Herself- the advantage of own resident therapist! Mair coming on top of other stuff, became too much, so cards on the table with reading of s**tometer and figuring out practical stuff. Enough role models there- just look at Biden, what a life, how much adversity – always getting blindsided, never lost faith and focus. This too shall pass, just keep going. Guess the best tribute to Mair would be to live a full life- she would have approved.

Events in USA and Storm Christoph did finally displace covid from the top news spot, despite all the anxieties and challenges the covid story just needs to run its course now, unless something dramatic, a miracle, happens. Herself receives the vaccine letter from NHS, rehearsing what is known anyway- she is in category 8, and will get in the spring, Yours Truly being in Cat 5 may get it earlier.

Cabin fever gets Herself too, and although tired from her dance lesson, today instead of usual Saturday one as Meera off at weekend, wanted to go to Prestatyn beach, so mutts in the car, for a run on the beach and shopping on way back.

S**tometer: 4/10

22 January 2021

Made it to and back from the beach yesterday, and glad went there- blew off the cobwebs, the freezing cold and rough sea as tide was in, just what was needed.

So, the big news item is that Biden has removed Churchill's bust from his office, reminding readers about how Obama had done the same only to discover that he had actually moved it to his personal living accommodation and how Trump pointedly

showed its restoration to the Oval Office to May when she rushed off to congratulate him and the mind boggled. No wonder Trump showed it off because they were similar and no wonder Biden with his support for many things like Black Lives Matter may not be impressed by Churchill whose views on race are well known- could not stand Indians! Brought to mind the experience when had applied for the Churchill Travelling Fellowship in 1990s where the interview had gone well until the last question: What does Churchill mean to you, and given own foot in mouth problem said what he had meant to us Indians as learnt from the school history lessons. Guess what..... did not get the fellowship, hey ho.

For God's sake, surely there are better things to discuss and let us look at what Biden is actually faced with and already doing. And by the way whilst at it look at UK's record on race equality – yet another report, this time about universities and the absence of black professors. Another issue to rant about- been trying to promote discussion about what to do given that Race inequality (like many other inequalities) is a blot on the society and must be addressed but not the way it is being done at present; write to the BMJ and then send a proposal to The Lancet, and guess what, hey ho, no dice. To some extent not surprised at The Lancet's refusal to take it up; very difficult to have any constructive dialogue, the society is not ready, too angry, entrenched positions and being reinforced, want justice (sic) not peace. Some of the worst perpetrators of race inequality are some (a few) BAME leaders. What a terrible mess mankind is in – may be the answer is sixth extinction.

Good day outside, sunny and looks warm after frosty start, Paul's birthday and so Herself arranges to walk with him later, mutts included, and finishing with a socially distant glass of prosecco, sounds like a plan. Meantime left to own devices and so do some chores and practise writing, stimulated by Carole Langrick's email sharing Bach Bukowaski's poem: I know and you know and thee know:

And they lived happily ever after

*You say you know but do you
When you seek answers already given
in ways other than traditional
love has many aspects and forms
Or when you need answers to things
before their time, not worked through
wanting clarity and certainty
Glad you remind me now and then
but may be you should trust
that I know what is needed
just as I know that you know
that you are you and have needs
and that it can not go on forever*

Covid almost the background issue, even in Wales where the hot topic is the rule breaking politicians drinking in the Senedd and whether May elections need to be postponed. Whilst Priti Patel talks about fines for house parties- but then are not parties already banned? And BoJo finally beginning to see errors of his ways and start hedging bets about what next in terms of restrictions, when will they be

eased/lifted. Ofcourse UK nations making their own minds, and Gething also dropping hints to manage expectations. Looks like a long haul.

Arvind from NY rings and says 2021 is a write off and Sukhdev who recently moved to Sutton Coalfield to be near son, trying to adjust to a new place at 80, atleast had his job. Everyone just focussed on getting on, head down, one day at a time.

S**tometer: 3/10

23 January 2021

Picture post card views over breakfast, snow covered, beautiful clouds with white, blue grey, cerulean colours and then waves of weather front coming from the sea, alternately clear and then white out. Herself starts looking up about the Ice Man - Otzi – says thought of it as saw Trevor walking up the field, as he does every day, regardless of weather, and had begun to wonder is that how Otzi met his end- on way to work? So ended up with a lesson during breakfast and learnt few things. Strange how mind works - things just come up.

BMA questioning the policy of 12 weeks gap between two doses- how is the public going to make sense if there are two groups of senior doctors on opposite sides; Janet shares the Sunday Times analysis of the best, medium and worst case scenarios and even the best, full of unknown unknowns, not promising; Mold Golf Club sends pictures of the snow covered course- not sure when get there, hopefully outdoor activity will be on the list of relaxations whenever they start. The covid variant seems to be becoming a problem – with higher death rates – and questions about the vaccines' ability to control the situation. Susheela and Phil getting their jabs today.

Give up trying to finish Facades – about Sitwells – interesting and informative about the literary scene of the early 20th century, some of the well-known names come to life, but then find it becoming too much. The theme of too much carries on as alternating between Honigsbaum and Spinney books about pandemics – take away the specifics the general issues are the same: with science and society cooperating sometimes and often clashing especially on economy vs disease, public divided and blame game in full swing and the biggest problems being personalities; Reagan would not sanction budgets for AIDS and Thatcher hated inequalities for example. Is it worth continuing reading this stuff, not going on Mastermind?

Better to indulge in the more serious stuff like what will Melania do now – her photo snub on arrival at Palm Beach airport prompts speculation over post White House path, pundits talking about her deal with Trump and how much will she extract; except he will be fighting other creditors and will he also 'screw' her financially – the Deal Man after all. Guess this is in the justified Schadenfreude category. More fun coming as Biden removes the Red Diet Coke button from Trump's desk in the Oval Office – clearly has better taste, and also into fitness with questions about his Peloton bike with its potential for IT security breach. So, life coming back to normal finally as getting to grips with real issues.

Need to go down to Llanbedr and do some washing for Susheela- her machine broke and engineer not due for another week. Should be fun driving through snow. Herself suggests dressing up for dinner tonight – enough moping, says do not have long, if not careful could be prophetic.

S**tometer 2/10

24 January 2021

Another beautiful landscape, white with occasional snow flurries, birds around the feeding station, sheep sheltering around hedges, life stirring and going on. Some internal calm mainly due to long chat with Tariq, who has been a great friend – feels should not dismiss medication if feel the need. For now, enjoy looking out over breakfast and enjoying the nature- Herself needs to check Mozart, stimulated by the radio programme in the background. So, lesson on Mozart- was not interred in a pauper's grave, common grave was still individual and named to be distinct from the graves of aristocrats which had to be preserved, and was not deliberately poisoned though may be have over self-medicated with antimony and other stuff being partly a hypochondriac. Internet is a wonderful thing and esp Wikipedia- do donate to it, not regular, more when guilt kicks in. Dead at 35, what would Mozart have achieved if lived longer, wonders Herself, and discussion on whether artists keep going on or do they dry up, is there a finite pool of creativity inside?

Dig out Tara Brach's *True Refuge* – time to re-read it, and may be Eckhard Tolle later, did and still do find them helpful, and trying to get routine back in- with meditation and yoga, watching diet and exercise. Give *Celestine Prophecy* to Herself – had found it interesting, and may be that is why together now, everything happens for a reason even if not evident then.

Interesting push back from Van Tam, the media's favourite doctor known for plain speaking, asking the BMA as to who to deny to speed up second doses; fair question but equally naughty as the policymakers need to be transparent about the decision- after all the evidence for delaying to 12 weeks is not there and surely if the most important thing is the NHS then healthcare workers need full protection? Frankly vaccine or not lockdown precautions still needed anyway, so why the rush- better to safeguard the most crucial part? No wonder Yours Truly struggled in the NHS – always clash of ideology and evidence.

New Zealand gets a community acquired one but given their robust management stop it from going anywhere. Israel refuses to vaccinate Palestinians, so weaponising covid 19 – was ever thus, with biological warfare. Pandemic claims the scalp of Paul Davies- the Tory leader in the Welsh Senedd for drinking. Guardian piece cautions against believing the current anti-Trump corporate hype- these were the architects and the only reason for ditching is does not make business sense anymore. Have not become enlightened, only there to protect shareholder value and maximise profit. Business –politics nexus as strong as ever, Joe Public just the pawn. Barbara, though living in USA, still reads the Guardian and likes Reich's columns which she says are depressingly accurate.

Brian gets back in touch, resilient as ever, keeping busy, having switched to online music festivals- says enjoyed the Celtic Connections; used to enjoy going with him to the various local music events all over North Wales. Must find out how Tony is. Cefyn busy with Mair's funeral arrangements, thankfully the funeral directors are well organised but even then there is much detail, and poor chap is struggling but soldiering on. Says had to crash out completely yesterday – not surprised, rather surprised not before and proud of him.

Another great newsletter from Maria Popova on the theme of love – what is it and the limitations of the language to express it, drawing on the work of Barthes
“only thing which makes love love is its self-renewal in the consciousness of the lover.”..... “and quoting Browning, Rilke, Martha Nussbaum and Adrienne Rich on the meaning of love, when one knows one is in love and the right to use the word, love. Says these things come to her during walks, which she does every day: “act of walking is also a mighty machete for clearing the pathways of memory overgrown with life”.

So, take a walk, after lunch in Llanbedr, had to go and deliver Susheela's laundry anyway. Own turn to cook as Herself has the book club.

S**tometer: 2/10

25 January 2021

Wake up agreeing together to slow down, take one day at a time. Clearly pandemic not helping but equally it is here and not going away soon.

The trip to Llanbedr yesterday found another thing to add to the already long To Do List there - the shed in the vege patch was flooded, the ditch got blocked and the water, and everything else with it, came over the field, all over the patch and into the shed- mud everywhere. Going to take some doing to clear it, and will have to wait till weather OK. Was nice to see the bulbs coming out though and can visualise the patch by summer. Must start planning the work there and get ready for planting- need to move down for a few days.

Susheela another one who has stopped being glued to the news, too depressing says she. Brings back memories of Martin Lewis who wanted good news stories to lighten and balance the coverages – said in another context but not much different to pandemic, not to trivialise but people need hope. Personally felt lifted by the news story from the Conversation about dinosaurs communicating through their butts- much like baboons do now. Aha, so talking though your backside has a basis in evolution, bet you did not know that. Give me more of this stuff, life getting too serious, better to learn from and emulate people like Jim Haynes, who just passed away in Paris and who for 40 years ran an open house every Sunday for strangers to drop for dinner – fed thousands, enriched theirs and his life. Looking forward to seeing the film about BoJo to be played by Kenneth Branagh – he is a great actor, not sure when released; having seen the one about Dominic played by Cumberbatch.

Herself packing up some lunch to go on the 'Explore Denbighshire' tour – by car, all socially distant, and with mutts in tow. Says surprise for Yours Truly; had started this some time back but then paused due to lockdown, Guess considerations of mental health justify it.

S**tometer 2/10

26 January 2021

Big day- launch of the Manchester India Influencers List, an initiative to encourage and recognise Indian diaspora who are helping communities and building bridges between Manchester and India. Always a challenge to strike the balance between the known 'suspects' and 'unseen/unsung' and those already established and those with potential; suspect it will be a mixed response, some folk will feel aggrieved. Part of the job, being a jury member – do wonder why do it, but guess it is payback time. The day has been chosen because its India's Republic Day, not that it is going well in Delhi with farmer's rallies- India is boiling again. Event goes well; like most Indian events, chaos, late start, poor time keeping – but used to it, would be upset if otherwise.

Herself had to dash off to support distraught Julie, whose dog has had fits and is at the vets; already fragile this is one more thing and she will need some loving care; hard to do with restrictions, that physical touch that can make such a difference not allowed. Try and remember all the friends who are struggling and which puts own issues in some perspective – need to find the energy to keep going especially with some major challenges with the Charity; not wanting to promote stereotypes but the aggressive North American approach to working is stressful; finally, Dick is seeing what was predicted.

UK covid deaths exceed 100, 000 and Asian stars join in to dispel myths about the vaccine and appeal to them – would be even better if worked for their upliftment, as ignorance of poor folk is due to their life circumstances. Limited education and work opportunities reinforcing ghettos and playing into the hands of radicals. Feel like taking a break from talking covid for a few days.

Go for a longer walk, mud, snow and some ice on roads, not wanting to risk steep ravine opted for the trig point on top of Moel Gasyth- ankle deep snow but great views from the top, cloudy though good visibility. The night sky with waxing moon has been simply marvellous at night – one advantage of disturbed sleep is being able to see this, wish had a decent camera to do justice to photos, but may be best to just enjoy it. Bit like looking at photos of various trips with Arvind and BL over the years- Patagonia, Peru, US national parks and the Dolomites – he sent 6 albums, lot of work and cost but then that is him, thanks to him managed to do some things which would have remained on the Bucket List otherwise. Herself looks at them, but if you were not there hard to explain, anyway enjoys them and then starts reading up about the places especially the US Parks, Arches and Bryce fascinate her. So, agree that as soon as possible head off to USA and spend some time travelling around. More plans- ever growing To Do List and the most important thing is to survive first, so focus, and especially stay calm.

S**tometer: 2/10

27 January 2021

Been reading and practising Tara Brach's RAIN method (Recognise, Allow, Investigate and Non-identify) yesterday, and with breathing exercises and rosary had a better night - strange feeling to sleep uninterrupted for over 5 hours. Coupled with walking and detoxing from alcohol/sugar and caffeine seemed to be getting calmer. As the Monk said: "*The most important thing is to remember the most important thing*" and which is to enjoy each moment, it is what it is.

Despite intention to avoid talking about Covid, can't stop- Herself goes on a rant about BBC where the only news is covid and especially their reading of names of the people who have died. Must agree with her as being used as pawns politically, why not let the families grieve in peace, and in any case guess what they are going to do – they want to 'curse' the politicians who messed it up. BoJo's mealy mouthed apologies and still no intention to actually learn does not appease, only further polarises. Almost all commentators agreed that the high death rates are due to poor decisions and him and his cronies bleating we did not have text book – WTF; what about the Sygnet report and if nothing else just read any book on pandemics. Herself says only likes Radio 3, short fact-based news and then music – to give people solace; what is the point of going on and on. Stop her from getting worked up – Yours Truly could wax lyrical for hours on the subject but not the time - suggest she goes and practises her dance and Hindi lessons. Feel the need to focus down on own very small world centred around the house, the hamlet and the mutts, the problems of the world are worth looking at but not engaging in unless anything practical within one's control; been there, done that including the 300 miles Jarrow March, now earned the rest.

Herself has been reading parts of the Journal and wondered what the plan is – keen on plans is Herself; though there is a plan, there is also no plan. Just writing about the days in no particular order- noting whatever takes fancy; it's all about one person and their time in lockdown at age 66; a person who is trying to make sense of life at this stage - would it be of interest to others and why is not the point at present, too early and will see at the end of the year.

Trying also to write more on particular topics of interest, having done some pieces already on the approach to tackling racial discrimination in the NHS and commentary on the management of the pandemic. Been thinking about the experience with the Milroy Lecture and wondered whether to write another piece examining the original assessment – what has one learnt during the last two decades, are doctors true to the Hippocratic Oath or are they hypocrites – and especially with the benefit of learning from the experience and about life? Something to think about, but make sure it is constructive, though sometimes what may be intended that way is not perceived as such, but hey ho, will give it a try. Especially after the NHS at 70 interview and repository is sorted – all Yours Truly's professional, and part personal, life story, is becoming a part of the archive. Stephanie has been really busy but

hopefully this will be done soon, looking forward to it –partly as vanity as Codman said: “all publications are advertisements” – basically saying look at me!

Snow melted out there and currently dry with some sun, supposed to start raining later – will help clear the garden, the wood from the chopped tree need sorting, should be good fuel, and then a decent walk should do it nicely.

S**tometer: 2/10

28 January 2021

Had completely lost track and realised that had missed the Burns Night on 25 Jan, having struggled to find a vege haggis in Morrisons few days ago- so a belated celebration last night with tatties and neeps, no one to pipe the haggis but have Burns Address to Haggis courtesy YouTube. Discover recording of Burns Night with poetry, songs and dance and so join in with the Gay Gordons and Eightsome Reels among others – not easy with just two and in a small room but more fun. Brought back memories of time in Shetland with the first Christmas, Hogmanay, Burns and UpHellya – a wild month of celebrations. No whisky though, staying off for now, not missing it.

Picked up a fascinating blog from Brainpickings on the celebrated writers on the creative benefits of keeping a diary, and among many others this quote from Anais Nin really resonated:

“It was while writing a diary that I discovered how to capture the living moment. Keeping a dairy all my life helped me to discover some basic elements essential to the vitality of writing

When I speak of the relationship between my diary and writing I do not intend to generalise as to the value of keeping a diary, or to advise anyone to do so, but merely to extract from this habit certain discoveries which can be easily transposed to other kinds of writing.”

Coming on the back of yesterday’s entry see it as a sign and endorsement, and so feeling energised.

Also energised with texts from Son#1. Spending fair time with Tara Brach, (re) reading to see how to convert her stuff into own practice- interestingly it was very helpful when in depths of despair, not sure why dropped the practices, need them as a lifetime aid (lifeline) as it is what it is and so there will be periods of low, roll with them rather than fight them. Constant worry about Herself at the receiving end of the curmudgeon’s mood swings:

Be Ground

Be crumbled, so wildflowers will come up where you are

You’ve been stony for too many years

Try something different

Surrender

The other quote from her book:

*“You think too much, that is your trouble.
Clever people and grocers, they weigh everything”*
(by Nikos Kazantzakis – who he? but makes sense)

So, stop analysing, accept reality, receive with gratitude, and forgiveness of self and others; when taking time out periodically to spend time on this daily the effect is noticeable. Must (re) look at the Meditation Based Stress Reduction model also - *“Stressed spelled backwards is desserts”* – and MBSR shows how, need to find out.

Saw a lot of fallen wood on the walk yesterday, good quality fuel and so agree with Herself to go foraging, starting today and will make piles on various sites along the way and then fetch them in the car. Says Paul also needing a walk – home working and alone – getting restless so will go together. Good chat with Brian last night, asked him to stay in touch regularly and not wait, has started to act the hermit also, self-fulfilling prophecy, hopefully can spot him on walk soon weather permitting.

S**tometer: 1/10

29 January 2021

Ofcourse BoJo's visit to Scotland yesterday was essential, not for UK unity purposes but for this gem of final remarks; here is Crace in The Guardian today:

Verbatim: *“If [the vaccine is] approved by the MHRA then we will have 60m doses of it by the end of this year for the whole of the British people. And so it's a success for Scotland. Uh, it's a success for, uh, Britain and, uh, it's a success for Britain because it is a success for Scotland. It's a success for Scotland because it's a success for Britain.*

“So, uh, I'm, uh, you know, it was very, very encouraging to see it. That's, that's ... I may have done some other things as well while I have been here although I can't immediately recollect what they are. It's been an action-packed day and always a joy to see you.”

John Prescott eat your heart out! Keeping company with Trump, must be becoming a requirement for leaders, to speak in gobbledegook; actually, Blair was a master with his non-verb sentences, though very polished!

And according to The Conversation, bad behaviours can benefit you and others- so it is OK to: swear, drink, being bored, being stupid, making social transgressions; quoting Johnny Carson *“I know a man who gave up smoking, drinking, sex and rich food. He was healthy right up to the day he killed himself”* extensive research is cited to support the above five bad behaviours. No wonder politicians behave the way they do, always ahead of Joe Public and had mastered these.

Joke: dyslexic man reading copy of the consultant letter after visit to hospital excitedly exclaims to partner: the doctor says daily sex (dyslexia!). Hey don't hit me!

Big day today for Cefyn – Penblwydd Hapus – 60th birthday, rather sombre not just lockdown but Mair, says planning a lazy day and get a good meal later, Martin is a good cook so that should be OK. Tell him the latest Covid Joke: The Indian family had supper at English friend's house and had to be tested for covid since they could not taste anything! Better and more timely version of The Kumars at 42 sketch about Indians asking for the blandest dish in an English restaurant. He is a lovely man and hope he finds peace and joy.

Covid vaccine supply fight with EU goes on re-igniting the Brexit row, and a new vaccine – Novavax on the horizon with better efficacy than Oxford- which one gets not a choice and any case no sign yet; Wales rates coming down but lockdown to go on till 19 Feb. One year since the first UK case was detected in York- Student B, with his mother A who had flown in from Wuhan week before.

Overcast day, possibly rain and turning to snow by tomorrow, Herself has to go and let Paul's dogs out as he had to go to Barrow in Furness to collect new laptop – ambivalent, one hand chance to get out, on other 6 hours' drive. Ourselves have not driven far since going to Anglesey for the birthday, fed up with the curmudgeon's comments during her driving has put his name on the insurance so he can take the wheel – should have stayed shtum. Will try and make Indian savoury pancakes for supper later, to spice things up a bit.

S**tometer: 1/10

30 January 2021

Early start, after decent sleep, to see rain turning to snow- like a painter's brush strokes slowly adding on the canvas, green pastures turning to white, birds and sheep scuttering in the fields. Sitting entranced over breakfast, at peace with nature. Herself goes and fills up all the bird feeding containers and the place is full of tits, thrushes, sparrows, no sign of the woodpecker yet and the mouse coming out from under the shed to pick the seeds on the ground- need to watch the mutts who go berserk on seeing it.

Coming on the back of the walk yesterday where spotted the first primroses, ofcourse snow drops aplenty and some daffodils, and buds on bushes and trees- all awakening. Met the lady down the road, with brood – four kids under ten and a dog – and lovely chat, doing up their house which has some land and excellent views. Quickly distract Herself who has one final house to design in her.

Enjoyable film last night- *The Dig*- about Sutton Hoo treasure, Herself searches and finds out that the film was shot at various locations including near the original site in Suffolk and Godalming, and then educates Yours Truly on architecture and which resonates especially when mentions Lutyens and could visualise Delhi. Must admit a good building/estate is very uplifting and sadly what we have these days can't be

good architecture, guess share Prince Charles' views. BTW Herself thinks he is OK, though can't say same of many others except Queen.

Great to see the spat between David and Goliath over Gamestop – not that understand that sort of high finance manipulations even though seen enough films – but the fact that small people are taking on the 'experts', those immoral, crooks on wall street, is wonderful to behold. Ofcourse it will end in tears for many, was ever thus.

Finish the Brach book, the key message being (repeat): "The most important thing is to remember the most important thing", so remember and be here now, that's all there is. Off to Llanbedr later to sort out stuff in the bungalow and do some more laundry for Susheela, must go to shops and pick up for Herself's birthday next week, having almost goofed with Cefyn recently. Not sure walk possible today, but have arranged to go with Brian sometime soon, can do it officially as allowed to walk with one person

The vaccine war with EU seems to be sorted, Macron chiding BoJo: "Half-friends is not a concept" but then pot calling kettle black since that is what all politicians are, friendships are only for a purpose and time-limited. May be too harsh as video of Biden reminding his staff about respect, saying and if he ever sees anyone being disrespectful he will fire them, doing the rounds on WhatsApp, so there are some decent politicians. Merkel being another one- such modesty, ofcourse if modesty was the criteria Modi will win but not many will accuse him of being a unifier or addressing the deep-seated problems of India.

Good article in the Guardian about the everyday covid mistakes still being made- focussing on what is allowed not what's safe; never outsource your safety and treat everyone as an 'idiot' Yours Truly's view. Herself agrees though struggles. And guess what: UK going to have a doggy poo problem, with growth in dog ownership! There is always profit to made in every situation – just need to figure out. Reminded of the story where government paying for killed cobras to control the menace leading to setting up of cobra breeding farms! Policy reversed but too late as folk released all the bred ones. Hey ho.

S**tometer: 1/10

31 January 2021

Another evening at the movies- getting to be a habit- and watched *All is True* about Shakespeare after the disaster at the Globe Theatre in London and after he moved his family to Stratford- given Kenneth Brannagh and Judi Dench not surprising it was wonderful -the story, acting, settings. Like such films, about life and relationships, the historical link makes it more interesting.

Cold night, Herself does not like heat and the Curmudgeon does not like cold; in any case sleeping arrangements between couples can be fascinating. One thing leads to another and so more discussion with Herself which is helpful in clarifying things,

though both recognise not easy to start new relationships in 60s (if ever). Reminded of the quote from May Sarton's Journal:

"Am I too old to acquire the knack of happiness? Too old, perhaps, ever to take in another's life to share with mine on a permanent basis? If so, I must make do with what I have..... and what I have is a great richness of friends and a positively ardent love of nature. Not nothing!"

Not to forget the latest WhatsApp message about the bee and pot of honey, very happy when on the rim and enjoying the nectar but wade in and get trapped. Too much of a good thing.....

Glad Brian coming over today. Cloudy and windy outside. Herself in charge of socially distant refreshments afterwards.

Vaccine saga tests the Brexit arrangements in Ireland, pressure on UK to support global vaccine programme, not time to be parochial – support that stance simply as pandemic do not respect country boundaries, like it or not it is One World – all together and One Health – human, animal, plants, the whole nature. Except this remains the utopia- no cure for the human selfishness. Slowly making way through Honigsbaum book and after finishing SARS onto Zika pandemic – reading out of interest, nothing to learn since all show same problems since time immemorial and not even worth repeating here.

Need something to cheer up, but nothing good via WhatsApp today. Listen to Kirtan and stay calm. Start thinking about the vege plot- been given enough books and now that almost freed from 'work' obligations will get going on it; had an email exchange with Denise, a former poetry group member, who wants to help with the 'allotment'. Mahadev from Jacksonville updates on his plans for further medical schools, now in middle east – never gets tired of planning big projects. Love him, though testing, always picks himself up.

S**tometer: 2/10

01 Feb 2021

Goodness me, another month gone; just over year since last visited India.

Good walk with Brian yesterday, snow up at the trig point and had a snowball fight and then up and down the hills doing over 7 miles. Came back to nice soup and the works by Herself, likes to do things properly so table setting and all that, won't have it any other way even knowing mug of tea with a tin of biccies/slice of cake is usual fare. Anyway, Brian enjoyed it.

Beautiful day with bright sunshine, though cold. Herself walking with Julie in the afternoon and the mutts, Jasper, Julie's dog, has not been well, worrying her. Will do a shorter walk later and must sort plans for Herself's birthday tomorrow- the present has not arrived, been chasing eBay, must check if can get a click and collect dinner, most places only doing weekends if at all.

Herself finds the Wales Covid vaccine calculator site and works out will get her first jab in late March/early April and Yours Truly, being older, in late Feb/early March, with second doses 12 weeks later. Lowy Institute ranks UK in 66th place for its management of the pandemic; given that the NHS comes out top of international league tables it is tragic- shambles and shameful leadership. Concluding words of Honigbaum: *“What is abundantly clear, however, is this: thousands of lives have already been lost, not due to our lack of knowledge – we have had plenty of warnings- but because of our collective failure, abetted by complacent politicians, to take those warning sufficiently seriously and to prepare for the pandemic that virologists and other experts told us was coming our way.”*

On the theme another timely newsletter from Maria Popova about Confucius on good government: *“The proponents of a world order will neglect at their peril the study of the only process that has repeatedly proved its efficiency as a social coordinate” and the process? Treating public good as a matter of personal goodness, rooted in purity of heart and a discipline of mind.”* Ofcourse Confucius not everyone’s cup of tea but does make sense, moot point as no chance of this in the present age, but may be its time will come. Some signs with political changes, for example Biden in USA and here in the UK the Muslim Council elects its first female leader.

Finish reading May Sarton’s Journal and again found resonance: *“But I must not forget that, for me, being with people or even with one beloved person for any length of time without solitude is even worse. I lose my center. I feel dispersed, scattered, in pieces. I must have time alone in which to mull over any encounter, and to extract its juice, its essence, to understand what has really happened to me as a consequence of it.”* Mentions a book called Loneliness by Clark E Moustakas which seems interesting, but not easy to get hold of. Try Ruthin library, no luck but ordered more of Sarton and Robert Macfarlane – not been in touch with library for a long time, so looking forward even though it is click and collect only. Wonder if Herself may want to read Sarton, not really her genre and may misread intention - giving too much as is her wont makes it worse for both, the giver and recipient.

S**tometer: 2/10

02 February 2021

Her big day- 64 today – “Will you still need me” Herself feels ageing more challenging, so to assure her continue with the Beatles song “And if you say the word I could stay with you”. Excited with all the presents from friends – thoughtful stuff, borne out of long friendships. Yours Truly failed as the eBay present not arrived, so offer to make up by cooking as going out or takeaways not options either. Socially distant callers from nearby and may share the prosecco and cake with Alison and David later. Weather permitting – raining now- will go for a walk in the afternoon. Happy to see her happy, worry when broach the need to go back to Llanbedr, as time has come to take stock and recharge – the last two months have been great in helping sort out stuff mentally, thanks to her.

Reminded of the book – *The antidote: Happiness for people who can't stand positive thinking* by Oliver Burkeman which is about the Negative Path: “*the idea that the more we strive for happiness, and other psychological goods like security and confidence, the less we achieve them. And so, paradoxically, it is by thinking more about the downers in life, such as the inevitability of death, the inescapability of suffering or the impossibility of security, that we achieve something like happiness*”. Nothing different from the ancient wisdoms: like the American Indian saying about taking advice from a grieving person, and joy also appreciated after sorrow, but put more contemporarily and hence wider appeal.

Do get it, not sure everyone does, will see the reaction from the Poetry club today, the topic is Joy of spring and as expected had Larkin, Wordsworth and Browning poems but Yours Truly had sent

Spring: (Edna St Vincent Millay)

*To what purpose, April, do you return again?
 beauty is not enough.
 You can no longer quiet me with the redness
 Of little leaves opening stickily.
 I know what I know.
 The sun is hot on my necks I observe
 The spikes of the crocus.
 The small of the earth is good.
 it is apparent that there is no death.
 But what does that signify?
 Not only underground are the brains of men
 Eaten by maggots
 Life in itself
 Is nothing,
 an empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs .
 It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,
 April
 Comes like and idiot, babbling and strewing
 flowers*

The poetry groups mates are a good bunch, but levity does not go down well always; glad have Bernard to keep company as he sends

*Spring has sprung, the grass has ris;
 I wonder where the birdie is?
 There he is up in the sky.
 He dropped some whitewash in my eye!
 I'm alright I won't cry,
 I'm just glad that cows can't fly!*

South African variant big news item – Mattdoor going in ‘Hard and Fast’ with testing and containment plan, not the usual halfcock stuff then but sadly not sure how it can really work, the cases are geographically well spread and hence unless robust basic foundation everywhere isolated surgical strikes of limited use. May shake things up a

bit though. Long way to go and need to avoid the trap that covid will become less deadly: The Law of declining virulence may or may not work, so remain vigilant and build the robust health and care system. Sally's 93 old mum in care home had her jab but says since nothing actually has changed – no visitors- why not give it to a key worker instead!

Stopped reading pandemic books and turned to *Walking Home from Mongolia* by Rob Lilwall, light and enjoyable read – like the endurance type stories.

S**tometer: 1/10

03 February 2021

David and Alison did not want to come closer, opting to stand in rain and sing Happy Birthday to Herself; Paul came later to do justice to cake and prosecco.

Big day today, Mair's funeral at St Asaph's. Gathered at her home and followed the hearse for a 'covid friendly' (surely better word?) service, first such experience and can't fault the arrangements though immensely sad as so impersonal. Her friends gave her a send-off outside her home, standing quietly in the street and then watched proceedings via video link. Great service, noting her long and impressive career as the Principal Harpist with Liverpool Phil, a teacher and most importantly a wonderful human being, Cefyn did a fantastic job coordinating everything to the last detail with a fantastic shroud that he and Mair had woven together, flowers and the hymns, finishing with Tom Jones. Herself regrets not being able to sing- how can there be a Welsh funeral without singing, and no get together afterwards either. Cefyn has arranged for Mair to be interred in the family plot in Old Colwyn – date to be fixed, and has brought the flowers back home for her friends to view, must ring him later, as he is distraught though hides it. Like all funerals think about mortality and practical arrangements – need to review them but not now.

More important things meanwhile, as Mair would have wanted and which is towards the living and especially Herself. Very perceptive and made it easier by releasing the Curmudgeon to go back to Llanbedr – pre-empting any excuses, so mature and actually made it worse. Recognises the need to let things take their course and wait for the current pandemic to settle and for some normalcy to return. Have a farewell, for now with Herself and the mutts, walk around Moel Gasyth, beautiful day with sun shining, and load up the car. Back in the bungalow, restart the house after two months absence, feels odd but also comfortable; like being home, after all had set it up for own needs. Maybe the answer eventually would be to get another house together- not her or his but theirs; know it would please her no end, something to think about.

Ruchi does not call so relieved as Rey would want to see the mutts lying in front of the log burner- as not easy to explain why not together. The concept of together yet separate especially with lockdown surely not sensible. Anyway, though a sad day also glad as wakeup call and so feel calmer and try to settle down in Llanbedr. Watch this space. Enough today- been a heavy day.

S**tometer: 2/10

04 February 2021 (Llanbedr, Denbighshire)

First morning back in Llanbedr after nearly two months, house still cold though slowly warming up, had forgotten to change summer to winter duvet which did not help, but good to be back in own bed! The price ofcourse being no tea in bed in the morning. Wonder how Herself fared, will find out later as coming after walking with Sally.

Start the day with proper meditation and yoga, must get the routine back- the anchor which stops the drift. Tidying up inside of the house, list of jobs to be made including getting Stuart to come fix the bidet showers! Attending the AONB Dark Skies session and depending walk later- if enough time will head to Moel Fenlli, not been up there for a while, personal Moel after all, must look after it!

Was not just Mair, Captain Sir Tom also passed away yesterday, looks like the Chap up there is needing company and calling his faithfuls back. What an achievement at age 100, to raise £33 million for the NHS- must have been a remarkable man. BoJo clapped for him, perhaps a better gesture might be to ensure elderly are well cared for, the disadvantaged have some financial security- even Jeremy Hunt, another architect of the destruction of the NHS asking for payments to vulnerable, a miniscule amount compared to both, the current costs and long terms costs of not doing it. And how about properly respecting and helping the NHS, Dido Harding tries the usual in front of the Select Committee, blowing smoke in their eyes- Tim Harford in his Radio 4 More or Less programme picks out all the holes.

Got back few more submissions from friends about their experience of the Covid pandemic – basically how was 2020 for them, some very interesting and contrasting reflections, with one consensus that it was an unusual year, unlike any other in lived experience of most people. Will pull these together after the deadline later in Feb and looking forward to creating the compilation, feeling blessed.

Must say hello to Mark and Val opposite, must be wondering after the seeing the car back, and also Idris down the road and perhaps arrange to walk with him, not to forget dear Gordon, what a fantastic chap so full of life at 89.

S**tometer: 1/10

05 February 2021

Great walk up to Moel Fenlli yesterday, hardly a soul on the way and at the top- almost like a post-apocalyptic world. Bit slower than usual as out of practice but felt wonderful, the views, whole place to self, so privileged to have this on door step; says Rob also, another local resident, as met him at the end.

Herself dropped in on the way back from walk with Sally to check on the curmudgeon, more worried when tell her what happened the previous night when had left the car boot open- strangely none of the neighbours commented, surely they

must have noticed as walked past esp as have been missing the car for so long.
Losing marbles!

Tony had to go down to look after mum – not sure what is happening there though it is a matter of time.

What is happening in the world however is interesting as Biden stops support for Yemen war, Putin jails opponent, coup in Myanmar- reminded of the trip to Yangon in 2016 after 48 years, having lived there as a child, and India telling the celebrities and world leaders to back off from commenting on the Farmers protest; which form of government is worse: dictatorship or democracy, go figure.

No time to waste on such lofty matters, when there is more interesting stuff like the fact that George Clooney is a 'Sew Bro' – men who are taking up the fine art of sewing! Occasional buttons and even turning up of trousers was Yours Truly's limit so admire them – send it to Paul and Brian who are real Sew Bros, Cefyn does not count as that is his job!

Lockdown will waste 87 million pints of beer, Quarantine hotels being set up – long overdue, Starmer being pilloried for lack of real opposition and not setting our clear vision along with the usual stuff about whether schools will open or not – different nations having different views, the rates coming down including in Wales, and trials going on about mixing different vaccines and one shot vaccine. Same old, same old.

Life feels a bit like the Bing Crosby song: Busy doing nothing

*La-la-la-la-la-la
La-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la
La-la-la-la-la-la
La-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la*

*We're busy doin' nothin'
Workin' the whole day through
Tryin' to find lots of things not to do
We're busy goin' nowhere
Isn't it just a crime
We'd like to be unhappy, but
We never do have the time*

*I have to watch the river
To see that it doesn't stop
And stick around the rosebuds
So they'll know when to pop
And keep the crickets cheerful
They're really a solemn bunch
Hustle, bustle
And only an hour for lunch*

*La-la-la-la-la-la
La-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la*

*La-la-la-la-la-la
La-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la*

*We're busy doin' nothin'
Workin' the whole day through
Tryin' to find lots of things not to do
We're busy goin' nowhere
Isn't it just a crime
We'd like to be unhappy, but
We never do have the time*

*I have to wake the Sun up
He's liable to sleep all day
And then inspect the rainbows
So they'll be bright and gay
I must rehearse the songbirds
To see that they sing in key
Hustle, bustle
And never a moment free*

*We're busy doin' nothin'
Workin' the whole day through
Tryin' to find lots of things not to do
We're busy going nowhere
Isn't it just a crime
We'd like to be unhappy, but
We never do have the time*

*I have to meet a turtle
I'm teachin' him how to swim
Then I have to shine the dewdrops
You know they're looking rather dim
I told my friend, the robin
I'd buy him a brand new vest
Hustle, bustle
We never do have
We never do have
We never do, never do
Never do, never do, never do have the time
Never do have the time*

The days just disappear; with hardly anything to show for it! But maybe that is enough – survive for now. And see if can get the sleep cycle sorted, woke up at 230 last night! Finished reading Lilwall's 3000-mile travelogue from Mongolia to Hongkong but then found nothing else to read at home, the library has not responded with requests- drat.

S**tometer: 2/10

06 February 2021

Miracle- nonstop 7 hours sleep last night, not even a pee call. Was a bit anxious when went to bed, had been dreading the thought of another sleepless night, and spent time with prayer beads in bed until dozed off. What could have done this?

Was it another walk up Moel Famau yesterday, met just 2 people on the way, slightly wet but clear day. Was it the chats with family in India, and seeing mum looking better – brother says peace reigns with the maid! Was it the glass of whisky and 2 panadol at night? Could it have been the nice exchange with Dick, both struggling with the Americans.

Or could it be Herself – given she was also happy being in Peniel and able to spend time on own, getting on with stuff, had a few chats over the phone during the day. Learn a lot from her – quotes Henry James, whose last words were: Be Kind, and wants that on her gravestone. That and “I told you I was ill” (Spike Milligan).

And ofcourse laughter - a viral video of a parish council meeting, a real-life virtual meeting – talk about art mimicking life, none of the satire/programmes on office life come close to what happened there! The woman at the centre of that, Jackie Weaver, an employee of Cheshire East Council, has become a hero (heroine) and got interviewed on the Women’s Hour! And Michael Jones, who used to be the Chair of that council knows her. Discover the research project on Happiness – says learning, not rewards, are the key, so trying to learn more and also participate in their research by downloading the app, and subscribe to their newsletter; send it to A Parkin and Mahadev also. Reminded of the book of the dialogue between Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu about Joy – above happiness and pleasure; and there are no better examples of the personification of joy, the positivity radiates from them; cherish the meeting with Bishop Tutu in London few years ago. Sadly, Ved Mehta passed away in New York- the blind writer who brought Indian writing to Americans, had read his story few years ago. Always admire folk who overcome disability – worked with Liz Matthews who was congenitally blind and fiercely independent, had to constantly hold back the urge to help her, had to do everything herself.

Cefyn feeling better, and fired up about the NE India project incorporating Mair’s wish to promote music exchanges also, and preparing an application for the British Council call for India Wales art projects. Really looking forward to it. Must check on Brian today- has been quiet, with no contact since last week.

Need to catch up with some chores and chase eBay- the present for Herself has not arrived and so call it a day and ask for refund, shame. Been thinking about an anthology of tributes to the teachers who influenced Yours Truly. Becoming clear about limitations as writer and poet and so need to build on what can do, rather than keep beating self up with unrealistic expectations and goals. Herself would be proud: I told you so!

Not going to spoil it with the usual mess in the world- it can do without Yours Truly for a day. Time to go make some Indian tea, with mum’s special masala.

S**tometer: 1/10

07 February 2021

And it worked again- though with one pee call, and up at 0730! The walk up to Fenlli yesterday followed by some chilling at home including watching a film about effect of dementia on a family – *What they had* – and another excellent (being modest) dinner is not a bad way. Hope there are no lurkers near the cairn on Fenlli as tend to laugh and scream at the top, looking at the beauty of the nature all around, may get carried away by men in white coats if not careful; tried to show it to sister in Delhi via video but does not actually convey.

An excellent long read: *A managerial Mephistopheles: inside the mind of Jeff Bezos* by Mark O’Connell, describing the all –pervasiveness of Amazon, can’t escape it even if one tried: “*Amazon works too well. Its success and ubiquity as a consumer phenomenon makes a mockery of my ethical objections to its existence. (When I think of these objections, I imagine Bezos literally mocking me, laughing his famously weird, raptor’s laugh.)*”. Another one, along with others like Musk, becoming God at the expense of humanity – people are just pawns, with employees having to pee in bottles and one driver got caught taking a dump outside the house after making a delivery. Seemingly Bezos favourite word is Relentless and he wanted this to be the name for the company instead of Amazon- at least he is honest. Often used the quote by Warren Benis, in talks over the years: “*The factory of the future will have two employees: a man and a dog. The man will be there to feed the dog and the dog to keep the man from touching the machines*”; it looks that future is almost here. What can’t get head around is if people have no money and taxes are avoided where will the money to buy things that are mostly not needed (not to be confused with want) how will these super-rich make money.

Do own moral outrage and go to the other book sellers, resist Amazon Prime, to order some more books, stimulated by the article – reminded of the Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan film: *You have got mail*, truly a David and Goliath problem. Already refuse to use SoMe, except limited WhatsApp and YouTube but still an Amazon Prime member – may be next step to cancel it, feel like a hypocrite. What would it be to live without all this excess; all evidence shows happiness is being in harmony with the nature: both internal and external.

And as Matt Goss, The Bros musician, said in an interview in the Guardian: the secret is “*I always say a good heart and a dirty mind*”; Herself totally agrees with this philosophy and trying to convert the Curmudgeon; so, agree to go over this evening and have dinner and may be watch a movie together.

Sad to read that Christopher Plummer has passed away; can’t remember how many times watched *The Sound of Music* over the years from when kids were young to being a regular over Xmas breaks. Surprised to read in the obituary that he did not actually like the movie, calling it *The Sound of Mucus* and had refused to attend the 40th reunion of the cast. Not with standing, a great actor, last saw him as Getty in *All the money in the world* when Plummer replaced Kevin Spacey after the latter was ‘caught’ interfering with men; the emphasis being on caught since he is only the tip of the iceberg; #Metoo is not sexist, it is about humanity and respect of all sentient beings. Sadly, long way from there and drifted further- had seen *Adu* two days ago, a Spanish film about refugees; blaming them and asking them to go back and sort out

own problems does not work; people are just pawns in the hands of powerful maniacs.

Whether covid will help bridge the widening gulf remains to be seen- no point just vaccinating the well-off who will not be protected unless others too; a clear reminder of the inter-connectedness. More parochially whether this experience will help improve the NHS also remains to be seen- BoJo likely to announce a review and revamp, and at the same time rumour mill rife about Dido Harding likely to replace Simon Stevens, the mind boggles.

Seem to have got stuck today on the pawns theme – the insignificance and helplessness of oneself; must avoid anger and hurt and focus on what can be done. So, another masala tea, and make the aubergine bharta for dinner with Herself tonight, yummy! And weather permitting another walk up the hill – Famau- go left or Fenlli – go right, will see when on up there; 4th day in a row, going up nearly 1500 feet.

S**tometer: 1/10

08 February 2021

So, a good evening with Herself, having dinner and watching *The 100 feet Journey* film about an Indian restaurant in the heartlands of French cuisine- had seen it before but fun to watch again esp given her time in France.

Finally met a sensible person on the walk yesterday- stood 3 metres away and masked to let pass, usually carry own walking pole and use it to mark safe distance also and distressing that the vast majority do not even follow 1 metre forget 2 metres. Own rule is : everyone is infected and irresponsible, so be careful. Lot of discussion about the efficacy of vaccine given the variants, will it be worthwhile and soon be time to start accepting it with covid becoming endemic.

Been reading Maria Popova's latest newsletter about books and the following quotes struck:

"A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us," Kafka wrote to his childhood friend just as he was setting out on a life of making and honing axes of words.

"We read for countless reasons and books transform us in countless ways, reckoned and unreckoned. We read the way we love — with our whole selves, with the flickering constellation of values, longings, traumas, joys, hopes, despairs, formative experiences, and half-remembered impressions composing the self. We read with our whole being, but we also read ourselves into being as each book quietly reconfigures the constellation with its cosmogony of ideas and the emotional voyage on which it takes us, so that we emerge from it a different self. That, too, is how love transforms us. "

She goes on to quote *"Jeanette Winterson — one of the finest writers and thinkers of our time, a maker of axes and lifelines welded and woven of words —who begins*

where books begin — in the life and mind of the author, a fact so basic we have grown blind to its magic: How is it that a single person's experience can become raw material for something that speaks to generations of strangers, something that shapes selves radically different from the author's and from each other's? She considers what it takes to write from a deeply personal place in a way that bridges the abyssal divide between consciousnesses: The trick is to turn your own life into something that has meaning for people whose experience is nothing like your own. Write what you know is reasonable advice. Read what you don't know is better advice."

Guess this affirms that the only way for Yours Truly is to write from own experience and knowledge, do not ape anyone, be own person. And then it may resonate with others who will benefit from experience. So, will press on with the *Homage to Teachers* anthology.

The BBC has got a three part series: Trump takes on the world with testimonies from world leaders ranging from Teresa May panicking when the 'ladies' man' held on to her hand whilst escorting her through the White House and Hollande advising Macron not to expect anything from Trump amongst many unflattering quotes. Must look out for the series, justified schadenfreude- share it with Barbara and David Ballard.

Cefyn getting back to life and pushing on with his application for further work in North East India, tight deadline and need to align the Indian partners- not always easy working with the folks there! Today will be another walk hopefully, keen to continue though recognise need to get on with some other stuff too, especially after another morning call with Dick.

S**tometer: 1/10

09 February 2021

Combination of weather and tiredness so decided to take the low-level walk yesterday and did a circuit of Ruthin town centre, felt strange since some time had done it- deserted, unlike when could nip in and chat to Steve and Jeff running shops or stop by for coffee or browse books in library. Hey ho.

A posting from Tiny Buddha, another daily subscribed feed, had the article about congruent depression – as opposed to clinical depression whereby there are real reasons where this is inevitable, and chemicals not the answer. Follow up by seeing Dr K's video on the subject – makes lot of sense, and guess when think about it, this is just the wise saying – its ok to be sad sometimes. So just keep going; Tariq said will call to check- he has been a great mate.

The stuff with the Americans taking its toll on Dick also, who had to go and get a prescription. Must remain strong for now, as will take time before it settles down. All the more reason not to compound anxieties; too many taxing things going on. The *Homage to Teachers* anthology taking shape in head and so going to focus on it to

give some purpose; Eric will do the shed in March so next project is Vege patch-things are actually coming together.

Variants causing more anxiety, with calls for stricter border controls and quarantines esp as the magic bullet of vaccine may not stay ahead of the virus which is mutating all the time. Tony called last night after coming home for a break from looking after mum, and says Welsh early years schools will open on 22 Feb except Wrexham! as the rates are high there, but then would this fly again the Welsh policy of no regional tiers of restrictions. Guess still few days and things changing all the time.

Jeff, the postie, delivered the recently ordered books, will pick up the parcel from the porch later- trying to leave things for a while before touching to avoid catching bug though not sure if it works, and looking forward as run out of material!

Light snow, not sure will stay, all being OK will try and get up the hill again later. Will make 'Khichdi' that older sister taught yesterday, had a long chat after many days and learnt new recipes to try for Herself.

S**tometer: 1/10

10 February 2021

Drat, seems like was ignoring Herself, so had to placate, usually well composed and thoughtful, even though apparent that the Curmudgeon is taxing with mood swings. Wally.

In covid news UK starts quarantine hotels – visitors must spend £1750 for the compulsory quarantine, failing which jail and massive fines, guess that just about kills any travel, not sure how this works for poor people with humanitarian visits for example. Suspect as usual someone will make money. Vaccine saga carries on – more voices around uncertainty about effectiveness and lower uptakes by BAME communities. The hunt for South African variant intensifies as appears in other places though Kent variant seems to be more worrying according to Van Tam. “We are not going on a summer holiday” is beginning to look like a real possibility. Controversial report by the Think Tank Institute of Economic Affairs questioning the importance being given to the NHS – if it was not the NHS it would have been another health system “No rational basis for the adulation the NHS is currently receiving, and no reason to be ‘grateful’ for the fact that we have it”. Not read the report itself but superficially can see their point, after all it was not an organisation but the people within it who have done the work, and actually the organisation itself had failed. But does go against the British culture where the NHS is part of the genetic make – the best and the worst thing to happen. Already umbrage from different quarters, including asking Mattdoor to return the donation he received from IEA. Hey ho.

On the subject of politicians Trump impeachment starts in the US Senate and be interesting to see what happens- the result will define America for outsiders and determine the scope of Biden’s presidency – how much necessary change will he be able to deliver to reverse the damages havocked in the last four years, and future of

democracy in USA. And Scottish elections looking interesting with Sturgeon-Salmond saga, and implications for the referendum.

Guess the world will go on and today need to focus and let things cool down with Herself; meantime, work and walk on the menu for the rest of the day.

S**tometer: 3/10

11 February 2021

Interesting call last evening- S seems to be having existential crisis and so JS, Narendra and Yours Truly were roped in to listen to him and advise him, seemingly has been having 'ahah' moments during deep meditation and wondering why and how to get others to experience it. Obviously pleased for him and applaud his intention though could not see how to help – self journey had led to the discovery the answer is 42 and only love and laughter can save oneself; other way lies madness! Narendra suggested he turns 'ahah' into 'haha'.

Longish but flat walk yesterday to Llanfair and looped back, good stretch which helped think things through, and which means keep putting one foot in front of another.

So, start the day, after a not bad sleep, with meditation – not quite like Sakthi's deep one, as the monkey remains busy, but as they say noting that is progress itself, and getting on some work after chat with Dick who despite the problems is phlegmatic – infuriatingly humble.

Here we go again- another reorganisation of the NHS being announced and guess why, to 'cut bureaucracy and improve care' according to the BBC and 'to give ministers more power over the NHS' according to The Guardian– believe what you will, but bet it will another dog's dinner, Stevens will leave and it will be the same old, same old. And meantime the pandemic rages on, Kent variant becoming alarming to scientists who say need to keep studying it for ten years to monitor and make sure becomes less virulent – but then won't something else pop in the meantime, the black swan which catches them and policymakers out every time; Mathematician Kit Yates says all the SARS-Cov- 2 on the planet probably fit inside a coke can – how about this for a trick quiz question! Text popped on the phone to ring the surgery to get the jab – not quite the yippee moment as ambivalent about its benefits anyway and not sure how life would change.

Started reading Einstein's biography – always admired him, not sure why had not read him before, interesting start and looking forward to it. Weather good- sunshine, though showing -2C so should be a good walk today, and then some cooking in the evening.

Must follow own advice of Stay Safe, Stay Strong and Stay Sane – and look at the latest laughter yoga video that came via Whatsapp today. Cefyn excited about application and already making plans – happy for him and personally as gives purpose; Steve from TAPE had not forgotten and introduced Pauline who seems

keen on starting the cinema project as part of RICE. So much to do, all that is needed now is for the pandemic to be over!

S**tometer: 2/10

12 February 2021

Really enjoyable walk up to Famau and looping back via bridleway to Llanbedr followed by great chat with Son#1 yesterday- wondering about what to do with bachelor flat, really nice, ideally partying place with massive deck on 21st floor, but not used now as moved in with the partner, and about life. Both realise the need to support each other, glad that he is taking charge of his life; hope to be able to meet his partner soon.

On the subject, exchange messages with Herself, tell her she is a lovely person and the Curmudgeon is happy to have her.

Chinese New year today- used to be fun when boys were young and had Chinese friends in Manchester, with China Town all decorated. The word itself causing tensions now a days since Wuhan, the irony being that it is the Kent variant causing more of a problem. May be need to look on lockdowns differently, as just read something fascinating in his Einstein's biography: "*There was no sign that he (Einstein) was about to unleash an annus mirabilis the like of which science had not seen since 1666, when Isaac Newton holed up at his mother's home in rural Woolsthorpe to escape the plague that was devastating Cambridge, developed calculus, an analysis of the light spectrum, and the laws of gravity!*". So there, do wonder if there are modern day equivalents of Newton who have used the time well. Looking forward to the submissions from friends who offered to write in with their experiences of 2020; must start putting it together soon.

By the way, Wales first in the UK to reach February vaccine target- got appointment for 17th Feb, same day as Stuart finally offers to come and fit bidet showers in the house, clean bums finally!

Trying to follow Rilke's advice to young poets and send detailed, and hopefully constructive, feedback to S about his 'ahah' moment; do one's best and let the other decide what to do with it being the motto.

Another sunny day outside, though guess deceptive as will be cold, but a good walk on the menu, and a proper cooking session for tonight- got caught up with various things last evening and ended up with a quick stir-fry, which given that left the chilli-oil at Herself's place seemed bland! But nice to be good busy, did not even get into reading properly and fell asleep by 9, ofcourse now up since 5!

S**tometer: 1/10

13 February 2021

Joys of small things- from Marcus Aurelius “*baking bread splits in places and those cracks, while not intended in the baker’s art, catch our eye and serve to stir our appetite*” or the “charm and allure” of nature’s process, the “*stakes of ripe grain bending low, the frowning brow of the lion, the foam dripping from boar’s mouth (ofcourse for his time!)*” reminded the Daily Stoic message yesterday and felt grateful for all the beauty that surrounds us and makes life worthwhile.

Certainly, the joy of cooking last night- methi aloo (Herself does not like the seaweed, just as well) and tarka dal followed by Tom Hanks film *News of the world* – hard to think of the travelling newsreader across southern USA. May be that is what is needed now, to counter the non-stop 24/7 banal news most of which has nothing to do with how to live a good life. Reminded of the joke about the guy who used to buy the newspaper but put in desk drawer to take it out after 3 days to exclaim: Thank God it is not happening today. Sorry.

The covid narrative seems to be changing with positive news of high vaccine coverage, falling rates, possibility of easing of restrictions and then acknowledgment that it will become like flu anyway. However, Australia and New Zealand not taking chances and cracked down hard and fast on the identified cases. Whack a mole may work within defined regions but unless global, wonder how things will ever get back to ‘normal’. Resigned to no travel for now, though looks like Britons are booking summer holidays despite warnings.

Trump trials goes on – the mind boggles that this is even going on, surely EVERYONE can see what damage he did, but obviously not; hope his lawyers know how to get their fees since he did not pay dear Rudy and set the lunatics on Pence who were looking to hang him during their assault on the Capitol. Never wrestle with pigs, both get dirty and the pig likes it – seems alien to Trump’s associates, it seems but then they are not the type to read George Bernard Shaw! What a circus. But that is life – first-hand experience with the Americans about the mad world due to the problems with the charity.

Did you know BBL- Brazilian Butt Lift is the fastest growing cosmetic surgery procedure in the world! In a world where much needed surgery like for cataracts is denied to a large population for want to basic manpower and facilities. Hey ho.

Herself carrying on in Peniel- restless as usual trying to re-organise the room and may be loft conversion. Must remember Valentine’s Day tomorrow. Today, go to the library to pick up some books – timely as going to be raining and no walks next few days, and do Susheela’s laundry as washer did not work despite repair!

S**tometer: 2/10

14 February 2021

Did you remember the Valentine’s Day? Or got a beating from the partner? Have you wondered about its origins – enter Wiki: “*Valentine’s Day, also called Saint*

Valentine's Day or the Feast of Saint Valentine, is celebrated annually on February 14. It originated as a Western Christian feast day honoring one or two early Christian martyrs named Saint Valentine and, through later folk traditions, has become a significant cultural, religious, and commercial celebration of romance and romantic love in many regions of the world." Guess the emphasis is on 'commercial' celebration, otherwise why once a year and not everyday be nice to the partner? Hey ho.

One thing leads to another – that's what googling does - and so drift into an article about Durex – yes! The inventor was an immigrant called Lucian Landau who worked for London Rubber Company but was completely forgotten until recently when duly acknowledged – basically he fell out of favour with the later owners of the Company and as Herself said they 'rubbed him out' as his name disappeared from the company records. Only read a long article but there is a book by Jessica Borge on history of London Rubber Company – intriguing stuff. BTW Durex stands for Durability, Reliability and Excellence. Bet you did not know!

Planning to spend the evening with Herself in Peniel who offers to cook, after the Rugby match- loves watching big men rolling around in mud! Had dropped in yesterday for a short time to enable the Curmudgeon to gaze upon her and not forget – not likely but thanks.

Nothing new as Trump gets acquitted, and immediately claims victory, and so a really divided America – but then was ever thus. Not sure why hailed as the exemplar, America is probably the worst thing to have happened last century, morally and financially (yes, largest proportion of global debt) bankrupt. Anyway, Trump makes Nixon and Clinton look like saints!

Pressure building up to relax restrictions, and make this the last lockdown. Hard to know what to make of it – see the problems facing large numbers of people due to work, schooling etc and when will it end anyway. So, stay focussed on surviving for now – one day at a time. Weather awful, rain and wind, so not sure if walk possible- had a short one yesterday and could do with a proper stretch; may be time to use the cross-trainer in conservatory, bought two years ago and used twice, par for the course for such gadgets!

S**tometer: 2/10

15 February 2021

Great evening- Herself went to trouble with soup and fish pie, which went down a treat and even had a Ferraro Rocher choc; actually came home and had biscuits – problem with sweets once have one need more. Anyway, was after nearly ten days, but need to watch out. Listened to Bill Evans and talked – good conversation. Herself had read the recent entries in the journal and wanted it noted that some comments were patronising and to stop being an A***hole. Had to come back as the stuff with Americans goes on, needing to be home to work, so not quite the Valentine's Day.

Earlier Brian had dropped in for a socially distant catch up – worry about his isolation so was happy to see him; has had his job, maybe can get a walk soon, hoping to see what they say at the next review of restrictions, hopefully later this week. Praying for golf to be opened though at present weather atrocious, could not even get out yesterday with fierce winds and rain. Hoping for a break to get out later today, if not up the hill, then to town – must get some exercise as started getting up early again, not stressed but unable to sleep. Up since 3 and then gave up and caught on some writing this morning, and which seems to be coming along well.

Getting more interested in radio- Herself is an addict, says from her studio days when listened whilst working on her art works and clearly very knowledgeable. Search for DAB radio- might go for the one at John Lewis, not Amazon! These guys are clever, as YouTube has blurred the skip ad button and put a like/dislike button above it to catch out; may be bite the bullet and subscribe to ad free YouTube, which is only fair. Let see how radio works and then decide.

Started reading McFarlane: *Wild places*, such vivid and detailed writing about nature, envious of not just style but also what he has been up to, well atleast can experience through his books. Alternating with Einstein biography which is heavy going as so far more about physics itself though snippets of person- so he never acknowledged his daughter and there is no trace of her; he divorced his wife on the condition that she could keep the Nobel Prize money which he was bound to get! Will re-read Feynmann again also and try and distil their thoughts on education as part of another project- to be continued.

Had a call from Betsi Cadwaladr about volunteering- the caller was clueless and had to remind of what had already sent them, automatons perfunctorily ticking boxes. No wonder folk annoyed after volunteering – three quarter of a million people did at the start and then they went and gave £1000 a day contract to Deloitte consultants.

Nothing in news exciting today- part news fatigue and part calmness as accepting that it is a shitty world – very liberating. Raman upset as Auckland locked down and resigned not going to see granddaughter for some more time – she will be a toddler by the time he gets there, sad. But happy to see them having a party at home and going bird watching with friends- what that! Have not been close to anyone for a year, even outdoors, forget a party at home. India (even India) better than UK- hey ho, should have stayed there!!

S**tometer: 1/10

16 February 2021

Twenty nine years since he passed away, and Yours Truly now older than he was; still remember him

Tribute to Dad, 2021

More respect with each passing year
with age comes wisdom they say

but only if foundation there
 which clearly he well provided
 along with basics, good education
 do miss the chance to sit and talk
 say sorry and make up for lost time
 Or make the best of time now
 look after self, others to make him proud
 that would have been my dad
 remember him and remember this
 as give thanks for his life today

So have exchanges with sisters and brother about dad, mum sends blessings. Must never forget family.

Level walk yesterday, with leftover khichdi and roast veg for dinner and mindless film – not worth mentioning the name, need to do something banal now and then.

Good chat with Tariq and catch up on the developments professionally, both pragmatic cynics and had to laugh at the forthcoming reorganisation of the NHS in England- do not know why bother as now in Wales. Not that Wales is any better- Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board known to be in trouble, with variable care. Not sure anything can ever be done to fix the problems- life's mystery, unless radical change where no appetite as wedded to the imagined NHS.

Send first draft of the Teachers anthology to Herself who reads it straightaway and then calls – very complementary, says the voice is authentic- her test for any art form, and so highest grade in her book. Ask if need to declare an interest, does get carried away, not knowing Yours Truly is just one of many voices, and quite lowly, re criticism of education and how to reform it. But thanks, anyway.

Finally pluck up the courage to measure BP, do not like doing it when tense as higher readings add more anxiety but felt up to it today- do need to check regularly.

Only travel restriction and equal access to all for vaccines will stop the pandemic and make it liveable says Devi Sridhar from Edinburgh- been a good commentator throughout; must have been a colleague of Raj. So, Britons need to forego foreign trips for freedom at home- but only if good test, track and trace systems in place, of which not much news, with all focus on vaccines. To add more panic, Laura Spinney waving the next pandemic shroud, due to antimicrobial resistance – the ray of hope is the learning from covid where fast science, cooperation and new models of working means able to act faster. So, the race for newer antibiotics needs to speed up. If it is not one thing, it's another- the trick being to stay fit, so tell brother to stop reading stuff on fasting and exercise and instead get on with it, move man!

Much warmer temperature - 9C, but cloudy, must get up the hill today, and contemplate.

S**tometer: 1/10

17 February 2021

Good walk up to Fenlli, seeing some new trails, met Idris on the way back- very refreshing. Learnt new recipe from sister, to be tried today, and made the usual cauliflower for dinner followed by another light film, a spoof on American elections – *Long shot*- which was funny. And not a bad sleep, ofcourse oblivious to what was cooking in the background. With time difference between west coast America and Sydney and so the day goes pear-shaped on waking up as challenging emails about the saga with the Americans. All plans cast aside to focus on the new problems- seems never ending; no point in talking as bit like expecting Trump to see the errors of his ways, and so it is a matter of breaking off soon.

Anyway, the good news today was Stuart turning up to put bidet showers in all the toilets and so clean bums; even in the annex, posh eh. He is bemused as had never fitted them before and called them doggie showers. And then off to get the jab, well organised at the local surgery. AZ/Oxford vaccine as nurse reads out all the consent and information including side effects and no guarantees, and that no idea when the second dose will come. Women sitting next, socially distant chairs, had not been to Tesco for a year- how sad. Susheela getting a replacement washing machine after complaining so off laundry duty, and she gave a box of saag paneer as thank you.

Let Herself know about the challenges today and offers virtual tea and sympathy, and leaves the curmudgeon alone for the day. Due to jab also, going to be a sofa day and going to use it to catch up on writing, which is coming along and getting enjoyable. Discover that Wales National Library also collecting covid stories and so may liaise with them also re the new anthology. Agree with Herself that need to start work on vege patch as mid Feb and the plots need work to get them ready for planting soon. As soon as weather allows must get down there and start clearing and digging.

S**tometer: 2/10

18 February 2021

Survived any immediate reactions to the jab- had taken it real easy yesterday to avoid provoking the virus in case, and so just pootered around the house. Given other stuff going on, not much else to do as monkey loose. Did read some more of the Einstein biography: “*One of the strongest motives that leads men to art and science is escape from everyday life with its painful crudity and hopeless dreariness. Such men make this cosmos and its construction the pivot of their emotional life, in order to find the peace and security which they can’t find in the narrow whirlpool of personal experiences*”, says he. Is there a co-relation between genius and mental and emotional health, he is not alone in that category?

So, what is the excuse for the Curmudgeon- neither a genius nor emotionally intelligent, and depressed too. Time to consult Herself, so plan to go over and lend a helping hand in the garden, more like get in her way as knows her stuff, but maybe will then agree to come over and help sort the vege patch.

So, its official now, research from Bristol and York shows management consultants in health care do more harm than good, but keep getting hired, could have told them, and also that this is not going away as the system is being perpetuated by the revolving door between the NHS and consultancy. He was not wrong when Lord Falconer told the truth about covid being a gift that keeps on giving to lawyers, and include management consultants in that.

Prince Philip, 99, spends another night in hospital, though not corona related and Harry and Megan expecting second child for the Royal watchers. Otherwise, nothing new in the news- same old same old. Just jabbering on, nobody taking blind bit of notice.

Doing further work on writings – coming along, and enjoying esp as pressure off, only doing for fun. Robert sent a nice email asking if could buy cards made by Herself, but does not do them commercially, may be will listen to Robert and get into the studio. Do as I say not as I do, as advises the curmudgeon but shies away from own art. Been reading some of the submissions from mates about their experiences of 2020 and have mixed feeling – sadness, resilience empathy coming through, hopefully put the anthology together in a few days.

Today looks dry and mild, and after taking care of business off to Peniel for lunch and some work in the garden, must be back to do - not looking forward but needs must.

S**tometer: 2/10

19 February 2021

Woke up at 2 today, only 4 hours sleep, not really tired though but maybe hit later. Been reading, listening to the new radio – had completely forgotten that radio exists until Herself (re) introduced.

Also catching up on news and cheered up to note that wanted man quits lockdown at home for 'peace and quiet' in prison, and to discover a man with a BMI of 28000 – seemingly his height was wrongly put in as 6.2cm rather than 6ft 2in! and got invited for a job even though young as vulnerable, but put them right and refused queue jumping.

Other news not so cheery as report shows 20.5m years of life may have been lost to covid across 81 countries, much more than seasonal flu, and ex Australian PM Kevin Rudd was frightened of Murdoch; be afraid, very afraid. But there are still good people as Dolly Parton asks for plan to install her statue on the grounds of Nashville's State Capitol government building be dropped, as now is not the time.

More work done on the year end anthology and tidying up other stuff, will get the gardening books and start on vege patch - about time. Gwydion messaged about resuming piano lessons on face time- except have not done any practice and so guess need to restart; btw, what is the excuse, really no reason except lazy.

Waiting for the covid update from FM – looks like will continue lockdown but slight relaxation of restrictions, wonder if golf will open though weather looks rough with rain.

Interesting AONB partnership meeting today– sadly not like the Handforth Parish Council, more civilised! Lots of issues with visitors coming to Moel Famau with parking and damage to landscape not just violations of restrictions and generally not enough regard to the countryside for example with salting and gritting which damage verges and hedges. Feel not able to contribute much though useful and informative – so one way at present, as planned work to link health board and AONB faltered.

Tidying up day today, both physically with house and work chores, looks like an indoors day!

S**tometer: 3/10

20 February 2021 (Peniel)

So over to Peniel last evening again, just go with the flow. Bit of drink and good meal and reading and snoozing in front of TV. Nice to be back there but must not overdo it, easy.

Finished Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* - fantastic writer, his detailed and vivid descriptions cause envy not just due to writing but the experiences he has had - wish was younger and could visit the places he takes one to. Send note to Sumana, the writer, who wrote the book on why she wanted to be a tree and she says likes Macfarlane. Being with nature the ultimate spiritual thing. Remember this as sat through AONB meeting yesterday, impressed with knowledge of members and work done by staff and feel inadequate as new to the area and to the subject - being a city dweller, so let them know that not unhappy if want to let Yours Truly go as the group is unwieldy and should be reduced.

Wales lockdown to carry on till **12 March**, minor relaxations but not even golf yet and no hairdressers for Herself, so keep calm and carry on. Some relaxations in schools but looks like not unanimous agreement as Whitty seems to disagree with BoJo. Well, nothing new there, Adam Curtis, who is paid to understand why things are the way they are struggles, says of BoJo in Radio Times: *Its simulated toffs who are aware that they are failures. They know that we know that, so we are locked into this strange emotional pantomime. They (the public) know he's a bit of a git, bluffs and is a bit sub-standard, but they accept him. It's baffling. I can't get my head around it.*"
Hey ho.

Covid not a joke and mental health is suffering- especially those who live alone, 4.2 million people feeling always or often lonely! Herself gets on the phone and rings people living alone, especially the elderly in 80s and 90s. Glad care homes going to allow limited visitors. Need to check on Brian, Tony might be relieved with Alfie's school opening next week hopefully though Wrexham may not do so, will check, also re his mother as has been going down south at weekends.

Google fires Mitchell, founder of AI ethics, after firing her colleague, so we can now all relax that these companies have our interests at heart! Hard to avoid them, as even food take away service via Facebook page only, but thankfully Nant y Felin agrees to correspond via email. Going to get a take away meal for the evening, after a loooong time, not the same as eating out but compromise.

Got distracted with story of the King Arthur and got reminded that it started in Wales- need to find out more about Welsh history. Slowly getting clarity on next stages of life, it's what it is and this is home. Hopefully Herself may feel benevolent and help out with the vege patch, when weather clears, rain and floods now, no chance of even a walk today. Another reading day- seems to have fallen behind, used to read a lot before not that remember detail later, tend to enjoy and take away meaning to improve own thinking and writing, the problem being not able to then attribute, and may get accused of plagiarism. Things sink into unconsciousness and get processed and come out, Herself says that is the process of creation, and art happens like that. Remind her to get on with her art then, and get told off, but atleast getting on with dance, mind they chat more than dance during the lesson.

Slept better than last few days, though still not right, try not to think too much.

S**tometer: 2/10

21 February 2021

Herself loved the chicken from Nant y Felin - at last some proper food - the vege wellington not so, drowned in gravy so pastry like cardboard, anyway glad Herself happy. Send suggestion to put gravy in pot instead but no response. Again, dozed off in front of TV, esp after double chocolate and wait, double cream, brownie, so whilst amount of sleep ok, the pattern is disturbed, had to get out of bed at 5, what else if go to sleep by 9pm!

So, finish May Sarton's *As we are now* - sad story of elderly dumped in (un) care home; big discussion with Herself over breakfast, says can't understand why reading sad stuff, with her empathy she gets absorbed and feels upset. Not sure agree as do not identify with the people in story, just a way of understanding life, not to find ways of reinforcing own problem as Herself implies. Anyway, like Sarton's prose- get it and feel comfortable, do not like big words, long sentences, hence not chance of reading Ulysses!

Take her advice, download BBC Sounds app, and send for 'on ear' sleep earphones- sadly only place was, wait, Amazon. So can listen to radio at night. Gives a new lamp also for night reading, as heading back to Llanbedr later today to do some work, especially finish the stuff with Americans- never talking to them will be soon enough, life goes on. Must also finish off a few other pending stuff, to declutter life.

Long chat with Judith yesterday, working full-time plus, says it's all about covid, nothing else getting done, forget public health. Don't talk about the £22 billion private contract for track and trace or the 3/4 million who volunteered help, no use practically and all the workload on starved public health departments. Still no way to help out,

and now giving up- just ignore it, aka becoming uncaring, but what else to do? Focus on what can be done.

Russia finds H5N8 bird flu in humans, says controlled but then that is what the Chinese said too with corona. It's all about vaccine now, jab, jab, jab. Not letting own guard down as don't believe anything anymore- not good of course, but for now. BAT -the tobacco giant- spends £1 billion to keep addiction going; Thatcher was an advisor as was Clarke, what a mess. Give up reading news.

Rain stopped, so walk later around Peniel, then Indian lunch as peace offering then off back home on the agenda.

S**tometer: 1/10

22 February 2021 (Llanbedr)

Just over two months since started writing this journal, and two notes: usually write mid-morning and so the day's entry is a report back of yesterday, and it's about things catch attention – not a systematic historical record, though have noted the tendency to follow UK Parliament with focus on England rather than Wales. Anyway, sure the content will change over time, as it should- just a story of what happened to one man.

So, back home and caught up on work on return, roasted vege and cous cous dinner and a good film – *Second best* with William and John Hurt (not related) about middle aged single man adopting a boy, found it interesting and 'enjoyable'. Not good sleep though. Brian said will come over for a walk, and Tony rang to say Wrexham schools not opening yet. Vera flies to Indonesia on 4th on a mercy mission to accompany an elderly who wants to go back home rather than be placed in a care home here.

Will take Brian up Famau via vege patch and pick his brains and get help to move the big stone, weather good with temperature of 9-10!

Good to see The Guardian article about elderly high achievers- 94 years old Margaret Ford becomes an author and Madonna Buter a triathlete at 90! Marvellous, so there is hope. And for that need to survive and laugh, and enjoy simple things like goats from Great Orme coming down to Llandudno town- reclaiming, and Dr Feel Good, Kishan Badalia, a junior doctor becomes a DJ to keep own mind off the stress at work and which takes off with millions of followers.

Unlike the leaders- the brazen response by Mattdoor re lack of transparency on contracts was shocking enough, and more so as the next time (not on BBC but Guardian) is how his mate, the local publican who got a £30 million contract under investigation. The tactic is never apologise and go on attack- listen to Heffernan on BBC sounds about the leadership and how it is failing societies; leadership development an industry worth £30billion!

Interesting article from Popova on poetry and science, and on objective and subjective reality – need both science and poetry to save us from stockpiling endless

information that fails to inform our ignorance or our irresponsibility, and to subjectify is not necessarily to co-opt, colonise, exploit. Rather, it may involve a great reach outward of the mind and imagination. Great messages, article mainly about Le Guin.

So, a new variant- a Nigerian one now, and Fauci from USA saying masks till 2022, and meantime 7% of UK 17 years old have tried to take own life, what a tragedy.

Start another May Sarton book- diary at age 82, Einstein slow reading alongside.

S**tometer: 2/10

23 February 2021

Oh dear, Herself messaged first thing to say has booked a covid test, tired and sore throat, so off to Ruthin community testing site; will self –isolate till result tomorrow. Going to be tense 24 hours and will then decide if get tested too as recent contact; only 6 days since jab, in any case not even sure if effective at all. Well, that was an interesting start to the day, after a not bad sleep.

Guess sleep helped by good walk with Brian, up Famau, off touristy tracks, just as well as weather warmer and so walking in woods helped cool down. More people around- mix of weather, after rains, and relaxation of rules. Cold and windy on Jubilee Tower so scamper down as had not taken big jacket. Walked back past vege patch- Brian offered to come and help with heavy stuff.

Not just politicians, the BMJ joins the ranks of emotionally unintelligent, announces charges for publishing doctors' obituaries- uproar from BMA itself; guess money more important than people- the business trumping everything. Time could not have been worse given the toll on health care workers. Not just them as USA reaches another grim milestone- 0.5 million dead, more than the two WWs and Vietnam war combined, and they let Trump off, go figure. Fill in this blank: USA is a land of BoJo published English road map out of lockdown- 21 June when social contacts resume finally, in four stages with four lfs; so, don't rush out yet. Anyway, await the Welsh road map, not due for a few more days. Be interesting as too much cross-border issues- how to enforce different rules between these two land locked countries.

Promod sent the link to The Hindu Bard: Dorothy Bonarjee, an 18-year-old Indian student who won the Bardic Chair at the Eisteddfod in Aberystwyth in 1914! Ofcourse an active Wales India literature exchange programme and poets like Tishani Doshi with mixed Welsh Indian heritage, but the roots go back a century; guess one advantage of the Information revolution as can find new stuff so easily. Even Karen Owen did not know this. So, looking forward to the end of the pandemic and get on with the RICE stuff, so much to do and exciting stuff, esp as after prolonged stress may be finally getting to the end with work issues. No more falling into trap and offering to do stuff- only if asked and even then being firm.

Raman joins another Board, on a charity in Mumbai, United Way doing much needed charitable work, happy for him as needs to keep busy and has a lot to offer. Good

chat with Ruchi recently, Rey growing up so fast, a right chatter box with mischievous grin- missing them.

Weather bit grim, cloudy and windy so going to be a slow day – will nip out into garden in between to start tidying up. Blitz on vege patch from Thursday as showing sunshine for a few clear days.

S**tometer: 2/10

24 February 2021

Tense night, waiting for result, so woke early; at 615 got message from Herself saying negative covid, so relief, says feeling OK. Hard but does seem has background anxiety as also went to GP few days ago for a long-standing mole – unnecessary but then Yours Truly has some medical knowledge, and keeps too busy with stuff except art!

Yesterday was a washout, did not even change from pajamas, rain and wind outside, so kept busy with writing and reading; finished Einstein book – impressed at how he clung to his core beliefs and increasingly a humanist with his lobbying for a world federation to control arms race: a unified governance structure to mirror his unified field theory, sadly both elusive. UN in his view did not meet the criteria and as recent events show he was right: “*As long as there will be man, there will be war*” and “*I don’t know how third world war will be fought, but I can tell you what they will use in Fourth - rocks!*”. Einstein’s relativity, Heisenberg’s uncertainty and Gödel’s incompleteness – the three major theories that shaped the world, from men of not just science but philosophy. All the new generation knows is the current IT titans who are mostly up their backside, though Gates trying but not with the same vision as Einstein.

Dinner- cooked again to keep busy and watched *Blackbird* film on Prime about voluntary euthanasia in US, star studded with Susan Sarandon as main character- do like her acting. Light but serious stuff about families and end of life, a subject of increasing fascination. Must look at own plans, afraid of losing mind and being dependent, can’t stand the thought, hope will be helped out. Do generally feel at peace with death, tidied up as best as could – ofcourse wish things were different but not in control; finally got the NHS at 70 to put stuff up and so the whole life story is in the public domain, and family already have the personal stuff. Useful reminder from Daily Stoic yesterday- You can’t make people feel what you want; tried best and now accept things. Do worry about Herself, but reassured as seems very pragmatic, having faced losses before.

Ruchi’s 7th wedding anniversary today- Raman sends a video of celebration at home – still feel bad at not being there on the occasion properly, had to dash back day after due to family issues. Sadder especially as did not please either side - lesson is to do the right thing not what others want.

Showing rain outside so wait till later; anyway, going to be 5 days of sunshine from tomorrow, more like May than February it says, so will do a big push then, itching to

get going on garden and vege patch. Having done well with writing last few weeks – finishing stuff off; and will need to plan next project, will be a challenge as used up all own material, except unless move to more personal stuff and then question of how to phrase it, need to think through. Ofcourse Brian's story is another option – seems ok with the idea but guess will depend on how it comes out, if and when, and then he can decide?

Weather permitting walk and some gardening, and cook for Herself to cheer her- will drive over with dinner.

S**tometer: 2/10

25 February 2021

So, Son#2 is 32 today, seems not long when baby then happy toddler and boy, always laughing and with that concentration when playing cello.

Need to look up poems for next session and weather permitting go to vege patch. Order more library books – time to re-read the Road by Cormac McCarthy, had read long time ago but did not get it, and keep seeing references to it, clearly pertinent as reminds the need to have purpose, do good and remain true.

Listened to Mukul Devichand (wonder if related to Pramod Devichand from College) on BBC Sounds re digital news industry – another world out there and names like Vice, Taboobla, Mashable deciding what is important and using twitter, Facebook to further 'control' thought; frightening and sobering and further confirming the need to avoid FOMO and stop obsession with news. Loser's game, this chase and need for approval and gratification – just be and enjoy. Esp as governed by folk like BoJo – former French Ambassador, Sylvie Bermann, calls him a liar and compares his handling of pandemic to Trump's and John Crace follows up with accusations of abuse of the people and turning PMQs into a farce. Well, whilst he's dumping in the parliament, the public is dumping outdoors as 'Wild Toileting' in Dorset has become a major pandemic problem- nowhere else to go and so stinking bushes and urine-drenched street corners. Hey ho, India is coming to the UK.

S**tometer: 5/10

26 February 2021

Survived yesterday- helped by chat with Umesh, wise GP and friend, does not believe in medication though at times helpful, gave good advice, and by weather and time spent at vege patch. Cleaned out the shed, strimmed – wire broke and had to ring Tony for advice as manual at home! and dug the first patch. Herself came over and spread more seeds and pootered around, then sensed curmudgeon 'absent' so went back to Peniel.

Finally call from Betsi Cadwaladr saying would like help as volunteer with BAME vaccination uptake and other things later, agree in principle and get sent a long list of e-learning, must note how many hours!

Another day at vege patch today and also the garden- cut grass and tidying up on the agenda, no walk. Good to keep busy, must have a project as Brian says, and reinforced by Umesh. So, looking for other things to do, apply for trustee at XXXX which complements AONB partnership group. The stuff with Americans may be coming to an end- but not over till it is over.

Order more books at library, strange not being able to browse and look at new stuff. Onto Macfarlane's Underland book now- totally different world underground, especially Wood Wide Web as trees connected through roots, lesson for humanity. Trying to get some order back- like in Bathafarn days, despite the problems had felt more in 'control' then.

UK Covid level down to 4 from 5, vaccine programme not to be prioritised by profession only age – so teachers upset, and over 40s to start as the next group, Karen Owen had hers today, not sure how as only in 40s which does not start will April.

Prince Harry says British press was destroying his mental health, not surprised as some really nasty media folk, and the Queen encourages public to get vaccinated.

S**tometer: 2/10

27 February 2021

Yesterday at the vege patch- beginning to shape up, work to do but can see the plan and looks good. Also tidied up the garden, maybe short fence with next door, as overlooks her garden. Getting comfortable at home. Gave a personalised OS map to Val and Mark- did not realise at first and then came over to thank, good neighbours across the road. Nice, tired day so feet up, another film 'Remember' on Prime with Christopher Plummer about Jews and Nazis, strange plot but passed the time, with roasted vege and Quorn fillet dinner. Brief catch up with Herself. Send two poems to Philip on theme of families- human or animal, could not think of latter category so send rueful ones, could not work up the enthusiasm for jolly ones. Slept ok.

Start the day with news, same old stuff going on – US private operator takes over GP practice with 0.5 million patients, and Keep Our NHS Public etc take umbrage but sadly impotent- the genie has been out for some time and the doctors are complicit. Biden releases report confirming Saudi Prince approved Khashoggi killing – guess what difference it will actually make? Relying on values: empathy, humanity, shame etc is for wimps, bullies rule and get used to it.

And enjoy life- especially today as weather excellent, so off to Clocaenog to walk with Brian, then shopping and rugby Wales vs England on the menu. Forget covid today.

S**tometer: 1/10

28 February 2021

Cymru am byth- Wales beat England to lift Triple Crown, managed to catch it after walk with Brian- went down to Melin y wig and Derwen, wooded walk and along the river, nice. Enjoyed chatting on the way- sharing stories of getting things done, what is the world coming to, no one takes responsibility or cares. He had struggled with getting his professional registrations sorted- and got fed up and resigned, saving £750.

So, 12 million people had signed up as volunteer lockdown army to help in various ways including with food banks and look after lonely – well done. Hope the new budget being announced recognises the needs of vulnerable and does not take volunteers for granted. BoJo enjoying a reprieve due to vaccine success but one swallow does not..... Guess the problem is lack of an alternative- Starmer and Labour not rising to the challenge. Need to learn from other places, Trump coming back and re-seizing the Republican Party and where USA leads, others follow?

Send application form to join as Trustee for XXXX, something to do, and need to start online training for Betsi Cadwaladr volunteering work – hope something comes off it. Meantime prepare the vege plot calendar of planting and start sourcing stuff and get Eric to sort out shed insulation soon. Got to keep busy.

S**tometer: 2/10

01 March 2021

Good chat with Gordon, Mark and Val standing in the warm sun across the road- new ways of getting together; the old fella is lovely, so positive and active, goes for a decent walk everyday – got to keep moving. Cleared out garden yesterday, moss everywhere on drive and patios – scrape off as best, should get some moss killer and spray and wash the slabs but no jet wash, may borrow from Brian later and brought out garden furniture, bet the weather will turn foul soon. Later on, to vege patch to saw all the wood so can be taken to Peniel and use chain saw to create logs for the burner there, and then walk up towards Famau car park, tired walk as sleeplessness caught up and then hernia hurting, must be getting stretched internally and limped home to lie down. Bit disconcerting, guess need to get it fixed soon once second dose of jab done? Got to slow down on physical stuff.

Yesterday was the anniversary of first case in Wales, Gethin said lessons to learn, could “definitely have done things differently”. But will lessons be learnt- an article from The Conversation points to the new relationship between academic and policymakers which helped to accelerate science to fit in the policymakers’ timetable- with need for faster decision making. Adar Poonawala from The Serum Institute – the largest vaccine maker acknowledged the cooperation from various funders that enabled his company to get ready, though not without risks but also laments lack of global cooperation on policymaking - national may be better but international another level.

St David's Day today- no celebrations, had the dinner party last year with Mair and others, send photos from last year to Cefyn, sad reminder. He has been really busy on the India project and has started producing lots of interesting stuff.

Ordered more books on McFarlane's recommendation – the writings of Fermor, and off to library to pick up some in the meantime. Otherwise going to be a slow day to nurse the sore groin, hope settles as could then go for golf, assuming will open soon. Will chat with Herself later- says been busy with sorting garden, including mending fence, again, as mutts escaped – why do people have dogs. Reg next door passed away and so looks like she may have new neighbours as Jan can't stay on her own. Hope it all works out.

Will try and pick up some Nytol at the chemist as sleeplessness is now tiring, up at 330 again, and finally gave up at 6 after listening to some BBC sounds stuff- Bragg on stoics. Little sleep is not for bragging at this age!

S**tometer: 2/10

02 March 2021

Nytol worked and slept well, only one pee-break from 930-6, hope lasts. The day was bland, apart from driving to library to pick books and buy Nytol at chemist, just lazing around the house, nursing sore groin, some reading, cooked chick peas and watched a film – Trial by fire- about prisoner on death row; not quite as good as The Dead Man Walking.

Couple of chats with Herself, getting on with the garden in Peniel, feeling pleased as taking shape- the typical bit between the teeth personality and won't stop until done. Says then will focus on art and move into studio- believe it when see it, has not happened in the year since got together. Yes, hard as know that art is not a tap – turn on/off - having done some more writing recently; after the anthology of Covid 2020 experiences and homage to teachers feeling dry and will need to wait for another inspiration.

Maybe today's poetry group will inspire- the theme is families- human or animals; only Philip chose animals, some interesting ones around nostalgia, wishfulness, thanks and challenges. Yours Truly had sent in two, one being

Family Court (Ogden Nash)

*One would be in less danger
From the wiles of a stranger
If one's own kin and kith
Were more fun to be with.*

and suggested the next theme as funny poems about the opposite sex- like Bloody Men by Wendy Cope- so men to send in about women and vice versa. Let's see what happens, apart from Bernard the others are sober types. Robin, being the

prolific poet himself, had sent in two of his own, hope he is OK as looking after his wife.

Corona virus unlikely to be over by end 2021 and especially international travel looks to be out, science coming in conflict with culture as Japan asks China not to insist on anal swabs for Japanese folks who get psychological pain for this intrusive practice, China defends it for scientific reasons. Long covid now the big concern including in children and mental health – high levels of suicides amongst women in Japan another example of the ongoing mental health toll. The northwest mental health support work looks to be going well- will wait to see what the evaluation shows. The really good weather- with sunshine- on the one hand helpful for both mental and physical health and on the other promotes rule breaking, starved of social interactions and fatigue people lowering guards.

Another nice and sunny day and will try and do more to see what happens with groin pain- can't just keep sitting down.

S**tometer: 2/10

03 March 2021

One night wonder- Nytol no use last night, but also not that bad. Had spent the evening in Peniel, made purees to go with chick peas, says liked it. Listen to Leonard Cohen and this and that chat – finding way again. Garden looks good, nearly there it seems, bought lots of seeds for the vege patch, so later this week start planting, looking forward to it. Next door will be vacant soon, does not know what will happen, worry about new neighbours.

Mark stopped by with daughter visiting from Manchester; on furlough and says folk out and about. He had gone around and sprayed the moss killer on drive after seeing Yours Truly struggle– what a lovely gesture.

Son #1 says trouble with flat- will need lot of money for cladding and stairs- and not sure can even sell; should never have bought but late now.

Covid dictating the world as Rugby world cup 2021 cancelled with way things are in New Zealand, not surprising given what happened with French team in six nations- guys went out of social bubble and caught corona and game cancelled, disappointed fans and tensions with other teams as Scotland complains and appeals for award of point due to French failure. India rates going up again also. New budget coming out with schemes to support business and people – not sure what it means practically, and no alternative as Starmer fails to show any leadership, rebellion building up in Labour Party. In Scotland Sturgeon on backfoot over Salmond. What all this means for Wales unclear, looming elections; interesting times as Gethin seems very visible. No doubt Tories enjoying this.

The world seems preoccupied with re-writing history as Dr Seuss books being withdrawn over hurtful and wrong imagery; not sure how such actions help. PC going

mad, ofcourse what happened was not right, by today's standards, but then look at what is happening today. Why worry about past, enjoy the present and look at the future which is at risk. Anyway, how far does this go – life has always been about oppressed and oppressors, and the only difference that can be made is in here and now, so focus. Better things like waiting for the world's oldest sweet shop to reopen in Pateley Bridge according to The Guardian, something to consider PC- Post Corona.

On the agenda for the day tea with Brian, will cook and take him something. Go for a level walk also and sketch planting for the patch. Some reading as new stock arrived from World of Books also. Trying to get back into reading, undistractedly.

S**tometer: 3/10

04 March 2021

So tried whisky last night, and helped with two paracetamols managed to get some sleep, though the S**tometer kept fluctuating during the day- the monkey is amok. Had a good visit with Brian, like his philosophy of head down and keep busy, especially physical work, his building is coming along well and the grounds looking good too. Bit like Herself who seems to be motoring too in her garden though do worry about background stress as did not look too good the other day, good that going to watch a film with Paul with all the mutts.

Looking forward to Raman and Aneeta's meeting today- can be a powerful combination - and hope it goes well for them. Also, the Osler Club Zoom tonight – let us see how it goes, do not always get it, like most clubs have their own ways. Hopefully will hear about the possible opportunities with Betsi Cadwaladr, Professor Rees supposed to call explain more. But, must watch out for planning life around others.

Finished Macfarlane's Underland book – another gem and started *Irreplaceable* – The fight to save our wild places by Julian Hoffman. What a mess the world is in- the words from Macfarlane: "*what sort of ancestors do we want to be known as*" – so apt, and yet so difficult to practise. Certainly, Yours Truly's generation has a lot to answer for the shitty state of the world. Trying to make some amends, wait to see about application for XXXX Trusteeship.

Westminster warned as poll shows record backing for Welsh independence but does Westminster care – ofcourse not as Sunak does the stuff with smoke and mirrors budget, you can fool enough of the people for enough of time and that is all that matters. Hey ho. Need to watch some satire later, even rerun of Yes, Minister be good. Got to laugh.

S**Tometer: 3/10

05 March 2021

Osler Club talk good though drifted off a bit and then paid the price as could not sleep for some time afterwards, finally before midnight but result not bad, guess this is the new norm. Did a bit of sorting out various plant pots and getting ready for planting later this month. Herself dropped by and went for an inspection to the vege patch, and gave further suggestions – should be good fun when get going. Hernia bit of a worry now as some discomfort, perhaps soon as second dose of jab get it fixed. Good chat with Professor Rees about how to help Betsi Cadwaladr, used to read about him in medical press and so will do some work on it today.

Sir Mansel says covid was completely under-estimated, he should know being ex-chairman of Public Health Wales and one of the first victims; inequality clearly played a bit role in death toll but no signs that it will be addressed any time soon. Today anniversary of the first English NHS case in Royal Berkshire though disputed by daughter of Peter Attwood who died on 30 January and recent post mortem tests confirm had covid- so the actual death toll much higher (than the already current disastrous number) if take into account the gap between 30 January (or before) and first reported case. What chances politicians and BoJo repentant – you guessed it; the Clap for the NHS is replaced by Slap for the NHS as budget says 1% pay rise for NHS staff- whilst billions for cronies as still no published details of contracts awarded. BC Health Board remains challenged, some improvements and without knowing details tend to agree that the report is cosmetic, and the Board is in special measures in all but name.

In other news globally 900 million tonnes of food waste annually – equivalent to 23 million 40-tonne trucks, bumper to bumper, seven times around the earth - who comes up with these – but sobering. Do feel guilty if things have to be thrown out and keep looking at shopping list, but invariably end up buying more esp to avoid going again. Rather than address such issues Mumbai politicians celebrating the closure of iconic Karachi Bakery- can't have anything to do with Pakistan, and OCI will need permission to take up any research work in India, along with some other restrictions – the growing intolerance and attack on civil liberties worrying.

Going to be another easy day, some work, reading and level walk- cloudy outside and cold. Sunny tomorrow so save gardening till then. Watched fourth cricket test in India earlier– going to be interesting as England putting some pressure, strange to see empty stadium. Herself nosy about diary and asks to see it, so better send it.

S**tometer: 2/10

06 March 2021

Very lazy day yesterday, gave up in the afternoon and retired to bed to read and recover, just could not muster energy. Slowly came around, enjoying (*sic*) Hoffman's book – one million plastic bottles bought around the world every minute and guess where they are ending; also refers to Derbyshire's essay on how children lost the right to roam in four generations – with anxious parents driving kids to school and never letting them out of sight, partly exacerbated by loss of green spaces, latter by

the connivance of local authorities- the Future Generations Act in Wales supposedly to preserve spaces exists on paper only, and so on. Rage, rage.....

The relentless pursuit of 'development' driven by commercial interests still not registering as the burning platform for society- the ability of humans to give in, with few exceptions, baffling. Nicola Avery writes back after hearing of own experiences with charity and Americans about how universities are capitalising on online education due to pandemic and turning it into cash cow- no thought of 'education'.

Well do what one can. So, finish the anthology of covid stories about living during 2020 and send it around to various organisations, and wondering what next; keen to see if can help practically – may be help set up services for long covid including mental health, will check with Professor Rees at BC, though he was cautious about expectations- working is not easy! The pundits saying over a million people affected by long covid, on top of all the other work that was set aside as NHS focussed on the pandemic. And whether the NHS will be there anyway as the clamour about nurses pay increasing- the arrogance of politicians though Gethin says no ceiling in Wales but then easy for him to say that to the Review Body, political point scoring or further sign of breakup of the union. Must confess getting increasingly intolerant of English arrogance. Hidden from view is the fact of bird flu – all birds in lockdown since December forcing all captive birds to stay indoors, nightmare.

Used up leftovers with rice for dinner, food almost finished, so time to go shopping. Nice chat with Promod last evening, offers to host for a holiday there soon as allowed- be good to see his new place on the beach; amazing guy- says philosophy to keep busy though accused by oldest daughter for hiding head in sand. Some merit in his approach since what can't be changed must be endured, and life is for living and he does- Herself likes his energy. Strange that most friends are 'normal' and energetic – what happened to Yours Truly, from exemplar to helpless.

Spoke to mum this morning, though hard to talk over the phone now a days, getting increasingly challenging to handle and worried if the maid will disappear, Raman tired and so feeling sad at not being able to help at all. Anyway, says enjoyed the cricket match – always followed Indian team and very happy that India won, in 2 and ½ days only, short test matches this series, India number one in the world. Well in cricket and may be intolerance and so worry what will happen there, and looks like all the more reason to make life here- whatever can be salvaged.

Clouds just lifting outside, may stop by the vege patch and cart the wood to Peniel later- Herself offers to make dinner, and may stay over, must make effort. Wrote a nice message back after reading the last entries, not sure why bothers with the Curmudgeon.

S**tometer: 2/10

7 March 2021 (Peniel)

Back to Peniel yesterday after sorting the metal sheets and barbed wire which had flown off from the haystack in the field and were strewn around on the hedge-

dangerous, could have been an accident! Need to respect nature more. Brought all the wood for log burner. Herself made nice stir fry, some wine and watched Dave Allen (yes!) rerun. Good evening but sleep elusive, 4 hours, restless in bed.

The world however waking up from the slumber as pubs deluged with beer garden bookings, one Leeds pub took 700 bookings in five hours. Money to burn and for those with more can bid for Jack Dorsey's first tweet - bids reached £2.5 million. Guess what it said "Just setting up my twttr"- such profound words; only twits need apply? Ofcourse super rich with nothing else to spend on, after getting rid of the only rich (not super enough) from Wentworth golf club, which cannot be bothered with top doctors, lawyers only as golfing partners! Mind boggles, the most unequal country in Europe now?

In other news impending Oprah interview with the Sussexes- the Palace pre-empting it by presenting a united front by leading a tribute to healthcare workers, presumably to slow claps from nurses who are angry about the insult from HM government. Is not life fun?

The Covid 2020 anthology out finally- and some nice feedback, every little bit counts, do what you can with what you have, today.

So today is garden in Peniel, taking branches down and sawing logs as soon as sun bursts through- been a cold start. Good chat with Herself over breakfast- saw a solitary heron in the field, majestic when flew off. Hopefully not own fate and can cope with the curmudgeon. Walk down to David as his birthday also- no pressies though as Herself left it late. Then pooter around, started reading biography of Rhys Davies, the Welsh writer and have Hedd Wynn next on list - time to learn about Wales, looking forward to going to National Library in Aberystwyth, have sent them covid and NHS stuff. Finished Hoffman's Irreplaceable book - happy to read that Drakeford had rejected plans for M4 Black Route through protected Gwent levels given SSSI and impact on historic landscape. Good on you but watch out, they will be out to get him.

S**tometer:2/10

08 March 2021

Let me out, the world does not make sense anymore! So, Banksy piece was set on fire, and a digital Non-fungible Token (NFT) was created with blockchain technology and which makes NFT more precious, the price went up four folds, from \$93k to 400k? Tell Herself in the wrong business spending all that time in studio, says is on fire (*sic*) as creative stuff fighting to come out, so wants to be left in peace for a while. Happy to oblige and so plan to get back to Llanbedr later today.

Good two days in Peniel, lovely soup and pasta last night with the glaces sent by Robert for Xmas, finally, to top it and snoozed in front of telly watching documentary about George Lloyd, and trundled off to bed early. The walk earlier helped, gorse flowers out and the primroses lane coming to life.

Really good stuff from Maria Popova, about Katherine May and wintering (the power of rest and retreat in difficult times):

We are in the habit of imagining our lives to be linear, a long march from birth to death in which we mass our powers, only to surrender them again, all the while slowly losing our youthful beauty. This is a brutal untruth. Life meanders like a path through the woods. We have seasons when we flourish and seasons when the leaves fall from us, revealing our bare bones. Given time, they grow again.

And

Here is another truth about wintering: you'll find wisdom in your winter, and once it's over, it's your responsibility to pass it on. And in return, it's our responsibility to listen to those who have wintered before us. It's an exchange of gifts in which nobody loses out. This may involve the breaking of a lifelong habit, one passed down carefully through generations: that of looking at other people's misfortunes and feeling certain that they brought them upon themselves in a way that you never would. This isn't just an unkind attitude. It does us harm, because it keeps us from learning that disasters do indeed happen and how we can adapt when they do. It stops us from reaching out to those who are suffering. And when our own disaster comes, it forces us into a humiliated retreat, as we try to hunt down mistakes that we never made in the first place or wrongheaded attitudes that we never held. Either that, or we become certain that there must be someone out there we can blame. Watching winter and really listening to its messages, we learn that effect is often disproportionate to cause; that tiny mistakes can lead to huge disasters; that life is often bloody unfair, but it carries on happening with or without our consent. We learn to look more kindly on other people's crises, because they are so often portents of our own future.

Well, that's another reason to carry on, to pay debt and heal self.

Herself says, told says so! Look at the Royals- after the Oprah interview, what a mess: status, money no use. Why have family squabbles in public- the Royals do not seem to learn with disastrous interviews; never fight with a pig lesson lost on them. So how does the interview help with the British press?

Rather read about spending pandemic walking down memory lane with her 300 vinyl records, bringing all that rich life into her house again-well done, Anna Doble. Sadly, own vinyls long lost, had a good collection, hey ho. Small things with big differences, focus of life. Helped by good chat with Omo and Dick and decided move on from Americans- closing down charity, it was of a time now need to move on, more to do. Energised.

Go back later, weather permitting bit of garden/ field, tidy up Charity stuff....

S**tometer: 1/10

09 March 2021 (Llanbedr)

The pundits out in full flow, talking about racism following the Sussexes interview – seemingly there was a worry about the skin colour of Harry and Meghan’s first child – and whilst shameful, struggle to see what exactly is the answer then. Race inequality just one aspect of unequal society and in any case which race lives harmoniously – Black vs Asians, Hindus vs Muslims, not to mention the various sects of Christianity and so on. The race to define (and challenge) the Other is fully on – a race to the bottom. It even pushed the International Women’s day off the headlines even though half the women in a survey in Guardian fear it is going back to 1970s. Glad to see the women fighting back and reviving sheela na gig- carved into stone, squatting, naked, showing off enlarged labia the stone carvings of women which were kept out of view by clergy and society but being celebrated to create the Big Vagina energy, the pruders may think otherwise but well done girls.

Good walk through the woodland, saw a plaque marking Gwyneth Carey’s 90th birthday – had enjoyed her reflections on 2020 as part of the anthology, at 95 so full of life. No wonder and just confirmed the importance of being in and with nature. Watched *Detroit* – a film about the riots in 1967 – topical given race issues and reminded of the various visits to the city, an example of urban decay, and yet such riches with the Henry Ford village and the estates of the moneyed. Finished Meic Stephens book on Rhys Davies- some good stuff about Davies and the literary period of the 20th century and liked the quote:

Offhand, I should say that Welsh nationhood is consistent with an attitude of minding one’s own business, self-sufficiency, a certain elemental instinct and appreciation of the poetry of life; vitality, humour; and attitude containing a vision of small range but intense within this restricted orbit”

Will do for Yours Truly.

Covid fading into background – Nightingale Hospitals set to close and first day in North Wales with no covid deaths. Drakeford says BoJo ‘Really, really is awful’ and as expected the sycophants jump up and ask that the office be respected! News story about starlings and their murmurations in Somerset reminded the need to go and watch them in Aberystwyth, as soon as allowed to travel, hopefully after this week.

BTW Banksy picture burning was not a stunt, seemingly the new art is digital, so if have spare few hundred grands then worth investing. The Zoom owner Eric Yuan banks £6 billion in another news – the numbers are just crazy. Where is this money really? Will end in tears again, but guess the trick is to make sure not in one’s life time. “Are we being good ancestors”, who cares?

And so maybe the answer is eat, drink and be merry, though not quite what is on agenda today, must get some garden stuff and tidy up, need to inject some colour in the garden also. More reading as weather cloudy, with winds forecast.

S**tometer: 1/10

10 March 2021

No luck with the garden stuff- sadly very limited availability as centres still closed, drat, will have to wait till 12th when hopefully some relaxation of rules. So spent day pootering otherwise, with a walk around the area, finding a new path through the fields, must do more of this. Chat with Anu, poor chap in trouble, new wife and son still stuck in India. Another one trying to rebuild life, all those dreams of youth, who would have guessed the situation in older age. More calls including with Johann re creating school of reflection which will need lot of work, slowly slowly catchee monkee as seen as counter-culture (rather counter-establishment think) though much needed.

Bored with news about Royals and race – family squabble in public. Also bored with scandals in the NHS – billions wasted or pay dispute with nurses; the arrogance of politicians is unbelievable but sadly no way to hold them accountable. Whitty warns public about maintaining rules and not relax too soon, and maybe is getting some control on the situation especially as BoJo clearly bored with it and letting him and Vallance run, even Stevens puts the knife in gently about nurses pay rise which he says was supposed to be 2%, BoJo has other battles to fight including with devolved nations and party infighting.

Herself on fire- says has to make 40 pieces of art for the July exhibition, really happy to see her so engaged. May drop in later today to check! Says not sleeping well, same here – another restless night. Otherwise going to be another slow day- completed the census form, still being asked about the annex which still seen as separate dwelling; leave it with them to sort out. Susheela having medical issues and suffering so have a chat, will drop into Cefyn's studio as well later.

S**tometer: 2/10

11 March 2021

Poor Cefyn, now looking after neighbours- both terminal with no family so running around, still not finished with Mair. Looked tired, says feeling the strain esp the thought of more funerals. Sorry for him, says not doing as much as needed, looked at some of the framed work from Shillong - fantastic, he is really good. Pick up few plants from Aldi and cadge a tea from Herself, and two ginger biscuits- she is infectious with sweets, but not stay long. Saw *Genius* film on Prime- Colin Firth and Jude Law, story of Tom Wolfe and his editor Max Perkins, had seen it before but forgotten and worth watching again, like both actors and the theme obviously. Not a bad day though no walk with pouring rain. Need to stop thinking about sleep, is what it is, had fallen asleep listening to Theodore Dalrymple on illness and poetry through the Hippocratic Society.

Another record as BoJo's press secretary, Allegra, refuses to answer the question about his (false) accusation that Labour had voted against nurses pay rise – guess how many times! She was asked 20 times, according to Huff Post. Jeremy Paxman eat your heart out – only 12 times with Michael Howard! Beware, such folk walk

amongst us, but in good company with the driver who blew his car out when lit cigarette after using air freshener in closed car. There is hope for the world, with idiots around. But not much hope for patients with long covid – as GPs told them to go away; the Welsh government considering extra support though no specialist clinics. One year today since WHO called the pandemic – 116 million infections with 2.5 million deaths across 200 countries; UK done badly.

Nice one from Maria Popova, quoting David Whyte on friendship:

FRIENDSHIP is a mirror to presence and a testament to forgiveness. Friendship not only helps us see ourselves through another's eyes, but can be sustained over the years only with someone who has repeatedly forgiven us for our trespasses as we must find it in ourselves to forgive them in turn. A friend knows our difficulties and shadows and remains in sight, a companion to our vulnerabilities more than our triumphs, when we are under the strange illusion we do not need them. An undercurrent of real friendship is a blessing exactly because its elemental form is rediscovered again and again through understanding and mercy. All friendships of any length are based on a continued, mutual forgiveness. Without tolerance and mercy all friendships die.

Yours Truly surely glad and grateful for his friends, nice messages from BL and Nobhojit after they had seen the NHS at 70 story.

Wind has blown the trellis fence and so need to fix it, with lull in weather, still overcast but not raining, so may get somethings done outside, even get to the vege patch. Keep forgetting to ring Eric to come and sort out shed- Tonight! Not much else on the agenda, wavering re continuing GMC registration and membership of BAPIO- may be time has come to put the past behind? Joe Melton was more courageous when burned all official papers after retiring and took up painting- not many able to do so. Well did go back to the keyboard yesterday- Herself puts the Curmudgeon to shame with her dance and Hindi practice, running out of excuses.

S**tometer: 2/10

12 March 2021

Good day at the vege patch yesterday- tidied up a lot, beginning to take shape – nice tired afterwards, so another film night- *Dark Waters* about the Dupont and Teflon scandal, reminded of others in the genre like Erin Brokovitch and saddest part no change, relentless pursuit of profit at any cost supported by corrupt governments goes on. Common man has no say, agree Amir Hannan also- amazing GP, been pursuing and persuading others in crusade to engage patients in care including sharing records, after 15 years still long way from being adopted, but does not tire, do what you can his motto. Finally caught up with him after 5 years – need to make up for lost years.

The murder of Sarah Everard in London by a police officer causing more concern about women's safety, as she has done before MP Jess Philips read out in the

Parliament names of 118 women killed by men last year, had put BoJo to shame for not having enough women in cabinet. How to shame a shameless guy, and the Royalty squirming on their race record– neither looks the type to 'Woke up'; Yours Truly gets more exercised every time see such reports not because of the problem but the solutions – the only way is through promoting humanistic values not in silos around gender, race or sexual orientation; that way both parties complicit. Must check with Professor Rees re Betsi Cadwaladr plans for supporting BAME communities- is it real or tick box exercise; is the guy genuine and is the system with him?

Clive Myers in the Guardian writes about the need for strong regulation as a bulwark against the strong media – lesson from USA; says Journalism is about Truth, sadly not most folk perceive, mainly the mouth piece of the moneyed and powerful. Thank God for still some decent journalists and newspapers- HuffPost and The Guardian and all the informal stuff often done by volunteers to try and inject some accountability into the broken system.

Jabs day today- mum, Raman and family all went to get their jabs at Lilavati Hospital in Mumbai and Herself gets hers later today too. Scandinavian countries ban AZ vaccine now- what is the Truth, does anyone know and who cares, remind Herself not to get carried away after vaccination, again. Waiting for the official statement from Drakeford re Welsh rules- trailer says golf will open and few other things over the next week or so, yippee though if only he can also engineer the weather, as looks like rain for a while! Guess Herself will want to scoot to the hairdressers as soon as possible and perhaps can start visiting some people, long overdue? Anyway, wait till later. Will head over to Peniel for the weekend in case Herself gets reaction to jab, few chores in the meantime, And don't forget keyboard practice.

S**tometer: 1/10

13 March 2021 (Peniel)

Oh dear, just as complemented them, news arrives of closure of HuffPost UK's national news operation by the new owners BuzzFeed, to fast-track its path to profitability! So, another nail in the coffin for accountability - wonder what will happen to Paul Waugh's Zone from HuffPost now especially as he tries to challenge BoJo for his prevaricate then panic style of government, not that much use since Starmer found seriously wanting - people get he is not Corbyn but then who is he? Distracting tactics carry on with BoJo ruling out return of Parthenon marbles to Greece- says were acquired legally, by the rules of the time, and plans to mark the anniversary of lockdown on 23 March - can the country hope that this will include an apology for messing up big time and costing lives and to pay decent wages to nurses?

Italy going back to lockdown - half of country shutting down again and France tops 4 million cases and AZ vaccine controversy rages on. Wales start easing of lockdowns slowly, Stay Local from yesterday - within 5 or so miles, await news if allowed to golf in Mold or reciprocal arrangement with Pwllglas as before, and Tony says meet in the middle and go a walk! Herself has a sore arm and says felt light headed after the

jab but still going to have her dance lesson today, listen out in case a thud! Good evening though windy and rainy outside, so quick walk for mutts and dragged them back before too wet and a meal deal from Morrisons supper.

Spoke to Ameera after a long time, been managing the Laboratory business remotely since last year from farm house in India and then Dubai, says good thing became a mum as soon as it started and could not have given the time to son if still working as before. Wonder what the kids will be like post lockdown, hers a bit younger, but others - will they be anxious to go out, how to ease it for them, talk of nature therapy - get out into the country, sea and woods and reconnect. OK for some but city kids, no play areas anymore.

Read more of Fermor, though not sure as of a particular time and jumps between travelogue, literature, art and so for the somewhat illiterate curmudgeon a bit taxing as have to keep looking on internet to make sense. Good BBC sounds programme on How to invent a country - just finished the episode re the Netherlands, did punch well above their weight including ruling Britain, the association with William of Orange since daughter was born in Drogheda, the scene of the Battle of Boyne, on 12 July and ofcourse regular travel through Schiphol before switched to Emirates.

Herself is making lists of things to do in two parts, up to easing in England in June to enable cross border travel and before then when more easing in Wales - day trips galore, looking forward as cabin fever getting worse. Gotta keep busy and stop thinking/planning too much. Going to be another slow day today as rain, winds continue.

S**tometer: 1/10

14 March 2021

Herself felt unwell so dance cancelled and a lazy day yesterday, took the mutts out around Moel Gasyth as not been out much, and watched rugby: Wales trounced Italy, one-sided match but England France good with England prevailing. Trip down memory lane with rerun of Top of the Pops 1980 in the evening on TV- life time ago, reminds of disco parties in hospital messes, not much of that now a days.

Pondering day after reading Avril Henry's story in the Guardian long read: "my body is unserviceable and long past its sell by date" and who faced challenges as tried, finally succeeded, to end her life. Probably the most taxing issue for Yours Truly- as feel strongly about the right to end life, in certain circumstances; and seriously worry that may not get the help when needed or may leave it too late and become a burden. Wonder if the assisted dying bill will come back to the parliament and anytime soon, or must remain as an insoluble problem given such polarised society, and meantime keep killing people otherwise by more 'legally sanctioned' means including in poor care homes, lack of welfare, pollution and greed. In next few months must have a plan, and in case worried this is not suicidal, totally against suicide. Meantime make a note about the book: *The Inevitable: dispatches on the right to die* by Katie Engelhart, bit expensive so will check library first.

Another good read was extract from Michael Rosen's new book *Many Different Kinds of Love*, writes about his urgent diagnosis, days in hospital after getting covid, his near-death experience and life afterwards:

I am not who I was.

I am who I was.

This is not me.

This is me.

Same but different? Looks like another book for the list.

Scanned through collection of articles written by artists/writers about Brexit: Goodbye Europe, Herself asks whether feel guilty for voting leave. If one knew then what know now problem, but the dilemma remains, the reason for voting leave was to use it as an opportunity to recalibrate politics, both domestically and internationally. Was not happy with either: tired of neo-liberalism in UK and waste and abuse of power with limited accountability in EU, sure did not work out the way had hoped, and blame the media/political nexus who relied on public divisions and apathy. Glad to be listening to BBC Sounds on history of countries- was thus, is thus, will be thus, so agree with Herself to make most of now.

Unsurprisingly the Sarah Everard vigil turns into chaos with police manhandling some women protesters and Duchess of Cambridge, comes incognito, to show support. Pundits will have something to say about whether opportunistic or not, overall tend to agree that the Royal Family needs to retreat into background, monarch not a bad idea but parading and involving whole family especially as some seriously deficient members bad idea.

And which translates into lazy Sunday, with some cooking for early lunch and weather permitting walk the mutts, and scoot back down to Llanbedr. Tony been up and down to see mum- says matter of days now, agree to meet for a walk mid-week, both need it, and also book golf, seemingly can get to Mold, under 'being local'. Must ask Tony how to be retired- switched off from job completely, though now flies small plane for fun but guess has hands full with young family. The idea of not doing something for workaholics difficult, so make a list of what can be done: walking, cooking, reading, playing keyboard (maybe get the piano), tend to vegetable garden, golf, TV, theatre, cinema, travel with friends but is that enough for 'good' life?

And ofcourse could write more - learn from May Sarton' s At Eighty-Two journal:

"Get in there, stay in there, figure it out. It is the same for writing. Some people write for fifteen years with no success and then decide to quit. Don't look for success and don't quit. If you want writing, write under all circumstances. Success will or will not come, in this lifetime or the next. Success is none of our business. It comes from outside. Our job is to write, not to look up from our notebook, and wonder how much money Norman Mailer earns".

Guess down to who defines 'Good life' - has to be personal decision, not seeking approval from others nor becoming selfish esp as recognise need to accommodate Herself's views and plans. On that note, coffee time and then turn to cook.

S**tometer: 2/10

15 March 2021 (Llanbedr)

Anita's birthday today – 68 – so started the day with WhatsApp video with her, says same as everyday- nothing new, granddaughter sends her video wishes. She has been very resilient – keeps going despite all the adversity and family tribulations. Wish could get her to come and stay for a while, but on her own, which highly unlikely.

Back from Peniel yesterday via garden shop to pick some essentials to get ready for planting, and basic shopping, then read some more of Sartre- Herself cautions against it, says depressing stuff, but disagree it is what it is for her, still useful to know how old age affects people and so follow up by ordering some of her recommendations at the library. Watched the controversial *Bombay Begums* Netflix show- typical Indian puritans up in arms as if sex, drugs do not happen there. Hypocrites. Slept well or not, is it worth talking about anymore- danger of getting fixated, like weather and soon be bowels and pissing, and ofcourse hernias. Will be in good company re bowels anyway as increasing interest in stool gazing-there is a Bristol Stool Chart with seven types of poos; share it with Avnish the Indian stool guru.

Read an interesting article sent by Mani about how Britain is now the dumbest nation in the west- not entirely correct though had some elements of truth, is definitely an increasingly unequal society and getting worse. Council tax bills rises affecting poorer- an £88K house in Easington in Durham will pay £1498.53 whilst a £1.2m house in Westminster will pay £1127.07, surely something wrong. And Britain's high streets lost 17500 chain stores in 2020 – everyone will be working for Amazon, taking dumps in bushes between deliveries and peeing in bottles whilst driving. But how will money be made then, who will buy and pay anyway? By the way garden furniture becoming scare, can't seem to get it anymore with high costs of transport – not just Brexit but container freight. No wonder BoJo and ilk want to give more power to police- getting ready for the unrest that must follow? Yesterday's conduct at Everard vigil an example, Dame Cressida refuses to resign – as usual.

Now it is The Netherlands which suspends AZ vaccine due to safety concerns, WHO keeps supporting it though; feel frustrated esp when asked views- how the **** should Yours Truly know, that is all had on offer- take it or leave it. Jab, jab, jab regardless the only strategy by the government, British science against the world? Old joke about medical experts: number of options available to patients always one more than the number of experts asked; got to disagree otherwise not seen/listened to problem?

Herself says had a light headedness episode yesterday, do worry as not sure if to do with jab or curmudgeon transferring anxiety, though outwardly denies it and says strong. Know misses social contact and wants the curmudgeon to do more – admire for going out of way to help others, annexe for Cerys latest example – why not let her use it for few months, asks Herself.

Enough for now, walk with Tony beckons, agree to meet at Three pigeons in Graigfechan, be good to get out.

S**tometer: 2/10

16 March 2021

Great walk yesterday, up towards fishery and down to Clwyd Gate, felt the stretch, also time to catch up with Tony – good mate to share concerns with, wise and sympathetic, and happy though occasional glimpse of concern for Alfie being a much older father. Must do more of the area, wide open and good walking. Happy tired so pootered around afterwards, half watched *The Sisters Brothers* film on Netflix about the wild west with Joachim Phoenix and Jake Gylnehaal, both good actors. Might finish tonight.

Worry about the chosen theme for the next poetry group: had suggested funny poems about opposite gender and in the light of Everard murder seems insensitive so write around to apologise and cancel the theme, instead have a free choice session. Good article from The Conversation about How men can talk to women about safety fears, important stuff though ashamed to say that did not do this when young. Barbara writes back agreeing but also aware of the importance of holding onto lightness as carefree childhood is in danger of disappearing.

Another one bites the dust as Thornton chocolates decide to close all 61 stores – and go online. BT offers local communities chance to take over the iconic red telephone boxes for a £1; suggest same to Herself who says may be linked to the chapel in Peniel as on their land, anyway too complicated. Must say do like them and if ever get the chance will think along with pinball and fruit machine and the old juke box- down the nostalgia lane!

Finished episode on Hapsburg dynasty on BBC Sounds- enlightening and almost the precursor of European Union, and look at the consequences after shooting of Archduke Franz in Sarajevo. Theme replicated in Daily Stoic- about unintended/unforeseen consequences – quotes Peter Thiel's vendetta against Gawker, but would anyone (including may be Thiel) agree that the media has got better as a result. As Seneca said Fortune has the habit of dashing all plans and so good intentions and intellectual humility essential.

So is Yours Truly exemplifying Seneca's qualities – Herself says more work needed to balance all relationships, not just with Herself but all friends and family. And stop wanting to do more, do what is in control and not worry, spend whatever necessary and not compromise on comfort or deny too much- stop looking for bargains all the

time, especially after experience at Home Bargains. On that note, and given weather OK, get to the vege patch and do some work and a flatter walk today.

S**tometer: 2/10

17 March 2021

Wake up to a nice e-card from Anne about St Patrick's Day today – took back to days in Ireland, happy times with daughter as baby, must hang on to those memories. Wake up perhaps too much as really had no sleep, bad night, just could not settle down.

Spent yesterday at the vege patch and tidied up more, need Brian to come with his large metal rods to shift the heavy stones, Eric lined up to insulate the shed and then do the wall also, will need to buy bag of lime. Ready for serious planting and summer of home grown veges, yippee.

Also joined the Sheffield team about their plans to support BAME communities during pandemic- Tom Heller is doing such a fantastic job, feel sad other areas not doing more, and certainly no response from Betsi folk. Momentum building nationally for a full enquiry, putting pressure on BoJo as part of the anniversary next week- waste of money or worthwhile, time will tell, or will it? Don't hold breath. Focus on local elections and riding high on vaccine success despite European concerns about side effects. India records highest daily spike this year.

In other news today, Prince Philip goes home after a month in hospital – glad to read, wonder if he gets the century card from the Queen also as he reaches 100 later this year! See saw otherwise- Uber to pay UK drivers minimum wages, holidays and pension and in Atlanta another shooting with eight Asian women killed, win some lose some. Dennis the menace is 70 – used to love it, grown up together though drifted apart as have not seen one for a while, may be an idea to look up especially as Yours Truly more like the curmudgeonly Mr Wilson, did not know he had died in 1962 itself.

Finished watching The Sisters Brothers film- nice one about brothers and family and humanity and started *Into the Wild* film. Otherwise plan to go to Prestatyn beach with mutts and picnic, Herself says don't disturb till 4pm as in studio so will do the garden at home and herbs, and finish paperwork re charity and business though be interesting to see what Mahadev is suggesting – says working on government contract for Covid Test and Trace.

S**tometer: 3/10

18 March 2021

The knives are out and so are knaves- the top Svengali, Dom Cumming calls DHSC 'smoking ruins' (how do people come up with such graphic terms) and so had to set up the vaccination system outside of the NHS. Very clever and BoJo fell for it- who is

more responsible? Wrong on both counts: if NHS so bad then do something to address it and have you seen what the alternative has achieved- even a fraction of that cost would have done miracles through the NHS and local authorities. Problem of ideology trumping evidence and ironically Dom claims to be on the side of science, guess when it fits. Be interesting to see if and how the enquiry into pandemic is done and what will it say; go the way of Iraq war probably, short memories and limited rage is what politicians thrive on. Meantime, the vaccine supply in jeopardy and yesterday's euphoria with numbers vaccinated turning into panic at the policymakers level.

Politicians, and indeed some parts of the public, do not like to hear the truth or anything challenging, another example is the article in The Guardian which talks about the British inability to handle the accusations of racism by Churchill – 'Cancel Culture' rules.

On the positive side, Wales announces bonus payments to NHS staff in recognition of work done during the pandemic, and hopefully people will be able to claim back the streets from goats- yes, they are all coming down from the mountain into Llandudno town centre!

Keep dipping into Sartre's Eighty two journal, not something to read at a go, but find it depressing esp as she comes across as unhappy and unfilled needing constant reassurances about her importance and craves recognition, sad. Daily Stoic gave a reminder of mortality and the need for exiting with grace: Are you prepared for life's final challenge, like Aurelius was? Do wonder and generally feel satisfied, yes could have done things differently but can't live in the past, whatever happens in future is bonus, still can and will do more but not become hostage to it and because it will make a difference not for boosting ego.

Had a good trip to Prestatyn beach last evening- wonderful sunset, mutts had a good time though did run off and caused a ruckus- why do people have dogs- and picnic in the car looking at the sea. Herself had gone to a lot of trouble to prepare from Jamie Oliver's vege book – Iranian style rice eaten out of the bowl as forgot to pack plates, but good fun. Lot of traffic on the roads though beach quiet. Must be careful about practising silence with Herself, needs and loves to talk whilst the Curmudgeon happy just being; given from school of "*Who knows does not talk. Who talks does not know*" and as Gibran said "*You talk when cease to be at peace with your thoughts. And when you can no longer dwell in the solitude of your heart you live in your lips, and sound is a diversion and a pastime. And in much of your talking, thinking is half murdered*". Says learning Hindi is challenging and does not accept that is doing very well, always in a rush.

Good sleep last night, after Nytol and no alcohol, with only pee breaks but tired physically and so looks like a lazy day at home. Send out the Homage to the teachers anthology – needed to get it out before late, few already passed away. Really felt good and blessed to have learnt from such teachers.

S**tometer: 2/10

19 March 2021

Interesting chat with a trainee referred from Healthcare Leadership Academy yesterday about her project – had chosen Yours Truly to be mentor; realised how old and distant one has become from the NHS as names like Muir Gray and others in quality field meant nothing to her and yet doing the same old things from 30 years ago. Every generation fights the same battles in their own ways, not much learning from the past? But maybe sample of one problem, and others aware? Anyway, what struck was the ephemeral nature of fame/life- here today gone tomorrow.

The temporariness clearly comes through the Fermor book *A time to keep silence* about monastic living – get Benedictine but not Trappist approach, latter too harsh. Short book but he is a hard writer to read as uses such descriptive language with technical and precise words, lot of which have to keep looking up disturbing the flow. Very different writing to Paul Goodman's who described nine forms of silence: *“Not speaking and speaking are both human ways of being in the world, and there are kinds and grades of each. There is the dumb silence of slumber or apathy; the sober silence that goes with a solemn animal face; the fertile silence of awareness, pasturing the soul, whence emerge new thoughts; the alive silence of alert perception, ready to say, “This... this...”; the musical silence that accompanies absorbed activity; the silence of listening to another speak, catching the drift and helping him be clear; the noisy silence of resentment and self-recrimination, loud and subvocal speech but sullen to say it; baffled silence; the silence of peaceful accord with other persons or communion with the cosmos.”*

Reading the only option as tired yesterday and even though slept well again still tired – no other symptoms as eating well also. Suspect the last few weeks took their toll on body, and catch up time. Not bad way to rest since reading is just a way of becoming rich – rich in wisdom, imagination or happiness as said Harry Truman. Did imply that to trainee but in a rush of youth – need to be doing, pushing things, careers to build. Also finished the *Into the Wild* film – sad story of young man with existential crisis triggered by poor parenting who then dies alone in Alaska, just when had learnt the truth – Happiness only when shared.

Of course, would say Herself, sharing makes it fun but what stops it? Too big a question, so for another time. Today, cancel golf session but must get out a bit, if only into the garden to tidy up and need to do some shopping as running out of groceries, stress the body a bit and test it.

Europe gives in and agrees no evidence of adverse side effects from AZ, and supply problems persist. Momentum building for public enquiry into management of covid, though the general mood shifting from covid to resumption of life - the NHS worried about meeting the huge backlog and nervous about early and indiscriminate relaxations. Caution to the wind and time for being bold being urged, risky and difficult decision as France also imposing lockdown again. When will the nightmare end?

On the positive note, CO2 emissions cut during pandemic and more cycling and walking to improve public's health – hope sustained, atleast the latter though former

probably not as folk recognising the ephemeral life may become hedonistic especially with savings and say to hell with tomorrow, live today.

Well, so focus on today, get up and get into the garden for now.

S**tometer: 2/10

20 March 2021

Ah well, Herself insisted on reading the diary but then did not like parts - got a lecture on how talking is important, silence in relationship is selfish; that's is what comes of reading people's private thoughts.

Had another lazy day, with some gentle gardening- tidying up, impatient for plants to grow esp as privacy with neighbours compromised. Then very enjoyable film *Blinded by the light* on Netflix about a Pakistani youngster in Luton who got saved by Bruce Springsteen's songs; very uplifting, based on true story.

Finland happiest country and UK dropped from 13th to 17th place – based on social support, personal freedom, GDP and levels of corruption. No wonder UK dropped, No 10 backs Jacob Rees Mogg's attack on HuffPost journalist – could never understand that guy, such arrogance. Well in good company as The Guardian long read is about the Clown King- how BoJo made it by playing the fool. Bugger others, look after own happiness.

Official start of spring- with equinox today, and later on the Wales grand slam chance and hopefully will beat France this evening. OK, so here is an experiment for next 30 days, look at the top headline in The Guardian and the BBC at the time of writing, Today, The BBC: France and Poland impose new lockdown measures and The Guardian: Michael Rosen backs call for UK Covid enquiry and here in Wales from BBC Don't let Grand Slam cause covid surge. Covid rules today with news of Imran Khan testing positive and top doc says forget foreign holidays this summer. Welsh FM announces more relaxations, with gradual and cautious increments.

Wales also making black history lessons mandatory in schools, good idea, still no news about how to help BC with their BAME covid programme. Send reminders, but not holding much hope. Hard to know what is keeping people busy, apart from some clinical (not all are with Covid efforts)/front line related staff what is the excuse for bureaucrats?

Robert sends a nice note back after getting the Teachers anthology and says should look at lessons from people who undermine one, how not to do things as important and may be something there. Turn leadership on its head and start with counter-intuitive stuff: Less is more, Slow is fast; Follow not lead; What not to do; learn from tyrants?

Still overcast outside, though inside a bit better, still not fit but less tired, so will get down to the vege patch for some preparations and maybe to town to say hello to Susheela and Phil- are struggling with isolation. Check with Herself later, after dance lesson and meantime do some cooking and cleaning.

S**tometer: 2/10

21 March 2021

Drat, Wales lost to France – really exciting match with last minute decider, guess have to wait till next week in case France do not make up the points, tense few days. Must learn the rules so can watch with Herself, fanatic about rugby and may be go to a game, only one ever seen was at Murrayfield in the 1980s.

Managed to get the first game of golf yesterday, Herself was busy so being footloose headed off and not a bad game – not many folk around but then was cloudy. Felt better for it, managed good sleep too.

So, the BBC top story today: Life during pandemic focus for 2021 census, tonight is the night of ten yearly census; The Guardian: Coronavirus: pressure on Johnson not to extend UK curbs – so open up is the call, and Wales: employers looking at flexi working permanently.

In other news Welsh language seems to be capturing imagination globally and according to Duolingo app, an extra 100,000 people have started learning it since Oct 2020 – Yours Truly still in the foothills and dreaming. What exactly was learnt during the pandemic year – hard to say or quantify, survived and did not go nuts? Bit more cooking, walking, reading, learnt about garden/sorting allotment, and guess writing- did finish off lot of past stuff related to work, but failed on music and on making a meaningful contribution professionally to the pandemic effort- though latter for not want of trying. But why does one need to do anything in retirement – just take care of those around and be nice?

Poor Anu, off to Delhi on Tuesday, says will need six covid tests for the month-long visit- there and back, and which cost more than the ticket. But has to go for personal reasons, feel sad for him – has not had an easy life; strange how some just sail through and others never get peace.

Time to head off to Peniel for the day, take the stuff cooked yesterday, Herself says would go and have a look at brother's new house – might get some hints re vegetable planting, and walk around Moel Gasyth. Ruchi sends a message to say will call so Rey can say hello to the mutts. Nice day outside,

S**tometer: 2/10

22 March 2021

Good time in Peniel yesterday- drove to see Mal's new home in Babell and stopped in Pentasaph Franciscan Monastery, very beautiful and well-kept estate, sadly non-viable according to Friar who chatted. Trying to work with an Order in Kerala to take it over. Too many buildings in Wales going to ruins – not historic enough or onerous demands of Listing. Herself ducks out of Book Club meeting – not having done the homework, again, says could not get into Americanah by Adichie! Watched

Midsomer night murders new episode, gave up after an hour- too bizarre, but earlier Come dine with me episode- first for Herself, never seen one before, looks like will be hooked. The things folk do and say to get attention; no wonder society in a mess. Drove back late night to avoid confusing the Census data- both had already filled the forms and said no one staying overnight on 21st.

Whatsapp video call with Ruchi in Mumbai, Rey is growing fast, Herself had not seen for a few weeks and surprised especially how well speaking now. Says covid rising again in India generally and Mumbai in trouble as people blasé. Lessons still being ignored; BBC Panorama's Jane Corbin lists four key areas for effective control:

1. Early and effective action to control borders and monitoring of arrivals
2. Testing, tracking and tracing everyone suspected
3. Welfare support for those in quarantine
4. Effective leadership and consistent and timely public messaging

Wait to see what happens in Wales as more relaxations by FM from today- garden centres and non-essential from main (not non-essential shops themselves) to open amongst other, though wary of English approach, says is rushed and Wales aims to be cautious.

In top stories today: BBC news: PM to phone EU leaders to avoid vaccine export ban – as nations compete and fight for the limited stock compounded by disrupted supply chain problems; The Guardian: Kill the Bill; Twenty police officers injured in Bristol protests- against giving more powers to police, and BBC Wales: PM's covid map very optimistic, says Drakeford.

In more interesting news, plan to publish book based on Douglas Adams' archive – Unbound, a crowdfunding publisher will produce, new way of financing publications. Should look up and get a copy, and also time to re-read it, download the YouTube clip about 42 and send it around as a reminder to folk; was a great writer.

And the article on growing asexuality movement -1% of global population do not want sex, which is not the same as not wanting romance or intimacy. Wonder why in news today? Floods in Australia, Dick says OK as on 11th floor in Sydney though not gone out for rain. And news item on London Mayoral election – interesting list of candidates, maybe vote for Count Binface, thank God for satirists, reminded of David and the Conservatory Party!

Dry but overcast outside, should be OK to get to the vege patch later, some reading and a walk on the agenda for the day.

S**tometer: 2/10

23 March 2021

Anniversary of lockdown – one year ago today, one minute silence at 12 noon, 126172 dead, many preventable sadly. The Conversation lists six lessons the UK should have learnt:

1. Act quickly
2. Act decisively
3. Trust people to follow rules
4. Communicate early
5. Tackle inequality
6. Be prepared

and what does the UK do- clap for the carers and slap the nurses. Hey ho.

Good day yesterday with one bed in vege patch getting ready, wait for the current frost to go and then plant, topped up with a Netflix documentary about the admissions scandal in USA- celebrities and wealthy paying to get progeny into Ivy League colleges; education and health clearly big businesses. And guess what will these ivy leaguers do – become pharma execs and make big bucks as Pfizer exec caught hoping virus never ends, from pandemic to endemic and prices will be jacked up. Reminder of Lord Falconer- the one who praised pandemic for it keeps giving, Hail Corona. Or become politicians or lobbyists or both like Cameron, accused of lobbying on behalf of Greensill – did him favour when PM and then reaped reward as became advisor after leaving No 10.

So, to headlines, BBC News: UK marks one year since coronavirus lockdown, The Guardian: Nicola Sturgeon accused of misleading Scottish Parliament over Alex Salmond although independent review clears her, and here in BBC Wales: Wales remembers those lost to covid on anniversary.

Herself helping next door as Jan needs to return the mobility car after loss of husband, so off to Abergele, little money, poor health wonder how she will cope so far from shops and amenities, worries Herself and also if may get new neighbours and what sort.

Three months into diary writing, and what progress? Is one moving on? So here is how it looks:

“How does one move on? Erase the past and start again? Reinvent self, a new self? A happier, contented, peaceful self? What will it take? If money and health not a problem, does it make it easier? Can the mind switch mode?

And the questions keep swirling, daily, non-stop. Is there a logical approach to this conundrum – trying to create a plan, working systematically? What decisions to make first – get rid of past or embrace future? Why binaries? One or the other, why not both? Accept pain and pleasure, so long as more of latter and identified with neither?

What does it mean to be retired? Become slothful, lazy, fixed on TV, beer can in hand? Is there a balance between busy and not too busy – what could it look like? Is there a formula or is it bespoke? Does it need structure or can it be fluid?

Is the answer, to do whatever gives joy? How to find meaning when nothing appeals? Or what appeals beyond one’s ability? But then make a start, why accept defeat from the beginning?

Is this depression? Is it clinical depression? Or congruent depression - given one's circumstances? And what difference does it make? The worst, or the best, part is all down to oneself- no one, nothing can solve the basic conundrum, down to oneself though once decision made support will flow. Or so they say? Who is they? What do they know of one's problems- Yours Truly is unique, no one has suffered more, ever, life is so unfair? Or is it?

Ah well, work in progress then. So, keep bugging on. Good chat with Tariq, after call with Mahadev. Cloudy outside again, but no rain – tossup between another go at the vege patch or golf, tea first and then decide, and maybe garden centre too, and stop by to say hello to Susheela, Phil needs another procedure as symptoms continue.

S**tometer: 2/10

24 March 2021

Two different worlds – locally life resumed, stood outside at mid-day but no one came to mark the one minute silence, garden centre opened, more people around, even a group of youngsters protesting about right to protest in Ruthin town- no masks! and nationally- sombre, ceremonies marking anniversary, jury out whether BoJo truly repentant, especially as leaked No 10 meeting quoted him saying greed and capitalism saviours from the pandemic.

But maybe not for long as The Guardian report says along with pandemics, climate breakdown – with UK taking over G7 presidency and AI- uncontrolled and soon to be uncontrollable as AI surpasses humans there is a now 1 in 6 risk of existential catastrophe, and societies need resilience. All this hastened by work culture as Goldman Sachs employees express concerns about 95-hour week and the boss says need to go the extra mile - for greed.

And power. Interesting take by Daily Stoic, says it's not that absolute power corrupts, the old adage, but that it shows up the real person – sadly by the time true colours come out often late. But there were signs, with Trump and BoJo and yet..... and the show goes on.

So passed yesterday with another day at golf, cold, cloudy but good fun and on way back stopped by to see Susheela and Phil, he is suffering with chronic rhinitis on top of everything else so suggest Jal Neti and will go over to demonstrate today, says has ordered the pot. Interesting film about the monkey problem in Delhi- uncontrolled growth and uncontrollable as revered also – low budget but real life with poverty and exploitation at heart of it, do not like them as attacked in Shimla and Mumbai Elephanta caves.

Today's headlines, BBC: Patel promised overhaul of asylum seeker rules, The Guardian: Big banks still pouring trillion-dollar finance into fossil fuels and BBC Wales: We're just asking for our officers to be safe- asking them to be prioritised for vaccinations.

While the world grapples with such issues, it's a walk today with Tony, Llangollen way, says Howard will join – should be good fun, and then may be Peniel after some work on the vege patch. Herself says phone kaput, so take out old iphone – not been used since India – and will take it over, in case helps esp with BBC Sounds/internet etc whilst gets the other fixed/replaced.

Thought of life without work seems strange, caught between have a structure to the day or go with flow every day, but surely some goals – like what? Music off and on, writing lost as no inspiration, vege patch maybe, golf could be- and maybe need to find partners and join seniors- though do enjoy on own also? Guess travel and social outings – theatre/eating out will help, so keep plodding. Boring stuff, mundane life- he woke up, after fitful sleep, pootered aimlessly, then picked up energy and went to golf/walk, back to read, have a drink (sometimes), cook, watch TV film and sleep. In between occasional phone call, but only a very handful folk to talk to and not much on WhatsApp. Repeat..... again.....

Cheering reminder on BBC R 3 about simmer dim being welcomed in The Shetlands- ah well, that is something to look forward to. So, pull the finger out and get out there for the walk today....

S**tometer: 2/10

25 March 2021 (Peniel)

Short but nice walk with Tony and Howard over Llantysilio – history lesson from Howard about limestone quarry there and who also wondered whether Herself would consider joining the AONB Partnership Group and then off to the vege patch. Strange to see really large monkey puzzle trees in the woodland there – wonder how and why? Tony spent few minutes trying to figure out the distant bird moving on tree tops – and won't accept it was a seagull until came much closer; unusual behaviour. Brian came along to help shift the heavy stones on the field later on yesterday, older but much fitter, and managed to sort out rest of the beds and shed- looking better. Then for a good evening in Peniel- Herself made a nice picnic and off to Brenig overlooking the lake with not a soul in sight, then drove in cloudy dusk over the moor, wonderful. Topped by another session of Grand Design, wonderful folly conversion in Wales by a young couple- possibly a folly as Herself brings up the point about building one more house. To be continued...

Eric phoned to postpone and coming on Friday instead, so stayed over in Peniel last evening and back this morning, bringing old bookcases for the shed.

Two interesting covid stories today- a group at Blavatnik School in Oxford tracked all policies across the globe – the largest repository, highlighting China, Taiwan, Vietnam and New Zealand as examples of countries which managed to flatten the curve and keep it there; not like the BoJo sombrero claim, and how a conversation on a bus journey in London between Martin Landray and Jeremy Farrar led to setting up the UK's Recovery Trial to speed up the discovery of effective treatment – turning

all the previous bureaucracy on its head. Will lessons be learnt and gains sustained? Or the old tensions come back?

In the BBC news: Vaccine passport decisions may be up to pub landlords – so prevaricating again, The Guardian: EU leaders push back against bloc's plans to halt covid vaccine exports- given supply chain problems, and in Wales: Tourism businesses champing at the bit to open. So, watch out in next few months, chaos or calm.

Clearly money being made, or to be made, as Adar Poonawala of the Serum Institute of India rents a Mayfair mansion for £50k per..... week! Holy schmoly. And Dorsey's first ever tweet goes for \$2.9 million – the owner thinks it's the Mona Lisa of tweets.

Glad some of the money is going where needed as Scotland offers 4% raise to NHS staff – hope rest take note, but then is it the looming election gimmick. Feel sorry for Raman as New Zealand announces more stringent rules for visitors- no idea when people like him will be allowed.

Overcast but not too cold, and turning to rain tomorrow and so might as well get another game, so book golf, hard to get slots till much later in the afternoon, but should be OK.

S**tometer: 1/10

26 March 2021

Not so good golf yesterday- it's all in the mind, if not calm then game rubbish; earlier gardening not much help though tidied up lot more. Strange how minor change of plan, with Eric postponing can disturb. Rounded off with *The Last Sentence* film about the Swedish journalist, Torgny Segertstedt, who challenged the Nazi regime- interspersed with complicated love life, comes the time, comes the man- will always be people fighting for the right thing. Interesting and apt quote from it: *Cattle die, kinsmen die, thou wilt also die; but I do know one that thing that never dies: the judgement on the dead* (in the film he says the reputation of the dead).

But where are the right people now, with no roadmap to address inequality- tough on covid, tough on causes of covid – as clearly the biggest determinant of preventable deaths. The best that the parliament could offer was the offer by Sir Walker to walk around with a pint of milk as his protest against extension of covid restrictions – not that he knows the price of pint of milk as he confessed, and ofcourse, walk and walker- irony mimicking life. Life is a joke but that should not translate to letting jokers run the show.

The stuck ship in Suez canal affecting as both sister's families in shipping- holding up billions of trade, watch and wait, be a while before cleared. Big is not always beautiful or useful.

The BBC News: China bans 5 UK MPs after abuse sanctions – spreading lies about Uighur Muslims, among them Iain Duncan Smith not known for his humanity and

care of vulnerable in this country, The Guardian; snap, leads with same story and BBC Wales; snap. Ah well, now that all is sorted in the UK, focus on elsewhere?

Anyway, Wales opening up tomorrow- Stay Local to become Stay Wales, so start planning day trips though shops/cafe not yet, but there will be crowds, no doubt esp with Easter coming up. Stephanie asks to join the NHS Covid History project Advisory Board- clearly balance between investigative journalism and history or is there, will find out; Are we being good ancestors- did we leave a good record, of the Truth?

Off to pick up prescription and books at the library, then join Raman for his webinar- Zoom fatigue setting in according to an interesting video on WhatsApp, based on Brick in the Wall soundtrack, kids wanting to be back in schools, lovely; then prepare for the XXXX Trustee application first stage – have to say something on video for 90 seconds, seems such a short time so sound bites?

Nice to sit in the conservatory and look at life coming back into the garden- pink camellias, daffodils, and dog-flowers (are they, must ask Herself) and may be the photinia, pyracantha and jasmines will take off, need them for privacy from neighbours. Herself looking forward to rugby this evening – will France destroy Wales' dream of Grand Slam. will go over and watch with her and stay the weekend. Cloudy though not too much rain at present. Says slept well, so that makes two- as did manage last night.

S**tometer: 1/10

27 March 2021 (Peniel)

It's all happening- Scotland beat France, what a game- Herself happy and ofcourse meant Wales won the six nations title last night; Wales lockdown easing and from today:

- Stay local restrictions will be lifted
- Self-contained accommodation can re-open
- Outdoor children's activities can take place
- Libraries and archive services can re-open
- 6 people from 2 households can meet outdoors, socially distanced,

and tonight clocks will change.

The sun is shining as sat having breakfast with Herself and life seems better, remember the start last year. Sent Son#1 a message as he can celebrate Scotland win (having been born in Edinburgh, a Morningsider, no less) whilst Wales triumphs: win-win; he otherwise is an All-Blacks supporter. So, a good day yesterday, with a very windy walk around Moel Gasyth followed by Risotto and TV.

Started reading *Frances Partridge diaries*, last of the Bloomsbury Group- starts in 1940 so focussed on war, not unlike pandemic scenario. More interesting than Sarton, which was abandoned as was Fermor- admired latter's detailed knowledge

and writing but did not get it. Interesting chat with Herself, cautions against benchmarking or imitation, rather stop reading for a while and create own - tend to agree as enough in subconscious from long decades of reading and time to give it a voice? In any case as read more realise that at heart issues are same - and apart from very limited writing which is timeless most is ephemeral, has limited shelf life.

The theme has been in head for a while from professional observations over last few years as see new generations (re) discover old concepts afresh; feel happy that they found it or sad at wasted effort, could have told them easily? Also bit of jealousy as new messiahs emerge, Yours Truly and ilk in oblivion - guess that's how it has always been?

The BBC news: Over 70s get booster jabs from September; The Guardian: Booster shots to go to at-risk groups from September; BBC Wales: First UK nation to lift travel ban - within Wales though, from lockdown to stay local to stay Wales.

Difficult to square jabs promise with other news re European ban on export and Poonawala having to prioritise India; countries looking inward not global. Another case of over promise and under-deliver by BoJo? Guess his biggest concern is 6 May local elections and if he can ride the current euphoria with low numbers of cases, high vaccine rates, easing of rules and general public apathy with covid he will be fine, lucky again!

Not so lucky there as Indian cases on rise, Mumbai and Delhi both affected, latter ruling out lockdowns and emphasising need to live with it. Guess means no travel there yet. It will need to be Zoom for a while, not the same as Rey, not seen since Jan 2020 has changed completely, such a wonderful boy- at this rate will be 3 plus by the time hold him again. Anyway, all seem to be managing so something to be thankful for.

Today's job to clear up and burn hedge cuttings, get rid of compost and bin and prepare to move the shed to new base, and to visit Cefyn later! Sounds good.

S**tometer:1/10

28 March 2021

Had some idea but his house, a listed arts and crafts design from early 20th century was very interesting, nice original features and tastefully decorated as Cefyn proudly took us on grand tour, not to mention the three-tiered grounds and overlooking the estuary and Conwy castle from Deganwy. Lot of work needed though and ofcourse still working through the estates and house clearances of Mair and neighbours- will keep him and Martin busy.

Went to Llandudno for walk after, the goats down on the street and putting up a performance with clashing of horns for the few visitors, though mainly empty and in parts ghost town. So, not a bad day as earlier managed to tidy up the garden in Peniel and burnt off the hedge cuttings, lot of smoke everywhere and both smelling like smoked kippers.

Not sure why feel tired- physically, could barely keep awake till 830 last night, that deep tiredness- Herself prescribes multivitamins and wonders if anaemic. What is the meaning of life comes up again and life is a death sentence and so in the reflective mood, partly due to weather- rain and wind outside this morning- and counted six people who died in last few months, sadly including two suicides- both troubled young women. Noting life going too fast, Herself draws the picture of the home needed - with long list of must haves- sea view, trees, ground, terrace/balcony, study/studio, sauna/jacuzzi and get carried away over breakfast.

No excuse for not getting on with it since looks like earth has a reprieve as asteroid Apophis unlikely to strike for another 100 years! Though Herself says wait to see what happens this year and do some travel first. Touchy subject as no idea when as Germany facing covid crisis and Europe braced for third wave though idea of spending time in India appealing, and to get Shetland out of system. For now, it's today- asked Brian to come over for lunch, make Puree Aloo and Seviyan - traditional Sunday Indian fare, walk unlikely so maybe TV later – sadly not cricket as not on main channels, final one day between India and England, so checking on BBC news and sister keeps sending WhatsApp updates, guess mum watching too.

In BBC news: US condemns Myanmar reign of terror - as more killed, The Guardian: PM branded irresponsible for back to office calls- will be interesting as how it plays out eventually with the full spectrum from work anywhere like Nationwide Building society to spy cameras to monitor call centre staff by Teleperformance for its 380,000 workers and BBC Wales: Heart-breaking wait for couple waiting to travel abroad for IVF.

BoJo riding the vaccine wave for local elections- says success due to capitalist energy, and England will recover jab by jab, job by job, except latter mainly for Amazon and ilk.

S**tometer: 2/10

29 March 2021

Had forgotten about life BC- Before Covid- and got reminded yesterday as had a leisurely two hours lunch with Brian, Indian comfort food topped with Masala chai, and then a very breezy and rainy walk on the hills; that's how life should be. Need to do more of this stuff before go mental, more than already, and so Herself going to check with Mary and Graham about a get together and also plan atleast one picnic a week. Alice wants to come and stay in annex for the Easter weekend- be great if they can!

Had a good chat with Bill Worth, former boss, who rang after getting the anthology and reminisced, very decent chap and blessed to have him in life. Watched a nice film: *The African Doctor* based on a true story, about discrimination in rural France – good mix of humour and serious. Very apt as had just seen this in Partridge's diaries – her entry for August 31st 1942 about an American officer telling a collection of English ladies on how to treat blacks: "*They must beware of any friendly impulse*

towards hem, never let them into their houses, and above all never treat them as human beings, because they were not. Frances (Penrose) says the faces of the ladies were a study in delighted horror, as they heard that none of their daughter's virginities were safe and that all blacks carried knives. 'How are the poor blacks to be entertained' asked one brave lady. 'Oh, you needn't worry about that. They are always happy and make their own entertainment by singing and laughing'.

Find solace from Maria Popova who quotes Walt Whitman: *After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, love, and so on – have found none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear – what remains, asks he, and then answers: Nature remains .. the trees, fields, the changes of seasons- the sun by day and the stars of heaven by night.*

Holi festival today - subdued affair in India, unlike past with colours and get togethers says family, no proper 'jhoom' (frolic) only Zoom, sad. Scrolling messages and some Holi jokes WhatsApp on waking up and then phone call from sister saying mum has fired the maid – dread talking to Raman as he has to manage the consequences especially today- being Holi. What to do with elderly unmanageable parent – end up arguing with Herself who senses frustration but hard to explain as has no idea of India and family life there, feel worse at taking it out on her and so head back to Llanbedr to sort out head. But after a slow dance with Neil Diamond singing If you go away on a summer's day – not enough of course. Need the break to catch up on some work, both actually as Herself needs to get into studio also.

In the BBC News: Suez canal rescue workers shift stranded ship – does not mean clear though; The Guardian: UK Covid: 'fresh air' safety message highlights No 10 concerns about rule-breaking as England eases lockdown and in Wales: Second Covid jab prioritised in vaccine slowdown.

No sign of Eric- so need to ring him this evening, weather turning, rain stopped and some signs of sun. Better clean up annex in case visitors and otherwise a catch-up day.

S**tometer: 3/10

30 March 2021 (Llanbedr)

Tired day yesterday, little energy –had a chat with Raman, nothing really to say, he has to deal with fallout from mum's actions- but reminded him to take care of self as mum not helpable. Feel helpless and sad. Sat around and out of boredom watched an Indian film on Netflix – low budget, middle class, family drama in contemporary India, enjoyable though the name escapes now! Reading Partridge and mindless scrolling of news on iphone.

BoJo's race commission likely to scrap use of BAME label- no detail though - on face can see the point as resonates though not sure of recommendations, doubt if it will make any more difference than most of the others before it. The mood in USA with start of George Floyd trial also pushing for changes. In other news Servier a French pharma firm fined £2.3m for deaths of up to 2000 due to drug called Mediator for

diabetes- life is cheap, here the Lighthouse lab for covid testing filmed secretly about its poor practices- so no idea whether tests reliable, and now it is Canada's turn to raise concerns about blood clots and AZ vaccine.

Had to turn to Daily Stoic with its message about Less is More, pandemic has shown the value of appreciating small things- going for drive around the seashore from Deganwy to Colwyn Bay and seeing goats in Llandudno town makes one thankful, or should do.

Wake up tired again, though slept better- went to sleep around 10. Wake up to look for positives- interesting story on BBC news about photographer Daniel Freeman's journey taking pictures of small towns lit by streetlights, shop fronts and moonlight in America, some lovely images. Used to love small town America (and generally in Ireland, Scotland and now Wales) and reminded of Whalan, Minnesota, so small that the annual parade stands still and people walk around it- Less is more.

So, catch Jeff, the postie who says will bring the parcel tomorrow, sadly despite covid needs signature- must be the one Ruchi sent with Indian paintings, looking forward. And arrange to have tea with Ceinwin and Robert later this week, and Phil's birthday next Monday- take coats in case rains in gardens, but atleast can meet! Small things, big differences.

BBC News; World leaders call for treaty on future pandemics- whilst screwing WHO; The Guardian: Nobody is safe until everyone is safe/Leaders urge global pandemic treaty – whilst screwing WHO, destroying the NHS and weakening health systems globally with promotion of neo-liberal policies and indiscriminate health and social policies; BBC Wales: City's homeless numbers plummet since lockdown – in Cardiff, and charities pushing for more permanent changes for rehousing them.

Herself had a power cut last evening, so no University Challenge and Connect final-favourite programmes, says the techie turned up at 1130pm to come fix the transformer at the back of the field, through her garden. So little sleep. Must tidy up house today and also self-care, time for another own haircut and beard trim, and not just sit around.

S**tometer: 3/10

31 March 2021

Herself on mercy mission so came over with a picnic and drove up to the Famau car park, nice quiche on bench looking over the vale, lots of folk around – weather and rules relaxations, and then walked up Fenlli with the mutts- better as not many go that way. Watched sun go down and all seemed right with the world.

Earlier had sat in the vege patch, watching sheep looking after two young lambs just delivered- missed the delivery, would have made a good video for Rey, something magical about life taking shape as slowly mother and babies bonded, licking and suckling, taking wobbly steps, standing and lying down. Man is the most dependent in terms of its progeny, especially the better off ones- richer the more spoilt.

Enjoyed reading more of Partridge and the passage – *“I live for pleasure these days, and find no difficulty in filling my days and nights with it- reading, writing, eating, sleeping, gardening (mildly), looking for flowers and butterflies, listening to wireless, talking, thinking, playing my violin, being with Ralph- there is no end to the delights. And what do I do for suffering humanity in return? Or anyone else except Ralph, for that matter? All the same I do quite seriously envy people who feel they do some good in the world. Ralph never stops believing that if one is not doing harm one can congratulate oneself... “*

Useful says Herself too, though still feel need to do something- but what, wait to see what the Race Commission says when report published though can see some sense in leaked recommendations – but the devil is always in the detail. The fundamental problem is not being part of any set up and hence not easy to do anything as most stuff, apart from becoming a commentator – something which feel is distasteful – not much can be done alone, when interested in social change. So may be Ralph is right, and keep going, with friends.

It is what it is in the rest of the world- the Suez canal has opened, Trump sets up website to rewrite history, BoJo and Arcuri affair in the news and ofcourse he denies wrong doing as Mayor of London – mixing work and (carnal) pleasure almost acceptable in politics, Volkswagen to be renamed Voltswagen – to mark switch to electric cars, not an April Fool’s joke but serious, and UK’s hottest day yesterday in 53 years- yes, it was hot, T-shirt day.

Yes, it was the parcel from India, and no he did not actually need the signature but has to hand over personally- covid rules, no point discussing so thank Jeff, the postie, Herself would be delighted with the paintings. May stimulate as says not happy with own work- guess the year long absence not helped. So started the day, another hot day it seems, gardening and planting, and reading and thinking and listening to music..... Actually, if done right time does fly- should take more care of walking boots and clean them, wash and clean car, do the ironing – all stuff ignored or rushed. Have to make work of daily necessities and enjoy them, rather than hanker after what if and if only.

Read about the Japanese and their Cherry Blossom parties to mark the change of season, and the colours are coming out though the usual purple of heather and yellow of gorse on hills still some time off. Nature is not yet in Yours Truly’s nature, really, sadly.

The BBC: Shielding coming to an end for millions – 4 million freed but are they actually free; The Guardian: UK an exemplar of racial equality: No 10’s commission concludes- bit provocative so will wait; BBC Wales: Teacher-assessed grades creating too much pressure on pupils and teachers

S**tometer: 2/10

01 April 2021

Lovely day yesterday- how life should be. Rowy dropped in, had not seen her for a long time, socially distant coffee in the sun- she brought her own as needs to be careful with her medical condition, great to see her and catch up. Mark and Val showed their latest work on the house- very clever people and have done it all tastefully, swap sloe gin (to them) with almond cake (from them) –save it for today when Herself comes. Followed by good day in the garden and planted the first crops- bit late but 1st earliest potatoes, onion sets and seeds, cauliflower and leeks, fingers crossed. Evening rested watching programme about Wales and nature along rivers.

And getting annoyed with the Race Commission report, one day later and would have been seen as the April Fool's Day joke – could not resist so fire off letters including to The Guardian:

“Dear Editor

With reference to the Race report published today, I am not sure if it is stupid since the last thing that the country needed was fuel on an already volatile situation or tactical by taking the other extreme position to provoke debate to enable meeting somewhere in between. Let us see how the Government responds finally and my plea is do not under-estimate the anger of generations of ethnic minorities or indeed the support of moderates like me who see the need for change (<https://www.thehealthcareleadership.academy/time-to-rethink-our-approach-to-racial-discrimination-in-the-nhs-rajan-madhok/>). All lives matter and this can only happen if we find common ground first.

Yours faithfully”

How not to do things. Or being cynical, was it pre-election ploy, to stoke tensions given May elections?

And meantime keep messing things up- Test and Trace made little difference so that is £37 billion down the drain, Rowy has to wait 2 and ½ years for an operation now and outsourcing to American interests continue though Open Democracy claims a success against Palantir, the data company. And not even let people die in peace- as Henry Marsh starts again about assisted dying asking for an inquiry.

But what one can do is to dine in first or business class on the empty planes on runways – in Japan and Singapore, around £380 a meal – and sold out! Well got to use them somehow.

Overcast today- hopefully will lift later, coffee with Ceinwen and Robert and dinner with Herself later on the agenda and some more gardening, reading, writing. Supposed to be another announcement by Drakeford about rules in Wales, so await. Ha, Ha the Voltswagen was an April Fool's joke or was it; The Guardian has quiz on previous jokes: in 2019 Duolingo app claimed to have added a new service – its green owl logo would come round in person and bully one into doing their lessons and there was a choice of three flavours: encouraging owl, disappointed owl and passive aggressive owl, This year Duolingo says it is dispensing language lessons on loo-rolls.

The BBC News: Met officer investigated over rape allegations – raped two female colleagues; The Guardian: Fewer than a quarter with symptoms in UK are requesting test – and only half self-isolate, and BBC Wales: Pubs could reopen and families meet indoors in May.

Hey what happened, the electricity has gone off- drat as had just started the cooking, hope comes back or will be a take away! Not much sleep last night, no reason- constant see saw; have asked GP for blood tests.

S**tometer: 2/10

02 April 2021

Another day gone, was it wasted or worthwhile – since survival can be enough at times? Not sure electricity outage fully to blame but did throw off, and overcast weather, restored by mid-day and company guy called around to apologise and says may get compensation – wow. Herself came over and went to pick up rhubarb crown from Susheela's and to Mair's house to support Cefyn who was down there to clear up- feeling low, not unsurprisingly given is now looking after very demanding neighbour placed in nursing home. Mair left some things for Yours Truly – sad and glad. Tea and hot cross buns with Robert and Ceinwen- outside with coats on in their lovely garden, nice afternoon; decided to drive over to Brian's after dinner- to get some fresh air and counter cabin fever; took some leftover Indian food, atleast he seems to enjoy it, or says so. His building project very impressive – though worry as works alone shifting heavy stuff, moving walls and holding up ceilings! Started reading *Pride and Prejudice* at Herself insistence on reading Jane Austen, to get some culture and says ideas about writing.

Looked at some poems about political correctness – given had come up as an issue whilst planning the session for 6th April, and so being incorrigible put these in along with others submissions, gotta laugh. Especially as all the news yesterday was about the Race Commission report – the problem will be sustaining rage, yesterday's news tomorrow's fish wrapper.

Heard back from XXXX in XXXXX, says partner YYYY has Alzheimer's and felt very sad, left it a bit late to get in touch with them; that makes three close ones with dementia; worry about it a lot as would not want to be in that position; keep postponing power of attorney and other legal stuff and should get on, who knows. Hang on to Herself, will know what to do hopefully!

The BBC News: Dozens of MPs criticise divisive Covid passports- proof of vaccination status, building on vaccine certificate to enter pubs; The Guardian: Dozens dead after express service derails in tunnel – The Taiwan train crash and BBC Wales: Shielders could become prisoners in own home – due to loss of confidence, having been lonely may struggle to reintegrate within communities. Well, dozens seems a 'popular' word today – so may there will be dozen of Easter eggs, but very small ones! Herself keeps complaining about too much sugar whilst reaching for chocolates.

Easter bank holiday starting today- nice weather – so stay away from Famau, the crowds will be out, decamp to Peniel for the weekend later but first some more prep on vege patch, ironing, washing. Sleep elusive again last night.

S**tometer: 3/10

03 April 2021 (Peniel)

An outdoors day with sowing in the vege patch - need to get more equipment - cloches and greenhouse to begin with, and then sorting fencing in Peniel. Surprising difference in temperature between Llanbedr and Peniel- quite cold up here esp in the evening on the walk, nice and clear though. Looked like a gritter in the distance- won't be surprised. And then Doors indoors at night- documentary about the group, still love them, always listen during flights especially often landing back in Manchester to the singing of Jim Morrison. Good day, though tired.

AZ vaccine causing worries as seven unusual clot deaths reported- hard to know what is going on, no news on second dose yet. Interesting article about the untalked pandemic of air pollution killing 8.7 million each year, and ofcourse more misery as NHS waiting lists sky rocket. Bigger problems for faithless people- as Faith atleast provided support through its own community, man is not meant to be alone.

Managed some sleep, only pee breaks so not bad. Beautiful sunny outside over breakfast, hill and skies scene like paintings by Herself, has been busy in the studio, and though biased has done good, proud. Will celebrate Easter in spirit this weekend and some hot cross buns! Asked Cefyn to drop in if coming this way, to cheer him up. Weather holding up so get on with more hard jobs in the garden in Peniel, try and get the steps done today before cold spell.

BBC News: Two visitors for care home residents - finally, poor lonely folk and suffering families; The Guardian: NHS feels strain as tens of thousands of staff suffer long covid- but is there a plan both clinically and logistically esp as waiting lists rising also; BBC Wales: Clean up after huge party in Cardiff Bay- was bound to rebound after cooping up.

S**tometer: 2/10

04 April 2021

Easter Sunday- in the spirit reflect on the three most important questions: What is the meaning of life, Are we being good ancestors? and How are you going to live today? Herself brings it down to practicals: Have I enough food in my belly, Have I a roof over my head and Do I have people in my life who love me? And sends Yours Truly to go and make breakfast.

About time too, as usually get waited upon and need to fight out the tiredness- mainly mental and so need less thinking and more doing time. Did few things yesterday including a visit from Cefyn and Martin, sitting in sun over tea and buns- they needed a break from having to sort out Mair and neighbours' estates and life. Some good ideas about Mair's harp going to Shillong and how to use it to promote

music exchanges- something to work on. Good walk after through the muddy fields, losing paths but tired mutts, and selves so prawn pasta and early to bed.

Up to 1956 with Partridge: drat, she made no entry for 19 Dec 1954, would have been interesting to see what one person thought of/did the day Yours Truly arrived on earth.

Well, there it is - Alan Duncan, his deputy when foreign secretary, says BoJo a clown with no diplomatic skills, Alan and millions others, not kind to May or Cameron either. But what can Joe Public do, esp as Starmer getting battered by his own - his anniversary today, What has he done? Interesting article few days ago about past PMs, even TB did not enjoy it, who was it said it ends in failure? Maybe due to hubris as David Owen wrote in his book.

The BBC: Covid passport trials for mass events- like sports matches, conferences and night clubs; The Guardian: BoJo to give go ahead for covid passport trials to begin; and BBC Wales: Covid fears prompts bay cordon and police patrols- after Cardiff 'party'

Here are the three questions re Covid vaccine: Does it protect the person - milder illness but not preventable? Does it stop the spread: No, still can carry and pass on; How long the protection lasts: after one, two doses and when booster needed- who knows? Maybe time to pretend science any use - and stop controlling? Or clear workable rules- masks (but clean); no touching (not even elbows); ventilation; distance; and hand hygiene? And if in doubt test and isolate? And either employers or HMG compensates for isolation? Hammer it home every day!

Not likely to happen so focus on how to live today- fresh air and sort out garden in Peniel and walking later. Keep the world small, it's enough.

Shitometer:2/10

05 April 2021

What a bonus- Dean and Ashley came for their weekly shower and Dean got roped into shifting the tool shed; dismantled and re-erected next to garden shed room so much tidier arrangement. Swing shifted onto concrete base and lo, bigger garden. Enjoyable work, celebrated with nice lunch and then tidying up. Mission accomplished drove to Brenig and walk near the cairn, up to stone circle and bumped into Chris Madoc Jones, retired GP, avid historian and old friend of Herself; good to hear more history, says knew about Sam Ramaiah in the 1980s! Will introduce him to Osler and History of Medicine Wales Clubs, and has offered to show historic Denbigh. Rerun of Columbo on TV- dozed off. Agree with Herself- was a really good day. Except for one sad news- Rose passed away, no medical details but seems like a fast death from bowel cancer. Such an amazing woman, held the U3A together for so long.

Chat with Umesh, says bought a small hotel on Kovalam beach, Kerala, lovely pictures- so another thing on the loooong To Do/Visit list. No idea when.

Maria Popova reminds about kindness, quoting Tolstoy “*Nothing can make our life, or the lives of other people, more beautiful than perpetual kindness,*” and KINDNESS by Naomi Shihab Nye

*Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.
Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.
Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.*

Also mentions On Being Project

https://onbeing.org/?mc_cid=19a189e78e&mc_eid=37569aa38e - worth looking.

Raman sends 366 meditations from Daily Stoic- happy that he has found stoicism, needs it. Says had a good time in Khandala- garden looked lovely in pictures. Mum managing somehow, all afraid to intervene as nothing practical can be done- so will deal with problems when they happen, why suffer twice: imagining now and dealing later.

As predicted, rain, some hail, cloudy start today- so indoors, go to B& Q to get stuff and back to Llanbedr later. Phil's birthday so will drop by later. Is it being kind to Herself, to bugger off back to Llanbedr, esp days when reminders of mortality with Rose gone now? But maybe kindness is not to push, go easy and with the flow- and one day...

Meantime, The BBC News: Twice weekly tests offered to all; BBC Wales: New school curriculum to be delayed to aid pupils - allow teachers to catch up post pandemic, the biggest school changes in 30 years; The Guardian: Everyone in England to be offered twice weekly tests. Feel confused about these tests - does it make sense scientifically and cost-effective.

S**tometer: 1/10

06 April 2021

B & Q shopping trip limited use as few things in stock, Phil's birthday get together cancelled as too cold, and so it turned out to be an indoors day after return from Peniel, and did non-stop TV: *In the name of the father* film about Guildford four with Daniel Day Lewis, followed by *Page Eight* with Bill Nighy, both with other excellent actors- so overdosed on the shitty world with corrupt systems, and topped off with a documentary on the 2014 Everest disaster. Surprisingly better sleep afterwards. so, despite the weather not a bad day yesterday.

Not sure spoof- unlikely as on *The Conversation* – seemingly used Nespresso pods being used to make a home testing covid kit; will it work with other pods? For those worried about re-joining the world after long spell of loneliness- scientists also say that the brain will rewire after long isolation once start meeting people again, confidence will come back. Sadly, what may also come back is night pollution as more dark skies during pandemic and people able to enjoy the stars.

Herself motoring on and spent the day in the studio, or so she said, but happy for her.

The BBC News: Covid passports are one option says minister – be interesting to see what happens finally as public health regulations devolved in UK, will four nations agree; The Guardian: Labour opposed to discriminatory and confusing Covid status certificates – for going to pubs and matches etc; BBC Wales: Wales over 50s vaccine target success disputed – supposed to be by Mid-April so guess there is time, so why the fuss today.

Wonder if should maintain a Covid and politics free journal for a while? What would life be without either? Vege patch, walk with/without mutts, picnics with Herself, tea with friends Does not sound too boring, or does it?

Funny weather outside- sun and snow/hail alternating; anyway, time to do some proper writing also and general catch up. And cook later. Better send this to Herself- wants to read every week- trying to make sure the Curmudgeon is not going off rails.

S**tometer: 1/10

07 April 2021

Got carried away by further news coverage around the Race Commission report and wrote a letter to the HSJ, arrogance of politicians treating serious issues like games and so had to get it off chest, not sure what it will do, if anything especially as there is little unity amongst opposers either. Another chat with the Betsi Cadwaladr chappie who promises to explore how to 'use' Yours Truly to support their work for race inequality – will know soon enough if anything likely. Weather precluded work outside but did manage to get a walk later though very cold and got up the hill and back to TV – another Bill Nighy film: *Turks and Caicos Island*, seems to be doing well in the spy roles and then an old film *Sleepers*- cast studded including De Niro and Hoffman about abuse of boys in a correctional facility; ofcourse denied by the establishment in both. Herself locked into the studio, panicking about framing the paintings as time short – is a perfectionist, whilst Yours Truly is Good Enough for some things and especially in these times. So passed yesterday, helped by talk with Tariq earlier managed sleep. Reading set aside lately as TV taking over, guess whatever works should be the rule.

Sonu's birthday today- in Delhi on leave from Dubai, got reminded that he is now 47, remember the day he was born in Vohra Nursing Home, time flies. More WhatsApp messages about old age these days, contemporaries getting philosophical – one good thing lately has been reconnections with old mates, be nice to actually meet also, and hopefully travel soon. Though increasing doubts about AZ vaccine – both side-effects with clots and supply, and so not sure how travel will work. Good Daily Stoic about studying philosophy being like annexing past into own time, and so need to read the greats but not as historical accounts, more about the person- to know the real one, what made them tick.

Raman appointed as the Belgian Diplomatic Economic Advisor in Mumbai, happy to hear as has done a lot for them over the years. Spoke to him and mum, seems to be managing.

The BBC News: AZ blood clots update due as UK starts Moderna jabs – MHRA investigating along with EMA and both due to report back, meantime UK getting ready for Moderna; The Guardian: MHRA should issue new guidance on AZ jab urgently, says health committee chair; BBC Wales: Moderna vaccine UK rollout begins in Wales - Elle Taylor from Ammanford received the jab at the Glangwili Hospital in Carmarthen. Wonder what will happen now between AZ and Moderna, and any case supply of AZ also slow- waiting to hear about second dose.

Outside still very cold, started with frost on ground, so not likely to be much in the vege patch today. Herself coming over later and so cooking on the agenda, some ironing and tidying up. And reading. Tariq interested in the S**tometer concept – says natural to have 2-3, life is more strife than joy, and any case fluctuates throughout the day. Says just be.

S**tometer: 2/10

08 April 2021

So yet again did not do anything to save the world yesterday – went for a walk up to car park through another route up the hill, planted the snowdrops picked on Moel Gasyth, another walk around Llanbedr Hall with mutts and Herself as they arrived for dinner. Tried Moong dal – asks if good for bowel, guess will find out. Dipping occasionally into Partridge and Austen- neither to be read at a stretch; Chris gave *Life of Osler* book – a tome, started reading, lightly written, and so may carry on. Intend giving the book to Graham for the Club. His Presidential address tonight- wish him luck and looking forward.

Slept OK, though fuzzy headed this morning, spoke to Anu in Delhi to check all OK- impossible to talk sensibly with him, gets caught up in minutiae and goes around in circles, so had to stop after 20 minutes. In the strange mood went on Twitter to see what has happened in the former world – not sure want to reconnect with it, does not look like much has changed in the NHS. Different people but same problems. So going to be one of those days- and to avoid getting down, book golf later this afternoon. Vivek Chabbra sends a spiritual book about Art of Living Guru – nice gesture, though not reading that is required.

And look for light stuff like the story of the Welshman, Brian Robson, who being homesick in Australia and unable to afford flight fare, got himself posted as luggage in 1965, in a box except got rerouted to Los Angeles instead of London from Melbourne; says wants to track down the two fellas who helped him with his plan, by nailing the wooden box shut and posting it. Great escape/crate escape; thinking inside/outside box!

The BBC News: more than enough vaccines for under-30s – Hancock- since they should not have AZ and hence need Moderna or Pfizer; The Guardian: UK expert urges people in 20s to keep getting jabs – says Spiegelhalter; and BBC Wales: Men think they can grope me because I can't see –says a visually impaired woman as report shows disabled women twice as likely to experience sexual assault.

S**tometer: 3/10

09 April 2021

Golf to the rescue – cold and windy but managed 13 holes, though lost two balls – unusual as was getting good, character-building game, followed by Osler Club Presidential Address session in the evening- Graham gave the talk on Osler's last patient- Mrs Fulton in Glasgow in 1919, and charged £525 guineas (about £28k in today's money) –seemingly based on guinea per mile rate and he came from Oxford, sadly both the woman and Osler died a few months later (separate reasons!). Interesting Club and felt bad for Graham as otherwise would have been a proper pomp and ceremony in London, and he had to be content with Zoom. Drifted into

listening to own interviews for NHS at 70 – felt pleased, not sure if anyone will ever listen or take note. On that happy note to bed, and managed sleep again. BP seems OK – though fluctuates a bit esp the systolic and wonder if change medication- due to talk to GP next week. Trick to stay calm.

Interesting follow up letters in The Guardian re end of life – want wishes to be respected, says many writers, but will they be enough; retired consultant writing: *“I can not be the only doctor who worries about how they might have to quietly manage their own death., should the need arise. What doctors want for themselves should be legally available to others”*. Not morbid but this is a recurring theme on mind these days. Another article about the term BAME having had its day and what should replace it- feel like saying: how about Person, people- why this obsession to attach labels and create the other. Is not the ultimate objective to recognise everyone as unique? Worry about becoming too preachy and not worldly anymore.

Bit of work today- trying for an alternative arrangement for Akhil to develop his plans for patient safety in India, after the closure of own charity, hope something can be done; he is tireless and very committed. Then off to Peniel for the weekend – may be that is the way for now, anyway important not to think/plan too much, let it be. Wales rules relaxations being brought forward – with travel outside/into Wales allowed from 12 April, hey ho.

The BBC News: People can start thinking about foreign travel – from summer, though costs of tests etc deterrent; The Guardian: leads with same and BBC Wales: Household mixing and gym reopening brought forward.

Wales elections main focus in the news otherwise with Drakeford from Welsh Labour outlining interesting plans including Clwyd and Dee Valley AONB becoming national park and focus on health services, for example. Not looking in detail as not much of a believer in political process, only humanity.

S**tometer: 1/10

10 April 2021

One of those moments yesterday- 12 minutes past 12 noon when BBC interrupted to announce the death of Prince Philip, aged 99, and then it was all about him with sombre music on radio and non-stop news coverage. Remembered the last time had similar experience- when Pundit Nehru died on 27 May 1964, standing clustered around the only radio in the neighbourhood in hot Delhi. Sad for the family, like all deaths, and despite his own style guess was liked by the public, largely due to his support for the Queen who clearly enjoys massive respect and rightly so. Herself does not like too much display of grief and generally concerned about becoming too parochial especially with news coverage with little reporting of big international events.

Otherwise felt useful as managed to progress the arrangements for Shillong Wales Music links via Mair's gift of harp- William Mathias Centre going to help and have also asked Yours Truly to join as a trustee, and also good to see potential

connection between ICHA and HLA via Akhil and Johann, seems like a good match and hope things work out. Ten holes on the golf course (do think 18 holes is a bit much), windy but later sun came out, but slow game, not enjoyable as breaks the concentration; the following young kid, not more than ten was a wizard so tailgating whilst the oldies in front zig zagged! Later on, an interesting presentation on Archeoastronomy via the Dark Skies Team– why are the old monuments: temples, stone circles etc the way they are and what did they signify, very informative, guess it goes back to ancient civilisations philosophy of seeing one world and everything being a part of nature; those guys were not daft, delusional to believe that recent generations have done more than them in improving knowledge, in fact probably done more damage.

Good start to the day- sunny weather, breakfast upstairs watching the sheep with the triplet lambs – so wonderful to see young life, same sense of happiness as seeing young children running around in the school grounds; wondering whether left too late for hedge cutting and so must look out for bird nests, logging and tree pruning also on the list. Talk with Herself re going to Manchester next week – have to do the annual masterclass at the university and although Zoom possible but is it time to venture out, will check with organisers; have not been over the border this year at all. Walk on Prestatyn beach and fish and chips on the agenda for the evening. Got to do a Zoom session for Johann’s leadership cohort so need to get organised, and Herself has the dance lesson.

The BBC: Gun salutes planned across UK in tribute to Philip; The Guardian: Queen and royal family mourn Prince Philip as tributes pour in; and BBC Wales is about gun salutes. Not surprising.

Whilst in India, the Kumbh Mela attracting attention – talk about a potential super-spreader event, in 2019, 50 million people gathered on 4 February, the largest peaceful gathering in the world on one day. Religion and political rallies are exempt from covid rules –and hopefully corona will respect this. Violence in USA as Biden tries to push for gun control after more recent shootings – do admire him though hard to judge what impact he will have eventually on that broken country.

S**tometer: 1/10

11 April 2021

So, Herself was not alone as BBC flooded with complaints over coverage of Prince Philip’s death – BBC 2 lost two thirds of its audience between 7-11 pm according to Deadline (btw this came from The Guardian), whilst Rowson recalls meeting Prince Philip who told him that The Times was the ‘bloody Murdoch rag’ and would not have it in the house. What’s not to like about the guy! Did not know, among other things, there is a Cartoon Museum – and he was the patron; added to the List of places to see.

So, radio and TV off, had the session with Johann about leadership and boards- and reminded of the joke about non-executive directors being like bidets- not many know

what they do but they add class. Keen youngsters in his group and caution them to not worry about whether their wishes will come true but worry that they will come true – can't tell what things mean until get them, and so be ready for all eventualities. On the whole a good session, and felt useful. And wanting to be further useful spent the day sorting out garden stuff, nice weather though chilly helped, and place looking good now. Trooped off to Prestatyn beach later to let the mutts run, stayed to watch sunset with fish and chips- beautiful skies, Herself excited with the colours of clouds, and listened to Peggy Lee: Is that all there is. Likes it but finds it depressing though Yours Truly sees a different side- which is acceptance of life as it is and to enjoy and not worry too much. What's wrong with it?

The thought resurfaced this morning, guess cooked during sleep in the head, and wondered whether to write one's take on it; found resonance in Partridge's diary in 1959 when she writes: *"I don't want competitive social life, or occasions when large gatherings are shouting and drinking together, but only to be with people I am fond of, old friends or stimulating new ones. I don't want variety and excitement for their own sake. I do want peace, including quite a lot of privacy, to live with my darling Ralph. I do want some sort of work and opportunity to pursue my other activities like music and botany, I do want health, comfort and ability to go on enjoying getting sensual pleasure from my surroundings."* *"A wonderful simple charter for living! Or perhaps just cutting one's cloth, et cetera? Or a Freudian flight from reality? Or acceptance of reality?"*

Will practise some of the above today and have asked Susheela and Phil to come over for afternoon tea – Herself will pull out stops with silver and worries where to sit if cold outside – should make up for missing his birthday last week. Mahadev rang to say was in Delhi and had no trouble travelling there – on business as gone to sort out details for the project; gets Yours Truly thinking about going too, though Mumbai under curfew now. Do worry that have lost the will and become afraid – can't stay in a cocoon and maybe after the second dose need to rethink, will talk to Raman. Otherwise, what is the meaning of life!

The BBC: Special service to remember Prince Philip at Canterbury today with funeral at the chapel at Windsor Castle on 17 April – only 30 people allowed to attend; The Guardian: Virus hotspots could lead to third wave in UK, scientists warn – as systems for test. trace and isolate not robust enough, misplaced trust in vaccine as other countries, for example Chile, shows rise after good coverage; BBC Wales: repeats national news about Philip.

S**tometer: 2/10

12 April 2021

Lazy day, biting cold outside though sunny so indoors and tea with Phil and Susheela, nice rolls and flat coffee and walnut cake – Herself worries but was tasty, and quick dash to the argy bargy corner and back- beautiful evening skies. Watched Joanna Lumley on India – through Rajasthan, Delhi, Dharmasala and Kashmir- good

but superficial as tried to pack too much in, had forgotten she was born in India and hence affinity. So not a bad day yesterday.

Freedom day- allowed to travel out of Wales from today, opposite also true so English crowds pouring over the borders! Hair today, gone tomorrow as salons and others open – been 15 months since barber, Herself getting restless but thankfully has the exhibition to keep busy so off to Rhyl to find framer- short notice, big order and Llandudno for paint brushes on the agenda. Have lined up golf for the afternoon and then back to Llanbedr- why need to go back, hard to answer and guess due to need to keep moving to stop thinking? Think affects Herself, need to be careful – still fragile relationship though getting better mentally. One day at a time – that's the meaning of life: today live a good life, don't hurt anyone and laugh. Cold again, light hail/snow on hills.

Rainy season in Florida and warnings about alligators coming out during mating season – can think of one where the alligator would be useful though even it may back off from the bigger beast in residence there since leaving the Capitol. Sad article from Nesrine Malik in The Guardian: "*When I was young, I left Sudan in search of success. Now I yearn for family and home.*" Concludes: *...living and thriving where you are born is perhaps the most immense privilege of all*". Well, Yours Truly truly yearns for it and sad as India situation getting worse and not sure when get there.

The BBC News: Shops, gyms and pub gardens reopen across England; The Guardian: Spring cold snap hits as England relaxes lockdown restrictions – not enough to stop shoppers as BBC Wales: Early queues as Wales shops reopen after lockdown: TK Maxx and Primark in Cardiff highlighted.

S**tometer: 2/10

13 April 2021 (Llanbedr)

Trip to Rhyl and Llandudno to sort out exhibition – Herself excited and relieved to get frames and brushes sorted, traffic on the roads and busy town centres and seaside, long queue outside Primark in Llandudno. Followed by golf – not bad- and Netflix-Hindi film Anokhi Dekh and then Roald Dahl's *Esio Trot* (Tortoise spelt backwards) with Hoffman and Dench, lovely film of late age romance – reminded of *Our souls at night* with Redford and Fonda, told Herself about latter and got reminded had already seen it, proof brain going. Slept well afterwards in Llanbedr, cold as had changed to summer duvet- drat, so had to wear a jumper in bed.

Vaisakhi today- another one in lockdown, and who knows about more yet as WHO warns about complacency with pandemic growing exponentially globally and certainly in India. Speak to Raman, thankfully new maid secured for mum- God knows how long for but given almost likely a full lockdown in Mumbai soon, relief that there will be someone with her; says Nmrta (Rohan's wife) grandma passed away- was expected. Another one to pass away was Shirley Williams, almost the last of the conviction politicians – did admire her; not like the present bunch as Cameron being

investigated, by BoJo – any bets on what will the report say? Philip, Bless him, was right when said: We have 650 MPs and most of them are a complete bloody waste of time. Life is poorer without such folk.

Esp as the Facebook whistle-blower, Sophie Zhang, found multiple blatant attempts by foreign governments to abuse platform on vast scales to mislead their own citizenry, and caused international news on multiple occasions. Wonder what will happen to her now- have always felt for whistle-blowers, none of whom known personally ever set out to do so but got pushed into becoming one. Is there a scientific reason: when does the thought take hold, for that is what happens when they cross the mental bridge to pursue it despite all odds, and why does it take hold so – Yours Truly was very wary of this trap and hence signed confidentiality agreement years ago, but was that cowardly? What is the ultimate duty- to self or others? Something to work on more (Add to To Do List).

Tony and Brian coming over for a walk- will try the other route up Fenlli though hard to see on map, they are better map readers so will ask them to figure out. Overcast so far but atleast dry. Need to prepare for session on Thursday, thankfully no need to drive to Salford as will be done remotely- Blackboard Collaborate, not Zoom, so need some training. Any case, time to start doing some work!

The BBC News: All 50s now offered first dose of covid jab – though an article in The Guardian talks about James Reason's Swiss Cheese Model and why reliance on jab is misplaced; The Guardian: 4.6 m people missed out on hospital treatment in England in 2020 – terrible situation as Yours Truly on of the stats; and BBC Wales: More than half have had first covid jab in Wales.

Starting to wonder whether worth comparing BBC and Guardian news, though Herself says about any news – is what it is and stay focussed on the day and close ones.

S**tometer: 2/10

14 April 2021

Wonderful walk yesterday, good weather and company – good to have mates; Tony up and down to Farnham for mum – does it uncomplaining, Brian glad to be out as now getting tired with the building project, almost done, waiting for Will to come in May and help finish, has done a great job, admire his ability and perseverance. Topped up later by Ken Loach film: *Sorry we missed you* about delivery drivers – will never treat them with disrespect now, what a hard life, ironic that watched it on Amazon Prime; not that his wife as care worker did any better, ubiquitous problem- more with less and faster but where is everyone going anyway. Need to stop the world for a while to recalibrate and restart. Good exchange with Nobhojit in India and hopefully can focus on the little one can do to help humanity.

Karen's birthday today- have not seen for over 15 months, send chocolates to make up. Robert having a good time in Tiree and aiming to get back by end April if car sorted, got damaged by a crofter and had to be sent to Oban for repairs. Hank

Azaria apologises to every Indian person for voicing Apu in *The Simpsons* – where is this going? Apologise for every wrong ever done; problem being those who need to do so and change oblivious – the good getting better and gap widening? Yes, it is scientific and not losing it – trauma, uncertainty and isolation have affected or minds and memory say neuroscientists; and need to get out and reconnect to recover.

The BBC News: Call to widen Greensill probe rejected by No 10 – ofcourse, eyeing contracts once out of office; The Guardian: UK study in mixing vaccines between jabs to be expanded – mix Pfizer and AZ with Moderna now for broader, longer immunity and for easier administration; BBC Wales: mum robbed of life by late cancer diagnosis – three months to be seen in breast clinic for urgent suspected cancer.

Weather looking good today, cut the grass on the field and clear up beds for sowing, maybe golf? Book eye test also- get sorted medically as looks like NHS in meltdown, and self-care.

S**tometer: 2/10

15 April 2021

Well someone was happy, Herself heard from framers who had already done the whole lot – delighted with the result, whilst Yours Truly pootered on the field, had 13 holes of golf- the ball just won't go into the hole- useless putting though good drives and then got a birdie on 13th, hey ho. Social commentary about caste system and exploitation especially women in the film, *Article 15*, which shows mockery of Indian Constitution which forbids any discrimination, on Prime Video to finish off yesterday.

Looks like dog bites man is back in news- the saying used to be only worth reporting if man bites dog – with growing epidemic as a result of pandemic; some with fatal consequences. Never understood obsession with certain breeds, and in any case why do people have dogs! America learns the lesson- after Brits and Russians- and Biden signals pulling out of troops to mark the 20th anniversary of 9/11 attacks on USA; sad tragedy as wars only punish the innocents by bombing and destroying- the price of misdeeds of handful paid for by misfortune of masses, what is the justification for war? A theme in Partridge's diaries as her husband was a pacifist along with others; not quite finished but got what was needed from her book so off it will go back to the library.

Got the masterclass with Salford students today and will explore further programme of work with Margaret who suggests continuing with the course, and Herself coming for dinner and then would go and see the sunset from Famau- weather looks lovely.

The BBC News: 4.7 million waiting for operations in England – including Yours Truly but any appetite to turn the crisis into an opportunity, dream on; The Guardian: Just 3% of world's ecosystems remain intact - with all their original animals and undisturbed habitats, mainly in Amazon and Congo, East Siberia and northern Canada and Sahara; BBC Wales: Industries £40m challenge to cut emissions – industries joining across South Wales to cut carbon emissions over next 20 years

Did not sleep so well last night, nothing special happened but yet.... mysteries.

S**tometer: 2/10

16 April 2021

Wonders of technology, until they do not go well; so, spent the morning seeing if could work via Blackboard used by Salford University and gave up, went to Teams as they do not use Zoom – too much choice, and then there was hardly any time left before the session itself, which went well from the feedback. Happy was of some use – Did you help anyone today, may be the way to live. Buoyed went to golf, followed by dinner with Herself who came over and drove to Famau to see the sunset – glorious, not alone as many folk up there, left it a bit late so just caught the end, will have to go again. So, yesterday just went.

Strange, days can go in a jiffy or be interminable, interesting chat with Herself, doing everyday things with care and love – modern jargon mindfulness – as used to happen does take time; washing, cooking, cleaning – no wonder people did not have time in the past. Herself said spent 20 minutes hanging washing the other day, stretching all clothes and hanging properly on line, reminded of own mum taking her time to cut vegetables or knead dough for chapatis and dad's morning ritual of shaving. Now everything rushed and then spend time scrolling on phone, bored. Bring back joys of small things, some folk can do - fascinated when walking with Herself spotting new flowers or Brian or Tony for example who notice such things- wonder why these creosote coated new fence posts and is creosote back in use they discuss. Herself says started to feel older this year and Yours Truly agrees (not that Herself is older!)- seems like finally dawning; what to make of it, to be discussed.

Saw The Guardian article about 2.5 billion T rex over 127,000 generations on earth around before becoming extinct and now we only one- our own T (ony) Rex; so, send it to him, to cheer him up.

Drat, the Peggy Lee album ordered for Herself turned out to be vinyl not CD, says will give to Alison, looked up again and yes CD is lot of money! Raj says in Anglesey and loving it- seems like he is discovering Wales after years of exotic holidays in places like Maldives- the joys of small things on door steps.

Jobs to be done today, visit to library which is allowing browsing, GP to pick up blood forms, vet for medicine for Ashley's poor lamb etc before can go to golf – be a busy day, and then to Peniel for the weekend. Try Brenig sunset tonight maybe.

The BBC News; HK billionaire Jimmy Lai jailed for protest – for participating in pro-democracy demonstrations in 2019; after Jack Ma looks like crackdown by autocrats in China; The Guardian: Rapid Covid testing in England may be scaled back over false positives – despite having NICE and Screening Committees rushed policies and wasted billions; BBC Wales: Brexit and Covid blamed as 200 car jobs at risk in South Wales – and ofcourse just one example, more to come.

Sleep OK, better than night before, and that is all to be hoped for now.

S**tometer: 2/10

17 April 2021 (Peniel)

Beautiful sunset at Brenig, went there after delivering the medicine for poor lamb to Dean and admiring his menagerie with among others the piglet and peacock, strangely they all live happily together. Herself was happy to find the Hen Ddinbych site of the Bronze Age Farmers on the hill during the walk. Started reading Alastair Campbell's *Living Better* book on depression – and found his Tíree connection, will have to tell Robert, just at the start but seems like a good read with very open and honest writing; good to see he also uses the S**tometer- more details on the book and own assessment later. But overall found a good collection at the library yesterday- was good to be able to go inside. Back in Peniel for the weekend- Herself thinks may have found a satisfactory arrangement, for now.

Another beautiful day today- sun shining, and so good day to work on the steps in the garden, using the sleepers to build them, though have enough work to do including joining the XXXX AGM- will find out whether successful in application to be a trustee.

Good chat with Herself last night and this morning – about current situation and bottom line/s being to forget past; and move on; love ones who love you now; be kind generally and do what you can with good humour – was always thus but time to put to practise.

The BBC News: Prince Philip funeral to mark unwavering loyalty; The Guardian: ditto and so is BBC Wales; the funeral begins at 3pm today with a limit of 30 people attending.

Sleep OK but more pee breaks, not good. Just had a call from distressed Raman as mum being violent to the maid who has to be let go to safeguard her- really stuck in terms of what to say/do, so keep quiet and let him be, to collect himself. Very bad news as Covid rampant and so no idea how things will be managed now.

S**tometer: 3/10

18 April 2021

Not just mum- though Raman managed to persuade the previous maid to come back though now more risk as she comes only for a few hours but he has started accepting that this is not soluble and he is not responsible – but Sonu has tested positive and his wife is not well though not positive. Talked to colleagues, during a zoom meeting about their Mashaal project, and find out that things are really bad – no beds, no oxygen or medicines with black markets emerging, all non-covid work in hospitals stopped; life is really now lottery, with Mumbai and Delhi especially bad. Very worrying situation there, and no end with crowds still gathering, civil unrest not far?

Tried to distract by keeping busy building steps in the garden, and then out for a long drive over the moors around Lynn Aled- lovely scenery, and reading Campbell- good personal account of his struggle and quest to understand depression and now promote mental health; disagreed with his politics and especially Blair, but lot of sympathy as a person- to have come through and done so much despite (though he would say partly because of) serious depression. Some good lessons.

But that did not help this morning as Herself feeling low- long discussion over breakfast, adding more guilt about the imbalance in relationship with Yours Truly the sole beneficiary.

Whilst rampaging in India, complacency setting in here as further and faster relaxations of rules including a regular gig – no masks or social distance but with negative tests being planned in Liverpool – 5000 folk getting together as part of an ‘experiment’ on 2 May. Seemingly the first one was the world snooker championship yesterday. No covid deaths in Wales though worldwide 3 million deaths and 40 million infections- ofcourse an under-estimate

The BBC News: Salisbury poison suspects linked to Czech blast – the Russian suspects from 2018 seemingly also implicated in the blast in 2014; The Guardian: BoJo urged to act now on sleaze crisis or lose red wall votes – but will need fundamental rule change as even Cameron claims worked within rules; BBC Wales: Could rain clouds provide green energy in future – given that one guaranteed thing in Wales is rain.

S**tometer: 3/10

19 April 2021 (Llanbedr)

The mood from yesterday carried over and Herself got restless and ‘had’ to go Caernarfon for a day trip – set off the long way via Snowdonia- lovely scenery, especially the back of Snowdon after Betws y Coed; castle closed and not many people around, not much trade according to the ice cream parlour woman, and then to see Bryn Celli Ddu- an ancient burial site over the border in Anglesey and then walk around under Menai Bridge.

Went off to Llanbedr afterwards, and finished Campbell and started on Vivek Murthy’s book on *Loneliness*, another public health crisis – more connected yet never so lonely feeling by large portions of society at all ages, not just the elderly. Sad state of affairs as major societal issues especially mental health not being tackled – too complicated for the soundbites and instant age, and no real political leadership for change. Labour Party not up to the task according to another internal report; may be pandemic is like the situation after WW2 and time to restart the welfare state – less is more when equitably distributed, but who will provide the leadership.

Weather looking good, the plastic greenhouse delivered and so better sort out the field later today, after getting blood tests. Robert sends extract of his family journal, look forward to reading it. Says Campbell fondly remembered in Tiree.

The BBC Wales: Big six agree to join European Super League- breakaway group of elite football clubs being formed as challenge to UEFA and FIFA; The Guardian: European Super League as big six agree to join new competition – just shows the priorities, football rules; BBC Wales: Rebuilding NHS could be bigger task than covid – but will the opportunity be taken esp after elections next month?

S**tometer: 4/10

20 April 2021

Finally met Dom and Ravinder, Susheela's son and daughter in law, who are visiting them before the baby arrives in July – nice couple and followed up by a quirky western film: *The quick and the dead* from 1990s with young Leonardo DiCaprio and Russell Crowe with Sharon Stone and Gene Hackman- used to like the last particularly. Ravinder gave matar paneer with some dough – so made chapatis and enjoyed with the film. Passed the day scrolling phone watching developments in India – very worrying situation with covid, the worst of behaviours with shortages/blackmarkets now adding stress. Spoke to Raman as India on list of red countries now, and he had to come back from the hospital where they had gone to get second dose of vaccine, anyway has procured another maid for mum. Mind in a spin with all sorts of strange thoughts – where and when will it all end? Must stop thinking as nothing to be done from here.

Another good newsletter from Maria Popova about Walt Whitman and the problems due to mismatch between reality and expectations – the need to accept what it is also reinforced by Daily Stoic; how do they know which message to send, uncanny or what? Some good stuff in Murthy's book about ways of combatting loneliness – kindness seems the answer, Tom Tait from Anaheim, California, won the Mayor election on the Be Kind flag, and then produced some fantastic results for the community. May be do own bit and hold a get together for the estate- over cuppa and cake, with good weather?

Not the same as the message from National Library of Wales – had sent two emails before about their call to submit covid experiences and finally spoke to someone who asked to send another email to enquiries, to get this auto-reply: "There will be a restricted Enquiries Service for an *unspecified* period due to the *uncertainty* caused by COVID-19. We will *attempt* to answer all enquiries if *practically possible* and *hope* to return to a full service" (personal italics). Honestly, unless shut completely, and why, this is routine remote work? Must be a reason but what? Maybe that is Yours Truly covid experience submission to them! Especially as a Guardian report shows Brits more productive on the job and less sick during covid.

The Conversation had a piece on factory farmed chicken- horrible stuff- not that meat eater anyway but wondered whether to stick to vege food for visitors – will decide with Herself about Mary and Graham's lunch visit on Friday

The BBC News: PM to meet football officials over super league; The Guardian: The government may legislate to stop European Super League, says Minister – mind

boggles with obsession with this in the face of what is happening generally; BBC Wales: any six can meet outdoors in Wales from Saturday

S**tometer: 3/10

21 April 2021

Much thinking about future plans esp for writing and some follow ups yesterday – nothing concrete yet but getting there, then golf – strange how lapse in concentration, by slow play or looking at phone, screws up the game and so left at 10th hole, watched a strange film: *Shell* on Prime about a daughter and father making a living and life, unsuccessfully, on a remote Scottish roadside fuel/garage – sad one though not sure what to make of it.

Ego deflated as unsuccessful with the application to join XXXX as a trustee; keep trying for such or accept that time is up and not needed anymore? Inclined to latter especially as find many people unprofessional – talk but do not follow up, still no response from the GMC after 5 months on a topic which they want to promote- reflective practice- and where there are very few, if any, detailed examples or the folk at Betsi Cadwaladr – promised to get back few weeks ago, again, and so on. Yesterday's National Library of Wales example perhaps sums up why things in a mess. But is not that unkind- perhaps own viewpoint is distorted and negative? Look for the good and ignore the rest philosophy. Herself advises against following up if people do not respond- and certainly not in anger/complaining; their silence is a no, hear it and accept it.

So, the experiment with news headlines comes to an end where 7/31 times BBC and The Guardian news headlines matched, with Wales 27/31 led with a Wales story and all three only agreed 3 times – twice re Prince Philip; these were noted at the time of writing, usually around 10am. What does this experiment mean – the two outlets are different for sure and news is fleeting nothing lasts beyond at most a few days confirmed - but guess it gave something to do to fill time for a while, anything that gives structure to the day is welcome? Anyway, stopped now and instead browse news and found some interesting ones today: Dawkins stripped of the Humanist of the Year award for his trans comments by the American Humanist Association, and joins Rawlings who returned her award from RF Kennedy Human Rights Foundation after being criticised for her transgender comments – political correctness gone too far? Stifling discussion? Where is the boundary between acceptable and not – would Chauvin have been convicted, as has happened, for murder of Floyd if there was no pressure to tackle race? TOO difficult basket.

Justin Welby joins in the call for Covid public inquiry – wonder if it will happen and how and in time as lessons need to be learnt for both, further management of pandemic as not over yet and the lull could be a deja vu of last year, and what to do with health and social care as waiting lists soar. Even Cefyn wondering about going private for Martin's cataract.

On the happier and lighter side: A crowd sourced poem: A surge of hope to celebrate the coming of spring by Elizabeth Jane Burnett bringing together 400 voices of nature lovers as a riposte to events of last year – not unexpected small things including cherry blossom, spot of sun on moss and blackbird among others. Lovely. Guess what: The British Town Crier competition will be held in silence and judged on quality of written cry with a word limit of 140 – mind boggles. But not as much as at the next story in The Guardian about just washing hands and genitals during lockdown – hygiene habits taken a hit but will they recover or the ranks of unwashed swell.

Mind restless with anxiety about India – one day at a time and need distraction. So today off to Chester later to the Indian store and get a takeaway from Koconut Grove – first travel outside Wales since lockdown began in Dec (and even before); ask Susheela if she wants some spices. Herself says will come by around 430 after putting in a day at the studio- on a roll, so keep going.

S**tometer: 3/10

22 April 2021

Looked like life BC (Before Corona) as hit Chester 5pmish yesterday and traffic compounded by roadworks in city centre, 25 minutes to get across the bridge, and many eateries and pubs especially riverside full, though the shopping area a bit desolate – ate sitting by the river and then a walk on the city walks, had not done it before. Also stocked up at the Indian food store. Surprisingly had a good sleep despite (in spite, as tired out) with help of Nytol.

Had a nice email from Richard Smith (of BMJ) and noted his support for The Lancet Commission on dying – will follow up.

It's all about covid in India – Delhi chaos, Sonu not well, had high fever, sister says too many people infected and have given up getting tests so numbers gross underestimates, no beds or oxygen, essentials get scarce- her medicine delivery, which is left at the gate of their community housing took two hours as gate staff running ragged. Akhil tries to put a positive slant as will speed up herd immunity. No news of Anu, despite calls, and Mahadev trying to find flights.

Here scientists warn of third wave by summer, even BoJo is hedging bets, may let him off the hook re inquiry as pressure builds up and more instances of cronyism, with favourites awarded contracts, with BoJo directly involved with people like Dyson. Waugh from HuffPost compares him to Blair – Bounceback Boris vs Teflon Tony, ducking and weaving despite all the muck. Latest being resignation by Johnny Mercer, Veterans Minister saying the most distrustful. awful environment I have ever worked in, in government'.

Now Jane Austen being pulled into slavery and race row as her Museum updates its information given her father's links with Antigua sugar plantation – woke madness, a revisionist attack cry news media. War Graves Commission also being accused of discrimination in how ethnic minority soldiers especially from Africa and the middle-

east were commemorated. Wonder if tobacco or arms trade will be seen as the equivalent of slave trade by future generations – jobs here for arms industry but raining death elsewhere- same issue, no?

Two camps in society as Golby writes in The Guardian “*So, this week, enjoy whichever of the two vices you ascribe to- having a beer in the sun or looking at other people having a beer in the sun and tutting really loudly about it – because it ‘ll be a long time until these two warring factions find peace*” – says lockdown encouraged certain twitching vices. Outrage everywhere except where needed- to call for social changes and getting some accountability. Elections on, and have a discussion with Herself about who to vote- players different but play same, coalition as Loach called the Left Unity remains elusive, rather die than compromise- so much for espoused values of politicians.

Enough of outrage and time to get ready for walk with Iain, coming over – be good to see him after a long time, weather good also.

S**tometer: 3/10

23 April 2021

Yippee – after a long time had a proper walk with Iain, not since Dec 2019 had done 32K steps with good climbing, sunny day and hills lovely. Good to catch up with him also – says was busy with work but now slowed down and happier as did not like going full blast. Wondering about involving me in his charity- sounds good. So, a good day yesterday as Herself came over on way to Nant Clwyd y Dre and managed to say hello to Iain.

Only snag was GP practice rang to say need more blood tests, so no rest till know more, not helpful as really worried about India- Sonu still feverish and since does not like being ill very irritable and sister bears the brunt. Covid has even got to Everest as Norwegian climber tests positive – “where you go, I will follow virus”. India added to Red List countries and compulsory quarantine for returnees, no visitors- still no news from Anu or Mahadev.

Good to see some world leadership as Biden starts committing to climate change and raising taxes on the rich, still some way to go for him but good start. Not such here as more sleaze exposed between No 10 and cronies – Cameron under spotlight, BoJo ducking and weaving. Dom Cummings being accused of leaking- why or rather why not, entitled to take revenge? And Drakeford being accused of playing politics with easing announcements in time for elections.

Busy day today as Mary and Graham coming for lunch – logistics apart from cooking – Herself fusses more and so will come and take over, cooking almost done, decided to go fully vege, no meat. Weather great so may be able to sit in the garden.

S**tometer: 2/10

24 April 2021

Graham delighted to get the Osler hardback book, one Chris gave, and lunch and visit overall a success, brought some stuff from their garden, lots of herbs. Sat in the garden mostly though came through to dining room for lunch with doors and windows open. Got talking about state of NHS and profession- he mentioned the letter in The Times from retired GP lamenting the old days when home visiting stopped hospitalisation and suggesting making these part of training schemes. Not sure why it happens but sadly only in older age the doctors realise how the profession has lost the way somewhere, nothing like becoming a patient to see this – walk in the other person's shoes? Feel like writing another letter/paper but to what effect, as can't seem to interest anyone, or is that being too pessimistic?

Rest of the time preoccupied with India- Sonu still not well, continuous fever with body ache, terrifying reports about health services- saw the news item mentioning Deep Baluja's name as the medical director hospital which ran out of oxygen, had worked with him in NE India over 40 years ago, nice chap. Achintya from Kolkata very upset with the politicians and blames the election rallies. Anu finally pops up, says all got infected and so now stuck in Delhi and can't travel back and anyway when he does will need to fork out £1750 for compulsory hotel quarantine. Mahadev coming back on 27 and says if compulsory quarantine, then will go to USA instead. Raman sends a video, from Dr Bossche, scaring people off vaccinations – one hand yes, there could be unintended consequences as never before such a global vaccination programme been implemented but on the other hand, confusion between Evidence of No effect and No Evidence of Effect (good or bad) and hence need to carry on and continuously monitor? Anyway, no sign of second dose yet, either for him in India or Yours Truly here. coming up to three months soon. One good result of efforts for Covid vaccine is that science much closer to finding an effective vaccine for malaria also- that will be great.

Schadenfreude – as Dom Cummings comes out fighting and calls BoJo mad and totally unethical and questions his competence and integrity, nothing like when thieves and former partners fall out. No sign of public inquiry into covid though, could this be another distraction to avoid that- knowing not out of woods yet with possible third lockdown in summer; lurch from crisis to crisis way of politics.

On the positive note, National Trust launches the Blossom Watch day today and asks public to send photos – bit like the Japanese custom of Hanami; recent cold weather has slowed spring here, but early flowers on magnolia, hawthorn, pear and apples along with cherry; nice to see them in the garden and the vege patch. Gardens as Oliver Sacks said is one of the two non-pharmaceutical interventions, other being music. Matthew Chattle has photographed more than 270 social distancing signs in London – creativity in adversity; lovely. Pictures speak louder than words.

Herself busy in Peniel with dancing lesson and stuff so golf on the menu this afternoon.

S**tometer: 2/10

25 April 2021

Days blurring into each other- same old, same old, is not that life, but is it enough? Is writing a journal a chore or joy, what to note and what not to note, and who for? So passed yesterday with the usual stuff, managed to finish Murthy's book - some good stuff in it about connectedness though hard to either see in action or do, so fire off a few more messages to friends to connect.

Also fired off a letter to The Times, after the chat with Graham: *"Once more a retired doctor lamenting the past when GPs used to make home visits, to benefit both, the patients cared for in familiar surroundings and the NHS with reduced admissions (Dr Turner, 23 April 2021). Reminded me of how I got seduced by the NHS as an overseas doctor- the vision of GPs being holistic carers with consultants to be consulted by GPs for specialist advice/treatment and visiting GPs patients in wards run by matrons (with their permission) was sadly only the idea, never the reality of the NHS. That partnership between GPs/consultants and nurses was/is the only way to provide good quality and affordable patient centric care. Where did it all go wrong and can it be put back together? Never let a crisis go to waste and so perhaps we should use the pandemic to create the true, fit for purpose 21st century NHS? Anyone interested – let us start a conversation about what it could look like."*

And being in that mood, sent a reminder email to the Betsi contact. Not really annoyed that people do not follow up when they promise but sad – lack of basic courtesy- and should this not be called out; Herself disagrees and says should stop 'pestering' people.

In real curmudgeon mode at present.

Probably a sign of the background stress with the situation in India: Sonu remains ill though not too badly but things can change and hence the worry. So have a chat with Promod, most positive guy, and agree to visit soon, and also make of list of what is good and should be grateful for. Herself going to come over and help with planting and further planning, weather good so should be enjoyable. Must talk to Ruchi today- kept missing her.

Interesting article about how Wales is being edged towards independence, certainly Sturgeon is going full blast – breaking up not good, as shown with Brexit but unless some balance between centre and local things won't improve, London and establishment arrogance hard to contain otherwise? Another WhatsApp message with an interview with Dutch Journalist Groenhuijsen about imbalance in news with overemphasis on negative stuff and no/hardly mention of improvements – glass half empty.

S**tometer: 3/10

26 April 2021

Aneeta's birthday in Mumbai today- guess another subdued Zoom party with Rohan in New Zealand for them, they got the second dose as birthday present for her and Raman, decided not to take mum as he says very crowded and chaotic and more likely to come back with infection. Nightmare in India- politics compounding as non-BJP states including Delhi getting hit in the media; very sad to see the lawyer from the Centre telling Delhi Govt lawyers not to be a cry baby. Blood on hands of politicians but do they care? UK and USA offering support including oxygen concentrators as the Indian diaspora worries.

Not that much better here – Covid inquiry still being blocked; why? Facts: #1 Pandemic the biggest crisis of our times; #2 Its not over yet; #3 we have made mistakes; and so why not have an inquiry and prevent further misery? But politics again – nothing different from previous pandemic as Hoginsbaum pointed out in his book. Rapid tests- lateral flow – under scrutiny again and who knows whether vaccines the answer, so much still unknown; guess one prerequisite for being politicians is not to have an insight and humility? BoJo also under pressure with sleaze but will anything stick, or change for the better- any bets? Meantime public being practical as “Seeking fun guy, tall with GSOH with a covid jab” – says the dating site advert according to The Guardian news item, the jab being the deal breaker (or maker?).

Managed to sort out quite a bit in the vege patch and the garden yesterday- with help from Herself who did most it anyway as had to field lots of calls from family; spoke to Niru after few weeks, says maid ended up in hospital with covid and so been busy with household chores, Sonu remains feverish—seemingly persistent low-grade fever for 8-10 days feature of the variant, and Ruchi really upset with political situation and lack of leadership. Outrage as government ordered twitter to remove posts critical of its handling of pandemic – worse than emergency under Indira Gandhi according to some commentators.

Oscars announced and so add *Nomadland* (best picture and first woman of colour (*sic*) best director) and *The Father* (about dementia with Anthony Hopkins) to the list of movies to watch. Especially as need to distract from getting exercised about stuff, as fired off another letter to the BMJ in response to how to tackle institutional racism and inequality:

“The answer to your question is: Not by (only) doing the same things as before. Take the example of proportional representation or having an ethnic minority as the leader which may be a necessary but not sufficient condition, otherwise how to explain the Sewell Report despite atleast three senior Asian Ministers: Sunak, Patel and Sharma and Advisor Mirza. To further illustrate: Google –headed by an Indian, Pichai - being called institutionally racist by an employee; recent death of a Black Doctor in USA who begged her professional colleagues for help (a failure of professional ethics not just race) and various writings recently in lay and medical press including debate about Diwali vs Christmas.

At heart the problem is our need for identity, thereby creating the ‘Other’ which divides us and to which there is no (easy) answer. We need to make a fresh start, taking account of recent developments - both positive and negative - much as I find

the Sewell Report disturbing there are some points worth considering; for example, I agree that the term BAME is not helpful and disagree that current regulatory system will help. Let us start by identifying what unites us first - our love of the NHS and humanistic values - and stop looking for easy fixes or silver bullets. It will take time, time to reflect, hear and understand each other but it will be worth it (1). What else is the choice? “

Maybe rather than firing letters, should just note them here and maybe will laugh at own arrogance when read later, or I could have told you smirks? Wonder how Tony's mum is doing, will check? Otherwise, another day in garden and golf, as weather holding.

S**tometer: 3/10

27 April 2021

It's all about India at the moment- so start WhatsApp first thing on waking: Sonu still unwell and very upset; Tinku advises him but himself also down along with sister; Sonali says situation awful, never imagined; only good news from Shillong who seem to be managing for now; feeling helpless but nothing to done at practical level so try and provide moral support to all friends – keeping head down to ride this storm. International efforts gearing up with supply of oxygen and beds. Very poor Indian governmental leadership- should have seen this coming especially in Delhi where the persistent poor air quality over the years has compromised respiratory systems and no wonder breathing problems worse. More interested in clamping down on 'criticism' as reprimand Australian – a newspaper which led with “Modi leads India out of lockdown ... and into a viral apocalypse” whilst his deputy, Amit Shah's son, Jay who leads IPL continues with games even though some players quitting – money to be made. Election Commission in India told: “Your institution is singularly responsible for the second wave of Covid-19” by the Madras High Court, which also cautions that vote counting may be stopped if rallies continue.

Does seem like the end of time – mind focussed on mortality – and reminder of how little stuff really matters, what counts is care and love; and just to live the moment and do what can be done. Raman and Anita being phlegmatic and esp as mum already on the war path with new maid.

No different here politically as another explosive revelation about the great leader: “*No more fucking lockdowns – let the bodies pile high in thousands*” seemingly said BoJo before start of second lockdown in October.

Anyway, good chat last night with CGWM re music and north-east India – looks like there is a way forward to build at the back of Mair's harp, Cefyn also happy. Must start looking more into the history of Gordon Roberts Hospital there as Cefyn found some letters written by a nurse in 1945 to friend back in Wales- says very descriptive, and that quite a few older people were born in Mizoram or Khasi Hill and spent early years there before the missionaries were thrown out by the Indian Government in 1969. The rise of Hindu fundamentalism concern for the links

between Wales and NE India and stay focussed on culture and not venture into religion, although Welsh, as distinct from the British, seen more positively and not being either imperial or proselytising.

Wales outdoor hospitality opened yesterday, with more to follow, and overall sense of relief everywhere. Got the message to book second jab; but must ask which one as Tony said mum had Pfizer 1st dose and AZ 2nd and has been asleep since jab – though already terminal so hard to say whether jab, but why give it to her?

The fine weather spell over as overcast and possible rain – will be good for the field.

Interesting quote from Maria Popova about gardening:

“Gardening situates you in a different kind of time, the antithesis of the agitating present of social media. Time becomes circular, not chronological; minutes stretch into hours; some actions don’t bear fruit for decades. The gardener is not immune to attrition and loss, but is daily confronted by the ongoing good news of fecundity. A peony returns, alien pink shoots thrusting from bare soil. The fennel self-seeds; there is an abundance of cosmos out of nowhere.”

Herself says Alison only switched off when weeding, very therapeutic; certainly, looking at things differently and enjoying the slow but sure progress in the garden and field now a days. Time passing quickly, have not seen TV for days and slow reading – not able to concentrate, two on the go: *The sentimentalists* by Johanna Skibsrud about families and how past shapes people and relationships, along with Julian Barnes *The sense of an ending*.

The first NHS at 70 Advisory Board about recording pandemic experiences through oral history meeting today – looking forward, so many issues; what to record- can there be any ‘truth’ and how – what will be the state of technology in 50-100 years’ time? Having read around past pandemics, no lessons – every time leadership found wanting generally with politics and money dictating responses with occasional rays of leadership often local, what possibly helps is personal stories of how people coped, to boost morale and help connect across time.

S**tometer: 3/10

28 April 2021

So, it is happening – well into Barnes book realised sounded familiar and remembered had seen the film, mind going! Could blame preoccupation with India – nightmare situation, almost everyone known personally touched as if a firestorm had swept through. More anger with the political leadership there- interview with Barkha Dutt whose father died but to what effect given that Karan Thapar and Ramchandran Guha already raised issues about megalomania; The Guardian reporter in India, Kakoli Bhattacharya dies with covid. No longer an Indian issue but global- unless India contained no control possible? Support being mobilised everywhere including British Asian Trust and BAPIO; someone got in touch via Robert wanting to donate money to charity in India for covid; personally support Doctors for You so let them

know all possible options. Not sure whether worth mobilising locally, given lot of affinity with India – problem being need long term association and not (just) one as needs persistent efforts, not easy to get things done there. Other friends getting in touch, Autilia points out parallels with Italy when she was gutted as watched the situation there helplessly, worried about her family.

Whilst in the UK, the arrogance of politicians and disdain for the vulnerable show no sign of abating as Monbiot wades in with criticism of the media for allowing government's cronyism and dishonesty to flourish and the parliament rejects the amendment aimed at protecting leaseholders from having to pay for fire safety costs, after Grenfell, despite some Tory rebellion; many (most) leaseholders will struggle to absorb the phenomenal bills.

Strange that success of vaccination programme – which in itself won't be enough anyway even if can be continued as still many unanswered questions – letting BoJo and gang off hook; dead do not speak for themselves but surely the living must speak for them but short memories. Grenfell is now 5 years old, and what has changed?

The media under scrutiny in USA too as reports of outrage including by prominent politicians against Biden for stopping Americans from eating hamburgers –after Biden was misquoted – his comment was in the context of climate change and as an example; irresponsible journalism or manipulated media – manufactured rage and division?

Rage, rage but must balance with love where can, trying to do atleast one small act each day to help others; even a phone call or message can make a difference. Herself coming over and then driving to Liverpool to see Promod in his new house; have not met for months, very strong and positive guy but lonely. Weather not that good, rainy.

S**tometer: 2/10

29 April 2021

India stuff doing head in – and after donating to DFY in India and BAPIO here and not being clear how else to help spoke to Akhil in Delhi first thing after a restless night; as usual calm and relevant advice; says exposure is almost universal the question is of effect: who will get ill and how badly and this is where panic is not helping. No doubt numbers are large and shortages but typical India scenario – malpractices including profiteering is making it worse. Bottom lines says he: stop condescending from abroad- India is what it is, send oxygen and concentrators, and try and calm the panic. Also, that attention will shift shortly as election news will predominate from this evening till 2 May. Always listen to him.

Though wrong to let the culprits off the hook- Arundhati Roy wades in with a long read in The Guardian and as usual very sharp analytical article; but would it make any difference; #ResignModi blocked by Facebook, says not at the instruction of Government – restored later. No hope as Roy points out by quoting Fredrick

Douglass: “*The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress*” and Indians are masters at humiliation.

Catch up with family and contact friends, and look for distraction and positivity: Parking Mad- the story of Gareth Wild who parked in every spot (211) in his local Sainsbury in Bromley over six years and Adrian Chiles who supports other ways of managing dog poo problem including use of nature like leaves rather than plastic make up for the doom and gloom. Biden does his stuff for gender inequality as flanked by Harris and Pelosi for his speech – good on you.

And watch the political circus here as BoJo fuming at not being allowed to get away by Starmer, slow and steady exposure of sleaze. Northern Ireland in mess as Foster resigns – pushed out. The idea of turning AONB into national park denounced by local politicians for interfering with farmers and nature, to be expected as election time approaches, and calls for Snowdon to be known only by Welsh name: Yr Wyddfa (Grave) and Snowdonia as Eryri (to rise). Covid receding in news and hopefully in reality too, though talks of the real toll now including on mental health and economy. It's not over yet, especially given the global situation.

Enjoyed Rosen's *A story of life, death and the NHS* – mostly celebration (and rightly so, given the dedicated staff) with some gentle reminders of fallibility, to give authenticity, as the story of nurses repositioning his nasal tube in the middle of the night for the doctor to ask for its removal in the morning. Sums up the NHS- dedicated, caring and committed staff who are often misused/unsupported in the system both politically and sadly sometimes managerially.

Had a good trip yesterday with Herself, Promod's house on the golf course with sea views excellent – making a statement with his art-deco design and extensive balconies, well done. Happy for him. Herself gives him some of her work – had a struggle as could not decide what he would like, gave what thought was her best –all one can do. Today, walking with Tony around World's End- what a name, but beautiful landscape, looking forward as weather good.

S**tometer: 3/10

30 April 2021

Twenty million people in UK living in areas with no covid deaths in April gives cause for optimism; but the resistance to learn and improve by the government unhelpful; refuses to publish NHS 111 training material as asked by the bereaved families or refusal to meet them – seemingly BoJo went alone to the memorial wall with names of dead (between Lambeth and Westminster bridges), for reflection. Well, if really reflective would have been empathetic; reminded of Maybot going to Grenfell and not talking; why so hard to show any humanity? May be the reason why Welsh independence movement gathering pace – Plaid Cymru leader thinks mood is changing and pandemic reinforced the need to take more control.

India Burning, what a change from India Shinning, as deaths continue to rise, crematoriums overflowing; overseas aid started arriving though enough indigenous

oxygen capacity anyway, and Devi Shetty video pointing out the more fundamental problem of lack of workforce to meet the sustained demand in the coming months/years. Sonu still unwell – 13 days fever – but atleast no other symptoms, ask Akhil for advice and try and encourage Sonu who is not naturally positive person; very impatient patient.

Good to see various sporting bodies joining up to boycott SoMe for four days starting this afternoon in attempt to reduce racist and sexual abuse; both the SoMe, which is out of control and needs some governance and reigning to prevent more social divisions, and the issues which show no signs of abating as Noel Clarke, actor/director suspended by Bafta after allegations from 20 women.

Thinking about next project and wondered about building on Rilke's Letters to young poet – the best example of mentoring and Gibran's The Prophet – the best summary of life and whether to use these as basis for summing up own learning, to stimulate younger ones asking for advice; the challenge being most want quick fixes and not able to see life as a whole. Feeling more strongly about latter, do not think short term, as keep remembering own mistakes, and many; failure of ability to trust others and be open; do not try and go alone main lesson.

Know what Herself would say: focus on future not past and on practising not preaching, and could not disagree; but is not why people write that they usually have failed to practise- do as I say not as I do, and may be writing is a way for them to encourage themselves?

Anyway, slow day today as getting second jab and had decided to stay in and catch up with stuff at home, Herself coming over to provide TLC.

S**tometer: 3/10

01 May 2021

So, no side-effects atleast short term from the second dose of AZ -10 weeks later, though did take some precautionary paracetamol, relief. Herself had an easy time looking after Yours Truly as not much care need, but still welcome, realised had not stayed in Llanbedr for months, mutts confused though like it.

Long chat with Sonali in Delhi, really freaked out at the scale of the problem, says reported numbers GROSSLY under, much much more people dying, and staff getting burnt out with no signs of abatement, says government's resistance to declare humanitarian crisis stopping deployment of foreign clinical teams that are much needed. Meantime trying with telemedicine. Frightening situation.

No news of Anu, but Mahadev ended up going to USA to avoid compulsory quarantine in UK – not sure what's happening, has USA not made India a red country? People trying workarounds just as Australian cricketers who flew back via Qatar, and now Australian government has clamped down hard with massive fines and jail terms. Sonu remains febrile with some abnormal blood tests but not too bad, so advise to keep going. Had a nice message from Chad, shared photos from his trip

to Sedona, Arizona. Arvind also holidaying in Grand Canyon. Look at holiday accommodation here- all booked up, may be hotels later but not keen on them yet. So, day trips for now and grace and favour friends' houses this year.

Party time here, as Liverpool hosting large night club two days event with possibly 6000 participants from Friday -as a trial. And mood very gung-ho, with more and faster relaxations despite some voices of caution. Seemingly BoJo's mobile number has been in public domain for 15 years- guess if many people from public got in touch, may be put in own contact list to show off! or Not.

Co Op joins Morrisons to ban plastic bags to save the world, but what sort as freedom is threatened with a sleep walking and complicit society, as Ben Okri writes in *The Freedom Artist*, started reading it, dark stuff and sadly with much truth. And Severn Trent struggles with a 300-ton fatberg in Birmingham – says will take till June; the end is nigh.

Busy working on creating a resource, like a work book, for mentoring, feel energised by it – not sure of the utility but even if a few use it, worth it. Herself wants to head back this morning for dance lesson and so will spend the day up in Peniel, after doing some chores including planning indoor planting. Taking it easy again, in case.

S**tometer: 2/10

02 May 2021

Bugger, s**t, f**k, mum fires the new maid, after only three days, big ruckus with yelling, throwing stuff and neighbours had to call Raman to come quickly yesterday, at wits end, speak to Vijay with similar experience with m-in-law and dad, suggests some medication as the only way so persuade Raman. Feel utterly helpless as the whole burden on him, knowing other pressures especially Ruchi and family struggling with managing the stress. Says Rey, age 3, has not seen another child for a year and all his interactions in terms of playschool have been online – 21st century child, wonder what they will grow up like. To compound things Sonu tests positive for Typhoid but questions whether false positive, but doctor starts treatment and asks for more tests which he refuses, thankfully symptomatically better.

Meantime India esp northern parts very bad – the peak yet to come in mid-May, the worst of Indian behaviours on full display, not enough to counter the goodwill of others, the task huge. Adar Poonawala under pressure from the powerful including politicians, both business and personal in terms of access to vaccines, says tired and hence flees to UK and exploring setting up facilities overseas. Anu finally pops up to say clinically better though wife still bad but nightmare situation as access to health care difficult, does not know how to get around the logistics of tests and flights, apart from quarantine on arrival in UK.

Constant scrolling news and checking with family and friends, passed yesterday. Average phone screen time goes up. Race to get back to normal accelerating here, covid way down the news. Maybe the reason why the wanton destruction of an Osprey nest, soon after the couple had laid an egg after fears that they may not

return, on Lynn Brenig made the national news- the local community up in the arms, Herself very agitated and thinking conspiracy linked to further proposed windfarms developments there; laying waste to nature.

To be expected as more revelations about BoJo surface- nicknamed Trolley: *You think you are pushing it along a path towards your goal the suddenly it veers off disastrously*, says an insider, The PM treats facts like he treats all his relationships – utterly disposable once inconvenient, says a former minister according to BBC (yes, even BBC). Ofcourse Freedland in The Guardian pulls no punches and lists all (most and the biggest) BoJo scandals, will know in a few days after elections if makes any difference.

Has public had enough, like in India where BJP facing defeat in West Bengal, the biggest battle field, though US shows why things take time as Romney gets booed and called traitor at the Republican convention in Utah for voting to impeach Trump. On the positive side Biden pushing through much needed policies- hope lives long enough to see through changes.

Typical British May Bank Holiday - rain predicted, Robin and Shirley coming over for brunch today, so get organised, weather playing hide and seek at present so will have to see where to sit, neither breakfast nor lunch the idea of brunch and what to provide generates discussion with Herself, prepare for eventualities.

S**tometer: 2/10

03 May 2021

Started well- great time with Robin and Shirley, poor chap going in for surgery soon and then with Susheela and Phil to catch up, they did not know about XX passing away so got in touch with her partner M, but then felt very unwell, severe cramp type pain in dorsal region, mind racing with drastic scenarios and could not get comfortable at all. Herself decided to stay to look after, finally after lots of tossing and turning got some sleep at 3 am with relief- some sort of trapped wind, very medical! Will ask Son#1 as he is coming over today with partner, more tomorrow on this as meeting her first time, feeling anxious, have cooked an Indian meal for them.

Yesterday brought home the old age, feeling it now, and thinking of own mortality, as going through things in mind lying in bed, what is undone still; was strangely calm, the only worry was about being messed up in hospitals. Herself keeps supporting, remaining positive, thinking never sorted anything only doing, certainly practises it, happy as going to see Simon and Megan for lunch, outdoors, in Liverpool today – after 5 months.

Given the state of world, best to just get on- India mess, Modi loses West Bengal and horrific stories of the disaster with doctors crying as unable to provide basic oxygen. Doctors in NHS no better off as 1 in 5 consider leaving the profession in another BMA survey, whilst the overgrown Eton schoolboys have turned the country into their playground says John Harris. Man U fans invade the stadium to protest against Glazers and European Super League and planned match with Liverpool

cancelled, await elections this week and see if anything changes or the fickle, short term memory public will be back to old merry ways.

On the positive side, Spiegelhalter says vaccine definitely helping and Denmark shows that Covid pass works, and Wales opens gyms, allows indoor meetings and hugging. Francis Crick Institute inviting poetic response to Covid -19, with an exhibition: A drop of Hope: Poetry from a vaccination centre which was set up by University College London and the Institute.

Giving thanks

Calls me in even before sitting down
soon after checking in for second dose
my name is says she, very efficient,
jab done, out in less than five minutes
adds God Bless you for extra security
what a wonderful nurse at the practice
give thanks for health care workers
so long as NHS, there is hope....

Ruchi posts a nice one on Instagram, though not much hope in India, says she.

S**tometer: 3/10

04 May 2021

Rather emotional yesterday, seeing Son #1 after 18 months, and his partner for first time, drove over from Sheffield with a nice cake – each praising other for making it so felt very happy, really nice girl and complements him. Sadly, weather awful so not able to go out but may be incentive for them to come again. Herself had given some paintings for them, went down well. Drained but in nice way, and after the restless night before, slept really well, with a Nytol.

India passes 20m covid cases, bit still no national lockdown, centre more interested in the Vista project to put their stamp on Delhi's architecture including building the new PM house, following one death tragedy millions statistics news pushed down to back pages and more important announcements of £1b trade deal between UK and India being celebrated. Infodemic over pandemic.

Bill and Melinda Gates to divorce, another one after Bezos, the pressures at that level must be very high; think of all that money- Amazon had sales of Euro44 billion in EU and paid no corporation tax as running in loss so how does Bezos become a billionaire; OPM- Other People's Money. As usual the creative ones get going on WhatsApp- *According to Melinda Gates, Bill just didn't Excel at his marriage. Apparently his tool in bed was Microsoft, he had no Power Points, and he always had to have the last Word.*

One victory for equality though today as England and Wales going to include Mother's details along with Father's on birth certificates – to correct the historic

anomaly, and ofcourse the new world. Not sure what happens with for example surrogate or donors- how are mother and father defined?

Herself busy in studio, will go over with leftovers from yesterday for supper (she always calls it that, not dinner), and otherwise joining the CLN MH project meeting and the poetry group today (still virtual, could have been garden but weather, heavy rain, drat) – theme being very appropriately weather!

S**tometer: 1/10

05 May 2021

Long chat with Raman – taking stock re mum and maid, no practical alternative, just muddling through, could see/feel his tension on VC, really upset and dilemma: to talk- to offer moral support or not- as unable to do anything and taking only reinforcing problem, as all down to him anyway. Set off reflecting on family and own generation – of mum's 2 brothers, neither family has a son in India anymore- both abroad, and of own siblings and cousins everyone has children overseas, to the extent that atleast one cousin has no immediate family to fall back on. The geographical footprint extends from NZ/Aus to USA/Canada via Europe. So much for family support in India- a myth for middle classes especially as many sacrificed to ensure children better off and sent them away from mess in India. Tragedy of first being immigrants from Pakistan and then losing kin. Real crisis for own generation as getting older – as no state systems.

Speak to Anita in Delhi, says Sonu continues with low grade unremitting fever, now father also feverish, no firm diagnosis still – and equally getting tested hard, so practising old medicine, and prayers.

More critical articles about India- from Aatish Taseer – 'Survivors guilt as watching the catastrophe unfold' in the Time and Natalie Grover being 'furious at Modi's wilful neglect of my homeland' in The Guardian. Dick sympathises and wonders what it will do to the self-image of India, so had to disabuse him- the only surprise being anyone is surprised- political-business nexus keeping public suppressed with no chance of change. Though upset with certain elements of public exploiting the situation, also see why selfish – as all Indians know have to look after own, no one else there. So royally f**ked, India Burning. Not much better in many other parts, as Indonesian racket of reusing nasal swabs brought to light.

Are we being good ancestors? As Trump makes comeback with own channel, with party still in his grip, Starmer on backfoot and already conceding Hartlepool, though rays of hope in Wales with Drakeford enjoying support but will it be enough? The Guardian is 200 years old today- Brian still talks about Manchester Guardian.

Not really surprised to hear back from BC contact, guess due to message sent to friend there and wish he had not followed up, and in dilemma, as apparent no intention of using offer to support them, and saying no to the symbolic gesture to show doing something means refusing when asked (Aha, we knew you are not serious) and doing it condoning (and becoming another successful stat reinforcing

the system); basically, over a barrel. Herself says should take up whatever crumb is thrown – even if ego bruised.

BC not alone, as others similar, worth writing to the GMC- who failed repeatedly to respond to their own deadlines, for example or forget it- is giving feedback, even genuinely and not as criticism/punitive, possible without people getting defensive. Dystopian world- on one hand slogans/lofty statements/presentations and on other side lived experiences with shabby treatment of customers. Another rant coming on- but worth writing, to whom and what purpose apart from keeping busy? The system is such that everyone can tick their box successfully and yet appalling result- who does one catch and hold responsible?

G7 foreign ministers summit start with Indian delegation being asked to self-isolate, after meeting in person- with mask but exchanging folders and elbow bumping on first day, go figure. Nothing else of interest, apart from lighter news about, big cat being spotted, again, this time near Chirk/Oswestry – bit like Nessie, more a gimmick than reality, well keeps folk amused.

Decided to keep Herself company and downloaded Duolingo to start Welsh lessons; do as I say!

S**tometer: 2/10

06 May 2021

The big day – or a whimper, elections, scratching head as to who to vote for Senedd and Police Commissioner- Labour candidate very weak, guess tactical as has been a Tory seat, so protest votes? Big debate about Autocracy vs Democracy- China or USA model – as polls show low support for American democracy and Hilary Clinton wades in challenging the problem of disinformation and the power of Tech giants esp Facebook. Will they lift the ban on Trump?

None of the big issues any use as India struggles, the world has turned upside down as the virus affecting all – India's strong man Jagdish Lad dies at 33 and the top bureaucrats falling like flies- used to think untouchable and would always be able to bypass systems but no beds or oxygen for them either. Teachers deputised for polling becoming ill. Classic case study of how not to do it. Neighbouring countries close borders as disease rages in Nepal with migrant workers returning there.

Guess was inevitable as UK deploys naval vessels to patrol Jersey as France threaten to cut electricity off. And Art funding to universities to be cut by 50%. One good story – 10Pines, a software company lets colleagues decide salary, based in Buenos Aires, will it spread here? Not in the near future, suspect.

Started reading *Mudlarking* by Lara Maiklelm; looking for stuff around banks of Thames – with some interesting discoveries mixing objects and history, makes it seem very exciting; always fascinated by people who find joys in such activities, got the book from Herself who got it from Simon, another mud larker for Xmas. Yours Truly's story would be Sleepwalking through life – especially as hear stories of

interests from people, tried to make a list of basic stuff that is taken for granted: names of trees/plants/birds or interests like fishing/cycling/riding/flying.... and realised that had nothing comparable to talk about, 'I worked' does not have the same appeal. Felt sad so off to walk with Tony and his mates- all airline pilots and will be talking shop but interesting and booked a golf session given the break in the weather. No point feeling sorry for the past, live now – be present, as Maria Popova reminded in latest post, quoting Kierkegaard

The unhappy person is one who has his ideal, the content of his life, the fullness of his consciousness, the essence of his being, in some manner outside of himself. The unhappy man is always absent from himself, never present to himself. But one can be absent, obviously, either in the past or in the future. This adequately circumscribes the entire territory of the unhappy consciousness.

S**tometer: 2/10

07 May 2021

Covid, India loop in head – further criticisms of Modi and the Government hiding the true extent of crisis, says Ankita Rao in The Guardian and Nepal facing humanitarian crisis as a result of the failure to contain in India. The variant makes its way to the UK as clusters found across England. Pretty dire situation. Whatsapp on the go. Can UK protect itself, if India fails? The NHS Digital data insecure – with very poor security to protect personal details, boost to antivaxxers. NHS needs £102billion injection says Think Tank and further effects of covid coming to light as deaths due to alcohol rise. Be interesting to see what happens with elections results today, so far Hartlepool is already lost to Labour.

Good chat with Dick, catching up and commiserating on the state of the world- Australia slow with vaccination and uproar as even nationals could not return as no isolation facilities made available, rather a blanket, heavy handed ban. Says another cluster in Sydney.

Watched *Falling Down* with Michael Douglas and Robert Duvall on Netflix after walk-good one around Minera and even the 'Beluga' made an appearance and golf-rubbish game with Simon Shepherd who asked to join him, very embarrassing as he was a good player, yesterday. Golf does teach humility.

Rain coming back, off to get eyes tested and library today. And to Peniel later.

S**tometer: 2/10

08 May 2021 (Peniel)

Could not contain self so had to write to the BMJ after another comment about resilient Indians, utter tosh, they have no choice; calling them resilient only condoning what's going on, a humanitarian crisis with failed political leadership.

More personal stories, entire extended families ill, thankfully so far avoided the worst. Hundreds gathered at mosque in Hyderabad for Friday prayers, sad but tragedy if exploited on religious lines, volatile situation. Good to see more state wide lockdowns starting though still not in worst areas and more hype in Delhi about oxygen and vaccinations. Raman getting worried about mum and planning to take her home, she will fight it but no choice. Check with Meera and Ramky in Chennai also.

Talk about politics, Tories win big in England and Labour disaster, never understand Joe Public, after all the mess and needless deaths during pandemic, sad at low turnout, apathy being exploited. Democracy the tyranny of minority. Labour winning in Wales, waiting to see if majority and ditto SNP in Scotland. So, some hope still.

Tale of two worlds: rich and poor nations divide demonstrated by Covid, and concern that Africa next.

Tried to link up Johann with colleagues in India and help develop medical leadership, sorely needed but the western model useless; need a completely fresh start with basics. Not sure if two parties can/will bridge the divide between? Not sure what else to do practically to support.

Meantime, carry on with experimenting more writing on Mentorship, and practice Welsh on Duolingo- must take it slow, and not move until fully understood. Interesting tech development – gather.town as a virtual meeting space to avoid Zoom fatigue – according to The Guardian. Can't see much use personally yet as world has shrunk and WhatsApp enough but may be.

Got the eyes tested yesterday, all covid secure, new gadgets, optician says got used to it but a big change; good news no cataracts yet- so blurring was fatigue, anyway gone now. Compare health notes with Herself- listing problems, hey ho. Distressing chat with Cefyn, really struggling, Mair and now next-door neighbour, on top of own health issues, with no escape to India or anywhere- all piled up. Must look after him, Herself makes a list of people to see soon also.

Weather bad today, so Ramblers cancelled, shame as was looking forward to seeing folk after a long gap. May be next week. Off to Peniel later and will dial into Ruchi's Zoom talk about seeing India afresh after their return from London a few years ago- be interesting as know her heart is in London and would love to be back, esp with situation now.

S**tometer: 2/10

09 May 2021

Already fatigue setting in – even calamities become 'norm' soon as Covid India news tapers off, though not stopped The Lancet from launching a scathing attack on its handling, BMJ publishes own letter online – for what it's worth, Raj Bhopal's old interview re Herd Immunity making rounds again, wonder what he would say now, drop him a voice message as he does not write much due to eyesight problems.

Elections predominate here, with Sturgeon flexing muscles re independence, Burnham positioning for Labour leadership and BoJo riding high on wins; Drakeford attributes win to handling of Covid. BoJo calling for Devolution summit and though not in favour of more breakups post Brexit, unless some balance restored between London and the rest, hard to see the mood shifting; it's not about UK, it's about London arrogance. But do not hold breath as knives out for Starmer already. First women of colour (*sic*) elected to Senedd and Scottish parliament.

A silver lining may be BoJo will focus on the NHS, but in his own way or will listen? Who will succeed Stevens in England– Harding, God forbid. And will Drakeford get some share to help Welsh NHS?

Rain kept indoors and anyway Ifor has damaged nail and limping. Watched *Rocketman* on Netflix last night with Herself, about Elton John's early life before got sober, good film, did not know much about him and certainly the fact that his half-brother lives in Ruthin, though no contact. Good on Elton to come back from that low point in his life.

The Gates divorce points out the growing rate among over 65s in the UK – Silver Splitters with some famous faces among them including Colin Firth.

Good chat with Herself over breakfast – diagnoses intellectual isolation and makes suggestions though hard to see how to progress these. Reminded of old conversations when used to be encouraged to go into academia and resisted since felt that did not know enough so how could think, teach or create new knowledge, and now its late and not taken seriously. So, continue work on the Mentoring project, whilst Dick makes another introduction, this time in Canada.

Weather windy and cloudy but no rain yet, maybe a drive later, and visit to the vege patch, will need much work once dry.

S**tometer: 2/10

10 May 2021

Is it fatigue- due to sameness as every day is similar with not much excitement or feeling of getting comfortable by accepting life and becoming calmer as wonder what more is there to write/say? Why do people write diaries, and does it have to be daily? Apart from creating a structure and discipline, and who knows what future may bring and entries may be useful?

Pootered around yesterday and drove down to bring flowers to Liz who seems to be settling in Lys Awelon, not allowed visitors- Herself planning a Hijack a granny expedition to get her out socially; visit the vege patch – things growing but messy needing lot of weeding and sorting, waiting for weather; Mrs Maudsley's house is sold even before going on market- three offers already, demand for country properties rocketing. Could not get into the film: *Pursuit of Love* Herself wanted to watch so left her to it and re-read Rilke's Letters to young poet and Tom Cox's Notebook – easy read, funny and stimulated thinking about this diary!

Covid in India not a medical issue but a media one – with both sides spreading own versions and blaming each other– whilst people continue to die and suffer. Jagdish still positive though mild symptoms only in Delhi whilst Sonu and Anita now negative, all cooped up in hot Delhi.

Gwydion says Beryl starting teaching again and so need to brush up and practise piano- bet she will be annoyed as really have not progressed, rather gone back – expecting virtuoso after 18 months will be starting afresh with her student. No excuse, shameful! Anyway, managed to stick with Welsh on Duolingo for 7 days – slow but steady, try and keep going.

Gmail not as private as some others, says The Guardian article, if not paying in money then paying by being the product, but what to do; like Amazon, is everywhere now. Resigned to being a puppet, price to pay, though limit as much as possible. Can't expect miracles, as politically getting more challenging with Starmer being criticised, mishandled reshuffle.

Keep bugging on, daily. Actually, not that bad a start, nice breakfast and then Herself takes off for Carriageworks and time to head back to Llanbedr after weekend in Peniel- could be worse.

S**tometer: 2/10

11 May 2021 (Llanbedr)

Troop off to have the blood test first thing in morning, decided to walk as later rain and may not get another chance, interesting going down the backroad past Bathafarn- the road littered with cans, cig and crisp pack surprisingly as no kids walking there or places to stop for anyone to sit in car, just a narrow country lane. Hey ho. The community hospital now wants medical masks and not the cloth ones – good idea.

Had managed 9 holes of golf last evening- happy to get back in the game after the disaster last time; all in the mind. Started reading Jodi Picoult: *The book of two ways* based on ancient Egyptian culture, used to enjoy her and looking forward. Surprise, surprise, the GMC finally gets back and wants to use piece on reflection. Will be what it will be, and creating life around basics and started practising keyboard again, got one week before facing Beryl!

WHO designates India variant of global concern, Nepal struggling – the King positive after attending Kumbh Mela and asks Everest climbers to bring back oxygen cylinders for refilling, bodies washing up on river shores along Ganges in India- due to overcrowded crematoriums. Akhil says will be a while before things settle, and head down everywhere, no news from Anu though Umesh says two classmates, doctors who could not get beds for themselves, have died in Delhi.

Here, almost like old days as Wales plans to open indoor hospitality, cinemas etc from 17 May, along with other nations, mood lifting. No Covid deaths in England, Scotland and Ireland yesterday though 4 in Wales. Another good outcome as NHS

gave jobs to refugee nurses, awaiting asylum, after retraining in a pilot in Liverpool- win: win as can earn something and help the beleaguered NHS. BBC mentions a network using Honeypot groups to fight anti-vaxxers, by 'seducing' them in and then countering rather than being adversarial – not bad, something clearly needs to be done to counter fake news and extreme views.

America releases Joe Ligon- the longest juvenile lifer after 68 years in prison – out aged 83, says survived by working as cleaner and now wants a job as a janitor. Some justice system – who did it help?

A quiet day, again, chores and house cleaning, and if dry maybe weed the vege beds. Nice.

S**tometer: 2/10

12 May 2021

Brian dropped by, on way from workshop to get his boat motor fixed, and caught in the middle of cleaning- but good to catch up, ask him to come back in the evening for dinner with Herself. Says finished all the hard jobs at home, plastering done and now wait for Will to come and help hang kitchen cabinets, Will got engaged, good news.

The Indian mess continues – another Karan Thapar interviewee says modest estimate 1 million deaths already (though likely under-estimate), more worry now with black fungus being seen in Covid patients, continuing shortages, and evidence-based medicine out of window as desperation sets in and people gobbling all sorts of medicines and traditional remedies- quacks and gurus flourishing, massive profits being made by pharma. Not just in India, at AZ too, and shareholders object to massive pay for the CEO. Though still unclear how it will end as Seychelles, the most vaccinated nation, faces rising cases and questions being asked if all the trust in vaccines justified- are relaxations rash, should borders be closed given Indian variants already in UK? Anita says neighbours went to all hospitals looking in Dwarka for second dose- bunking political non-sense about vaccine availability.

BoJo announces covid inquiry, hold it, during his term – so that is alright then, and does not announce any of the other stuff including addressing social care or relief for leaseholders facing bill after Grenfell, in the Queen's speech.

Covid does not stop violence in middle east as further conflict between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants (freedom fighters?) intensifies. And the world goes on.

Talking to Akhil yesterday, and hearing about more deaths of acquaintances brought on strange feelings – esp as watched an old YouTube documentary about Shekhar Aggarwal who passed away, looking at his photos from college days and then his journey as a highly successful orthopaedic surgeon, and wondered is that it? All over, already? Our lot will be gone soon, and the world will carry on – hard to describe though feel calm in one sense. Interestingly Picoult book protagonist is a Death 'Doula' –someone who prepares people for death, not medically but holistically, enable them to die peacefully (as best as can be); odd that hardly

anyone prepares for the only certainty? Found a UK branch of Doula and subscribe to newsletter and ask for info on courses.

Enough brooding for a day, short windows in weather, so stick around and do odd jobs, Stuart offers to come and look at shower that's on go slow!

S**tometer: 2/10

13 May 2021

What a lovely day yesterday, good chat with Gordon, lost another brother two weeks ago, off to Salisbury for funeral next, son will drive him down, very practical about it – Life must go on, amazing late 80s man, check with Herself whether to ask him to tea on Sunday to take his mind off; also chat with Caroline who maintains the village space outside and is doing some planting, day not over yet as met Sheela, the secret benefactor who gave strawberries and showed her the field, is a Glaswegian originally and had a good laugh with her. Then dinner with Brian and Herself which went until 10 after a walk around Llanbedr Hall and sitting with tea on deck with birdsong, diving bats, occasional hooting owl watching the still colourful darkening sky- what an evening.

The streak continuing today as off to Beeston to walk with Iain, decided to head that way to avoid bad weather here; will check about XXXX post with him- be good if it works out, something worthwhile to do.

Media war about India continues with supporters and opponents of the Government coming out – like being at tennis, moving heads, trying to make sense but more importantly waiting to see if anything will change for better! Will it in India, globally? Lunatics out now with promoting cow dung and urine as defence for Covid in UP- laugh or cry says one opposition politician, Modi still quiet, not a word. Mind boggles. Gates Foundation report comes out with its recommendations for reinforcing global systems including WHO – just when the world going the other way. Says report should not go on shelf like predecessors, any bets? Given that Liz Cheney ousted in USA by Trump supporters in USA and BoJo playing games as inquiry delayed, though The Guardian wades in and lists the following areas for detailed review:

- Preparedness
- Lockdowns
- PPE
- Care Homes
- BAME communities
- Test and Trace
- The science
- Vaccines

Would add squandered goodwill and wasted volunteers.

Send a letter to The Guardian:

“We should add another topic to your excellent list of key areas for Covid inquiry - Squandered goodwill and contribution of volunteers who rose up in large numbers only to be found fit for clapping on doorsteps as £1k/day paid to consultants! Missed opportunity to build a better Britain.”

Really shameful as Indian variant of concern, Bolton numbers already rising and some other parts of England, surely lessons already learnt and if action being taken then talk about it and if not then do it, inquiry over, public confidence won. Simple? Obviously not, otherwise how to explain BoJo and sycophants' stance.

NHS waiting lists being tackled with extra money and services, good news; Tracey Emin talks about her bladder cancer, brave woman; and Social prescribing continues- this time with Nature on prescription for London Wetlands; why medicalise things, it should be normal community activity? (Rant)

S**tometer: 2/10

14 May 2021

Another birthday on Zoom – Amani is one in New Zealand and Raman and family have a virtual party, time flies. NZ still sealed though some mention in news about opening up borders but guess not for India. The news remains grim and affecting here too as BoJo concerned about Indian variant. Drakeford voices caution re foreign travel for another three weeks whilst planning more relaxations- Level 2 soon. None of the Crowd trials scheduled in North Wales, criticises local MP, as nine planned for Wales, mainly in South- good or bad thing, discuss!

Weather got in way so walk with Iain cancelled, at last minute yesterday, so went off to Peniel, Herself busy helping Jan shopping etc and putting finishing touches to exhibition – pooter around, finish Picoult and walk with mutts around Gasyth. Air ambulance out as horse rider out in fields had heart attack, Lesley from the kennels seemingly, Herself says usually very fit- who knows what's going on inside a person?

Also use the time to catch up on Popova, this time on Huxley and his thoughts re mind-body – how little attention is paid, obsessed with 'I' and forgetting the universal connection and more importantly about lack of preparedness due to poor education

Although for hundreds of years we have been talking about mens sana in corpore sano, we really have not paid any serious attention to the problem of training the mind-body, the instrument which has to do with the learning, which has to do with the living. We give children compulsory games, a little drill, and so on, but this really does not amount in any sense to a training of the mind-body. We pour this verbal stuff into them without in any way preparing the organism for life or for understanding its position in the world — who it is, where it stands, how it is related to the universe. This is one of the oddest things.

Moreover, we do not even prepare the child to have any proper relation with its own mind-body.

Send it to Ruchi for Rey, and Dick re thoughts on education and seemingly he already subscribes and indeed has heard Popova speak online! Had a chat with Simon Frazer re contributing to his doctors training programme, about reflection as way of taking control of one's own learning – not sure if he will revert, or too abstract?

Pleased to see Green Party majority in Bristol Council – though no seats in parliament, from small seeds. Only way to stop the Tory juggernaut is 'Left' Unity – but even Ken Loach gave up, as can't seem to come together; good Toryism can be a good force but sadly no good Toryism in sight and the Left promise remains empty. Blair jumps on the bandwagon and calls for deconstruction and reconstruction of Labour – Hey ho.

Time to leave it to the big boys and to more basic stuff – pack up for walk with Iain, take out yesterday's sandwiches from the fridge; bit overcast but should be manageable. Herself sends text to remind about picking up tomato plants from Robin as going into pre-op covid isolation tomorrow. Hope his op goes well- been suffering with bad neck pains.

S**tometer: 2/10

15 May 2021 (Peniel)

Fantastic day- weather dry and even sun at times, walked up Vivod mountain near Iain's wood and looped back via Chainbridge hotel for tea and cakes – 13 miles hike; shows around his caravan and suggests we start using it, very generous and will talk to Herself, good for short visits. Head back for Peniel to be waited upon after long day!

WHO says going to be a worse year than the first one, as Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Japan and Egypt apart from India struggling with numbers and stretched health systems. Australia criticised for pulling up drawbridge and sealing borders and New Zealand in no rush to open up. BoJo now more worried about Indian variant here and surge testing and vaccinations being planned in hotspots like Bolton and Blackburn and Darwin, and Whitty says uncertainty about vaccine effectiveness against mutant. No one is safe till all safe, and that will take time if ever. So ends the discussion this morning over breakfast with Herself, who wants to live and be human – how can one ignore the lonely elderly who is 'crying' test, no answer.

No personal news from India – which is good, though last time Raman said Mumbai health system a bit better; but problems continue elsewhere. Still no sign of Modi, never attended a press conference in seven years, talk about accountability, democracy aka autocracy.

Nice to see some political leadership locally though as Wales considering pilot basic income scheme. Over in Japan gender equality rears its head, with concerns about royal succession as fewer male heirs.

Off for first walk with Ramblers after nearly 18 months, near Betws y Coed, overcast with showers prediction but still going ahead – take waterproofs! Herself offers to make sarnies – lovely. Life is OK.

S**tometer: 2/10

16 May 2021

Son #1 birthday- 34 today, seems like yesterday seeing him for the first time in Simpson's Unit in Edinburgh, the Morningsider Scot in the family. Send him a message and hopefully can talk later, not sure when meet next. May be try and see soon as things not looking good again, with concerns about the Indian variant growing and may compromise BoJo's roadmap.

Mum moved in with Raman, sends pic of her walking with Zimmer frame on the roof terrace, keep fingers crossed that works out. Big cyclone predicted in South India, as if not enough problems already.

Great walk yesterday, good to see everyone after long time and catch up, new side of Betws – along Irwch valley and past a big burial site. Ramblers were a great help when moved here and friendships continue – supporting each other, as life is not always rosy. Talking with mates helps, too many lonely people – vicious cycle as true friendships fewer and people tending to become more formal, no one just drops in anymore.

Interesting conversation with Herself over breakfast – sunny outside though rain forecast – comparing notes about Hindi and Welsh on Duolingo, both struggling at times and somehow ended up on origins of words - variations of Chahata (Hindi, Like) leading to Chutiya (Cunt, figuratively) and Herself maintains the word used to be an endearing, not pejorative, term in Olde English with husbands fondly calling wives cunts! End of breakfast, and first thing is to look this up- and Yes, amongst others Chaucer used it in The Canterbury Tales – spelt Quentye. So there.

Stop being a C**t and get ready for the day – Herself on chicken feeding duty as Paul away to Scotland, and Yours Truly's turn to make lunch. Do with a rest after two days of good walking.

S**tometer: 2/10

17 May 2021

Rest day yesterday, partly enforced by weather, till evening when cleared up so packed picnic and off to Prestatyn, sarnies overlooking the sea and then walk in the dunes- flowers out, especially wild roses, lovely. Mutts had a good run, got muddy and stank on the way back in the car.

Lesley sadly passed away after being rescued whilst horse riding- was generally fit. In other local news, someone crashed through hedge on the sharp and steep U bend

up the road- no one saw or not telling, and must have had mates with tractor to pull them out, injured badly? Known bad spot anyway esp winters when icy.

Son #1 rang to chat, had a good birthday, feeling positive about flat sale – at least not pressured, and work going OK with no Covid patients in ICU.

Further toll of Covid as one tenth of restaurants closed in UK, and pressure building on Japan to cancel Olympics- billions at stake, economy or life conundrum. Daniel Kahneman says AI will win, man won't be able to compete as not able to comprehend exponential change, being used to linear thinking, how people will adjust fascinating problem, but hey, says he won't be around.

Good chat with Nikhil from Mumbai yesterday, very committed and clever doctor, has made a YouTube video for mums to be, answering typical Indian questions, says sadly things won't change as a result of the pandemic, society and doctors increasingly pushed into adversarial positions and no meeting of minds possible. Sad with his analysis – as tend to agree after own experience over decades, and further as says does not want his children to go back- daughter in London and son in USA studying, and accepts his fate in older age when will be alone, has a very supportive wife though. Not unique as many friends and family in same position.

Finished last evening with TV arts channel watching Pink Floyd with story of Syd Barrett – what a band; reminded of the book: The ballad of Syd and Morgan sometime back.

Not good sleep, mainly pee breaks and mild headache. Back to Llanbedr today, and work on application for XXXX post and few other writings, esp the mentoring project. Herself looking after Jan and busy with her campaign against more windfarms up here. In bad books as forgot her book club last night- had not read the book anyway, nothing new there!

S**tometer: 3/10

18 May 2021 (Llanbedr)

Aha, Anu got back from Delhi- rang from airport, 5 hours wait through immigration then onto bus for the quarantine hotel- just allocated, no choice and now will have to wait for 10-11 days, whether allowed exercise not clear. Says Delhi was chaotic. Confirmed by Sonali and Akhil as K K Aggarwal dies in ICU, another one after vaccination –vaccine failure/escape, 50 doctors died in one day across India with 244 dead in second wave as India records highest one day deaths overall, though most agree gross under-reporting. More problems in rural areas now, cities slowly calming down. 'Everybody is angry' as Modi under fire according to NDTV, but then it would say that and would it make any difference, stealth fascism for a while.

No respite over here either as NAO calculates Covid costs £372 billion and Think Tank says economy will resemble that of Italy by end of 2020s due to Covid, Brexit, Net Zero (climate target). automation and demographics. Where will the new jobs be- may be renewable energy with planned changes to boilers by 2025- no new

fossil fuel ones but costs of alternative too high at present. Worth checking if grant available for conversion? Pressure to compensate key workers affected by long covid – no plan and going by Haemophilia or Grenfell scandals would be a long time. Whilst Mattdoor shrugs off all responsibility for Indian variant spread here – pleading helplessness and blaming science, again!

And Israel keeps pounding Gaza whilst USA and UN keep asking for ceasefire, Netanyahu uncompromising, and UK keeps sending plastic for 'recycling' to Turkey where not disposed properly, causing more damage. No recognition, despite covid in face, that its all one world- sink or swim together.

Not a happy scenario, as rich get richer and no conscience, stories coming out about Bill Gates being another pest, with inappropriate relationships with employee – had a reputation for questionable conduct in work-related settings. Almost becoming a right of passage and badge of honour for rich and powerful to be irresponsible and shady – how much to get away with game.

Not much yesterday, good golf and watched *The death of Stalin* on Netflix – a parody, enjoyable. Herself finds an article about self-reflection making better leaders, from British Psychology Society, interesting, worth following.

Talk to family and friends in India, rain later and so may be Betws y Coed for shopping – need new walking gear esp boots. Before then need to talk to Dick about next steps for Charity, got some ideas. Got to keep going.

S**tometer: 2/10

19 May 2021

Started well but went down fast – by the time arrived in Peniel late morning, the monkey had started playing, no discernible reason so curmudgeonly day, went to Betws, with lunch at Royal Oak, very well organised for covid and some shopping; Herself happy as got some goodies, no boots for Yours Truly so looks like a trip to Go Outdoors sometime soon. Quick blast with mutts to road test new footwear and back to Llanbedr after pasta dinner. Took Nytol and slept, with breaks till 8. Trying to figure out what happened, some clues from *The Chimp paradox* book by Steve Peters, just started reading it, interesting presentation of mind vs brain and how to control the Chimp; order a copy for XXX who is also fighting to control the monkey.

Some relief on India front as deaths going down in Delhi with beds available for needy- Akhil and Sonali confirm but rural areas still up. Talk to Sonu about further vaccinations for family.

But mood in UK worsening- BoJo being elusive, sends Mattdoor to front press conferences being interpreted as sign he is distancing self from bad news to come, which it will be as Dom Cummings fires broadsides via Twitter about being ignored, PPE procurement questionable and NAO points out other failures in preparedness, and wasted time in banning visitors from India – due to his obsession with visit to India; The Guardian talks about BoJo's Modi Operandi (very clever). Not to mention

that his nurse, Jenny McGree from New Zealand who had looked after BoJo in ICU resigns from the NHS in frustration, had not joined him for photo-op of clapping either, good on you girl, and reports of very low morale in service as staff fear ongoing disruptions. To pile on pressure, report of buried patient safety reports emerges- Royal Colleges failed to disclose their damning inquiries to regulator, what a surprise; usual suspects Kirkup and Titcombe turn up to comment on what was barn door obvious for long time as no one has been looking at the whole system anyway. No wonder own monkey gets out of control.

Official now, alcohol is bad, period- study using BioBank data confirms it destroys brain cells in any amount, pickled brains. Nobody will take note since pint is so much part of Britishness, as covid relaxations being judged by whether allowed to drink or not.

Trump investigation is now criminal not just civil, anyway be a while before anything emerges and even then, would it make any difference – will there be justice?

Arvind and BL book tickets to visit in August, hope things better by then – be good to see them. Barbara coming in June – currently will need 5 days isolation and tests, but OK for her as coming to see family anyway.

Not able to walk with Tony today as meeting about Mental Health project in middle of the day, and the piano lesson – so book golf for afternoon and meantime catch up on some work with Dick.

S**tometer: 4/10

20 May 2021

Started the ten days Stoic course – online, self-study – but with view to practise not just reading: to stop worrying what is not in control and to manage The Chimp. Keeping busy helps. Herself sends a philosophical email about possessions- physical and mental, and maybe time to declutter more, will sort out wardrobe and dispose not needed, and then shop for the next stage of life. And shows by example as gets on with erecting fence around swing in the garden in blustery weather, but paid the price as unwatched Ifor escaped and worried a lamb, got to go as done it too often now.

Spent yesterday, busy preparing application for the XXXX post, increasingly interesting as took some more soundings, and worked on project with Dick – do what one can, not become hostage to others, as their priorities different. Managed to link up with Simon on the golf course, and was a glorious evening. Got told off by Beryl – first piano lesson after 18 months, with no progress, says must stop racing and go back to basics: sight-reading, fingering and timing, have not got the basics, next few lessons will be to concentrate on these. Make or break time- will give it 5 lessons and if not cracked then pack it in. Like swimming, mental block with learning some stuff; on other hand, some (little) progress with Welsh on Duolingo.

New book *Battle for the soul* by Edward Isaac Dove being released next week, should make for interesting reading given Obama called Trump a madman, a racist, sexist pig, that fucking lunatic and corrupt motherfucker (never, wash your mouth), but not alone as Jill Biden said of Kamala Harris: 'Go fuck herself' after she attacked Biden in primaries. Lovely! Talking about exposes, report into Bashir interview with Diana coming out, going to be critical of BBC.

So, look for fun stuff and find 'Cardening' – growing plants in cars, not new as Volkswagen had the idea when created optional extra vase in Beetles in 1950s- hence the Flower Power generation. Seemingly Britain has gone big on gardening with every available space being used, windows and balconies for those without gardens.

Akhil sends a good one about what not to do if covid positive: Whatsapp, google updates and news, good advice.

Herself coming over then off to Go Outdoors near Chester, poor Gordon, opposite, in bad way, says teeth problem, so living on soup and generally down after brother's death, tried to cheer him up as must be hard. Only the lonely know how it feels.

S**tometer: 3/10

21 May 2021

Seem to be stuck – own diary nothing like Aurelius', no profound insights- just an old man trying to survive. Trick is to find ways to make oneself useful, and not get picky – so engage with various officers during the AONB Partnership meeting and with contacts to explore how to develop mentoring. Also working on the XXXX application – talk to Raj and Debbie; would like to do it, so fingers crossed. The challenge of re-engagement is self-created, having dropped out of circulation for a long time, difficult to re-join. So, keep chipping away. Spoke to Chandra after many years – got reminded of Voltaire and *Candide*, so download for a read, Gutenberg Library a good resource.

Covid in India now in hinterland and NE affected- The church has started a collection for the hospitals; Meban and Sandra say anxious times there. The variant on rise here – went up 160% in a week, Covid Test and Trace system failure contributed, and Mattdoor criticised for victim blaming in Blackburn by Gabriel Scally as not all hospitalised been unvaccinated and no comprehensive plan.

Uproar and anger – Prince William also jumps in this time, not just Harry and Earl Spencer, about the BBC interview; whilst sad for the family, the conspiracy mind can't help but wonder if there is a sub-plot to reign in or take out BBC also?

French study shows dogs better than lateral flow tests in detecting corona – 97% accuracy, may be Herself should not rush to get rid of the naughty mutt!

Rain outside, and anyway busy with various calls and writing, and have left over from last night's dinner with Herself so easy day, but need to do some washing! 21st day

and 21st week of the 21st year of 21st century- says WhatsApp message today, surely some significance?

S**tometer: 3/10

22 May 2021

Almost a full day at the office yesterday, lots of calls and catch ups – talking to folk about meaningful work, not worried about remuneration, more something useful to do; Raj and Dev will look out, and Debbie gives excellent feedback on application, good to have friends.

Watched *Wish Man* on Netflix, about Frank Shankwitz who founded the Make a Wish Foundation for children, movie dull but story moving and uplifting. Great guy, overcame adversity and did good. Resonates with current course on Stoicism and so stayed off Covid news, following Seneca's letter to: Lucilius: "Why would you be miserable now just because you might be in the future".

George Dunea's recent article (19 March 2021) on Ivan Illich turned up in inbox- interesting read, Illich was of a time, and useful personally though the establishment did not like him, even he would be shocked by the state now: As Dunea concluded "*For the more things change, the more they remain the same- but sometimes, he (Illich) might have felt, they even get worse*", as actors have changed – from doctors to corporate executives but story same. Food for thought for 20-year anniversary of own Milroy lecture in 2023?

Einstein $e=mc^2$ letter fetches \$1.2 million and Jeremy Paxman diagnosed with Parkinson's disease

Rain, rain go away, getting a bit depressing. Cloudy but no rain so walk going ahead, atleast not heard otherwise yet, like Bryn Alyn so looking forward. Herself says will come over and sort out house, run out of food!

S**tometer: 3/10

23 May 2021

Twenty-six folk and as many stiles, so rather stilted (*sic*) walk yesterday- stop/go, more tiring but rain held off and chance to catch up with folk, some new ones- guess walking popular now. Used the gap in rain to cut grass and go visit the vege patch- will need lot of work to tidy up but good to see veges and fruits healthy. Indian take away delivered from Pearl Ocean in 20 minutes including delivery time – mind boggles, eat but not sure good idea, God knows when cooked, basically frozen stuff. Herself's turn to be low, headaches- not surprised, having to deal with the Curmudgeon.

Good chat with Raman this morning, been missing each other on phone, being very practical with mum- handful, not able to control herself - says her remaining siblings

and families all in same boat, and stories from his friends. Has a good group of friends from Uni days, who support each other, one of them is going to take the lead on 'preparing' all on confronting mortality- not being morbid but realistic, says Raman. Felt better after chat.

A sends an update email- sad situation with P, but has found things to keep herself busy, though lonely. Should meet up sometime. Friends are important as the world remains the same.

Dom Cummings taking no prisoners as piles into Hancock and No 10 about their Covid management and holds them responsible for promoting Herd Immunity line against advice and which led to unnecessary lockdowns. Guardian says No 10 tried to block data on spread of new variant in schools. Numbers of cases going up, but so is vaccination rates and seemingly Pfizer and AZ both effective against Indian variants – though conspiracy theorists remain busy about the Big pharma and cronies creating the pandemic for profit. Is there a Truth, will anyone ever know? Over in India, the government asks SoMe to stop using the term Indian variant, so still focus on image management as more and more supporters turning against establishment – what good will it do, as no respite for a few years with elections due in 2024. Denbighshire remains Covid –free, says the Free Press; and long may it continue.

Bob Dylan turns 80 tomorrow and Hibbing, Minnesota prepares for a year of celebrations; wonder if there will be a film on his life. Enjoyed *The Doors* again on Netflix last night, had seen it in 1991 in Rochester, Minnesota whilst at Mayo! Great acting, in fact all the ones – Johnny Cash, Freddie Mercury, Elton John and Jim Morrison actors acted very well; enjoy that genre. Herself criticises Jim Morrison, who should have known better about drugs and lifestyle – but then can they, is not genius dysfunctional to 'normal' folk, how do their brains work, would they still be geniuses if behaving more normally? Don't agree fully with Herself, though can see her point partly as further details of Bill Gates past life emerge- he was not saint as he pushed Microsoft, and Steve Jobs had no time for him; not sure Gates is a genius in that sense, though very clever, Is Zuckerberg a genius or clever chap? Could genius be about taking the idea and making it successful- so two types?

Enough of that for today, need to get ready as Mike and Susheela and Phil coming for afternoon tea- rain predicted so will be cold conservatory, ask them to bring coats! Herself gets cracking, cleaning the house, after tidying up Yours Truly bad haircut- could not stand it- 18 months since been to a barber.

S**tometer; 2/10

24 May 2021

Great afternoon tea, visitors very good company, and Herself excelled with sandwiches, cakes and tea supplemented by Susheela's vege pasties. Mike trying to cope with wife's death, only son just retired in Melbourne, long way off. Loneliness

big issue- a million over 65s at risk as lockdown eases, says Guardian as many support organisations struggling.

World more intolerant as BLM activist Sasha Johnson shot in head in London, West accuses Belarus of hijacking a (Ryanair) plane to stop activist. Roman Protasevich from leaving – what’s the difference between the government and terrorists- and Police file case against former MP Chief Minister in India on using the word Indian mutant for B.1.617 variant and spreading misinformation and disobeying public servant’s orders. The Indian Journal of Medical Sciences takes The Lancet to task calling its article on India ‘Vulture Journalism’. No need to be smug here as GPs losing jobs after being ill with long covid. But good news as UK passes 60million jobs – well done.

Prince Charles writes in the Guardian about the work of small farms – the backbone of rural communities and highlights his Terra Carta, his Sustainable Markets Initiative putting Nature, People and Planet at the heart of global value creation; will he be taken to task by establishment for interfering in politics, given the UK deal with Australia? And is any one caring, as rural communities destroyed- houses in North Wales flying off the agent’s windows being snapped by city dwellers moving in.

Well, time to do one’s bit and tend to vege patch, gone out of control with rain, though all plants doing well, need to tidy up bigly and plant new crops. Came across Alcott via Popova: *“My garden has been my pleasure, and a daily recreation since the spring opened for planting... Every plant one tends he falls in love with, and gets the glad response for all his attentions and pains. Books, persons even, are for the time set aside — studies and the pen. — Only persons of perennial genius attract or recreate as the plants, and of books we may say the same, as of the magic of solitude.”*

And as reminder, his other quote:

“Human life is a very simple matter. Breath, bread, health, a hearthstone, a fountain, fruits, a few garden seeds and room to plant them in, a wife and children, a friend or two of either sex, conversation, neighbours, and a task life-long given from within — these are contentment and a great estate. On these gifts follow all others, all graces dance attendance, all beauties, beatitudes, mortals can desire and know.”

But first to Peniel to help Herself load the car to take stuff to the Tip, as part of her tidying up. Small things, big joys.

S**tometer: 2/10

25 May 2021 (Peniel)

Raman sends a photo of Dad’s notes of dates of births – Baboo (Yours Truly, the nick name never stuck) was born between 3-5 am on Sat/Sun 18/19 Dec, recorded he; also, had noted the birth of granddaughter. Brought back memories – sad and glad, strange how one never stops missing dads, he was a good man though very

simple (Anita is the closest to him in terms of personality probably, others more like mother!).

Interesting timing of theme as just started reading C S Lewis: *A grief observed*, which is more about God, but have not got deep into it yet, and more interested in his reactions to loss.

Loss is the big news today as WHO estimates 115,000 healthcare workers have died in this pandemic, and not over yet as now Afghanistan braces for the Indian variant, and BoJo government accused of failing to act over PPE shortages and not just workers as 8700 patients acquired covid during hospital stay for other reasons and died. Nothing learnt as local authorities frustrated about travel restrictions to covid hotspots in eight areas in England without informing or consulting them, due to the variant. No deaths for two days in Wales now though CMO says public should be worried, when will it all end!

Over in India, Baba Ramdev, the commercial guru invites further ire of the establishment for his ridiculing of medicine and baseless claims about the effectiveness of own products- sadly his own senior executive dies of covid, says because of Allopathic treatment. Distracting news to keep public angry and fighting and meanwhile considering banning Facebook and Twitter. Clearly governments failing everywhere (mainly)- as Russia accuses West of hypocrisy for interfering with Belarus hijack of commercial airliner, details of welfare of Princess Latifa in UAE still controversial, and in a page from Trump book- Samoa's newly elected PM locked out of parliament by the losing opponent!

Await Dom Cummings's attendance at the Select Committee, can anything damage BoJo; going to make an honest woman of Carrie in 2022, still no news about how many children he has, why women take up with such men and vice versa?

Guess power and sex play a role, as OnlyFans, a family run porn business also proves the obsession with latter, by reporting sales of £1.7bn during pandemic, well what else can people do with the state of the world: enjoy for who knows when we die, and an Indian couple charter a plane to celebrate wedding up in the air, to get around numbers restrictions.

Enough for a day, weather still bad, supposed to lift later, Herself getting second dose today, hopefully no reaction this time, going to be an easy day today. BTW blood tests all OK, sleep variable- occasional good nights, anxiety related pee problem. Did another one of Age tests, asks questions about what one thinks about certain things, and came out at age 40- gone up since last time few months ago when it was 33, Herself has got younger, says 27; sums up, men get older whilst women get younger in 'good' relationships!

S**tometer: 2/10

26 May 2021

Herself comes through with no effects after second dose yesterday, so walk the mutts for her, and before heading back to Llanbedr watch BBC Storyville on Robert Oppenheimer – father of atom bomb, but remembered in India for quoting The Gita- I am become death; sad story of person torn between science and real world. Gorgeous moon on the drive back, take some photos but never same on phone camera.

More dirt coming out re racism – story of forced deportations of Chinese workers from Liverpool after WW2, families torn, use them and throw them out; Tory Islamophobia report called a ‘whitewash’ – not institutionally racist, again, and to be balanced Kapil Seshasayee, the Scottish musician calls out casteism in India – more harm being done by Hindus to Hindus than across religions. On other news Kevin Spacey being rehabilitated – Uncancel culture – can’t waste talent even though ‘naughty’. Go try and make the world a better and equal place.

Or may be, go for a walk with Tony on Llantysilio as weather better and could do with a stretch, better use than getting wound up about state of things. But will read the Lancet Commission report on the future of the NHS- what do the great and the good have to say, and more importantly will it make any difference, as 42 trusts criticised for not sharing figures on patients dying of covid whilst in hospital; never been known to be a learning and open organisation, not that there is one NHS anyhow.

But then leaf from the master’s book, as Dom will point out today – constant trailers on twitter already – going after BoJo who had no plans for the vulnerable, or anyone, says Dom. Backlash from Northwest about lack of consultation about travel restrictions; Andy Burnham gearing up, chance may come sooner – Kailash would be happy for sticking with him. Starmer in last chance saloon with Batley by-election – chooses Jo Cox’s sister to mobilise sympathy vote. Who cares as Belarus saga plays out, Assad tightens grip on Syria as elections (*sic*) take place and Japan Olympics debate goes on with Indian variant now in 33 countries. People get the governments and systems they deserve.

Things settling down family wise in India though covid rampages as it travels to newer places and spikes in some older ones like Chennai; oxygen shortages a global problem and threatening collapse of dozens of health systems - 19 countries identified at risk. David Ballard says suffering from some long covid symptoms as recovers in Italy, keen for Yours Truly to visit but have to tell him about problems of travel and so need to wait till more clarity.

S**tometer: 2/10

27 May 2021

Anita’s 48th wedding anniversary in Delhi, memory of her wedding fresh in mind as friends camped at home for a few days with much partying; has been a hard life for her but carries on, have a nice chat to start the day. Also speak to Raman, mum settling down and he is getting on with stuff; says neighbour passed away, age 84- lived alone with servants after wife died few years ago, children abroad, says died of

social fatigue, sad. Concerned about Gordon across the road, Mark says back from funeral but is down, will look him up.

Needed it to overcome the doom and gloom with the circus in town- started watching Dom Cummings interview with select committees and after first few minutes gave up; hard to separate facts from personal vendettas, how will anyone make sense even though his comments on BoJo- unfit to be PM, who also has not denied crass comments such as piling of bodies or only for over 80s and on Mattdoor shocking. Sad part is his own credibility, though tried to come across as humble and contrite for own part- have no time for folk who plead afterwards, was a willing accomplice of BoJo and Gove (BTW Dom let the latter off the hook). Will it accelerate public inquiry – given comments about thousands died needlessly? Devi Sridhar piles in with another editorial in the Guardian – says public health experts were right and holds up Sturgeon’s approach to BoJo’s. Planned four nations summit on post –covid recovery postponed as Sturgeon and Drakeford combine forces to challenge BoJo modus operandi.

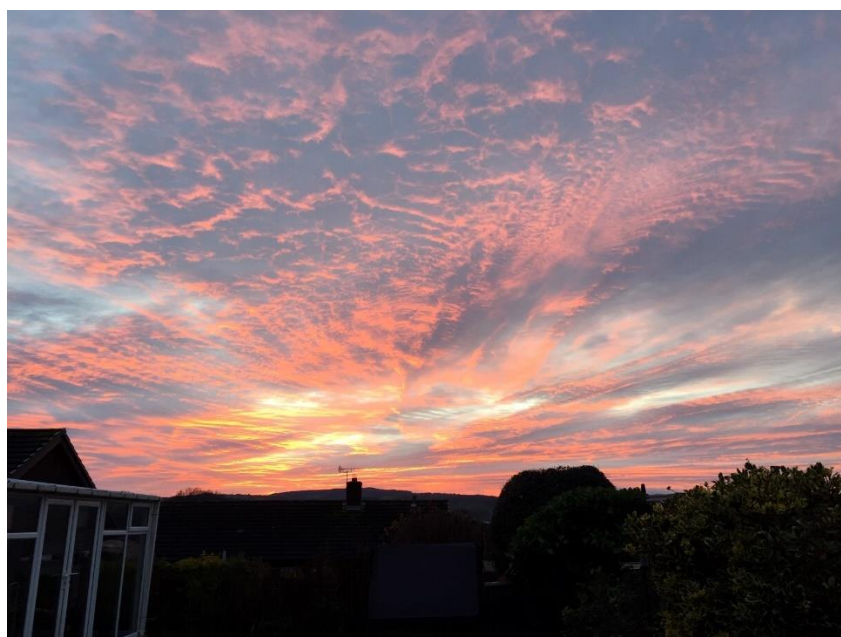
Biden orders inquiry into origins of covid – again, geopolitics to counter Chinese influence?

Went through the Lancet Commission report on the future of the NHS- frankly disappointed as same old, same old, write a commentary, but where to send and who will notice? Meantime, pressure mounts as GPs screaming with growing demands from patients.

Great walk with Tony yesterday, overcast but dry and chilly esp with wind on top – had a good ascent with the three moels on Llantysilio.

Sunny today, and going to be a full day at the vege patch – got to make up a lot.

S**tometer: 2/10



28 May 2021

Hard day on the vege patch yesterday – cumbersome strimmer and anyhow grass too overgrown and weeds+++ . Really tired- lesson, not do 5 hours non-stop; early to bed then.

Vijay says Pradeep Gupta passed away – not covid but MND – last seen in Delhi 3 years ago, and remember his house in Bengali Market and going to cheer him at water polo during college matches– good player. RIP.

Herself happy as exhibition gone up in newly refurbished Court House in Ruthin and rules permitting visitors allowed soon – may be some will buy them too!

News full of Dom and Select Committee, with BoJo and Mattdoor, being cocky and dismissing his comments – frankly all liars, to small and large extent, and sadly still not contrite, face them off school of politics. What difference will all this make, as Hillsborough still going on and trial collapsed – usual fate of enquiries but maybe there is hope as happened with BBC and Diana investigation with some resignations, there will be a reckoning eventually so keep pushing. Though Owen Jones rightly asks “*where were the critics who could have stopped Johnson leading us to covid tragedy*” and tells off Starmer for being acquiescent; George Galloway piles pressure on Starmer as throws his hat into the ring for Batley election, to split Labour vote and let BoJo in.

Black fungus, now epidemic in Delhi, to compound the situation, though numbers in hundreds and affects immune compromised mainly. Anu leaving quarantine hotel today – says stressful as not allowed out of hotel; got a short walk in 3 days with cold food. Back to work next week and all the other battles- his life is full of challenges, some self-created.

Guess what, the number of smokers has reached an all-time high of 1.1billion, so much for evidence base and public health; no match (*sic*) for the big corporates, money, money. money. Reminded of Thatcher and Clarke’s association with tobacco industry.

Wales leads the way in covid vaccinations in the world - amongst countries with over 1 million population (how many have less than 1 million- Vatican is the smallest, btw) – Cymru am byth.

Good chat with David in Tobia – busy in orchard, says using adhesive tape on base of trees to stop ants going up, be great to go over and spend some time, and happy to see Akhil and Johann agreeing to partner to support patient safety work in India.

So, a good start to the day, weather permitting more time on the vege patch, and Herself coming over later after walking with Sally.

S**tometer: 2/10

29 May 2021

Still tired, two hours weeding and planting but bone-tired, home and Herself arrives full of energy but takes pity, suitable tending and leaves Yours Truly to recover.

The Lancet asked to send the letter formally; hard work reducing it by half- Forgive the long letter, have not had the time to write a short one; but worth it, as reads better and may develop it further for submission to HSJ? Keep doing what can.

Both Mattdoor – broke ministerial rule over stake in firm and BoJo – acted unwisely over flat furnishing, let off with a gentle smack, naughty boys, no further action needed, says Lord Geidt; who has no power anyway as BoJo has the final say anyway. Go figure this law – marking own homework and one rule of them etc....

Whilst Tim Gowers adds weight to Dom Cumming's argument and releases the note sent about pursuing Herd Immunity option – bad idea he advised and also cautions against relaxing too much on 21 June, not out of the woods yet.

May be there is another world out there – as new theories about dark matter emerge and even Obama talks about UFO, USA to take it seriously. Ofcourse, how else to make sense of this world- probably a reality show for the celestial entities watching this lot on mother earth, all the ingredients there.

Can't wallow too much, need to pull self up, especially after bad night, not able to sleep and unnecessary pee breaks, so plan to go for the Sat walk, will be good as John leading a 9.5 miler and chance to catch up, hope rain stays off. Then will wander to Peniel, now that Herself has done all the hard work of painting and fixing fences – something about her approach, never stops working – not sure why sticks around with the lazy curmudgeon.

S**tometer: 3/10

30 May 2021 (Peniel)

Good walk near Llansannan, nearly 10 miles- lush Welsh hills and valleys, picturesque, again 26 people turned up, bit of rain and typical- too early till too late in donning waterproofs so end up walking in wet clothes for a while, boots soaked anyway. John Kelly is 20 short of leading 1000 walks, at age 79- what a guy, hard life, was a butcher down south and came up for the lady friend years ago which did not work out; makes himself useful and keeps busy. Felt better for the walk, and though still stiff, less tired. Must get to doing stretching and yoga, again, Ann, the gym instructor, advises too.

Up to Peniel then, for some TLC, get fed and watch *Pride and Prejudice*, the first version – Herself great fan and watching it umpteenth time. Slept better.

Discussion everywhere about the Indian variant and what will happen- somehow being Indian and medic supposed to know; frankly no idea and desperately trying to

make sense of the news and reading between the lines – Data not dates mantra but not always followed. Is Third wave on way? Any case, don't trust the government, or rather trust they will mess up- may be not in Wales as much, and maybe that's why folk flocking here as house prices skyrocket forcing locals out, protests and outcries.

In another twist, it comes out that BoJo has already married Carrie- in a secret ceremony – go figure the logic to keeping it secret; probably advised by some PR guy to create distraction from attacks about incompetence?

Talk about five-mile-high club, this pilot on a Southwest Airlines flight took it literally and tried it with first officer – in the cockpit! And a Canadian MP caught peeing in a cup during Zoom, after being caught naked previously. They also are part of human race.

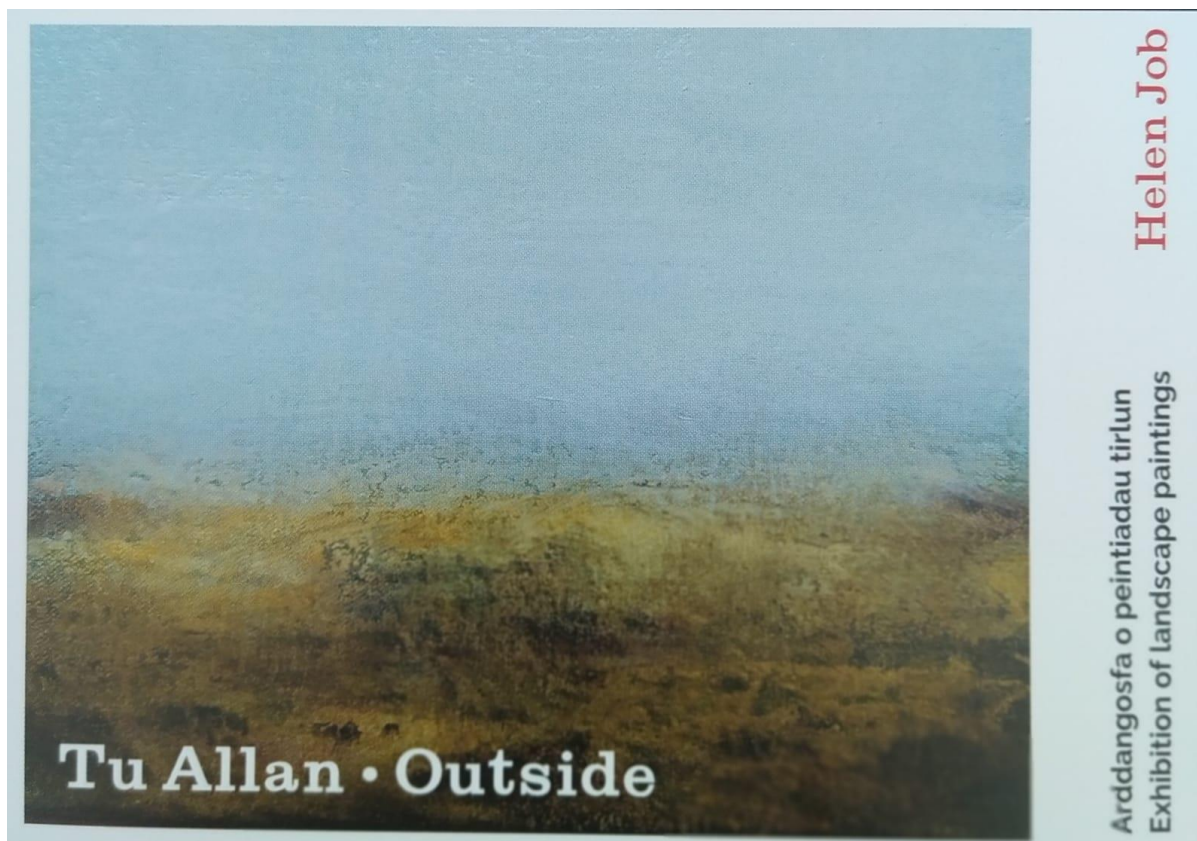
Beautiful day, warm, start with breakfast on the swing- Herself fed up of not going on holidays though the curmudgeon can't see what would be better than what already have – lovely views with sheep and lamb, and birdsong, with mutts running around, especially given concerns that not over yet, so trying to figure out a compromise, atleast get to restaurant and maybe theatre- Mike was going to Theatre Clwyd last week- and look out for self-catering accommodation in Scotland. And meantime, enjoy the day- head to the vege patch later to tidy up more and keep on top, take a picnic and book.

S**tometer: 2/10

31 May 2021

Another of those days – Raman said Aneeta's close relation (age 57) and Dilip – his batchmate - passed away, Dilip was a lovely guy, came through GB syndrome years ago but coped with disability, very successful businessman, and very stylish- immaculately groomed and turned out with classic shoes, best whiskies and cigars, taught Yours Truly about Indian cooking the proper way. Sadly, had become a recluse in last few years and did not stay in touch with Raman or others, RIP.

Ruchi feeling sad also and did not want to talk yesterday. Lost in thoughts, decided to go to Lynn Aled with picnic- empty place, lunch by the water, reflecting on life, gave thanks and felt better, so off to Ruthin to catch the exhibition – Herself happy with the display and plans events including private viewing with Gavin, might also arrange a viewing for own mates including a trip to see Denbigh Moors, not many have seen it.



Broke the rule and drank some red wine- not a good idea and drowsily watched Brian Cox on BBC about space travel and the universe – Musk and Bezos pushing for exploration driven by scarcity on earth with their grand redesign of the universe with factories on other planets whilst the earth becomes the paradise island; technology and imagination will make it happen, why not but meantime life goes on, and in fact backwards as another documentary about native people in upper Siberia shows as they go back to own ways after being under the Soviet regime which curbed development and banned religion. .

Catholic church questions why BoJo allowed to get married in church, being a divorcee- one rule for etc. And also getting away with everything else- can't ditch Hancock as that means believes Cummings, university students asking for 30% fee back due to covid and any case student loan a HUGE problem – market model does not work – will cost the public purse £11 trillion by 2040; Trussell Trust food bank supremo – Emma Revie says the best job in the world and should not be necessary; why is the NHS selling patient data- questions The Guardian, because they can, duh.

What else to expect when most Britons can't name all parts of the vulva, just 46% correctly identified that women have three 'holes' (urethra, vagina and anus) down below and 37% mislabelled clitoris– according to a study from Manchester, and the sample include both women and men. No comment.

Meantime hottest bank holiday predicted today – will try and work on the vege patch, Herself offers to help. Guess crowds will be out celebrating – live today spirit as Health Minister says difficult to hold back Indian variant spreading in Wales.

S**tometer: 2/10

01 June 2021 (Llanbedr)

Guess it's the stage of life- as another death, Subhash's brother Baldev, 83, dies of heart attack in Delhi, had long standing dementia, one son in USA and anyway no family allowed for funeral, all very strictly controlled. Speak to Subhash who has always been close to his siblings.

Long chat with Herself yesterday about future plans especially as time going too fast, Herself maintains still 14 good years left - the deterioration starts after 80, going to make inquiries about acquiring a bit of land next to house in Peniel to create a vege patch and a shed, and then add space in the loft. The steadily increasing news of potential Third wave as variant spreads across England provides impetus

Peru has the highest death rate per capita after a review - feel sad for the Peruvian people, had a great time there including hiking the Machu Pichu trail. Well, at least the government there tried to assess the damage, unlike what is happening in India, with still no proper recording, and its export ban on vaccines will affect 91 countries. Guess its efforts paid off in another way as WHO renames variants using Greek alphabet- so the Indian variant is now Delta, while UK is Alpha (so another first) – to avoid stigma.

Yesterday marked the 25th anniversary of the protest against the Queen's visit to Aberystwyth in 1996 – the only time a Royal visit has been stopped, students wanted someone from Wales to open the extension to the Library, and World's only alpine parrot in New Zealand may have moved to get away from people – very sensible.

Fake news is hard to spot and those more confident are actually less likely – with men being more overconfident; the answer is humility, self-monitoring, reflection and check which sites to visit and what to share. What if did not see the news at all- how will own life be affected, apart from checking in family and friends?

Sunny day outside, the poetry group meeting in garden today – not all can come, be nice to see them after a long time, the theme is humour and some good ones sent in by fellow members; Yours Truly had submitted Shel Silverstein's Messy room and My name is Sue- partly as loved the latter sung by Johnny Cash! And booked golf for afterwards. First, some work.

S**tometer: 2/10

02 June 2021

Days getting longer, so wake up at 5- but fresh, birdsong outside and sun peeping through, wonderful feeling, mug of tea in conservatory, remembering Raman's visit – gosh, two years ago. Miss the family- was good to chat to mum yesterday, seems to be settling at Raman's place, says busy and happier sorting out her old place and will start working on Ruchi's new flat.

Off to Chainbridge for lunch today with Herself, then inspect Iain's wood and caravan, in case decide to take up his offer of staying there for a holiday. Looking forward.

More hope in the world as Biden cancels Trump's orders to drilling in Arctic and support for Naomi Osaka who pulls out of French Open due to anxiety and depression at the thought of press conferences – Japanese athletes and sponsors rally around her. Though some like and seek press as Starmer did with Piers Morgan, to try and come across as normal- working class family and hard father – and got the sympathy but still lacking in policies. Stand for something man. Despite what he says BoJo has learnt no lessons- beyond it, Paul Waugh from HuffPost talks about his Mini-moon – “a phrase that sounds like a brief display of his buttocks, but is a very short honeymoon, apparently (though perhaps it means both). “

Fauci talks about pressures during pandemic especially early days, and his habit of responding to all, by signing with Tony- seems like a nice guy; along with Biden is reassuring, and so is news about no Covid deaths in 10 months yesterday in the UK! Not so elsewhere as Black fungus in India being watched carefully.

Glad to see Dick bouncing back with ideas, needs to keep busy, makes two, and so some work on his plans today before setting off. Strange (*sic*) feeling last few days with increasing realisation that whilst appreciating any help from others, not to become hostage to them and set own direction- it's what it is, for many reasons their bandwidths limited and will come around when right time, so keep going. Used to get annoyed at being let down, but more accepting now.

S**tometer: 2/10

03 June 2021

Oh dear, its Tony's mum now- rang yesterday to say passed away, sad but also glad that they were all there for her 90th birthday, so a good send off, was expected and in fact had defied odds and bounced back a few times, may be was waiting for the landmark. And its Baldev papaji's Kirya today on zoom.

Lunch at Chainbridge underwhelming though place nice and suspect Herself not that keen on the caravan though liked Iain's wood, trooped off to Wrexham and got some bargains at Mountain Warehouse, no boots still, definitely Manchester or Cheshire Oaks.

Got some inspiration – and going to work on two projects about joys of small things: collating photos over last year of things that brought joy and on the making of the

allotment – start pooling photos from both phones; for whom asks Herself, for us, to give thanks to nature and for life? Part of the Covid Chronicles series.

And to counter the negativity as news that Buckingham Palace banned ethnic minorities from office roles, until atleast 1960s and Royals exempt from Race and Sex discrimination laws; BoJo's school tsar resigns for not being given money to help pupils catch up with extra tuition and revolt from backbenches re cutting of foreign aid- latter especially, as pandemic rages globally and even coming back in North California where masks were 'banned' – yes. They do walk among us. No wonder space exploration seems attractive as NASA plans two missions to Venus by end of decade; earth is doomed.

Stephanie shows interest in documenting diaspora response to support to India during the recent upsurge – something else to work on. Make self useful.

Free day today as had arranged to have tea with Tony et al in Peniel, but they are staying south to sort out mum's affairs. Rainy now but supposed to clear up in which case vege plot and then golf? Could be worse.

S**tometer: 2/10

04 June 2021

Baldev papaji's ceremony was a nice but sad affair, affected deeply, as saw extended family after long time; kids have kids now, getting old and no way to catch up, missed out on watching them grow, festivities and wakes, and even the bickering, quite prevalent in Punjabi families. Raman and mum also joined in. Spoke to Niru to get the updates on family, says Subhash affected and worried getting depressed- runs in family. Sudden realisation that at heart an Indian – last 40 years trying to go against nature, despite challenges more comfortable nearer family – feel all alone.

Restless, went off to Peniel, no golf, no music; guess Herself got affected by mood, so not a good evening, back after a blast around Moel Gasyth.

Gotta pick self up- no way to India now- UK tightening borders again, more overseas travel restrictions as Delta variant (a new one- Nepal mutant of Indian variant also spotted) worrying due to more transmissibility; though Wales allows groups of up to 30 outdoors from Monday, indoors still restricted – up to three households, all complicated and does not affect personally so do not get into details. Talk whether English relaxations, due on 21 June, will slip. Relentless, even weather depressing last two months, after early summer in March, and slowed appearance of bluebells this year – late to flower, though some nice carpets on walks recently, cost of food rises fastest in a decade and guess what Roman Protasevich confesses on state television in Belarus, so it is alright then? In other news, United Airlines thinking of starting supersonic flight by end of decade.

Must get to the vege patch today to tidy up, got another blueberry bush from Jan and may drop into Brian later as working with Will on the kitchen- be good to meet him.

Herself picking Simon up from Chester, coming to pick up car for a few days to take Megan away for birthday treat. Speak to Akhil and say yes to helping on his conference- do what one can.

S**tometer: 3/10

05 May 2021 (Peniel)

Different – writing in the evening as went to walk with Ramblers, earlier start and drove to Capel Curig to go up Crimpiau and Gleision, had done it two years ago and enjoyed, better this time as very small group and all keeping pace, 12 miles with 2450 feet ascent- nice weather though windy in places. No time to think about stuff so not a bad day.

The world is still there- Tokyo Olympics go ahead after pressure from IOC, one million people in UK with long covid and infections rising again. Union elections being watched closely as implications for Starmer- whether sympathetic leaders will get elected or no, so far 2 out of 3 in favour, waiting for Unite result; Rehana Azam did not get the GMB job – though was tipped partly due to ‘institutional sexism’ criticism, remember her from the Jarrow March, gutsy, clever and committed.

Off to pick up some bamboo canes from Paul’s garden- has been cutting them down, needed for the beans in the field. Herself making dinner, and time to put feet up - tired but virtuous.

S**tometer: 2/10

06 May 2021

Interesting film on BBC about life of Amundsen last evening before bed, had read his story few months ago, still struggle with British obsession with heroic failure and veneration of Scott. Slept well.

Has the journal done its job? and what was it? Chronicle of pandemic experience, personal struggles, writing practice? All with a view to keeping busy, being useful and finding peace? Are we there yet? Nearly mid-way through the year, probably getting there, as more acceptance about life and focus on what can be controlled, letting shit go. Do miss family back in India, more time with mum and Raman – how will things be when finally do get there?

Whilst the world leaders try and set things right- with multinational agreement on taxing corporations and BoJo suggests vaccinating the world by end 2022. Meantime Trump waking up from slumber, as usual stroking hate by taking off after China and Fauci among others. Leave it to them as Herself brings the curmudgeon down to earth over breakfast, suggesting time to clean the car – very dirty, and finish her garden. Will head off to Brenig to see Brian and Will who will be dinghy racing today.

S**tometer: 2/10

07 June 2021

Watched Kevin Costner film – *3000 miles to Graceland* on Netflix last night – not really about Elvis but (weird) funny, mindless timepass about a heist in casino in Las Vegas.

Wake up to an overcast but warm day, will head off to Llanbedr later, Simon wants to see the progress on the field before heading back to London so will come over this afternoon, wonder what he will make of it. Working on the allotment anthology as HSJ rejects the article on the future of the NHS – reinforcing feeling that own time has gone, new players now. Stick to gardening and learning Welsh- 34 continuous days on Duolingo, not bad going, though wish could say the same for piano. Practise!

Herself wants to start a diary, noting what would ourselves be doing on this day, next year- so what will one be doing on 07 June 2022? Hard to get head around, at present, it will be same old, same old, but may be on holiday?

Microsoft's Kate Crawford- an academic – says AI neither artificial, as relies on cheap labour nor intelligent, as full of biases, and worries about its relentless march, asking for better regulation. As obsession with Bitcoin causes enormous environmental damage due to need for metals and energy to build and maintain the giant computers. While labour shortages driving wages – hospitality sector offering double the usual rate and villagers in Kirkoswald in Cumbria rally around to save the last shop. Harry and Megan's second child is called Lilibet 'Lili' Diana Mountbatten-Windsor - will it help build bridges or stoke tensions with his family? Hekking's Mona Lisa- a fake – raises questions about what is art and how to value it, again.

The only covid story is about vaccine stickers for dating apps- life must go on. And with that off to Morrison's to get groceries for dinner this evening- will make Indian (what else!) for Simon and Herself.

S**tometer: 2/10

08 June 2021

Bad day – spoke to Raman yesterday, had not heard for a few days so rang him, says mum had another fall at night- typical, goes to toilet at night, comes back and sits on bedside, dozes off and falls – and had to get the watch man to come and help lift her. Black eye and bruised ribs. Now complaining about everything – want to go back to her flat, her own bed etc. Try to speak to her but no getting through to her- has no insight anymore, just self-interest and self-preservation, guess that is innate human nature? Support Raman as best as can, not to take personally and need to be 'tough' with her- end up hurting those we love. Feel sad as helpless. Send a message to Son #1 asking him to get in touch with her via Raman – as she keeps asking about family. Thankfully he does. In the end family does matter, and parents

most – still miss own dad and constantly beat self up for not doing the right things and now can't.

So go off and tidy up vege patch, joined later by Herself and Simon, latter happy to see progress.

Depressing news with staff burn-out story and possibly impending third wave- experts say will know in next week or so, including whether vaccine protective; Wales already offered to all adults. But no travel possible. Though OK for some as Bezos flying to space with brother on 20 July, selling extra seat – bid currently at \$2.8m.

US approves first new Alzheimer drug –Aducanumab – after nearly thirty years, ray of hope; remember when Donepezil launched in 1990s and got caught up in debate about its availability in the NHS when working in South Tyneside, terrible disease and still long way from controlling it. As was thinking about Tyneside had an email from Wendy with a link to the article where Yvonne Ormston had written about her experience with cancer whilst CEO of Gateshead Trust, always like Yvonne – A-one- and did some good work with her. Did not know she was CEO but happy for her, and wish her the best in her fight with cancer.

Media making mischief with talk of No-Go areas in Didsbury due to the Mosque there, comparing it with Bolton, Bradford and Blackburn, as Whites feel afraid. Tariq says nonsense and Son #1 blames media for sowing disunity. Distracting news to take attention away from planned cuts to Overseas aid budget, as speaker blocked voting on the amendment to reduce UK commitment, given revolt from a large number of MPs.

What's the meaning of life today then? Guess, it will be golf as weather OK, after various practises- 35 days, continuously, on Duolingo learning Welsh (dysgu Cymraeg – ydw, mwynhau!) but not so hot on piano. Keep going.

S**tometer: 2/10

09 June 2021

Drat, Arvind rang last evening to say decided to postpone visit – says too much hassle and unpredictable as may end up in quarantine here; New York is back to normal and going out eating and theatre, very few patients in hospital. Says feeling low, stuck in past again, and work not enjoyable either so end up having a long chat- easy to advise, hard to practise and hopefully some things will stick with Yours Truly too. Reminder, need to check how Anu is coping. Sad fate of immigrants, culturally and emotionally alienated in older age.

Finished documentary – two parts series- on Elvis Presley, even with all that success never found happiness, did not do what he wanted: to play live and travel abroad, just became a puppet in Parker's hands, worked hard, no life. Came across very well in interview clips – even if highly selective; a real family man, devoted son.

Could not sleep with all that, took Nytol and woke up later and groggy- side effect. Must throw off the black dog, so look up the vege books and visit to Garden centre later to pick up stuff, think more about tidying up hedge at home also- will ask Herself about flowers, looks like will need some work next year if the laurel and jasmines do not grow as planned. Piano day today- better practise before seeing Beryl, can't let her down. Susheela's birthday also, will drop in – says cake waiting.

Interesting chat with Herself about mind monkey- lfor, one of the mutts, pulls very hard during walk as jack russells do after seeing a hare run across, so get annoyed with him, then get annoyed with self for getting annoyed with mutt, who is only following instinct, and then get annoyed with Herself for not training them or getting proper restraining leads. Bizarre. Herself says its progress as now aware of monkey!

Not sure of reasons, but in general, given views about most politicians, interested that Macron in France got slapped in face during walkabout; mind you Biden shows another side- good guy, coming to UK and will meet the Queen. Parlous state of world with over-reliance on few players as IT infrastructure hosted by Fastly crashes and shuts down many websites for an hour yesterday including Amazon, BBC and The Guardian, and some UK government sites too. Between politicians and oligarchs, the world is run by less than 50 people? Each pursuing own agenda but ideologically aligned – money and power- so jointly steering the world.

Ended up updating Whatsapp, despite concern about Big Brother, as no choice- how else to stay in touch with folk overseas especially; Raman says Son#1 sent a nice message about grandma, glad to hear.

S**tometer: 3/10

10 June 2021

Strange day, low mood, unable to shift, so drifted through yesterday, dropped in to Cefyn also and then along to Mair's house – picked up a baby belling cooker, brand new, for the annex, and may get some more things including some plants. Drank some red wine and watched *Naked Gun 2 ½* on Netflix to cheer up, and given Presley connection.

Wake up better today, overcast at present, may clear and any case must get to allotment, had bought some stuff from garden centre yesterday, did not have mechanical mower so will have to be online.

Barbara arrived from USA but has to isolate despite vaccinations – won't be coming to Wales sadly. Wonder if Biden's visit, arrived yesterday, will help unlock USA UK travel corridor, at present no travel possible unless special reasons. What else will Biden do, has come with clear agenda to put USA stamp on the world, warning Putin and challenging UK re Northern Ireland and Brexit.

Does not look like restrictions will be lifted on 21 June as planned in England as even BoJo has started talking about rising hospitalisations, and Neil Ferguson, the modelling guru talks about Third wave – the problem being too much of unknown.

Mattdoor on back foot as Care England - alliance of private care homes - says was warned of risks several times in March 2020. Want to bet a) Restrictions will stay post 21 June and b) Mattdoor will be let off, again?

And it has happened- the Palace says Harry and Megan did not consult the Queen before naming the child Lilibet, oh dear – damned if and damned if not, will there be peace in Royal Household? And does it matter? Like all families.

El Salvador, first country to accept Bitcoin as legal tender – others may follow, and bummer the environmental damage due to massive carbon emissions from the currency. Enjoy while one can, who knows what comes tomorrow. And on that note, need to get going - Herself may come over later, whilst doing the work in Nant Clwyd y Dre.

S**tometer: 3/10

11 June 2021

Mum has another fall – Raman managed to see and rushed so damage limited, physically but not mentally as mum now distressed, unable to come to terms and being negative and crying. Have a chat with Raman but what to say/do – he says same thing with all the elders in extended family, all very demanding and self-interested. Try and manage own anxiety – not sure if will see her again, and what to do if/when things happen? Had missed Dad's funeral by days also. What price success, having moved away from family – life of an immigrant, short term pleasures and long-term sadness. Travel there seems a problem – and in any case to what purpose, will it help? Being selfish or sensible? Raman says managing between him and Aneeta.

Need to find distractions, so work on the allotment anthology and also prepare for the Covid India History project- Stephanie agrees – to capture Indian diaspora contribution recently; happy to see Stephanie finally made professor- hard earned. Indian figures being revised, upwards, and even then no faith in any numbers there. Chaos elsewhere too- Santiago, Chile, in lockdown despite good vaccination coverage and WHO says high risk of autumn surge in Europe. John Crace sums up Mattdoor appearance at the Select Committees: *“What we had got was the truth as Matt would like it to have been. And we never got an answer to the question that had hung over the entire proceedings: what on Earth had Door Matt done to Dom to make him loathe him quite so much”?* Well Dom will answer shortly as launches a paid-for newsletter on Substack (a platform that allows people to sign up to newsletter mailing lists) – so watch the space.

Ed Miliband asks the Left to think big and forget incremental change, but would Starmer listen – as contest for Batley gears up. But can politicians anywhere think big anymore – America's richest men pay \$0 in income tax according to The Guardian report – so the nexus remains, though Biden rattling the cage at G7 summit. Hope he survives long enough to atleast shift things a bit. Do not hold out too much hope for transformational change.

Got to pull self up, as busy day – Phil got the call to go in for operation at short notice and needs pre-op assessment and so need to drive him to Broadgreen in Liverpool, where Duncan had his heart op two years ago. And then off to Peniel- hope Herself recovered from a hard day yesterday, was stressed out with the impending exhibition at Nant Clwyd y Dre.

S**tometer: 3/10

12 June 2021 (Peniel)

Remembered to pay the toll for Mersey bridge online, not at all a user-friendly method, had forgotten a few times in the past and got hit by fines, suspect they make more money through people forgetting.

Spoke to Raman first thing, says no need to go to India at present- will be what will be, and suggests need to sort self out first, decide what to do given moving back to India not an option. Mum will be up and down and he will manage as best as he can. Must stop thinking too much and find ways to keep busy.

Long chat with Herself at breakfast- as always, the practical person. Have lined up a few things to do, work-related, and focus on friends locally.

Does not look like England will open – wait for BoJo's announcement on Monday; Drakeford clear about protecting Wales – although small rise in numbers, only one death in two weeks, says will do what is necessary and reprimands Mattdoor for saying that Wales's vaccination success at the cost of England – as got more stock. Record numbers of applicants for nursing and medical courses this year in Wales – so despite all the news and burn out, the profession is attractive.

Science getting more complicated as Fauci says long interval between doses has contributed to spread of variant and USA Health Agency is scathing about Innova Lateral Flow tests being used in UK.

Amazon making a big push in India, through Narayan Murthy, Sunak's father-in-law, and being challenged by courts there for bypassing laws, hope sense prevails as the model is just not right for India, and for environmental reasons. Maybe the rich will pay another way, as the story in *The Conversation* shows: pointy shoes were a fashion in medieval England and caused an epidemic of bunions and indeed King Edward IV in 1463 passed a law to limit the toe point length to two inches in London. Ofcourse the poor escaped as unable to afford fashion. Some justice.

Got a few things on agenda today- got to give a talk to doctors about Global shortages of health care workers, very complex and insoluble problem, more a philosophical than practical discussion I suspect, it being a fashionable topic. Later in the evening talking to Dick and Sanjeev about practice-based education and how to add value, given the broken education systems. Most of current reading is around these matters- having finished Kirp's book from 1990s- *Einstein, Shakespeare and about education in USA*, lessons still relevant and currently reading Schon and

Moon's work on reflection. Let us see if Henley comes back and which may give some direction, no news about the XXXX post yet.

S**tometer: 2/10

13 June 2021

Early start today as on a Zoom conference to launch ICHA's new programme to promote patient safety in India at 6am – happy to see that Johann is going to collaborate with them and make available the Medics Academy's experience and resources. Akhil has done a sterling job over the last two decades, despite all the challenges- well done. Great to hear from Evita Fernandes, as the chief guest, about her work on maternal health in Hyderabad- so many good people in India but sadly not enough, if only it was possible to clone people like her.

Did not finish the last Zoom till 11 last night – the discussion with Sanjeev and colleagues was very broad including what could be learnt from fields such as care for homeless and dancing about practice-based education; very enjoyable and helpful. And it is going to be another busy day today, as Herself needs to be at Nant Clwyd y Dre to prepare for the exhibition also, and weather looks good, supposed to be warm. Raman sends a book recommendation: *Be idle, be happy: the art of idleness* by Karthik Venkatesh, but will reading it go against its title? Seems like a lot of work!

Looks like will have plenty of time for idleness as does not look like rules will relax much soon, concerns about the variant as discussion when it will stop mutating- scientists say not enough data yet to decide about lockdown. So, enough time to rant – as UK commitment to climate action labelled as all hot air; John Sauven, from Greenpeace sums up: *“Despite the green soundbites. Johnson has simply reheated old promises and peppered his plan with hypocrisy, rather than taking real action to tackle the climate and nature emergency”*. Every crisis is an opportunity too, as Hermes launches a new bag, made from fungus- in a move away from leather and its toxic processes, priced £3500. Clearly a must have.

S**tometer: 2/10

14 June 2021 (Llanbedr)

Herself is all fired up with the idea of buying the chapel next door for holiday lets and a study for the Curmudgeon, leaving the chapel as is; going to ask the Deacon if possible, not a bad idea and better if can get the small pocket of orchard at the back – says might be difficult as owner hanging on to all parcels of land. Will keep Herself busy for a while, along with the stuff on Nant Clwyd y Dre – preparations for Stitching Group exhibition coming along well, going to spend another day there today.

So, Yours Truly in Llanbedr catching up on stuff- weather overcast with some rain so not sure of going to the vege patch, will see later, more stuff to do in the garden at home too.

Awaiting news about England announcement today- four weeks delay predicted, would that be enough though, given Delta marching on. No news re any Welsh announcements. World not ready to open up and may not be till 2022- as G7 sets the goal of vaccinating everyone by then and pledges 1 billion doses- so 500 million people or actually 1 billion people, big difference as single dose with longer interval blamed for enabling mutation. Raman does not think any travel possible this year and advises to stay put – spoke to mum also and tried to calm her but not sure if she gets it.

Strange feeling last few weeks about roots- sense that tried to integrate too much and lost own Indianness, lived expectations of others, is it too late to reclaim self and what would that entail? Reminded of Mair, who towards the end reclaimed own identity and wanted to be remembered as Mair Jones not Roberts. Herself says time moving on and do whatever gives peace, past is gone and make sure do not regret future.

Has a point as usual as the world carries on – Grenfell survivors accuse government of fire safety Russian roulette as no action so far, renting is now cheaper than buying, due to high house prices in most of UK except some parts of Scotland and North of England; London is cheaper- wonder if will find another tenant for the flat there as current ones have given notice. 130000 households made homeless in England during the pandemic, despite government ban on evictions. Netanyahu ousted finally in Israel, but will things change much, though out still has hold with hard-line to settlement with Palestinians.

Chinese tonight and picked up stuff at Morrisons.

S**tometer: 2/10

15 June 2021

Its official, England Freedom day postponed to 19 July. BoJo making another rod for own back? Delta now the most common strain in Wales 70% increase in four days since 10 June says PHW with clusters in Conwy, Rhyl Denbighshire – coming near you, again. To make matters worse globally, counterfeiting of PPE, vaccines etc a booming trade and compromising efforts to control, says The Conversation report.

Is it resignation or nirvana when one no longer minds the endless work in the garden- tidying up and looking after each plant spending hours, and will it last? Spoke to Robert, who has not been doing much gardening or writing or indeed flute practice, though busy with family visitors and sadly Meriel had an accident but recovering - send some emergency chocolates. Thinking of going back to Tiree by July/August – spending time together, feel happy for them though sad not being able to meet, yet. Also caught up with Sukhdev, settling in Sutton Coalfields, though missing North Wales better to be near family – in middle of cataracts operations and dental treatment, another remarkable 80 years old. Another one where pandemic helped to make life decisions and relocated after years of living by self, after wife passed away.

The goats of Llandudno have been a casualty of pandemic as locals concerned with their antics in town and want them to go 'Orme' – back to where they belong and not on streets, says some friends! Also find distraction with Cardiff singer of the year- both days winners so far, two more to go before finals, excellent, the overall standard high, had not heard before and enjoying – another gap in cultural education filled. In another art news, Gormley statues in Crosby needed repositioning as sinking in mud- he is hopeful that they will survive as industrial fossil for 1000 years, not sure anyone is disputing or betting on that. Too busy enjoying the heat wave as UK weather hit 28.6C – hottest day of the year yesterday.

And so, life goes on, another day gone, Robert says wait few more years and time will fly even faster- middle of June, summer solstice approaching already, well into second year of pandemic. Not to waste time, so arrange to walk on Llantysilio with Tony this morning and then will tend to garden- as brought some plants from Mair's garden to rehouse them here, Cefyn says when the bungalow is sold, as it will be soon, it will all be gone, so use them.

S**tometer: 2/10

16 June 2021

Excellent walk yesterday with Tony around Worlds End – what a name – and back up via the tower, 9 miles and 1400 feet with beautiful weather and views; time also to catch up since first after his mum passed away, surprisingly for Tony found him low – generally positive – chores piling, says not to do with mum as was relieved for she was suffering. Felt for him, such a nice chap. And so talented, did not know has a Royal Enfield (bullet) bike also- must go and see it and have a spin, if possible, remember the one Anu had in Delhi, what fun. Yours Truly had a measly 150 cc Yezdi (old Jawa).

Had gone to check on Phil but had not come back yet, as was waiting for his medicines in the hospital- somethings never change; Susheela gave a thank you card and some Welsh whisky, very annoying, not sure why make fuss of giving a lift, had to tell her off.

May be caught a bit of his mood as struggled falling asleep. XXXX post official, did not get shortlisted – looks like was given confusing signals and which led to applying, would not have considered if not encouraged. Asked if would consider an alternative position there but given experience turned it down. Not unhappy though puzzled,

Covid vaccine to be made compulsory for care home staff as BoJo commits to lifting restrictions on 19 July- come what may, bodies not withstanding; parliamentary discussion, according to Paul Waugh, getting their own back on 'The Mayor from Jaws' (the movie, he wanted more to be like the mayor; comparing him to Starmer "eyes on the shark, doing everything to keep people safe", really?) Delta variant called 'Johnson' variant' as failed to ban travel from India to avoid missing the photo-op with Modi – fortnight of failure costing dearly now. Samuel Kasumu, BoJo's

former race advisor accuses Tories of inflaming culture wars. Delhi defies social distancing, doctors fearful of explosion of covid cases there.

Cristiano Ronaldo snubs Coca cola at Euro 2020 Press Conference and wipes of billions off market value – but good on him, interesting to see footballers doing what politicians should be, tackling race and school meals by Rashford for example. Homeless charity, Riverside in Manchester, asking for another hotel for homeless having done great work during pandemic with these vulnerable people – sadly now the commercial realities kicking in and Government's emergency measures response offer finished. Egyptian vulture seen in Isles of Scilly for first time in 150 years- may be come to see what the G7 were planning? The circus is over and now await the COP26 in Glasgow- do not hear much about that or Alok Sharma, gone very quiet. As has Mahadev, sitting in Florida, may be check on him.

Few things today, CLN Congress and piano also and may be golf if weather holds.

S**tometer: 3/10

17 June 2021

Did not quite work out yesterday, the CLN Congress technology failed and having rushed in the morning to attend got frustrated with waiting and finally gave up to work on stuff including sending article on future of NHS to BMJ; the mood followed to lesson and poor Beryl struggled with the Curmudgeon's lack of sense of timing. Finally got the act together at golf- millionaire's round as no one around and a good game, celebrated with a pint – first one in 18 months, have done a great job with outdoors area.

Another life lesson from Cardiff Singer contest last night as one participant had to pull out and substitute had to be found and who won- never, ever give up. Poor Susheela – been told someone at restaurant they went to has tested positive so need to get tested and isolate; told her how to order kits online. Had gone to pick up in Denbigh after advice but the staff had gone home- shambles, says Barbara also after problems during isolation after coming from USA; radio just says the same.

And they still defend government, even though Cummings releasing stuff showing BoJo called Door Matt 'totally fucking hopeless'. But then why keep him on? Good old Narendra Arora surfaces in India heading the Covid Working Group there- says world will depend on India for vaccines, should interview him also. Looks like Biden and Putin had a bit of a chat – and so all will be well now, and China stopped? Kim Jong Un in North Korea distracts by waging war on slangs, jeans and films as country starves.

Good one from Popova: *"How we spend our days is How we spend our lives, the life of sensation is the life of greed; it requires more and more. The life of the spirit requires less and less"* she quotes Annie Dillard on choosing presence over productivity. Herself, a supreme practitioner of the philosophy, fired up about the Chapel conversion and draws up a full plan, even though not even seen it yet!

Tony and family coming for tea over at Peniel this afternoon and got stuff to do beforehand including starting Covid India History interviews, so get cracking.

S**tometer: 3/10

18 June 2021

Much food for thought as the Chapel project exciting but also daunting – too much for what purpose, having seen the whole site will need a lot of work, and money, so mull over for a while. Clearly need to make some decisions as continuing pandemic and how the world around is shaping up confirms must take charge of own destiny, time is passing and learn to be happy with what is there. Almost everyone around is hunkered down, pulled up drawbridges, and focussed on must dos only- surely one benefit of pandemic to make people decide how to live, except some (many) not doing that rather getting depressed. Drakeford likely to confirm a four weeks delay like rest of the UK, with reports of NHS pressure around backlog.

And over in India, Ruchi says there is a free for all now in Mumbai, making her circle of friends more cautious as anticipating next wave – risk takers vs risk averse; but clearly mental health taking a battering. And be a long time before world safe, if ever- as leaked reports shows AZ price pledge omits poor countries- Angola and Sri Lanka will have to pay more; hey ho.

Finally, Simon Jenkins says what has been obvious for some time- public enquiries are institutionally corrupt as more inquiries come under scrutiny including Manchester Bombing, just give the money to victims, rather than enrich the lawyers. Political facade and a reminder of Michael Rosen's poem. High office a playground of the upper classes and rise of chumocracy as Dido Harding throws her hat in the ring for the NHS top job – why not, why let ability get in the way of ambition; if Door Matt can do it, anyone can philosophy and the public will keep taking it.

Or maybe not, as Biden shows and declares Juneteenth- to mark end of slavery in US- a public holiday, atoning, and Lib Dems win Buckinghamshire by-election in a snub to Tories. One swallow does not a summer make?

Some work then golf on agenda today.

S**tometer: 2/10

19 June 2021 (Peniel)

Very sad for Cefyn who is seriously mourning Mair- emptying her house taking a huge toll, on top of other problems – sit with him for a while yesterday practising amateur psychology from learned experiences. So many around having personal issues. Wise words from Ravikant about circle of life – young chap but very empathetic, had finally connected after few months, been very busy with Doctors for You work, very committed to serving poor in very challenging circumstances.

Came over to Peniel and explored extension of the loft and other changes to make it the main residence and keep Llanbedr as overflow – least cost/disruption, future-proof and safe option. Lovely location in Peniel and Herself has spent so much time and energy to get it right. Feel weight lifted, having made the decision so drank two whiskies – not such a clever idea, as peed more often at night, so a bit tired but hopefully will be OK as get going with the walk today- Ramblers walk on Moel Arthur with Chas leading, looking forward; Janet and others have gone off to Isle of Wight so will miss them.

Wales follows Scotland and England and delays full lifting of restrictions – but should not affect the planned Nant Clwyd y Dre play on Saturday, though weather may! Interesting article about Asia's Covid winners – countries which did well in first wave and where covid coming back South Korea and Japan as examples; low vaccination rates being blamed; sealed borders and test/trace and isolate not enough for longer term; Australia already talking about limiting travel till mid-2022. The argy bargy around vaccines continues as Bruce Springsteen concert on Broadway not open to those with AZ vaccine – since not approved in USA; WT* In case this provokes tears and hiccups then help is on way as study shows sipping water through an L shaped suction and swallow tool- a bendy drinking straw cured 92%. National Trust in Scotland staging a tour on history of sex and intimacy from 17th to 20th century, with linen condoms and bed curtains featured- another reason to travel there!

Going for Indian takeaway dinner tonight with Alison and David- and thinking of wearing Indian clothes – Herself thinks may be too much for them! Well, will find out. But first walk, so need to get ready.

S**tometer: 2/10

20 June 2021

What a lovely house and gardens- dated early 17th century; missed their open garden days, had 250 visitors, a wonderful meal with Alison and David last evening, had taken vermicelli for dessert but sadly did not work out well, Herself even demonstrated her Bharatnatyam movements to their amusement. Maybe show the Bhangra moves next time?

The Ramblers walk around Pennaclyddau and Moel Arthur enjoyable though sad about C situation – says may have to sell up but does want to stay locally. Surprising, or not, how often people stay in bad situations –work or personal, unable to make the break – came up last night at dinner too. Reflection easier than taking action as choices often theoretical not practical. Are we being strong enough to live the life one should/want to?

Back playing up so Herself taking it easy today, lets Yours Truly off the tree pruning job, anyway weather overcast and so looks like a lazy Sunday. Enjoy the orange marmalade made by David- gave a big Kilner jar of it, and Herself sketches all options for the loft for chat with planner next week.

Father's day today- old mate Ramnik sends Paul Anka's Papa song, as used to listen to Anka in his house during college days.

Bercow defects to Labour, another one lining up to take revenge on BoJo and chums, but is that enough for Starmer and when as Brazil reaches 500,000 covid deaths due to mishandling by Bolsonaro and all waiting to see whether and when life will resume. Interesting talk by Dr David Strain about long covid at BAPIO NW get together day before- left wondering what it means as everyone affected by Covid anyway - some after detected infection, others without detection as tests not available and then those uninfected but who also suffered – and may be a way to frame it as CFS/ME for former two and PTSD for the last category, and question is what can be done medically anyway? More a societal problem. Will try and clarify thinking by writing about it.

Good to see that Assisted Dying Bill to be lodged at the Scottish parliament –hope sense will prevail.

Getting ready for a lazy day!

S**tometer: 2/10

21 June 2021

Niru's 70th birthday today – already, sad that none of her family will be able to see her in Mumbai, another virtual party. Time marches on.

Finally, caught up on iPlayer and saw the Cardiff singer of the year final last night - glad to see Gihon win, the standard was really high and he was very good. Herself had banned any news till she could see the show, but was happy with the result. Arvind rang and frustrated with not being able to come to Wales in August, trying to see how to make it work and had to keep reminding him about the uncertainty – says America is open again, but guess his view not fully informed and limited to New York as news talks about two Americas as vaccination rates low – seems split along party lines. David keeps asking about going to Italy but still country still amber. Stopped thinking about travelling for now – can't see a safe and convenient way.

And why go anywhere when the world is trying to get to Wales- house prices rocketing, driven by the natural beauty and rural idyll, all this on doorstep. To enjoy it going to walk with Iain around Henllan today- will be a long walk, as usual, and looking forward to it.

Haemophilia treatment with contaminated blood at Treloar's College public inquiry starting this week- 120 children between 1974-87 were treated with blood, largely from USA, not sure of the timing as will refuel the vaccine deniers and also force the call for Covid inquiry. Anyway, not going to change anything anytime soon.

Herself busy with Beverley and Paul coming to work from her house as his house has been taken over by sister camping there between houses- sold hers and waiting to move into new one. So, pack bags and on way to Llanbedr.

S**tometer: 2/10

22 June 2021 (Llanbedr)

Excellent 18 miles with over 1500 feet ascent around Henllan, bit warm in places and no rain, new area and wonderful valleys and views from tops – Herself invited over for post walk feeding – chilli and baked potatoes, did not finish till after 9 and bone tired but very happy. Put things in perspective. Slept well.

Resonates with Anita Sethi's book – *I belong here*- started reading it, about the benefits of walking though her book about racism, done a good job of combining race and walking. Quotes Prince Charles who on being introduced said: you do not look like you are from Manchester, duh!

No wonder Dido Harding getting on the bandwagon and says if becomes NHS chief will stop relying on foreign workers – all will be home grown; mind boggles. Petition started to stop her from getting the job, interested that Stevens seen as very successful chief executive – on what parameters, last ten years have created more chaos and do not even start on five years forward view. Is it due to the recent vaccine success or give the man due, could have been worse without him?

Health remains big issue for foreseeable future, as Putin warns of growing pandemic crisis in Russia and highest daily total in Indonesia and here another example of territorialism as Sturgeon 'bans' travel between Scotland and Manchester region with Andy Burnham questioning it.

Interesting email from Julie Grier about pandemic experiences- after reading own account on NHS 70 – as Chris and she had written letters for grandchildren in case did not make it. Sure focussed minds and suspect reason why everyone's world has shrunk to basics and dearests. Did manage to have a good chat with Niru and Subhash, say Brijen likely to be posted to London by August, be nice to have them here, finally some family connection. All worried about India – Modi's track record examined in The Guardian, more hype than substance with empty slogans and more inequality and poverty, and a highly polarised society - the only Make in India.

Bitty chores day and will go over to see Phil after his op and isolation after return, not up to much physical after walk yesterday!

S**tometer: 2/10

23 June 2021

Yippee, 50 days of Duolingo Welsh today, slow but steady and getting used to its ways –someone else on the walk other day has been learning, off and on for years! Will head to Nant Gwetheryn when things open up to learn more, be an achievement. Not so for Piano, but going to persist – more question of managing Beryl's expectations, as do enjoy own style of playing!

Picked up more heather from Mair's garden and saw Cefyn yesterday- better than last time, life's ups and downs and need to go with them. Phil much better after op and all ready for the grandchild's arrival next month, train booked, happy for them.

Sydney has a cluster, after avoiding for so long, never ending saga- just when think over, bounces back, Dick says their area OK so far. Ivermectin being trialled in Oxford, after being standard treatment in India for months – science catching up with practice? G7 summit not to blame for the rise of cases in Cornwall, if you insist, and Matt Door promises to abolish quarantine from amber countries for fully vaccinated travellers.

Leavers high hopes of Brexit not met, says The Guardian but then whose hopes have been, may be the new 5.2 millionaires during the pandemic, not that of much use as mainly house prices rises. Not enough to pay for the new proposed Royal yacht, even Ken Clarke lambasts it – spend, spend by BoJo pursuing populist policies.

Finland, the happiest country in the world wants migrants – to cover the costs of greying generations, second only to Japan in terms of over 65s. But enough to be happy here if one chooses as Sethi shows in her book- her walking in northern England shows *“the three pathways of how sense nature, how it calms our minds, and that powerful awe really are good ways to heal. Certain chemicals that calm your body are emitted by plants, and hearing running water calms your body. Parts of your body evolve to experience awe- inspiring nature.”* Did not know Royal College of Psychiatrists supports Green Care approach – an umbrella for projects that explore and promote nature connections in mental healthcare. So, Forest Bathing on prescription next? Like the idea but worry about medicalisation, need to take it out of medical domain, after all a lifestyle and community development issue. But enjoying her book, very well written. Turning adversity into opportunity for healing both, self and society.

On that note, need to sort out ginger today- had planted some few weeks ago but with no outward sign got impatient and poked them to find there was some growth after all in the soil but is it over or still continuing, hard to say; anyway, going to plant bit more.

S**tometer: 2/10

24 June 2021

Rain at last, not much but enough for the allotment and hopefully fill the water butts there, interrupted golf yesterday though game was probably the best ever (yippee), ditto piano as accepted will take a looong time and so no pressure, just enjoy. Brian dropped in from visit to Chester to get materials to finish his kitchen project, nice to see him.

Finished reading Anita Sethi's book – well done to her, drop her an email, pointing out that unlike her, first generation immigrants do not belong anywhere, not sure will

hear back but wish her well. Mistake drinking tea- peppermint – in bed whilst reading as up lots in the night, or was it the chocolate bar also?

More respect for the Queen as even she comments on Matt Door: *“I have just been talking to your SoS for health, poor man. He came for Privy Council, she told BoJo. He is full of.... she added, Full of beans? offered BoJo “Classic. Wish she could sack PMs – BoJo dismisses claims about rape concerns as jabber – how much more can he insult and get away with? Long covid growing as now 2 million affected, and Dave Smith from Bristol who had 42 positive tests and seven hospital admissions over ten months; his wife arranged his funeral five times, Says: “I called all my family in to make my peace with them. I wish I’d kept my mouth shut now” – does covid improve sense of humour? Good luck to you Dave.*

Harrison Ford injures shoulder whilst shooting the fifth Indian Jones film – seemingly has had a few serious accidents in the past – remember the sets/show in Orlando Disneyland when kids were small and liked him. Tell Rhoda, from poetry group, who broke her shoulder whilst walking she is in good company, and send two poems about gardens for the next session – Lodged by Robert Frost and Their Lonely Betters by Auden.

Indoors day today, as raining and time to catch up, off to Peniel later as building planner coming to assess loft conversion.

S**tometer: 2/10

25 June 2021

Herself bought some aubergine plants yesterday so going to give them a try and also tried to make mint chutney Indian style- the food processor failed both so had to be done by hand and the processor goes back.

Nice message from Robert, says Meriel better and up and about on crutches, not likely to meet yet as worried about delta variant. Agree with Herself to go to Manchester next Friday anyway-about time. Worries seem merited as Meinir says son positive along with many other pupils in school and family has to be isolated and tested – more inconvenience than medical now. Not just here as Europe braces for third wave though UK opens more countries for holidays- now called on Amber watching, can book but may not be able to go or have to quarantine on return – big gamble, what price sun. ‘Two Jab’ BoJo – says fully vaccinated may be exempted. Not sure how things will ever settle as BoJo refuses to publish reports of trials from mass events or start the public inquiry, and 600m NHS home tests unaccounted for- people sent for them but no record of use?

Bonkers world, may be not the right word given that poor Britney Spears has not been well, but how can Conservatorship where father controls every detail of her life be right? Another high-profile case of parent child – after Megan Merkle? Sad for both parties.

Going to keep busy with NHS at 70 interviews today to keep mind distracted, though beginning to enjoy piano practice – using YouTube to help in between lessons. Gotta keep going.

S**tometer: 2/10

26 June 2021

It was Cumming, and now he won't be coming for a while – and so ran the puns as the story of Matt Door kissing his aide in his office and breaking social distancing (but OK to kiss staff?) emerged, finally he has cocked it up, or not as BoJo says matter closed as he has apologised, and is doing a great job? WTF, so Neil Ferguson and Scottish CMO were stupid to resign over breaches.

Some interesting interviews about covid India yesterday with Akhil and Aakash in India- surprised, shocked and stunned with the second wave and hardly anyone untouched; going to run for a long time as economy collapses, jobs disappear, prices rise and danger of social unrest. Not that its plain sailing over here either as UK faces summer of food shortages due to lack of lorry drivers, and cases rise to early April levels- Drakeford predicts third wave late July, and ramping up vaccinations- first in UK to reach 50% adults and brunt borne by younger people, but still aiming to relax mask wearing? Guess part of normalising- the decider would be the impact on hospital services, but then what about long covid?

Raman gone to Khandala and taken mum- really hard work transporting everyone with the paraphernalia, so thanks to him.

Watched *Made in Italy* with Liam Neeson on Netflix last night- about father and estranged son mending relationship, had not seen a film for a while. Nine-year-old Flora Rider wins the world marmalade title – so Herself going to send to Graham and David, though theirs not bad either. Herself busy with the play at NantClwyd y Dre tonight, hope the rain stays away – sun is out at the moment, fingers crossed. Son#1 coming over to see it, will make some dinner and eat at home rather than risk picnic in case.

S**tometer: 2/10

27 June 2021

And the Gods smiled- the sun came out and Much Ado About Nothing outdoors play at NyD was a success- went over after quick visit to the vege patch - weeds and overgrown grass, Son#1 met Herself and seemed to hit off esp as he liked the mutts! Says A & E busiest ever, with non-covid stuff, and not easy for anyone. Seemed lot more settled, even though flat sale fallen through – drat.

And justice – as Doormatt finally shown the door/on the mat and resigned though some wanted sacking (and for incompetence not indiscretion) and The Saj back in, was inevitable and he may now crow that he was right to not cave into Cummings,

be good to watch the tussle between him and Sunak! But will anything really change – homelessness on the rise and the Welsh subsidy ends in June so more problem, made worse by rising house prices here. Welsh dream squashed as thrashed 4-0 by Denmark out of Euro. Sydney now in full lockdown- Dick says will stay in Wagga, had just managed to get out.

Jane Setter- a phonetician – says do not correct people who mispronounce, as language changes and evolves constantly, thank you as get picked up for mixing v and w and forget accent on the right part of the word – dad always said Midd Les Brough! Indians as usual ahead as squatty potty in favour now – celebs using to ease the bowel movement, Raman using for years, and btw whilst at it, get the bidet shower also. Tinku happy to see the Guardian article on the subject – poo is a good subject medically! Has now got a place in Ranikhet, in the Himalayas, with snowy peaks around – sends a pic, lovely and so is Raman's bungalow in Khandala with Monsoon greenery.

Popova on love this week - Attention being the greatest form of generosity and love is the quality of attention paid to things; quotes Ortega

There are situations, moments in life, in which, unawares, the human being confesses great portions of his ultimate personality, of his true nature. One of these situations is love. In their choice of lovers [human beings] reveal their essential nature. The type of human being which we prefer reveals the contours of our heart. Love is an impulse which springs from the most profound depths of our beings, and upon reaching the visible surface of life carries with it an alluvium of shells and seaweed from the inner abyss. A skilled naturalist, by filing these materials, can reconstruct the oceanic depths from which they have been uprooted.

Happy to see Son#1 getting on with life in own way- though not using his abilities and talent, has not played violin for years but seemed comfortable in self, so why complain/worry.

Open day for Wendy Riddick's textile weaving/stitching exhibition in NyD this evening and Herself on duty- meaning ours truly required too, so another art evening, hope weather holds, overcast now.

S**tometer: 2/10

28 June 2021

Finally got to Glastonbury – virtually, as cancelled again, and watched highlights from past and recordings for this year, strange to see bands playing to cows in green fields basically instead of the roaring 150,000-200.000 crowd. Even though Herself more knowledgeable about music, had not heard about some of the recent new bands, stuck in the past. Not sure will ever get there as too old for rolling in mud/wet sleeping bags in tents, though would like some live music- had started going locally with Brian till Covid, he is a fan and knows the scene well, as surprising numbers of good performance in small villages around.

May be live music, and life generally, will start soon, Singapore first country to accept covid here to stay and starting to open up and live with consequences; seemingly Saj also liberal on this and given his last role will be acutely aware of the financial pressures and potential battles with Sunak. Difficult to read the situation from the news as Leeds rates in student areas go sky high and delta spreading fast – virus winning the race over vaccination programme, the latter will take a hit as many deaths now after vaccination – bound to happen due to probabilities including vaccine failure, but will be used by conspiracy theorists.

The latter have other reasons as mistrust in Big Pharma grows with J&J, and others shelling out billions for their role in creating opioid epidemic.

Heard Alistair Campbell on Radio 3 talking about his ongoing battles with depression yesterday – got to live with it, not going away so make it manageable is the answer. William Shatner, 90, still actively working and another one with a shoulder injury after horse fall, talks about loneliness: *“Its a part of everybody’s life, no matter how much attention you get, how happily married you are and how many children you have. .. we are essentially alone and the big mystery is will there be anybody there at the end?”* Secret is to keep busy..

On that note, time to get going, have another interview to record and then chase some more, and weather permitting tidying up the vege plot and home garden- full of clover, carpeted with the stuff and looks dirty!

S**tometer: 2/10

29 June 2021

So, it has happened, mum continues with her behaviour making it very difficult at home for Raman and so will have to go back to her flat – soon as finishes redecorating it and start searching for maids again (and again). Damned if and if not for Raman, try and support him.

Watched first episode of *Ray*, based on Satyajit Ray stories, on Netflix- not sure what to make of it, may be next will make it clearer/better?

Managed to weed the veges yesterday though grass and hedge needs sorting, looking good and few more cherries, plums, gooseberries and strawberries, and radishes and mixed lettuces booming – need to start getting them out soon. May be give to friends and neighbours. Did couple of interviews for history project- Nigel Crisp was good value, as usual; one of the most decent senior NHS people – always helpful and polite, and most importantly follows up, very unusual. Not to record here but his views on covid management were ‘interesting’; does not see much hope for better in the near future esp with the global situation.

Angela Rayner piles on BoJo: *“A fish rots from the head down, and by failing to sack the former health secretary, Johnson has proved he does not have the leadership qualities or judgement required to be PM”*; but BoJo shrugs it off having moved at the pace required and has not he done well with quick reappointment. Time will tell re

The Saj – another son of Pakistani bus driver (Sadiq being the other) as not many can recall his achievements from the five posts, he has held under three PMs. But is not that an achievement in this day and age.

Anyway, Saj is clear – no more restrictions after 19 July, not sure about Wales yet. Numbers still going up, Andrew Marr writes of his recent experience after attending G7 – crept up insidiously like mild flu with negative lateral flow and only PCR detected it. Two jabs no protection. National euphoria not matched internationally as Hong Kong bans UK flights/passengers, and other borders going up. Australia extends lockdowns too.

Lockdown blues becoming a problem as loneliness now bigger risk than smoking or obesity and Welsh government being asked for NHS prescriptions for gardening and dancing - not sure to feel sad or laugh; people suffering need help but why medicalise it- just reinforces the problem. And will Yours Truly be banned from doing more in the garden – surely overdosing, are there any side effects from higher doses?

Interesting The Guardian Long read about Amartya Sen's new book: *Home in the new world*, may be worth after Anita Desai's book about belonging, the piece focussed on impact of British Empire and Sen tries to inject some objectivity without forgetting Indianness- bottom line, difference between Britain and Imperialism- they behaved differently overseas. When in Rome.....

Raining outside- not bad for veges, weather lifting later so may get to golf today. Bit of tidying up of work before then.

S**tometer: 2/10

30 June 2021

Tariq says only three out of 100 children in his daughter's class year in school, rest isolating at home and been going on for a while, seeing more cases though milder in practice in Manchester area. People are moving around freely. Greater Manchester also in the news as Marmot publishes another report on sharp decline in social conditions there with coronavirus deaths rates 25% higher than in England, asks for more levelling up to increase life expectancy.

Schooling big issue and not getting the attention but then what is as Drakeford criticises BoJo for ignoring Welsh Parliament. Chris Whitty accosted and harassed again, fourth time by jobs, may be need police protection – for doing his job as a CMO. The tension is getting to everyone, though no reason to excuse attack on him and may be the answer is moments of collective joy as The Guardian article says asking for street parties: *But if we need a process of collective mourning (and I think we do), we also need collective joy: a national memorial service, followed by a raucous wake*, writes James Greig. Wonder what the reaction will be – with risk averse criticising the super-spreader events?

Herself feels the need to throw off the caution (sensibly) and start travelling a bit, so planning to go to Manchester on Friday – may be if can survive Manchester will be OK anywhere, as hotspot! Has visitors, friends, staying at present and catching up on old times.

Another round of millionaire's golf yesterday, only saw hares on the course! And managed to tidy up a bit more in the vege patch. Tested the first produce- radishes were lovely, will be ready to take out soon along with mixed lettuce, and time to plant some more.

Today, off to see Wenffrwd Pocket Park with AONB team, looking forward, weather looks good too. Wonder what Beryl will make of progress today - been practising piano though still some way to go to get fingers to the right keys!

S**tometer: 3/10

01 July 2021

Watched *Gone baby gone* film on Netflix last evening – for Morgan Freeman but his role small, corrupt cops with twists theme, good time pass after a busy day which included another interview, with Ramesh Mehta recounting history of BAPIO and recent efforts for covid, had to tell him now too far out of NHS to make meaningful contribution to future plans, as was insisting join them for a brainstorming session.

Happy Doctors Day today in India – seems to be gaining momentum there though no equivalent here. Have come a long way from the days of quacks and witchcraft, though could be better. Cefyn found something in Jean papers whilst clearing out – looked like a prescription from Meddygon Myddfai but Chris Madoc Jones put right- says a witches spell, handwritten note worn in a bag around neck, how interesting. Chris offers to tell more so will follow up.

Diana statue being revealed in London today, to mark 60th birthday- all eyes on Will and Harry, will they make up or is the brotherly relationship broken? All too common a story of human relationships and leave them in peace?

Another one bites the dust as Gap closing all stores and going online by summer – another victim of technology accelerated by pandemic; may be will dress virtually, like screen backdrops just have a screen avatar whilst lounging around in pajamas? Plans being made to offer booster covid to over 50s by winter, the rest of the world not looking good as raging in East and Australia – no one is safe till all safe, and not much chance of that?

More zoom meetings today – talking to Johann and team and teaching young doctors, looking forward. Then off to Peniel, via vege patch if weather permits to tidy up grass.

S**tometer: 2/10

02 July 2021 (Peniel)

Herself spotted a car in Morrisons with HJ08 number plate – parked next to hers and the coincidence struck her, spurred and to make up the Curmudgeon bought HJ08 PEN so Herself can be a proper snob with personalised number plates.

Now it's the fungal infections with covid causing concerns in the UK, Wales numbers up but no deaths and Paul Waugh from Huff Post wonders what level of deaths would be acceptable, one issue would be NHS ability to cop but will NHS ever be ready – now maternity scandal in Nottingham, with dozens of brain damaged babies, never learning organisation, and huge waiting lists with the tsunami of long covid.

The Guardian points out that June deadline for EU workers in UK has now expired and if not registered already will be living here illegally and starts with: "*We asked for workers, we got human beings instead,*" was how the Swiss author Max Frisch summed up the "guest worker" schemes that helped wealthy European countries rebuild their economies after the second world war. His quip lives on because it expresses the absurdity of societies that treat immigration as purely a question of economic need, reducing people to units that can be moved here and there as capital sees fit. Brexit was not supposed to be about a hard break but an opportunity to redefine the relationship taking account of the new world, but did not reckon with base nature of opportunists led by BoJo and the gang. Michael Gove and wife Sarah Vine divorcing – casualty of parliament.

Civilisation is the worst thing that has happened to mankind, and just started reading *The Human Kind* by Rutger Bregman, trying to turn the argument that crisis brings out the worst in people the other way as it brings out the best, rewriting history by confronting prevailing wisdom. Herself bought it for next book club so borrow it and the first few pages seem riveting. Not sure what to make just yet, so watch this space. Do get the sense of argument however as have felt that Empire has been the worst thing that happened to a large part of the world – and no wonder it is now Canada's turn as crowds in Manitoba topple Victoria and Elizabeth II statues for their treatment of indigenous children. And America has been the worst since last century, finally leaving Afghanistan – what has it ever achieved apart from mayhem?

Leave mankind and nature alone – pleased to see Wales Parliament introducing Nature emergency alarmed with reports of 1 in 6 wildlife, plants and fungi in danger of disappearing. Have been thinking about this for some time and had a chat with David at the AONB about doing something to protect nature by connecting more people with it – thoughts not clear on what and how to do, but note increasing evidence of benefits of connecting nature and health. Given the AONB will become a national park, wonder whether to explore the idea of the first Health Creating National Park, over and above the usual walking benefits; to be followed up.

But for now, time to get ready to go to Manchester, need to get walking boots, will detour through currymile to pick up some groceries and show Herself the 'big city'! Tariq said to drop in on the way to say hello. Knee swollen up, guess too much kneeling whilst weeding etc so need to watch- can't imagine life without physical fitness.

S**tometer: 2/10

03 July 2021

What covid – the traffic, people everywhere in Manchester, did not go to city centre but Didsbury, university area, ofcourse Friday and school pickups added but was a surreal experience, not having been there for a year. Herself says how could have lived in that jungle being a country girl; do see her point but it was OK when there though would not want to go back to live in a city now. Very enjoyable lunch with Tariq, Chennai Dosai, though starved of meat Herself had some masala mutton- as usual great to see him, so blessed to have him, always there if needed. Seems to be happier and getting on with work, advise him to not forget life. Mixed feelings about Manchester now, so many memories there.

Labour is back, as wins Batley and Spennings seat, but is it, really? What is different- wait to find out when Starmer speaks to his party next week, but so far nothing tangible or bold enough to galvanise folk. At least with Corbyn one knew, unlike Miliband and now Starmer, forget focus groups, set out what is needed to sort out the mess by BoJo – take a leaf out of Kim Leadbetter's book, she listened to the real problems of real people. Michael Jones says watch this space, BoJo out soon, maybe but would it be any better unless ideological shift, Can Biden be cloned?

Sadly, no walk today- John leading one near Menai Bridge – never been that way but the knee needs rest, and so will sit at home with the new boots to test them out! Think know the problem, lately started having some alcohol and eating sugar, so sleep rotten. Time to catch up on writing stuff.

S**tometer: 3/10

04 July 2021

Like the sign on Betws y Coed station, on 3 July nothing happened in Peniel- is it a good thing, discuss. Should something happen every day, or just living, doing the basics and enjoying is enough. But something did happen elsewhere as England routed Ukraine to get into semi-finals in Euro 2020, will it finally happen, fingers crossed. Johann had been to the Germany game last week, so will have something to talk about for a long time. Something also happened – fifty years ago as Jim Morrison of the Doors died at age 27, fans gather in Paris to remember him. And Trump staged a rally in Florida – 53% of Republicans believe he won the election and blame his loss on illegal voting. And protests across the country about underfunding and understaffing of the NHS. led by Keep Our NHS Public. May be best staying in Peniel where nothing happens. Except Dean and Ashley came for the weekly visit - shower for Dean and catch up with Herself, and general pootering around with a short walk to test the knee.

Send messages to Arvind, BL and Barbara re 4th July today, wonder if Barbara still here or gone back. Americans seems much freer as David Ballard says his friend and family from US have arrived on his farm in Tobia, can't understand British rules and why can't visit. Delta now the main culprit, present in 98 countries says WHO.

BoJo gearing up for opening up as Test and Trace causing havoc with services- hospitality staff yo-yo ing as customers turn positive, and schools- The Saj setting the scene for 'normalising' it.

Herself having dance lesson today, as network failed yesterday- probably as Yours Truly was transferring large files by We Transfer which took up the bandwidth. Weather permitting- strange as cloudy but no real rain, which would be welcome – may be beach and go and water the veges later. Keep reading Humankind and keep hoping, and keep bugging on.

S**tometer: 3/10

05 July 2021

Another brick in the wall scenario – as kids in schools game the lateral flow tests by using soft drinks to get positive results and bunk off, and BoJo and Saj setting the scene for open season soon. Hey ho. Much as enjoying reading Bregman, not sure will trust (all) fellow human beings to be responsible – do not outsource own safety. Fantastic take down of Mattdoor by David Mitchell in The Guardian: *“it was like a hit and run driver who has been chased by the police, has crashed his car into a primary school, legged it over several walls and fences, stolen some clothes from the washing line as a disguise, splashed through a mud pond, hidden in a sewer and been dragged by the arse covered in shit, then turning around to the arresting officer and calmly saying: I’ve decided that the responsible thing would be to turn myself in”*. Love the guy, satire best policy, only way to survive mankind.

Country gearing up for the freedom day- communities organising parties – Thank You day yesterday for covid heroes and even the Queen on the act, gives the George Cross to the NHS and going to be a garden party for the workers. Kailash spoils it by reminding them to rather give decent pay to workers in his newspaper article – give him a slogan in Hindi: Thali (food) not Tali (claps) but he does not respond, very focussed on telling and does not take jokes easily. Wales following suit on opening up- normalcy, the new one, and let them take the consequences.

Blimey, Barbara in blue lagoon in Iceland, guess on way back to USA, sends photos, the American friends seem to be getting on with life; hardly anyone here ventured out of country, and those went to India suffered. So, Herself sets off making plans for travel, may be Scotland, but will now have to wait till Sep to avoid the mad school holiday season.

Over in India, dowry payments remain stable and continue in rural areas despite being illegal, law and tradition (and society) different; people will be people. Fundamental change needed- a new age of enlightenment, learning from the failures of reason, the last organising principle for society which has created the present chaos, wonder what could it be? Susheela trying to rope in for race equality in Wales but lost for how to add value – own views at odds with prevailing mood of fighting and demanding justice for past. Send a polite note.

Beyond Yours Truly to address such matters so best to concentrate on what can be done – veges doing well, bumper crop of salads, so take some around to neighbours and Gareth having treatment says Iona, making Herself down as likes them. Life is too short, get a move on, time to head back to Llanbedr.

S**tometer: 2/10

06 July 2021 (Llanbedr)

Pleasant surprise- Arjun Aggarwal rang, says Bhartiya in Bengaluru going very well (Sanjeev had said so earlier too) and still have not given up on the hospital, wanted some advice re Mayo, happy to help and get in touch with Chad. Was a great project and learnt a lot, wonder IF Snehdeep will finally take the plunge?

Best to be nice and help wherever, and so get in touch with J as was feeling very low- as usual does not answer phone so will wait, such a nice person. Herself on fire artistically and locked in studio – happy to see her working; never fazes and keeps going cheerfully, how? If only could find out, worth billions as so many sad and stuck people out there.

The biggest experiment due to start as BoJo plans to lift all restrictions – in the face of rising infections almost all Delta – betting will not cause too many hospitalisations. Do see the dilemma and wait to see what other checks/support systems in place, anyway Wales may be a separate issue. Cumming releases another blog saying BoJo (repeatedly) admitted ludicrous that he is PM – him and many others, jilted advisors can be dangerous.

Read up on peeing in the night- anxiety related muscle tensions and overactive bladder, so take a free anxiety test, score high but not dangerous. Susheela keeps trying to pull in for race equality, says have to keep going, as a general rule but must come a time when say no personally and let others do it? So will go and listen this evening, after all raining and not likely to be doing anything, though few meetings today and then the poetry group- guess will meet in the conservatory. Forgot to get extra milk for tea, hope will have enough, will distract them with some Indian sweets!

Better send this to Herself as weekly update.

S**tometer: 2/10

07 July 2021

Dilip Kumar passes away at 98 in Mumbai- legendary actor, most remembered for sad and regal roles, guess Dharmendra now the oldest? They come, act for a while and are replaced- just like in life, all actors on stage.

Good poetry group session yesterday, much banter, Avril welcome new addition to liven things up a bit, always nice to see Gill, remarkable woman and keeps going, along with others – interesting theme of gardens and some nice poems, grass

featured often. Send a note to Susheela having embarrassed her at the meeting – bored with jobsworth folk peddling bulls**t; as an American policymaker used to say it was a Fake meeting, for its own sake. Racial, or any, discrimination, can't be solved, only made liveable for a time with some clear workable mechanisms – need to turn the whole thinking upside down, wish could make Jos de Blok, the guy mentioned in Bregman book in charge – to cut through all the nonsense. Will try and capture this for the article Buddhdev keeps asking for. Btw the book is well known, Dick had read it in Australia and some poetry group members too. Surprised did not come up on own radar- must get out more.

Data predicts 2 million cases by summer with 10 million isolating in UK and Saj repeats entering uncharted waters, be interesting to see how they phrase things over next few weeks. trick to avoid blame and take credit depending on how things pan out, to avoid going down the pan. One death in Wales in past week and campaigners urging Welsh investigation – would have thought in their interest to do so, and put some mechanisms in place to safeguard for future, must be some serious skeletons in cupboard. Obviously there are in England with mega contracts to chums, and trend set to continue with increasing selling off of the NHS. Customers fed up of covid excuse for poor service – yesss, though some legit reasons but blanket blaming bad.

Order Midnight Library book, recommended yesterday by Eleri, and weather permitting walk with Tony around Graigfechan, rain predicted but how much, not keen on getting soaked. More interviews about Covid in India – repeats but some interesting comments too, will be good to pull these together and see if something can be done afterwards; to complement own story of work in India. Writing going OK, though memory fading and have to dig deep- is that Alzheimer or general disuse as keep forgetting names. Could not even remember own favourite poem yesterday; had to look it up on iPad surreptitiously during the session. So, spend extra time on Duolingo this morning.

Piano later on with Beryl via Cefyn in studio. Much to do beforehand so get cracking.

S**tometer: 2/10

08 July 2021

Finally, England through to the finals- beat Denmark 2-1 after extra time; did they win or did Denmark lose? England were good but Denmark challenging too. Anyway, will be talking about this for years now. Though won't be talking about the research showing rise in covid numbers in men linked to Euro football.

Going back to normalcy as Sunak abolished universal credit boost- obviously they did not need it anymore as prices have come down and jobs aplenty since employers crying about not being able to recruit? Which planet, comes to mind.

Finished Bregman book, the world really needs turning upside down- everything one knows and follows is wrong: less is more, slow is fast etc; good to see evidence for

how Yours Truly have always felt. Question why do not others and how to be more effective, what can be done by self?

Raman sends photos of school admission card in Rangoon, age 11 when family moved to Burma (now Myanmar) and enrolled in D.A.V. School there but only for a few months as school shut due to Ne Win's nationalist policies and all foreign things were banned. Look at the school photo and then mirror- where did that boy go? Used to love that shirt.

Herself says Mal now regretting moving to Babell, run into problems with neighbours – small hamlet but big egos, Mark and Val on opposite bungalow in Llanbedr had someone climb over fence and put weedkillers down on the plants- had called the police as scared, wonder who would do that? Think related to putting deterrent spikes on fence as cats coming to use their garden to do business.

Rubbish on Duolingo today- getting tougher now, but may be the effect of Nytol last night, had taken on and usually woozy in mornings. Hope tomorrow better. Cooking Indian veges today- must use them or will go off, fingers crossed work out, trying new ways to cook bottle gourd!

S**tometer: 3/10

09 July 2021

Pleasant surprise- Iain dropped by yesterday after visiting his woods to give a set of keys for the caravan- says use it! Very impressed with the allotment, took some salad but still lots there. Cefyn and Martin also came for tea and asked (made) them to take some salad also- Cefyn sent a picture later to say made pesto out of radish leaves, must find out how. Happier as can see their way with the house, should get a decent deal and then can decide where to settle, the financial monkey off their back; Martin already planning on turning left for next trip to India!

Own monkey keeps going, and trying to manage, not helped by relying on people who keep leading up garden paths – promises of work (not even paid, just wanting to help) fail to materialise; hard to see where problem is. May have to stop relying on work for distraction, and get on with own stuff. Music practice getting a bit better, and hopefully after summer holidays, Beryl will be pleased. Enjoying writing too.

Started reading *Midnight Library* – about all the lives not lived, visiting them in the bardo – early to say more, but reads well so far; may be the message is the life one has was the only one possible, and so make the most of it?

Southgate and England team not giving into BoJo divisive politics, and maintain dignity with antiracist stance and call out on inequality; what a shame when so called 'uneducated' footballers are better role models than the Oxbridge toffs.

Test and trace app to be modified as making too many isolate- do not measure to make the problem go away? Anyway, looks like the horse has bolted, people will not be held back now. Article in The Conversation suggests treating covid as Norovirus,

not flu- when it strikes isolate, PPE to contain and prevent spread. Guess something different will be needed to balance covid and life.

Came over to Peniel last night, the bottle gourd coconut milk curry did not quiet work, drat- will talk to Ruchi again! Mark and Val coming for afternoon tea; Herself is getting good at these, with her sarnies and cakes; may have to be indoors as overcast and may rain.

S**tometer: 3/10

10 July 2021 (Peniel)

Missed writing this morning- got up late then rain, in two minds- walk or not, kept dilly dallying, Janet and Chas texted to say going ahead; finally gave in and went off, driving rain on A55 but then dry walk! over 10 miles around Tremeirchion- some nice country houses including Bryn Bella, fantastic country pile for someone, and an interesting one, Bryntirion, with grounds full of large statues of animals, dinosaurs, Darth Vader etc and of Michelle and Barack Obama sitting on a bench. Bryn says owned by a billionaire, and there was a write up in Daily Mail. Strange to think how much money in these parts with Denbigh town being poor.

Caught up with folk on walk, some up others down, Ann as usual fun and sat together for lunch on bench in Tremeirchion church graveyard. Full of admiration for people, lives they led and still do.

Not too guilty about leaving Herself as had been taken to lunch by Dean and Ashley to the White Horse in Hendrewydd and stuffed herself, having been starved of meat! And there was Yours Truly rushing back to cook this evening.

Only news seems to be the final England v Italy match, clamour for an extra bank holiday on Monday. God knows what it will do for covid numbers, which continue to climb and yet safeguards being dropped. Not only covid but non covid respiratory illnesses on rise as previously suppressed due to covid measures of social distances, masks and hand hygiene.

Nice chat with Kuki in Dubai, even he is 40 now- blimey, says things OK in Dubai but wondering next steps, clear does not want to go back to India and question whether will shift to Portugal where bought a house and has necessary visas. Says thinking about kids growing up in Dubai, very artificial place. Tell him to get out to country and connect with nature. Anyway, says will help with making a website. Good news.

Time to finish cooking and piano practice, getting late in evening.

S**tometer: 2/10

11 July 2021

Watched next lot of *The Kominsky Method* on Netflix with Michael Douglas in it last night- funny serial, esp the early episodes with prostate and peeing problems. Good

that episodes are short, done three at a time, up to 7th now, not sure how many altogether.

Listened to the Aberstywyth Book Club on BBC Sounds discussing The Midnight Library this morning, having struggled with Welsh on Duolingo. Interesting discussion and send it to XXXX – the life one is living is the only one possible, and there is a reason, accept it.

Started reflecting after chat with Kuki about the website for reflection, wondering about names and hey ho, there is so much out there already; thereflectivedoc or whatdoiknow or youknowbest for the key message all taken. Anyway, will work on what is it that trying to do/say and let the name come out. Something to work on today.

Herself has dance lesson, again on Sunday instead of usual Saturday, and beach this evening, before the match? And may be watch Richard Branson blast off into space – has beaten Jeff Bezos in the race of billionaires. Talking about money, baby to get the most expensive drug on the NHS- a new gene therapy, Zolgensma for severe spinal muscular atrophy, £1.79million per patient. How much is a life worth? Meantime NHS waiting list approaching 13 million, says The Saj, will throw money at it in private sector, and that is without the cost of long covid.

Raman rang to say managed to persuade Anju, the old maid to come back and will shift mum back to her flat, guess the only way. No point wondering/worrying – it will be what it will be.

S**tometer: 4/10

12 July 2021

It is not coming home but has gone to Rome, sadly England lost 3:2 on penalties, the pressure on players was enormous and youth as opposed to the experienced older Italians probably played its part when Rashford, Sancho and Saka missed, sadly it has brought out the racist elements. Only like you if you perform, how arrogant. Whilst applauding English side, and Southgate has pulled them together over the years, it's still not the winning force- Italy dominated the game throughout. Now wait for the covid fall out.

Daughter's birthday, still remember the call to go to delivery room in the next building in Drogheda and rushing out of theatre gear (operating that day with Owen Barry and Paraic Murray) and arriving just in time as Dr Neary (the one who was struck off later) brought her out. Was the best thing to happen and went 'cold-turkey' the same day after years of smoking – after the customary cigar with Anu – as now had a major reason to live.

Time to head back to Llanbedr, as have a few meetings including the William Mathias Board as observer in case join them as trustee, not sure how useful one can be but will find out. Apart from being a student, the only connection is with Mair's legacy for North East India and looks like things are moving on that front- had a good

chat with Sandra in Shillong and will follow up with Cefyn. Once he is settled as the old lady next door died in Glan Clwyd, had just given up and went quickly. Feel really sorry for him- been non-stop for last 18 months.

S**tometer: 4/10

13 July 2021 (Llanbedr)

Being busy with interviews and then CGWM Board helped- good bunch of people, though still feel nervous about subject matter. Not very knowledgeable about music- but happy to help, glad that Son#1 says getting back to violin again. Saw Liam Neeson film: *A walk among the tombstones* on Netflix, mindless violence, only went there as like him.

Spent time figuring out work on reflection and encouraged by Kuki's response decided to get on with it- trying to work with others creating a hostage situation as tied to their timetables, better focus on own work. Interesting to see so much on the internet about reflection – must be the latest fashion and all the catchy names taken or have history (some being famous songs): thereflectedoc, reflectionistheway, youcandoit, youknowbest, whatdoiknow, icansocanyou, itspossible, healthyreflection, reflectionmatters..... blimey. Ask Kuki to check timeforreflection or reflectionsimplified.

Footballers slam BoJo and Patel for their stance on race, and BoJo wavering re opening up- wants it both ways, even when next door the Dutch PM apologises for opening too soon and up to Lambda- found in Peru- now with variants and the WHO slams senseless greed with not sharing vaccines. Big problem globally as Delhi runs out – off/on programme with unpredictable supply- and IMA warns about third wave: markets don't know best or somethings are not for markets. Good that Tory rebels protesting against cuts to foreign aid – though doubt if it will stop Sunak/BoJo who could not give a toss that one third of world going hungry during the pandemic. Not sure what to make of Tony Benn's son joining the Lords- not like father who fought to get rid of his hereditary peerage – called it absolutely mad. "*I would not like to go to a dentist who just before he drilled into my mouth told me that he had not done this before but his father was a good dentist*" – man after own heart. Still remembering sitting in his chair in his local pub (not that he drank alcohol either, being a tea drinker) during the Jarrow march.

Leave the world affairs and live the moment – off to Robert Hughes for morning coffee, rang last night to say had met an Indian couple on holiday here from Birmingham and so had invited them and asked Yours Truly, and then golf with Andy, who has been travelling to see family and celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary year, but wanted to get in touch. And Susheela has donated some vege curry for dinner tonight! So, there are enough people looking out for others. Herself has a reprieve as Jan not going to Liverpool to look at another car – wish there were ways to make it easy for the elderly, if not careful will end up with a lemon, Herself advising as best but

S**tometer: 2/10

14 July 2021

Good day yesterday, and had a good chat with Kuki, going to help with the reflection project- sense that he gets it, so going to work on it some more next few days and try and get it going. Not a business but an interest, and something to contribute- no delusions of grandeur.

Blimey, another report on race by Runnymede Trust now, is it worth reading? Better write that article for Buddhdev, dig out old stuff. Pissing in the wind- Andy liked the idea, old men saying the right things (as they see, from experience and wisdom) but not able to get across to the young! He has been writing and performing songs on life's lessons too, but from a happy place, Good for him, nice guy.

Wales to announce new rules today, looks like be some differences – masks may stay, confusion for cross border travel; anyway, best to treat it as if nothing has changed.

Off to Llantysilio for a walk with the ranger to find out about restoration work after the fire- be good to learn, weather nice, also final piano lesson before break and then supper in the garden at Nant Clwyd y Dre. There are worse ways to spend days.

S**tometer: 1/10

15 July 2021

Son#1 sends a pic of his engagement; strong emotions. Reminded of the separation of lambs and ewes few days ago- lot of crying for a day or two and then went separate ways; if only humans were as uncomplicated.

Dig out old family photos and lists Subhash had made years ago and note all birthdays in diary- must stay in touch. Learn from Herself, always takes care with occasions, goes out of way, not perfunctionary. Went the full length last evening for the supper in the garden – pity not more people as beautiful setting, lovely food and David and Alison brought croquet set which was amusing.

David says hospital full now though not covid cases which are few but the covid procedures means less throughput, hospitalisations and deaths among vaccinated but scientifically bound to happen due to base rate fallacy.

Report says tax salt and sugar to combat obesity and unhealthy life styles, and whilst at it world peace? Must stop cynicism- had a good chat with Pam last evening and may be will start going to her yoga lessons – from Sep as finished for summer. Also finished piano lessons but must practise – Beryl seems OK with progress, and can see the difference but much more needed. Carry on.

Not going to Leicester on Sunday as Umesh's dog not well and so Plan B- will see if Anu wants to meet or go to Promod again. Today, dropping Phil and Susheela to Chester station as off to son and daughter in law for the new baby's arrival next week. Happy for them.

S**tometer: 2/10

16 July 2021

Gula's birthday today – 75, send message via Anita.

Another programme on race- David Olusago on BBC about immigrant healthcare workers- all the usual suspects, Aneez, Carol and Kailash feature, thought Jonathan Pie's take on race overall is much better- humorous and tells it like it is. Spoke to Susheela on way to station, race is not a binary but a continuum – with grades between blacks, middle-easterns, far-east, south Asians etc; says must talk to Robert Moore.

Wales will be back to normal on 7 August though both Whitty and WHO very cautious – better to follow what they do personally than official line. Laura Spinney wades in about rolling out vaccines globally, no chance without it.

BoJo sets out his vision – says levelling up but not taxing sugar/salt or anything meaningful and Starmer says will sweat blood to win voters respect, and meantime keep going down the tubes as inflation rises with prices going up.

Llandudno goats being sent to England to control numbers, misery or joy shared. Too many on the Orme. Guess will be full of tourists soon.

Good day on the allotment yesterday, though knee swelling, need to get support and rest – drat. Catch up on work today, and listen to Aneeta's talk on talent management.

S**tometer: 2/10

17 July 2021 (Peniel)

Interesting interview with Sandra Albert in Shillong about Covid and digressed into the long-term devastating effect of covid on people – not medical but social, hunger and poverty, and the helplessness of people in positions. Impossible/very hard to negotiate the system, applaud them for trying. Dick gave excellent feedback on the first draft of report about work in India – will revise, and hopefully will be something useful. Enjoying all the writing recently.

Anita says Sonu losing hair- 47 years old man, post covid- no other symptoms. Can happen after any illness but is there a covid connection? Over here more worry about Norovirus- winter vomiting bug, Immunity Debt is the term to describe reduced immunity due to lockdowns and the preventive measures. Covid cases passe 50,000 in UK for first time since January. Herself worried and unhappy as nurse says

prediabetic after test results and has to change diet- has to cut out sweet stuff and carbs, in bad mood. One way or other it will get you, live today who knows tomorrow.

And today is fine – great start with ‘limited’ breakfast sitting outside, blue skies, not a cloud, still, heaven. How would being on holiday be any different- already in a great place. Thinks being stingy! Ceri and Frank stopping on way back from holiday in Pembrokeshire to their home in Buxton for lunch.

S**tometer: 2/10

18 July 2021

Turned out to be a great day yesterday, weather fantastic and company could not be better- nice chats with Ceri and Frank, very interesting couple, got carried away and ended up making Indian pancakes and dessert for supper, except Ceri does not eat sugar or milk products but managed. Herself better for their visit, took mind off her obsession since speaking to nurse. Heard from Robert (Boyd) who is busy in garden too, having potted blackcurrant jam. Watched another episode of The Kominsky Method- good light fun.

Now The Saj has got Covid – tested positive, who else will isolate not clear, and strange situation – media and experts very cautious but public and politicians blasé. Agree with Herself not to outsource own safety to others, and stick with all measures for now. David keeps asking about going to Italy but can’t see a safe way yet- and also why, ofcourse love to see him but at what cost? Not even sure about staying in a hotel yet.

Raman says mum gone back to her flat and got the old maid, Anju, to come back – exploiting her need for money, but what else to do? Anu coming today – or hope so as unpredictable, will make some lunch and use up the Indian veges from Chester.

Weather holding up, and otherwise plenty on the go, with various writings- enjoyable. Trying to cut back on news scrolling.

S**tometer: 1/10

19 July 2021

Anu turned up, late and talked non-stop, but happy for him as needed the break, Herself went out of way to welcome him including driving all over moors to show him the area. Did not stay overnight. Bitter gourd did not work again, very bitter, must ask sister again- something not right though rest of cooking ok. Try bottle gourd next.

Raman sends pics from his Monsoon hike in Khandala, lovely, reminded of own hike a few years ago, and Son #1 sends pics from his Scotland trip – Loch Lomond and Ben Nevis.

Now BoJo and Sunak in self-isolation after trying to wriggle out with a loophole around being an experiment- but put on spot and did the U-turn. Neil Ferguson

predicting high numbers- may even be 200,000 cases and 2000 admissions a day with a difficult summer by late August/early September, and over in the US, Vivek Murthy, the surgeon general highlights covid misinformation on SoMe- spreading like wildfire. There are enough idiots around to keep this going including Katie Hopkins (yes, who she- why do people see in her, for **** sake) who is being deported from Australia for making 'jokes' about quarantine- wrote would lie in wait till they were putting the food at the door, open it in buff and yell boo, imbecile. Dick from Sydney says will be sorry to see her go. Denmark says Welsh double jabbed can visit but not rest of UK- mind boggles.

Tech industry is not going to do anything as details emerge of project Pegasus, the cyber surveillance weapon being used by tyrants to suppress opposition- journalists, politicians, activists being targeted – software sold by Israeli surveillance company NSO Group. Big brother is really here.

Comedian Tom O'Connor dies aged 81, used to watch him- was good. RIP.

Back in Llanbedr with box of goodies to last till go back to Peniel, more interviews today and then golf with Andy. Maybe cut the grass in the allotment- out of control.

S**tometer: 1/10

20 July 2021 (Llanbedr)

So, it's open- secret is in the open- they are spying on you. Modi government being accused of spying on opposition in India, Snowden pitches in with calls for banning the spyware and The Guardian running a series on it. Should increase donation to The Guardian- trying to get some accountability. Not that easier to pin slippery BoJo- doing everything opposite to the evidence, numbers rising so open up, crowds bad so go to nightclubs for next two months, no need for masks on trains..... and an anonymous consultant writes in The Guardian about how angry he feels, and the staff are tired. Pingdemic worse than pandemic so app being switched off for critical workers. Mangled the science completely, is there any order/plan or not – government handling a joke. Cumming says BoJo did not care as only over 80s were dying and had to be pushed into lockdown.

Met office issues extreme heat warning- was hot on the golf course yesterday and glad to come indoors. Prince Harry to write memoirs – guess need the money, if any sense would not do it, but..... Anyway, not everyone enamoured with the Royals- Clinton refused tea with the Queen and wanted an 'Indian' instead on his visit! Guto Harri quits GB News over taking the knee row so they appoint Nigel Farage who would not take the knee for anyone, ofcourse Nigel.

Good one from Popova about ending painful relationships: When is it time to move on? The capacity to give up on people very hard, need to stop believing they will change. Wilful blindness - forgiveness does not mean staying there, it means moving on and leaving them to it, accept people have changed.

But there are some good ones too, the film *Our Friend* on Prime last night based on true story of Teague family with Casey Affleck – sentimental but nice.

Good chat with Sonali yesterday, staying at the Monastery in Himachal Pradesh, shows the place on video- beautiful, says much calmer since there and would like to stay indefinitely through not becoming a monk. Wish her the best, reminded of time on Holy Isle which remains shut, sadly.

More interviews today, and Herself coming over on way to Loggerheads to meet Howard who wants to persuade her to join the AONB Partnership Group.

S**tometer: 2/10

21 July 2021

Boys with toys- so Bezos went into space yesterday, sadly beaten by Branson. Farsighted – to see and steer humanity over next few hundred years or short-sighted- as hastening the demise of mankind, with growing inequality due to relentless pursuit of profit. Rats leaving the ship, but then where is the safe heaven?

Not anywhere at present as Australia clamps down, France too and Olympics may still not go ahead- due to start on Friday. Talked to Ravikant last night- what happened in India in second wave was tragic, abdication of responsibility by government, left it to citizens. He said: Indians used to say God will help us but what if God was hoping that you would help Him. Really admire him, and wish could do something to help. George Monbiot writes about suffocating of rivers due to industrial farm waste, and the rocket race ignores the environmental impact. Time to reach into the knife drawer as Herself would say, or get on with it.

Dom Cummings comes out with more damaging (*sic*) material – says his team were plotting to oust BoJo, who they knew was useless. Got him for a reason knowing he was not able to do what they (Dom's mates) were thinking of- what were they thinking of? Change the world obviously. He did not think it would end this way- not just personally for him but as Brexit was an unknown and unpredictable. Though not much personal sympathy for him, do see his point as that was the reason why voted for Brexit, a chance to recalibrate politics- S**t happens, Got to live with consequences- John Wright's BBC diary talks about the burden on health service in Bradford with personal stories, another good man.

Consequences include not being able to go to India any time soon, as Third wave may be in Autumn, and God knows what will happen here. Off to golf and then walking with Pam to pick her brains about plans – not sure how the walk will go as another hot day. Went out late last evening and walked back in the gloaming with three quarters moon - brilliant. Should talk to Julie as getting stuck with Welsh on Duolingo – not sure it works on own, need some guidance.

S**tometer: 3/10

22 July 2021

Well, two things: its holidays and there is no covid. Prestatyn beach was full at 8 pm last evening, people still in sea, kids larking, drinking, making sausages on BBQ, dog shit everywhere on dunes and litter, no sign of social distance, not a mask in sight. Welcome to normal. Guess that is the end to trips to the beach for now. Had a good walk and talk with Pam- very knowledgeable about leadership and management and a very sensible approach to developing people, resonated, and helped stabilise the S**tometer.

Also helped by chat with mum and Raman- showed the renovated flat, much cleaner, decluttered, mum happy. Resigned to no visit for a while. India death toll just under 5 million, according to latest estimate, ten times that reported officially and two-thirds have antibodies- meaning rest don't, and long way to go for good vaccination coverage. Not much different here as all new focussed on improving vaccination but would that stop the pingdemic- as Starmer goes into isolation now. Does contact tracing as done now any use?

Don't wait for any sense from the government- as Cummings lobs more bombs; Owen Jones in The Guardian, in his succinct style says: *"From Iraq to Brexit to Covid, nothing is learned, just more illusions, and so this country will stumble from needless disaster to self-inflicted calamity, seemingly for ever more"*. Makes sense as not much sign of sense at top anywhere- Starmer purges party of Corbynites, and no sign of what he stands for. NHS workers offered 3% pay rise after lot of fuss, sweetening before the next storm. Liverpool stripped of UNESCO Heritage status, as planned Everton stadium final nail – got to make money, bugger rest.

Too hot to golf yesterday, wonder if better today- Andy booked a slot in afternoon. Hot and hazy outside. Plants running dry, must water veges today.

S**tometer: 1/10

23 July 2021

Covid cases at record high level in 20-29 group, no wonder as Eric Clapton joins others in refusing to perform where vaccination proof required – personal freedom or stupidity. And scientists advocating boosters, but no definite plans yet. Would there be, from BoJo, as muddle continues and food workers now exempt from isolation- joining healthcare workers, reactive mode and cover ups, due to reports of panic buying with workers shortages. No surprise that the Inquiry despite finding wrongdoings in Greensill scandal says Cameron "did not breach the current lobbying rules and his actions were not unlawful". Of course.

And yet they fall for the trap – as Exeter medical school has more demands than seats and asking/bribing students to defer; will grow up to be doctors only to be pilloried. No one learns and the world keeps going.

The good bit is being in North Wales, during the pandemic- named the most popular place for staycations.

Finishing the first set of interviews for Covid India project and need to check with Stephanie about next steps. Could go on for ever, so what's the purpose, beyond creating a vignette? Good chat with Dick and Johann, hopefully will be able to collaborate- easy to be objective from outside! But fascinating how people can talk past each other sometimes, guess have done it self.

Another hot day, pick up old generator from Helen M's garage as leaving home, having sold off- and will need to get it over to Iain's woodland somehow. Herself off to Carriageworks and then studio- or atleast plans to. To be fair, heat can be lethargic. Have not done any reading for a while, where is the time going!

S**tometer: 3/10

24 July 2021 (Peniel)

Confused, contradictory and chaotic verdict by Paul Waugh in Huff Post about BoJo's policies as PHE upgrades Delta variant's risk level due to reinfection risk and food shortages predicted. Sage adviser, Robert West, says ministers trying to get as many as possible infected in summer, and will blame the public. World gearing up for 11 billion vaccines by 2022, but problems with ingredients and global portal launched.

Meantime Tokyo Olympics go ahead with great opening ceremony, and New Zealand shuts down travel to Australia, and high death toll in Malaysia. Not that going anywhere and certainly not New York where a bull- Barney- is loose in Long Island- can't find him for last three days; the greatest nation on earth, Hey ho! Best way may be Multiverse that Zuckerberg wants to create, with parallel lives in virtual reality – in five years!

Travelling now to Llansannan for walk around Lynn Aled with ramblers- trousers or shorts, as cloudy but may be muggy! Brian coming later for dinner- his birthday and was going to be alone.

S**tometer: 3/10

25 July 2021

Oh dear, Brian did not think much of the loft idea – not much room and too complex. Back to drawing board; Herself in full flow with garden room, shifting log shed etc. Otherwise good dinner, trying to play cupid for Brian!

From cupid to covid as The Saj slated for saying stop cowering from corona, hey macho man, go easy as Spiegelhalter writes in The Guardian: Get covid and live longer? No, does not work like that. Taxpayers to bear costs for decades to come as bill mounts with no accountability, public inquiry delayed till spring 2022. Sydney will take months to recede going by other outbreaks in the world, Dick better off in Wagga esp as Freedom march held there yesterday, freedom to be idiots and kill others.

Good to meet XXXX on the walk yesterday, another kindred spirit, interested in Hindu scriptures, been reading Upanishads, suggested Razor's edge by Somerset Maugham, not sure why missed it but will order today, from worldofbooks not Amazon! Celestine prophecy?

Lazy Sunday, touch wood, first good night in a long time, with only one pee and rested, if only. Somehow need to get the routine back with meditation practice, and stop the monkey.

Herself feels like a long drive and so may be head towards Iain's wood and Mary and Graham's for tea?

S**tometer: 2/10

26 July 2021

Good day with Mary and Graham- nice banana muffins and cake, reminded of Maureen and Bob Josefchak, Canadian colleagues in Edinburgh who introduced these, used to be favourite breakfast with coffee whenever went to America. Nice chat and local walk, easy company. Off on travels soon including to Orkney and Shetlands, need to recover own mojo and get up and go.

Herself re-energised with new plans to revamp house, after dropping lofty ideas about the loft. More realistic. Suggest keep Llanbedr as is, knowing ups and downs – just acknowledge the reality with the monkey. More episodes of *The McKonisky Method* – funny stuff, and helpful hints about managing pee with herbal/alternative remedies!

Protests outside Drakeford's house – anti lockdown, antivaxxers. Former nurse Kate Shemirani compares NHS nurses and doctors to Nazis – for promoting vaccinations in rally in London. Vaccine or not and mask or no mask, more than covid, it's about loss of faith in the establishment, says John Harris in The Guardian, The Saj issues an apology after covering comment- but does not wash with public, who see beyond the words. Local councillor, Steve Dechan had £120million contract through VIP lane to supply PPE, unfit, unused, under-delivered says The Independent. No wonder no faith as Greensil inquiry report challenged by Jeremy Heywood's widow- being scapegoated, from the best ever cabinet secretary to an incompetent one. Problem worsening in USA as Fauci warns with low vaccine uptakes.

Olympics seem to be happening in another world, not following though see that Britain won three golds yesterday.

Tony rang to say ex-father-in-law passed away so been travelling again, and clearing his mum's house. Will try and get together for a walk soon. Overcast today, head back to Llanbedr and plant the cabbages from Mary and tidy up time. Not good sleep- one night wonder sadly.

S**tometer: 2/10

27 July 2021 (Llanbedr)

Sad day- Kailash passed away last evening suddenly, got to know from Johann who had seen the tweet by Aseem, Kailash's son. Will miss his daily lessons for life. Reminded again of impermanence and mortality; how time went for him- came from India with wife and two sons, all except Aseem left now as other son died young and wife passed away two years. Feeling sad. Uncanny coincidence- was watching *Ram Prasad Ki Tehrvi* film on Netflix when the message about Kailash came- story of the death of the patriarch and the family get together for funeral.

Spend evening wondering: Is there any unfinished business?

Another expert, Graham Medley, writes in The Guardian: "*The consequence of all this is that our individual risk of infection is going to be higher in the coming months than it has been at any point during the pandemic, because the number of infections will likely be higher than at any other point. Vaccinations will prevent many deaths and keep many people out of hospital. But the risks to individuals still exist.*" But could be so busy avoiding covid, forget to live and get caught other ways?

Back to meditation this morning – after many weeks of abstinence, does work when done regularly, so why ignore it, must pay attention. Welsh learning going OK, been looking for immersive courses, would help. Been invited to lunch at friends of Herself- looking forward. Spoke to Promod last night, said been banned from driving as had forgotten to renew insurance – so may be will make a trip to him, instead. Time to plan the Scottish trip too in Sep, once Herself has an idea of what to do with the house.

Interesting article via The Conversation about Monks Wood Wilderness – left alone for sixty years to see how nature recovers itself. Did not realise UK least forested in Europe- 13% compared to 38%. Feel more and more about nature, need to get in tune with it, reminded of Rumi's poem

*"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.
The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep."*

Send it for the next poetry group meeting which has as its theme: place/places, have interpreted to be both, internal and external, and anyway Rumi combines both.

S**tometer: 3/10

28 July 2021

Another one bites the dust- Ashok Merwah from college passed away, had a hard time- lost son in accident and then divorced from Welsh wife, but seemingly had remarried, had not seen him for a while. Was ten years older, does that mean have another ten years- does it work that way? And what to do with the ten years?

Lovely lunch yesterday, very civilised and great company, Robert, former prof of surgery in Liverpool with wife, Paula, and Bill from Pontryfydd Hall with Elizabeth his companion, and Penelope. Herself felt proud to be the youngest in the group! Lively bunch, may be meet again sometime. Had a message from Sean Hughes, was the prof in Edinburgh when worked in orthopaedic surgery there in 1980s, seemingly into history of medicine, Nice to reconnect with the past.

Watched *The Current War* on Netflix - about Edison, Westinghouse and Tesla, knew some of the story anyway but interesting film; Tesla was way ahead of his times but sadly exploited, usual story of genius not being commercially successful. Not to confuse rich materially with rich intellectually; not sure where Elon Musk fits, professes to be Tesla.

No more shielding in Wales says top medic, covid cases continue to fall for seventh consecutive day but one third adults in UK with atleast two chronic health problems, so not sure out of woods yet? Ken Clarke says not me guv to the contaminated blood inquiry, what else would he say, the cigar chomping health secretary who worked for BAT.

Indians turning to crowd funding to pay covid hospital bills. India does not attend preparatory COP26 conference meeting- third largest producer of CO2 by country but not per capita, so asking recalibration and others to do more. Not to worry as it will be over whilst everyone keeps talking.

Results soon on whether Slate landscape in Wales will become UNESCO World Heritage site – be great if it does; must make another trip soon.

Had a video call with Niru and Raman in Mumbai this morning, having lunch together- Raman taking pottery classes. Good for him. Rainy day predicted, so indoors mainly but will go see Cefyn in studio. Herself busy in Peniel, tidying up house and working in studio, or so she says.

S**tometer:23/10

29 July 2021

Yesss, Welsh landscape is UNESCO site, great, and with AONB becoming national park, this area will be rocking. How fortunate. May even rival New Zealand, currently seen as the best place to survive global societal collapse due to intensive industrialisation and climate change. Billionaires buying bunkers there. Surprisingly UK also rates high along with Iceland, Tasmania and Ireland according to a study in the journal Sustainability. Climate change here to stay with UK weather worsening.

An interesting take on government incompetence- been used as an illusion to break the NHS says a letter in The Guardian; not as incompetent as pretending. Except competent for whom – to chums who got loads money? Lot of PPE purchased unfit – Polyco Healthline named; 2.1 billion items worth £2billion unsuitable for use in medical settings. Ah, but we tried to save lives, we did not know the virus etc....

Asked to write a tribute to Kailash by Eastern Eye newspaper- only had one photo with him, when went to see cricket match at Old Trafford a few years ago. No news on funeral yet, JS says will update. Watched *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* film last night on Netflix, not bad but Guinness as Smiley was something else.

Looking good outside, sunny and so book golf for the afternoon. Herself says will drop in later with Carys to see the annex, tidy it. Be good to see it used, finally.

S**tometer: 2/10

30 July 2021

Ruchi's BD today- sends pics of eating cake for breakfast with Rey, the card arrived this morning – posted over 15 days ago! Manage video call with mum and Raman, does not hear much now so hard to talk. Mumbai still restricted Mon-Fri 7-4, rest closed, says forget this year. Happy Rohan in New Zealand, best place to be.

Monkey ran away yesterday, not helped by golf- Kevin, another player, good one, took pity and asked to join him but rubbish game and so left him at 7th, restless and curmudgeonly later on, so Herself took off quickly after showing Carys. Watched a rubbish Bollywood film- political point scoring type by BJP against Mayawati in UP, can't even remember the name and not bothered to check it out. Keep reminding Raman to cut down on WhatsApp and political messages.

Book a few events to keep busy, online cultural stuff, and another walk. Iain called on Facetime to show Rum – walking on the ridge with mates in Scotland, misty but beautiful. Scrambling, so not for Yours Truly. Must get out, too much time alone not good. Nice to get a school report at this age- Beryl very kind with her assessment of progress with piano, anyway gives incentive, must surprise her after summer hols!

Van Tam says 60,000 deaths prevented by vaccine, delta spreading in Spain and France though.

Raining today, pooter around, maybe ironing and washing, clean the fridge. Started reading *Razor's edge* by Maugham, having finished Midnight Library- was interesting.

S**tometer: 3/10

31 July 2021 (Peniel)

Storm Evert causing havoc down south, not as bad up here- famous last words and may chuck down on the walk today, off Corwen way, not done that before. Wonder if Mike, the psychotherapist, will come today.

Started the morning with a Zoom session from Bhau Dhaji Lad Museum in Mumbai about Raag and miniature paintings – pitched at children but just as well, says Herself, enjoyed it. May be should have stuck with Indian classical music rather than piano?

Japan widens emergency over frightening spike due to Olympics – what price pride and finances. Arla the dairy distributor says not enough drivers so stores running out.

Interesting call from Head-hunters about senior NHS vacancies in England- whilst flattered, not worth it as have no chance esp in current environment, though would like to help. May be offer an alternative way to add value.

S**tometer: 3/10

01 August 2021

Learnt something new- Hewitt, a hill above 2000 feet with ground 30 metres below it, overlaps with Nuttals, Foel Goch yesterday is a Hewitt! Lost between Munros, Corbetts, Grahams Anyway, was a good walk, see Bala lake in the distance. Brian came along, people happy to see him, wonder if he enjoyed it- would not be drawn into what he thought of the approaches by certain interested parties! Not being a matchmaker but be good to see him with company; says Will and Chloe coming to stay for a week.

Watched few more episodes of The Kominsky Method, slightly morbid themes this time, but still funny.

Not much in news- no isolation for double jabbed in Wales, but is it worth travelling abroad, know David upset not going to Italy but can't get the enthusiasm for flying. The equivalent of Ganges being opened at Llandaff Rowing Club in Cardiff so Hindus and Sikhs can scatter ashes after cremation of dead there; seemingly there is another one in Leicester.

Taking the plunge- and so will bring stuff over from Llanbedr and see what happens. Start rejigging house here. Herself very accommodating, been warned.

Start of the quiet month- traditional holiday month, must book somewhere, Herself thinking Whitby and Edinburgh for now. Job (*sic*) for today for Herself, along with going to NyD to prepare next exhibition – Cefyn's stuff going on display, be good to see it. Tag along or go for golf?

S**tometer: 2/10

02 August 2021

The state of the world on this day, here is the Guardian this morning:

“A quick roundup of what’s been happening so far:

- *Health authorities in **China** [are battling to contain the country’s most widespread coronavirus outbreak in months](#) and several cities have rolled out mass testing of millions of people and imposed fresh travel restrictions. China reported 75 new coronavirus cases with 53 local transmissions, with a cluster linked to an eastern airport now reported to have spread to over 20 cities and more than a dozen provinces.*
- ***US** president Joe Biden’s chief medical adviser Dr Anthony Fauci [has told ABC News he does not expect the US will be returning to lockdowns](#), despite the growing risks of Covid-19 infections posed by the Delta variant.*
- *In **Australia**, the state of Queensland has extended its lockdown until Sunday, defence minister Peter Dutton has been forced to isolate after a health alert at his son’s school and soldiers have been deployed on the streets of Sydney to enforce stay-at-home rules as New South Wales struggles to contain its own Delta outbreak.*
- ***Brazil** had 20,503 new cases of coronavirus reported in the past 24 hours and 464 deaths, the country’s health ministry said on Sunday. The South American country has now registered 19,938,358 cases since the pandemic began, while the official death toll has risen to 556,834, Reuters reports.*
- ***Mexico’s** health ministry has reported 6,740 new confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 128 more fatalities, Reuters reports. It brings its total to 2,854,992 infections and 241,034 deaths.*
- *Thousands turned out in **Berlin** on Sunday to protest the German government’s anti-coronavirus measures despite a ban on the gatherings, leading to clashes with police and about 600 arrests.*
- *The **UK** has registered 24,470 new Covid cases in the past 24 hours. There were 911 further hospitalisations and 65 more people have died within 28 days of a positive test.*
- ***Italy** reported five coronavirus-related deaths on Sunday, down from 16 the day before, the health ministry said. The daily tally of new infections fell to 5,321 on Sunday compared with 6,513 the previous day.*
- *A day after it recorded the most new daily cases since the start of the pandemic, **Florida** on Sunday [broke a previous record in the US](#) for current hospitalisations, as the number of patients in hospitals because of Covid-19 once again broke through the 10,000-person threshold.*

- **Tunisia**, which has one of the world's highest coronavirus death rates, received 1.5m Covid-19 vaccine doses from **Italy** on Sunday, the president's office announced."

Re India, expert predicts next wave in a month, but not as bad as one before. It's not covid but economy as domestic workers have lost their livelihood with middle classes no longer getting servants. Not much different here as BoJo facing pressure about intolerable hunger and poverty in home counties, wishful language from The Guardian, as BoJo won't care being busy with the forthcoming second child with Carrie; how many does that make?

Interesting comments from Herself yesterday about the world being an illusion – what is reality, one person's versus another. Says the Truelove poem by David Whyte made her cry; found it via Popova

THE TRUELOVE

by David Whyte

*There is a faith in loving fiercely
the one who is rightfully yours,
especially if you have
waited years and especially
if part of you never believed
you could deserve this
loved and beckoning hand
held out to you this way.*

*I am thinking of faith now
and the testaments of loneliness
and what we feel we are
worthy of in this world.*

*Years ago in the Hebrides,
I remember an old man
who walked every morning
on the grey stones
to the shore of baying seals,
who would press his hat
to his chest in the blustering
salt wind and say his prayer
to the turbulent Jesus
hidden in the water,*

*and I think of the story
of the storm and everyone
waking and seeing
the distant
yet familiar figure*

*far across the water
calling to them*

*and how we are all
preparing for that
abrupt waking,
and that calling,
and that moment
we have to say yes,
except it will
not come so grandly
so Biblically
but more subtly
and intimately in the face
of the one you know
you have to love*

*so that when
we finally step out of the boat
toward them, we find
everything holds
us, and everything confirms
our courage, and if you wanted
to drown you could,
but you don't
because finally
after all this struggle
and all these years
you simply don't want to
any more
you've simply had enough
of drowning
and you want to live and you
want to love and you will
walk across any territory
and any darkness
however fluid and however
dangerous to take the
one hand you know
belongs in yours.*

Heard from Judith after a long time- has gone to Austria to see elderly parents, first leg of holiday booked in Whitby, finally! Today, off to lunch at Julie's with Robert and Ceinwen and then Herself doing a video-recording for the opening of her Court House exhibition; has made a few sales, Paul taken some old ones too. Money, money..... sadly, its peanuts, barely covers the costs of materials.

S**tometer: 2/10

3 August 2021

Managed to catch up with Susheela and Phil too, yesterday, chuffed with new grandchildren though not keen on going to stay down south- can't blame them, big change. More episode of The Kominsky Method, taken a twist with Alan Arkin character dying – is it a dream or real, like Bobby Ewing in Dallas, guess will find out. Not going to google ahead!

David, Cefyn's lawyer friend, rang but it all comes down to making the decision – have to decide about making a break with the past. It will all depend on whether it can be done amicably or not.

Life does seem to be changing as covid receding in day-to-day life here, and in personal life getting used to the idea of impermanence and nothing left to prove, except that one lives with dignity from here on. Wonderful breakfast – clear skies outside and housemartins put on a show, flying around.

Off to drop the car for MOT and then walk back- must keep up the walking for the Offa's dyke challenge on 14th, and then poetry group in Llanbedr.

S**tometer: 3/10

04 August 2021

David Whyte poetry book: *House of belonging* arrived last evening, some good poems, like his (free) style, useful for some ideas, and so need to think about putting pen to paper again.

Got plenty of potatoes from the allotment, tomatoes and aubergines coming along and had peas and broad beans in salad yesterday – happy with how it has worked out, but must sort out the place soon.

Not so good otherwise as Raman says mum was not well – did not want to tell before – took her on VC, but can't hear much now and disoriented, he says very noticeable difference in memory. Feel sad, if will see her again. Herself says to go as soon as allowed, and will come along, though Raman says no point going. Speak to him about mum if things get worse, but do not say aloud what needs to be said. Guess, as no use, it will be what it will be.

Italy's Robinson Crusoe- Mauro Morandi- who lived on the island of Budelli for over thirty years alone, though had some tourist visitor, now back in 'civilisation'; does not think much of it, though has reconnected with family. Interesting article in The Guardian about Gen Zers who seem quite sensible, not angry and knowing theirs will be a tougher world. Technology not the answer- therapy via Zoom has not made mental health support available any widely, the costs have not come down nor access improved. So, what is the answer for the increasing angst and desperation in society?

Wales going to level zero from Friday – all open except advisory re masks. Scotland too. The modellers busy explaining their higher predictions which have not come about – numbers remain low, but is it over? Will it be ever over? UK may be getting better, though worldwide still problems- Japan resorts to naming and shaming rule breakers.

Enough for a day, Tony wants to have a long walk today- to prepare for the challenge, nice day for it, and looking forward.

S**tometer: 3/10

05 August 2021

Great walk up to Panorama view point above Llangollen and then back- 16miles with good climbs so should be able to manage the challenge in a few days.

Herself says take own advice – stop too much news and sad stuff, though some interesting stuff, Rihanna, the singer, is a billionaire- and Yours Truly never heard her. India gets a bronze in hockey after 41 years, Indian hockey and English football both stuck in the past. India moves to amber from red, for visitors coming to UK, but other way still closed- so no travel there.

Herself suggest parabl.org.uk for mental health support- says Peter Tyler recommended it. Will think though not sure what else can they say, after all the decision has to be made by Yours Truly.

NHS drops to 4th place, from 1st, according to the Commonwealth Fund study of 11 rich countries system- maybe will wake up now, under the new NHS CEO, Amanda Pritchard, first woman to get the job, but will she be man enough! Head-hunters write a nice reply back, after told them the job was undoable, or rather not the job that should be done, too much of politics. Tributes pour for Kailash, funeral probably 13th as coroner ordered a post-mortem.

Quiet day on the agenda today- may dial into the Avid Philosophy event on Zoom- about Indian philosophy, and must practise piano.

S**tometer: 4/10

06 August 2021

A slow day yesterday, rainy, so indoors, ended up watching a rubbish Netflix film: *Wild Oats*, wonder why would Shirley McLean and Billy Connolly do such movies? Guess, with nothing else to do; but in good company, as BBC report shows a third of waking hours spent on TV and streaming.

Interesting long read in The Guardian about politics dominated by two elites: rich and right wing and educated and left wing, elites of different sorts neither looking after the vulnerable. Education has not been the leveller as unaffordable to the common person. No wonder Corbyn got shafted by both, own party and Tories. Dick asks

what is the answer- and it is Keep Bugging On. Theme comes up in chat with Akhil – one does not do things with expectations of returns but because one wants to and feels the pull; he has been consistently pushing for patient safety in India, knowing most of the work is on paper and the reality is getting worse.

Really enjoyed the Avid session on Hindu philosophy, Shaunaka Das, the director of Oxford Centre for Study of Hindu philosophy was very good, laments why Indians have forgotten their own culture. Write a thank you note to him, not expecting reply.

Do as I say not as I do, as Alok Sharma flies to 30 countries, including during lockdowns, to campaign for COP26 - hey ho.

On a lighter (sic) note Lily's Vegetarian Indian Cuisine in Greater Manchester is serving a 7Kg Grand Thali with 50 items- no one managed to finish it in the challenge recently.

Rain again, Herself wants to go shopping – bathroom stuff and may buy the battery trimmer to make it easy at the allotment. Telephone consultation about hernia later this morning- not sure if want surgery, yet. Not much of a bulge or discomfort.

S**tometer: 2/10

06 August 2021

Not having had enough sex, chortles she, as the big regret in old age, as Liz comes over for tea and cakes yesterday; Herself worried about her loneliness, having been 'dumped' (as Liz feels) into the sheltered accommodation had brought Liz over. Great afternoon, laughing and trying to beat the black dog together- tell her about Sherwin Nuland's life and work. Says does not want to end up like mother, who is going to be, wait.... 108! In a nursing home with a daughter who is 81.

So, no shopping, instead used time to look up Nuland some more, having read some stuff before and watched him on YouTube. Finished *The Razor's Edge* by Maugham, about another soul that found salvation in India – lesson: can't run or drop out of the world, need to engage and find a way to deal with the problems.

Wales is level zero from today, masks advisory though Laura at the Conversation asks if mask culture is the future- new fashion trends? BoJo does not isolate after aide positive, says not close enough – Aha.

Lord Plunkett in Co Meath Ireland lets 300 hectares of his estate to go to nature-rewilding, already has got 23 types of grass from 3, well done dude, though not everyone likes it. World will only be saved by getting back to nature which can feed it- as Amaranth, an ancient grain, makes a comeback, through efforts of women in Central and South America; now a billion-dollar food and cosmetic product. Indigenous wisdom to counter climate change and industrialised agriculture.

More rain this morning, after dilly dallying finally decide to bail out of walk in Trefriw- feel bad at letting Ann down, is a good walk having done it before but not sure want to get soaked. Dean coming to help move wardrobes out of bedroom to spare, so will

give him a hand and later on dinner at the White Horse arranged by Dean and Ashley- Herself excited, likes the food there though will be later- 830pm table.

Free day otherwise, fill it – start with ordering more Nuland books.

S**tometer; 2/10

08 August 2021

Janet sends photos and message to say rain held off yesterday and was a good walk- drat, wish she had not, sorry to miss it. Instead went off to dinner at the White Horse at Hendrerwydd, first time there and anywhere in over a year, very late, did not get back till 12, Dean likes a drink, fancy place. Worth going again but calmly! Busy place, no covid in sight, except sanitiser at the door.

India gets another gold medal, after a long wait, Neeraj Chopra wins javelin; maybe athletes will get some support as hardly any financial aid, often very poor and rely of charity; only get recognition when hard work done. Pathetic situation. Team GB done well- matches London medal tally.

Britons complaining about high costs of holidays in UK, prices for accommodation doubled; no wonder agitated about going abroad for cheaper places.

Alok Sharma finally pops up to talk about climate catastrophe, whilst supporting government fossil fuel projects, no wonder not taken seriously especially after flying to 26 countries. People also want to fly, to cheaper holidays.

Raining again, wet all week if forecast any guide. Need to calm down as monkey out of control. Hopefully will pass.

S**tometer: 4/10

09 August 2021

Managed walk on Prestatyn beach, rain held off, after trip to Rhyl shops to look for house stuff; Herself in action mode, wanting to get things done now.

Used the day to catch up with friends, chat with Arvind, was on way to Vermont for a week's holiday with Katie, already planning Diwali – maybe travel OK by then? Umesh getting on with his hotel in Kerala and Promod has appealed against driving suspension and whilst waiting for it to be heard is driving!

Life goes on then, as it should, no point sitting moping. So booked golf today, weather clear- very unpredictable these days so take it day by day, and before then sort out allotment, bought a manual lawnmower. Started with some work – the CLN MH evaluation group meeting first thing. Work coming along, should be a good report, but needs much work and clear thinking – good to see Elise there and hopefully will drive it.

Smallest baby in the world, Kwek Yu Xuan born at 212g, in Singapore goes home after 13 months of intensive care- supported by crowd funding. Climate change high on agenda as IPCC issues stark warning, floods in India and Evia, the Greek island burns. Covid out of sight.

S**tometer: 2/10

10 August 2021

Miracle- the mechanical lawn mower worked a treat; wish had not listened to others and bought it before, allotment looks better with short, clean grass; tidied up shed too, on a roll, felt better for it. Had few holes of golf too, so not bad yesterday.

Another dance of housemartins outside window over breakfast this morning- interesting chat with Herself about parents; stifling kids ambitions but then they could only see what they could and wanted to protect the child? Give them wings, they say but not all manage it, sadly. Danger of looking at wrongs in life and beating self and others - Yours Truly definitely does that, worst being the cases of patients harmed due to combination of own arrogance/overconfidence and lack of systems of professional support and guidance. Can't go back to correct but can guide others to avoid, do your best now.

Virginia Giuffre sues Prince Andrew, who continues to deny he had non-consensual sex with her, a minor; not seen lately, wonder if he still goes for Pizzas. Won't be sweating over it, as claims does not sweat since being in the Falklands. David Cameron made £10 million from Grensill before it went bust – showed a significant lack of judgement was the verdict of the inquiry; and suspect that is what the Covid inquiry will show also about Dido Harding who finally steps away from the NHS having failed to secure the top job. Also not seen lately is Trump, niece, Mary Trump, writes another memoir – says he was in pain and afraid during post covid display of bravado; has left a deeply divided America. Will there be justice?

To more enjoyable things; cousin Amit turns 50 today, lives in Maryland and last saw him over dinner in Greenwich village in New York over a decade ago; sister Ritu created a WhatsApp group and asked all to send messages, very nice. Both cousins seemed to have come out alright- despite seriously depressed late father but guess mum made it up by always laughing; Shukla mammi is lovely.

Herself feeling down, says will power on with house stuff, overcast outside but supposedly dry and so may be golf later.

S**tometer: 2/10

11 August 2021

Seeing all the family photos from the past - posted by Ritu – brought back memories, and now sadness for having missed out; families can be a pain but also great source of comfort and joy. New Zealand to start a phased approach to opening up –

hopefully soon so Raman can go and see his grand-daughter. Though as low vaccinations globally means not out of the woods yet. Oxford-jab Chief criticises UK's booster plan, says donate it to the world. Quietly it seems covid is being pushed out of news, despite the largest number of deaths yesterday since March this year. Covid travel system is scam says The Guardian as high costs, delayed tests adding to misery of travellers.

News more about school results, with nearly half of the students getting A/A* - universities struggling with demand, some medical schools paying students to go elsewhere. How much due to sense of vocation and how much job opportunities in medicine, though pleased to see that young Max Woosey who started camping to raise funds for North Devon Hospice has raised £640,000 and just spent his 500th night in the tent. So, there is hope. If the planet survives, Coca-Cola most littered brand on UK beaches according to the Surfers against Sewage study.

Banksy surfaces, so life is getting back to normal. Been on a spree in East Anglian sea-side- spraycation – as eight pieces of Banksy style street art appear there. Not yet confirmed by Banksy.

Busy day, off to see Mary and Graham in their woodland near Ruthin, taking lunch for them, then annual meeting of Friends of Clwydian and Dee Valley. First, Zoom with Kuki to sort out website- be good to get it up and running, may give some meaning to life then.

S**tometer: 2/10

12 August 2021

What a lovely setting, 24 acres of nature, and the wooden sleeping pod – Graham had the camp fire going to make tea, surrounded by mixed trees, very nice place; an enjoyable lunch though short visit. Glad went to FoCDV meeting – nice to see John Roberts and Nev Howell after a long time and interesting discussion about move to National Park for the AONB. Personally in favour as must preserve nature and especially future generations. Llangollen was heaving with tourists as drove through town.

Though need to watch out given the roads around here- narrow, bendy, with lunatic drivers; end up reversing or jumping on brakes atleast twice every time drive any distance. Not safe for kids either- interesting exchange as bunch of them walking on the road around the bend - stopped to advise them to walk on opposite side so oncoming traffic could see them, around the blind bend. Only to be told by young boy that they have to walk facing the oncoming traffic, how to say good advice except when oncoming traffic can't see you. Did not want to criticise the teacher/parent. Hey ho – rules or common sense.

Money, money.... as vaccine companies ramping up prices though AZ-Oxford holding off for now; less than 20% workers actually back in office despite lifting of restrictions – further impact on 'sandwich' economy. Interesting article in The Conversation about past pandemics – that things do not actually change – biology of

disease is inextricably linked to social construction of illness and health, and humans are very bad at thinking about consequences writes Christopher Smith from University of St Andrews. And Chris Hodges writes about the Collective Suicidal Machine using Afghanistan as the most recent example of why America is in the death throes and their empire is at the end- fall of dollar will finish it off, unleashing the civil war, only a matter to time due to leaders like Trump who created the conditions. David says that is why took out Irish nationality and now living in Tobia, Italy, also that he knew of Chris Hedges who went to same school in Lawrenceville, KY as some of his friends. Small world- 4 degrees of separation?

Closer to home Gurkhas on hunger strike for not been paid same pensions as British soldiers and UK deports more people to Jamaica. Ofcourse hard for many people to live in their countries, but must think hard about jumping, west is not what it is cracked up to be. But, guess between rock and hard place. Sad.

Barbara does not do analysis or worrying and too busy in NC mountains in her cabin, guess drinking moonshine and travelling around, going to Slovenia and Croatia in October says she. Good for her.

Free day today, Herself off to Carriageworks, so will catch up with chores. Later on, drop into Susheela and Phil for their wedding anniversary.

S**tometer: 2/10

13 August 2021

100 consecutive days of Welsh on Duolingo- not bad though barely scratching the surface.

Writing later in the day; had to go to Oldham for Kailash's funeral, large gathering with senior establishment figures – Andy Burnham spoke also, great tributes. Saw many people from the past, strange seeing them after many years, all getting older, realised not much in common now and so did not seek them out and left after the service. Not sure what happened but it seems there may have been some mismanagement as Aseem called his father's death preventable and vowed to follow it up- he is a strong character like father. Why do people keep praising the NHS when it continues to fail – why not accept that it is broken. Talked to Amir Hannan, very good GP, who is upset with the way things are in the NHS and says only reason keeps going is his own practice. BBC report shows huge gulf in numbers of hospital acquired covid – ranging from 1 in 100 to 1 in 4 getting it. Funerals are really for those left behind, had gone for JS, who was very close to Kailash, and as respect for an Indian leader; sad that did not really know Kailash well personally, somehow it did not happen. Looked like had touched a lot of lives.

Stopped by in Currymile to pick up some food stuff, not much choice strangely and also lot of that stuff does not appeal anymore; Manchester seemed shabby generally. Brought some samosas for Cefyn also.

Shooting in Plymouth, six killed including the suspect, not terrorist related. But God knows how many killed as Taliban start taking over Afghanistan. Covid 'disaster' in Japan – PM says not related to Olympics and Paralympics going ahead without spectators. The Guardian talks about one-off tax on billionaires, loose change for them but big difference to Joe Public; dream on.

Herself has done her back so taking it easy. Going to be another early start tomorrow as off to the 23 miles Offa's challenge with Iain and Tony, so may be no diary tomorrow.

S**tometer: 2/10

14 August 2021

On this day, no news, no diary as went on a long walk.

15 August 2021

Yippee, yesterday did the 23 miles, 4000 feet climb Offa's Dyke Challenge walk from Cilcain over Clwydian range – 9 hours 32 minutes, just under the ten hours cut off, bit harder on climbs and descent on scree, as out of practice. Tony and Iain helpful, would have struggled without them; rain held off and excellent arrangements – well fed and watered all along. May join the Long-Distance Walkers Association, need to go back to doing more walking. Bumped into own Ramblers Group, good as may not have believed otherwise! Tired and stiff, and not comfortable at night so restless sleep. Still stiff this morning but not that bad.

India's Independence Day and Modi launches more initiatives and slogans – so long as enough people believe; sad situation there. Not sure better here, as Starmer more keen on aping Tories than shaping own policies- expels Ken Loach from Labour Party, WTF. Do not get people who are wedded to Labour Party, caused more destruction under Blair- Brown than Thatcher; no wonder Labour in wilderness, does not mean anything. The Guardian's Paul Mason writes about right-wing populists furthering Fascism's interest across the world - fascists do not need to do anything directly, being done for them slowly and surely. Afghanistan just about to fall to Taliban, outside Kabul today; the West learns nothing.

Fifth weekend of protest in France against Covid pass, vaccine beating new variants cause of worry. July hottest month ever according to US Agency.

Iain donated a piano stool, very nice and comfortable. Big day for Herself as opening day of exhibition, lot of people registered; the video Gavin made for her came out well. Had a good chat with Raman this morning- more positive since started his pottery classes and also getting some interesting work. Going to be a busy day.

S**tometer: 2/10

16 August 2021

All about Afghanistan in the news, panic – pictures showing amazing similarity with evacuation of Saigon; trillions spent and back to how it was, no one has ever conquered Afghanistan but does not stop the West. Not sure how to feel- sad for women especially or let every society decide how they wish to live; is there a right way and is emancipation a good idea? Barbara says ashamed of US and wishes all women could get out, she is trying to help an Afghani friend. Strangely had a call from MoD asking about own charity and whether we had any Afghani connection- told them the charity had stopped working.

Very apt quote from Popova

“This might be the most transcendent capacity of consciousness, and the most terrifying: that in the world of the mind, we can construct models of the real world built upon theories of exquisite internal consistency, that those theories can have zero external validity when tested against reality, and we rarely get to test them, or wish to test them.”

In other words, delusions. Except some persist in testing them- hence Afghanistan.

Flight Free UK- people who no longer fly – due to environmental concerns in the news, may be as a consolation piece for those unable to do so? Anyway, be a while until global situation changes. Gordon Brown pitches in with calls to jab Africa – to be fair he did support Africa and global health.

Adding to own stress, partly as sisters talk about mum’s deteriorating mental health, been bad last few days. Black dog heavy. Herself trying her best- but gets the short shrift, and which compounds own misery, why take it out on her. There is a lot of help out there so long as don’t have expectations, take it when given but not become hostage to it; do not feel able or keen to talk to many people about personal issues. Spoke to Sukhdev last night, although happy to be near, knows family have own lives and so does not see them much, misses familiar home and company in North Wales.

Herself back to dancing, back seems better, and may be that’s the answer- get out walking, stiff but should ease off though overcast and rainy.

S**tometer: 4/10

17 August 2021

Ended up going to Betws for a drive and bought new backpack- nice and comfortable, got good discount, old one needed retiring long ago, tea and cakes in Conwy Falls cafe, always great to drive across the moors; just love it.

Look for interesting stuff in news- given preoccupation with Afghanistan- Paul Taylor from Oxfordshire starting an 1800-mile tour on 50cc moped to visit places with rude and funny names; starting at Shitterton, Dorset, in memory of his friend who died of cancer. Reminded of the map at Christmas with the funny place names! Good luck to

him. First alcohol free pub about to start going international – and guess where it started..... in Athlone, Co Westmeath, Ireland and opening in Abu Dhabi soon.

Sadly, the wicked world carries on. Parcel delivery texts now the biggest scam – Susheela and Herself already fell for it; Bob Dylan accused of sexual assault by a woman when she was 12 in 1965; and Afghan veterans feeling upset as their efforts came to nothing, they feel.

Tried making bitter gourd, though better, still not right; the answer is deep fry says Anita but loath to do it, hey ho. Sonu and Kiran finally left for Dubai- very complicated travel with multiple tests and possibility of rejection till the very end; will need another test on arrival.

Very wet outside, so an indoor day, plan with Herself for the event tomorrow and discuss possible Diwali function – could be a good one. Did not sleep – up every hour, with monkey running.

S**tometer: 4/10

18 August 2021

One case and New Zealand shuts down. Rohan says everyone sitting at home; good idea or over-reaction, discuss. Surely big question is whether Covid can be eradicated, and if not then containment measures? Sydney Delta disaster and rising cases in South East Asia causing concerns, presumably.

Afghanistan dominates news – how long for, wonder.

Went to Morrisons to get provisions for NyD event today and empty shelves- manager says no deliveries, Nando shuts down restaurants due to supply chain problems and diverts staff up the chain to get supply moving.

Life in a rut, again, so plan some more walks to avoid sitting around- out with Tony tomorrow and then Sat and Sun walks.

Making food for the evening- for 13 – looking forward to it, hope weather stays dry, not sure how many visitors will turn up. Some progress with Diwali plans.

S**tometer: 3/10

19 August 2021

Wonderful evening at NyD- as usual Cefyn magical, gave a very engaging talk about his visit to NE India, excellent art work – paintings and textiles on display, going to run to end of month. Packed room – nearly 40 folk, concerned about being closed space, opened all windows but no one seemed bothered and seemed strange as Herself and Yours Truly wore masks. Sat till late over dinner- and desserts, came back tired.

No time for news today but interested to read The Guardian article about Australian psychologist Steven Taylor's book *The Psychology of Pandemic*, published just before Covid 19, reluctant publisher but now a bestseller, very prophetic. Says pandemic are essentially a psychological phenomenon and about the behaviours, attitudes and emotions of people and the psychological footprint is bigger than medical footprint. Maybe that's what old folk at NyD were saying last night? And what about the MPs in The Commons- more Tories than Labour mask less in a crowded chamber, arguing about Afghanistan.

Went to Capel Curig to go up Siabod but Tony not keen with swirling mists on top so lower-level walk below Crimpiau then Trefriw and lakes – 11 miles, and after last week, good enough. Home tired. Siabod will have to wait, nice chat with Tony, plan more walks – must keep going. Bit calmer since yesterday as Kuki got the website done, something to work on now. Looking forward to talking to Stephanie tomorrow- may be trip to Shetlands!

S**tometer: 2/10

20 August 2021

Raman sends photo of mum's feet, swollen, says not walking much now, rather depressing situation. Had a long chat this morning – including what to do if she deteriorates, says to stay put as covid situation still unclear. Belani rang yesterday, saying Rouchyka on way to Cambridge and he may come over later too. So, what's own excuse for not going over- apart from the hassle of travel. Spoke to Dick, says Sydney is now in lockdown till end Sep and they are staying put in Wagga

Not much to do here otherwise, off to meet Stephanie in Wrexham, must take the left-over history books for her, and visit the allotment- will try and tidy up next week when supposed to be sunny.

S**tometer: 2/10

21 August 2021

Finally, Herself got the Victoria plums- first fruits from the tree in allotment, strangely in first year, happy. Stopped there on way back after meeting Stephanie yesterday to tidy up and dig up onions and garlic also-plenty for a few months! Good chat with Stephanie, thinks laterally, got some ideas on what to do next – intellectually stimulating.

Just as well as will need things to do, had another chat with Raman and on balance, need to go to India- so planning and figuring out logistics, but guess have to do this or live with regret. No idea when the world will open so can't keep procrastinating- Australia in turmoil with riots and Raman says no chance of him going to New Zealand for a while. So, trip with Herself to India is off for now.

F**k now the most common swear word, displaced Bloody to third and S**t moves up to second in UK! Ah well.

India approves world's first DNA vaccine, prevents symptomatic disease in those vaccinated; seemingly it fights the virus. Await further news.

Off to walk with Ramblers today to clear the head, though looks wet, will see. Later on, dinner with Robert and Ceinwen.

S**tometer: 3/10

22 August 2021

Did not get back till 1130pm from dinner- excellent company, apart from Julie, Berwyn and Julia, friends of Robert and Ceinwen; generous host plied with drinks and food, stuffed, did not have desserts till 1030, chatting away. So civilised, guess first dinner after a long time, Robert opened bubbly to mark the occasion.

Got up early -6 to get ready to go for the Offa's walk, reluctantly, if not for Tony may have bailed out. In the end good went as nice walk, met few new people and good to meet some who are also learning Welsh and other languages on Duolingo. John and Donna, new to Gellifor, she worked for NHS- may be worth looking up again. John Roberts suggesting becoming trustee of FoCDV, may think, but only if purposeful project, really keen on health and nature. Will think.

Making inquiries re travel to India – not as complicated but still some hoops, wondering if cut out transit and go from London direct? Must decide tomorrow and book. No point procrastinating.

Today was Rakhi, Anita upset as her Rakhi not arrived yet, anyway Susheela did the honours and said a prayer- says should go to India.

UK approves Ronapreve to prevent infection and reduce need for hospital treatment- supposedly was used for Trump! but expensive -£1-2K for one course of treatment, so unclear how will be used in the NHS. Interesting discussion about what next- are boosters necessary for adults and do children need vaccinating at all and is it time to return to herd immunity, in BBC news yesterday about what's the best way to top up immunity?

Been a good week of walking and may be rest next week, weather permitting sort out allotment.

S**tometer: 2/10

23 August 2021

Start the morning with the dance of house-martins, sitting on wires and flying around – not quite time to go to Africa though so not preparatory gathering but a morning social? Wonder what they see when fly outside window, two folks looking at them.

No covid death in Delhi in last 24 hours for the 11th time; UK-USA relations nose-dive even Blair pitches in, but partly deflecting blame to cover UK failures; most deprived areas of UK have highest numbers of gambling outlets; and too many tourists in Snowdonia, and so goes the news as the new week starts.

Make a list of things, starting with booking ticket this morning- will have to be Emirates to avoid extra stress. Weather overcast, and anyway much to do.

S**tometer: 2/10

24 August 2021

Who would have thought that the small village of Llanynys was a major religious centre as the wonderful 6th century church attests, finally got to see it, beautiful inside and quite large now. Had tea in the grounds yesterday, on way to allotment. Tidied up and took produce for Susheela and Iona and Gareth- latter seems to be recovering from chemo though still tired, Herself caught up on all the news, really nice sitting with 'normal' people, salt of the earth.

Otherwise, day taken up with preparations for travel- away 29 Aug to 3 Oct, scheduling appointment for PCR test, cancelling others, start collecting stuff to take-ask Raman for shopping list.

And catching up on news like Tom Cruise goes to Asha's restaurant in Birmingham and being who is eats two chicken tikka masalas, one after other – a good massaman, and rain falls on Greenland ice cap for first time on record- climate crisis, what crisis? Takes mind off Afghanistan which is a mess now – not everyone will get out concedes UK Government, and covid as numbers start rising – 100 deaths in a day, highest since 18 March with more cases and hospitalisations; school children returning in Scotland last week led to nearly fourfold increase, so wait to see what happens in rest of UK as schools and then universities open. Alexei Navalny writes from his prison cell asking West to take action against oligarchs saying only action against corruption can solve the world's biggest problems and gets jumped on by letter writers pointing out the corruption in the West!

Reflective mode since booking ticket, want to go but also want to stay here, Herself got some taste of that sadly, and tip-toeing since; tries too much and then suffers also; need to shake off the dreadful feeling- what will be will be.

Overcast morning but may clear up, booked golf on the chance. Must tidy up allotment too. Gareth says can put rubble aside, and Dafyd may be able to use it.

S**tometer: 4/10

25 August 2021

Woke up worried about Covid travel certificate, in addition to one given by GP, so try and find out- had to go to NHS site with detailed login and security to check identify,

process easy but may take time to get clearance before can get the certificate, fingers crossed get it in time.

Checking covid situation regularly- Japan emergency in half the prefectures; New Zealand sticking to Elimination strategy and Cornwall warns tourists to stay away; so, all is not well in the world. India quiet though but heading into festival season esp in Mumbai with Ganapati festival early Sep. UK retailer supplies lowest in 38 years, shortages- Herself says can't get a wooden garden shed at all.

Charlie Watts, Rolling Stones drummer dies at 80- seemingly had throat cancer in 2004, so did well?

Overcast again, try golf and need to see Cefyn and pick stuff from Susheela's, will be anxious times now till get to India- and then another anxiety will start. Hey ho

S**tometer: 3/10

26 August 2021

Anxiety all pervasive- farms struggling as no workers to pick fruit and vege, no lorry drivers; vaccine immunity waning after 4-6 months of second dose, how much attempt to push for booster doses, cynical mind; not to mention Afghanistan – what a mess, Monbiot pulls no punches as lays the blame squarely on the war cheerleaders at the time – Blair especially- and the complicit media, concludes:

“You can get away with a lot in the media, but not, in most outlets, with opposing a war waged by your own nation – unless your reasons are solely practical. If your motives are humanitarian, you are marked from that point on as a fanatic. Those who make their arguments with bombs and missiles are “moderates” and “centrists”; those who oppose them with words are “extremists”. The inconvenient fact that the “extremists” were right and the “centrists” were wrong is today being strenuously forgotten.”

But would anyone notice or care? It is a s**t world or it is what it is and get on with life- as shown by people who changed courses in midlife – The Guardian features the stunning second acts, took the plunge. Admirable case studies including training as doctor and paramedic and barrister in later life.

Herself suffering with backpain, needs her chiropractor but not till next week, guess also affected by the curmudgeon – keeping up all night peeing, OK during day. May be time to go to a diurnal sleep pattern – night and afternoon? May get the scan done in Mumbai? Overcast again, but may clear up – some more shopping later on and then sort out stuff for travel.

S**tometer: 3/10

27 August 2021

The nights are drawing in – end of August; walking in dusk around Moel Gasyth looking into the valley, sprinkling lights, magical last evening, after visiting allotment, tidying up, tried three cafes for tea/cakes – none open, drat.

Lazy day otherwise, news full of Afghanistan, predictable attack came and killed over 60 civilians and 13 US soldiers – chaos, so much for the west supremacy. Biden under pressure, says will hunt down the terrorists but is not that they were supposed to be doing for 20 years?

Not helped by reports of covid surges, as good bank holiday weather and crowds out, and then schools will open. May be not a bad idea to go to India- though festivals there, so frying pan and fire. Anyway, need to get pre-travel PCR first, off to Heald Green in Manchester this morning, fingers crossed, £95 so less than the previous £150 but still a rip-off. Needs must.

Portrait of Queen looking like corgi to go in Lucian Freud centenary exhibition next year – good idea? given her age?

Slept till 3 before first pee- need to get this interval right – longer the better since its the proper sleep, BP OK- measured after a while 129/78, calm physically.

S**tometer: 4/10

28 August 2021

What a mess- went for PCR Test at pharmacist in Heald Green, crowded, then taken to a broom cupboard room, attendant trainee pharmacist, no mask, no air circulation, perfunctory swabbing – attendant says money making machine! Felt uncomfortable with whole experience. Anyway, came back negative- not that it precludes catching it after. Guess it is all mindless bureaucracy now with no science. Wandered around Currymile- more Kebab and Shisha mile now, saw Tariq on the way back.

Anxiety high on both sides as Herself affected also, long chat – no answers until after trip to India now, drank more than good so no sleep.

Finish other travel requirements this morning and filled Air Suvudha form- needed lot of information and struggle with uploading pdfs and then the final form shows phone number as Indian not UK number but no way to correct, so will have to see what happens when arrive.

Discussion in The Guardian about value of nap in the afternoon for employees: Sleep is venture capital! In other news, apart from Afghanistan, Sirhan Sirhan, killer of Robert Kennedy up for parole after 53 years, and same news item talks about the tense relationship between Kennedy and King; latter wanted more and faster and Kennedy with an eye on the politics; more joined up in stories than real life.

Tidying up and packing day – off to Llanbedr later.

S**tometer: 4/10

29 August 2021

Finally, D-day, off to India this afternoon- shortly make way to the airport, allow enough time as unknown. May be good omens, as Son#1 rang last night to talk about his wedding plan, keen to get on with it! and wondering about logistics, very happy to hear and offer them a trip to India afterwards to introduce to family there, says will talk to partner.

Another good omen, as Sandra suggests joining IIPH as adjunct faculty to help their courses- would be lovely, as linked to Gordon Robert Hospital as well.

Last flights out of Kabul, so leaving it as found it 20 years ago? Posturing about hunting down and killing the extremists, only playing into their hands. Covid in England 26 times higher than last year and now among top ten causes of death; Wales still lower. UK's oldest living heart transplant patient, Ted Warner, marks 90th birthday.

Time to move; Herself anxious and sad.

S**tometer: 5/10

30 August 2021 (Mumbai, India)

In Mumbai now; travelling very different to old times, not much hassle and people wearing masks throughout flights etc but not sure how effective this measure is as SD not possible. Flight full to Dubai but then empty- cabin staff says full out of India, so more coming out than going on. Very mechanistic, Indian approach to checking on arrival- frankly useless system but hoops to jump. Anyway, home finally.

Sad to see mum, much changed, very slow now, sleepy; maid says hard to manage dressing and toilet as not mobile enough. Raman back this evening and also Niru coming for mum's 89th birthday.

No way to avoid contact or keep masks on at home with mum and maid. It will be what it will be.

Mumbai overcast and very humid, Vinayak says government clamping on large gatherings and hence numbers of cases low.

Need to sort out phone/Wi-Fi, will wait till Raman back.

S**tometer: 4/10

31 August 2021

What a day- mum went off progressively during the day, getting more confused, restless, the whole Mumbai clan came for her birthday- in the end cut the cake on her bed, and then the saga began after they left, as up repeatedly all night, doubly incontinent, agitated, maid up all night helping. Finally calmed down this morning.

Been making her sit up, no memory of yesterday but bit alert, and sorting out care- not at all keen on going to hospital, and discuss with Raman future plan incl hospital at home and line up Mohsin Ansari as specialist- Raman says will ask Pandya also. Get medication review and ask for blood test. Got maid to get some rest, she is fantastic. Going to be one day at a time.

Good to see Ruchi, Rey and Adi also – lovely boy. Start some shopping – Ruchi will help. Son#1 sends a video for mum's birthday- everyone happy with his news and looking forward to hearing more about the functions; the idea of something in India to celebrate their wedding next year liked by everyone.

Political point scoring going on in Mumbai, with opposition stirring trouble by asking for festivals to go ahead- superspreaders, no one knows the real picture now, and any not sure how can following personal precautions with mum as she is, some visitors inevitable. USA in a mess- EU talks about stopping travel.

The last flight out of Kabul had ... guess what on board? The rescued dogs – says something about British values, humans left behind.

Interesting item in The Guardian saying young do not bother with phone calls anymore, switched off ringtones, use messages now. Good to talk?

Monsoon downpour outside, anyway not going anywhere- tired but not sleepy today. Need to get some routine going, as will be up and down.

S**tometer: 3/10

01 Sep 2021 (or 192021, as Subhash texted this morning)

Seeing the other side of ageing vividly as struggle for Raman and Yours Truly to look after mum- big woman, having to change diapers and to move her between chair and bed; no way for modesty, needs must. Went into hypo this morning, panic, get her sorted eventually; watching her eat her lunch, empty spoon in air going to mouth till corrected, remember when she used to feed us. Something surreal about two sons in 60s looking after old mother as maid had to take day off – she is very patient with mum. Discuss with Raman when time to get the hospital at home system set up- will talk to 1-2 folk; strange feeling waiting, thinking. Another one gone as A passed away, A partly relieved as had no life with dementia.

Herself standing by to advise; but just going with flow, not thinking anything beyond immediate needs. Except scrolling phone and checking out shopping to take back, whenever do go back.

Leaded petrol history – eradicated from world says UN; Berlin universities canteens go meat free due to climate impact- further evidence of latter as weather disasters increase fivefold. Covid divides Europe as countries with different experiences.

Sleep elusive, strange tiredness but not able to sleep. Not been out of house since coming.

S**tometer: 4/10

02 Sep 2021

Big haul of books – finally. Just finished Nuland's biography of his father, a Russian Jew in New York, very difficult relationship, do admire Nuland for what he achieved despite his background including own mental health issues- loved his Fuck it phrase for the black dog. Miss going to bookshops to keep abreast of latest offerings – just saw more stuff from Elif Shafak. Will try and make up during stay in Mumbai.

Mum's diabetes out of control, hypo again this morning, fed sugary tea/banana to raise blood sugar; definitely not keen on taking to hospital; Anil made intro to hospital at home provider so will talk today. Horror stories of how patients treated with unnecessary care/interventions and any case saw it first hand when took her to Lilavati a few years ago. Not easy to find a doctor who can see it from patient/career perspective- seem to have forgotten two rules: always see the whole patient and not just the symptom – nobody takes the holistic view, and observe not react to any small change unless very serious – chasing every slight change in lab results; so reactive and arrogant attitudes. Despair but calm, clear with Raman what to do so no later regret and recriminations.

Maid coming back this evening, will give Raman a break, slept here last night. He is the most sensitive of the brood and gets affected quickly. Seems in limbo, partly covid related reduced activity, so try and encourage to engage with other activities. However, having Rey helps as enjoys Grandpa role. Missing New Zealand.

Finally, sun outside, been raining since arrival although officially Monsoon was over two weeks ago- Nariyal Poornima to celebrate end of monsoon and start of fishing season, but does continue till end Sep. Will be very humid now.

Still trying to keep up with Welsh on Duolingo though seems a world away, 120 days streak, no piano and will have to restart on return. Which book to start with: Pamuk's *The Silent House* wins. But must get back to yoga and meditation to keep strong.

S**tometer: 3/10

03 Sep 2021

Bit better last night, Raman shouldered the burden as maid stayed away an extra day, but mum less confused and no hypo- had Dr Pandya visit last evening, really amazing 'old fashioned' doctor, his assistant carrying bag with all the gear, sat for nearly 45 minutes, very patient. Did want mum to go to hospital but then acceded to request to manage at home, after some discussion. Raman wavered a bit this morning esp when struggling to wash and change diapers, after visit to toilet- can see his frustration, guess had been shouldering it for a long time. Strange situation, waiting for the end? What does this period mean, when hanging on? For whose sake? Reminded of that quote from a book some time ago (forget which) about ending up hurting those we love, as mum screams at times when being cared for,

can't be easy to have her sons change diapers. Try and blank this. Maid back this morning and now ready to get the vaccine, finally.

NHS in mess, uproar about more investment and talk of scrapping free prescriptions for over 60- raise to 65, anyway different rules in devolved nations. Biden vows to overturn the abortion ruling in Texas- illegal after 6 weeks! – was expected with majority Republican in Supreme Court, Trump made sure to kill Democrats. Arvind says country screwed up, highly divided with right-wingers gaining ground. Coping with floods in NY in addition, says water got into his basement for first time ever.

Timely reminder from Popova about small joys, quotes Herman Hesse:

Great masses of people these days live out their lives in a dull and loveless stupor. Sensitive persons find our inartistic manner of existence oppressive and painful, and they withdraw from sight... I believe what we lack is joy. The ardor that a heightened awareness imparts to life, the conception of life as a happy thing, as a festival... But the high value put upon every minute of time, the idea of hurry-hurry as the most important objective of living, is unquestionably the most dangerous enemy of joy.

and *“Of all ridiculous things the most ridiculous seems to me, to be busy — to be a man who is brisk about his food and his work,”* from Kierkegaard in 1843. Sadly, things have only got worse since then.

Herself has the right ideas, enough to enjoy life in Peniel itself; says had a good supper meeting at NyD though not many came- their loss. Tinku rang, saying winding down and wants to spend more time in Ranikhet villa- and why not. Lure of filthy lucre not enough, more to life.

Maybe go out for a walk today, intermittent rain, heavy showers with bright sunshine alternating.

S**tometer: 3/10

04 Sep 2021

Another day passed, mum more alert throughout but then real hypo before dinner and big bounce after force feeding, up all night then, gets up herself and sits by bedside, danger of falling over, can't leave her alone, struggle with maid to get her to toilet at 3 in morning. No sleep for Yours Truly, tried to protect maid as has to work during the day.

Blood sugar OK and more oriented though drowsy this morning, hopefully be easier with the hospital bed due to arrive today, esp with side railings, tucks into bread and fried egg.

Did manage a short walk to the beach last evening and played with Rey on the rooftop. Intermittent reading of Pamuk, and scanning other books, and scrolling phone for news and general rubbish. Alfresco dining coming to end as councils reclaim pavements and roads with restaurants having to contract; Banksy's stunt art:

Girl with balloon that got shredded back on market at three times the price; and New Zealand Cinema's voice mail full of expletives- the guy recording it did four takes and uploaded all, with their F**ks.

Makes change from usual stuff as antivaxxers protest outside MHRA in London, blame shifting starting as Lee Cain, Dom's buddy, says government comms teams not up to task- may be, and may be what can be done with BoJo and confused messages; another example of latter the proposed social care changes- will it be NI and hence burden low paid or general tax, and how much. No wonder one feels like saying F**K. Drowning sorrows (or celebrations) getting costly as shortage of lorry drivers affecting wine deliveries.

Leaked report talks about funeral arrangements for Queen- code word London Bridge (is falling down) to trigger lockdown on SoMe etc; emphasises she is in good health otherwise at 95; what future monarchy after her?

Hope get some sleep today, will try afternoon- feel knackered. Raman busy, also they have a fruit only day until dinner on Saturdays.

S**tometer: 4/10

5 Sep 2021

What a night - went to bed around 930 after dinner at Raman's and up just after 11 to find mum sitting up, so try and get her to sleep and go back to bed to get up at 0100 to find her about to fall sitting up, had managed to get up again without sleeping maid noticing it, again get her off and this time sleep on sofa in front room and hear noise at 2 and she is up again, no way to get her to bed so keep sitting around till 330 when manage to get her to lie down till 4 - this time wake maid up too, change diaper, get her to toilet, wash and bring her to front room by 5, has banana and tea but falls asleep in chair, use time to finish a topic on Duolingo, sleep elusive, tell maid to go to bed so not both tired. Not sure how sustainable this arrangement is- between sleeplessness and peeing, brain fuzzy; her hospital bed failed to arrive, not due till Monday now- may make it easier as guess hard for her to sleep lying down now?

Think about all those folk who are carers- such a hard job, mum just sits fidgeting, occasional out of context comment as not well oriented time wise –mixes breakfast and dinner. Dread thought of being like this when 'older'.

Scroll phone though the outside world has no relevance to current existence – Wales passes another landmark as 8000 covid deaths; controversy about school jabs- JCVI against but SAGE in favour, science vs reality; Ivermectin, usually used to treat horses, causing problems in Oklahoma, was used routinely in India!

Sign of return to normal as MPs asked to smarten up for The Commons- no more jeans and chinos or black dress slipping off shoulder (happened to Tracey Brabin, before became mayor of W Yoks – was smart and auctioned the dress to raise 20k

for charity). But what normal as nearly 50 shops a day disappeared from high streets in first six months of 2021.

Two interesting long reads in The Guardian about America's 'humane' wars – so long as others not Americans attacked, and how Bush, Obama and Trump promoted Afghan war to create the kleptocracy; and is Covid the bringer of end to Neoliberalism – not sure of latter as got rid of the champions like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, no others visible to promote the Green Deal for the post covid world.

Herself sends postcards from Peniel- a million miles from here, but happy to hear is busy. Niru and Subhash coming for special lunch today along with Raman et al- Rey keeps everyone amused, nothing like a happy child to brighten up, uncannily like Rohan, how life has sped past. Raman suggests get self checked out, no idea when NHS will give appointment- must think about private insurance now, as long waits. F**kity F**k

S**tometer: 4/10

06 Sep 2021

Good day and bad night- mum OK throughout, enjoyed seeing everyone for lunch and tucked in fully, but refuses to sleep, restless moving around in bed, getting up, frustrated bring her out to sit for a few hours via another toilet break, back into bed around 330 till 530 – beginning to lose it a bit, short with Raman when he came this morning. Otherwise back to her old ways, dictating what to cook. Must speak to GP and start some medication to control her restlessness esp at night, even maid tired today.

Went to look at laptops and made a shortlist- Adi to help finalise, Raman books an executive health check for Yours Truly tomorrow. Started reading Ocean Vuong's *On earth we're briefly gorgeous*, was a bestseller last year says Ruchi and wants it when done.

Teacher's Day yesterday, celebrated on 5th Sep in India, so Mashaal and ICHA had events but sadly could not attend. Send them own material, for what it's worth. Find most want to talk/be heard not listen or learn. Chris Medoc Jones sends email showing frustration with NHS – says like religion, no questioning/criticism allowed, blaming it on doctors shortages unnecessarily, not alone but what to do?

Looks like Herself had a good event for Bethan's showing at NyD – keeps going, guess only way. KBO

S**tometer: 3/10

07 Sep 2021

F**k, mum's bed wrong height and no use, did not check before paying- Raman upset. Not sure how it will work as no sleep for either, even when she sleeps have to

go and check as gets up quietly. Had a chat with Raman about what next, as not sure can stay here for longer than planned – he is worried what happens when Yours Truly leave? Have to shut these thoughts, and let Raman have a break for now. Everyone's way of dealing is unique though mum situation very common - await call from GP to see what else to do medically.

Another night with no sleep - now at the stage that even when possible, can't sleep and just keep getting up to go and check on her; even though maid sleeps in same room does not hear. Can't blame her as knackered, says that is how it has been.

UK passes seven million cases; NHS and social care predominate politics – but it is not money which does not seem to figure much in discussions. UN slams Texas Abortion Law decision as discriminatory, will add more power to Trump who does not want UN or any global body. Jean Pierre Adams, French footballer in coma for 39 years after botched surgery dies, was at home latterly looked after by wife – 39 good years and for whom?

Will fetch laptop today – new toy - and must find a way to sleep and get calmer- was considering drinking some whisky but will be risky. Making peace with Raman with workaround the bed problem.

S**tometer: 3/10

08 Sep 2021

Interesting experience getting health check-up- factory production, all the usual tests – nothing of note; so, got to work on the anxiety problem with peeing.

Up again with mum- seems all else OK as eats well except sleep at night, if only would go off for 6/7 hours be OK. Workaround with bed useless, find difficult to manage Raman's frustrations- he really tries too hard, wish he would slow down. Feel bad about being short with him, would be good for him to have a break from Friday.

Trying to get to grips with laptop – will have to wait for Adi, whenever he can make time, to try and understand technology.

BoJo going to get the tax increases through – hardly any opposition, you can fool enough of the people all the time! Worrying news item that another lockdown not ruled out in England if numbers go up – do not even think about it.

Herself offers ear and support – and shares pictures of tomatoes, shame as would have liked to make chutney, next time!

S**tometer: 3/10

09 Sep 2021

Voila- mum slept all night, without even stirring, combination of tired and extra medications –add Melosit 3 mg and additional Alprazolam after chat with Dr Pandya, another great interaction, he really is a good doctor. Still, went to check every hour or so but able to sleep in between, feeling rested. Maid happy too. Hope continues. Bit groggy this morning so will review in a few days.

Long chat with maid yesterday, is a Roman Catholic, says converted from being Hindus, wise though 'uneducated' literally, gets upset when mum has to be told off, so talk about that whether it is cruelty or kindness; says same thing with her father-in-law- wasted all the money she earned on doctors when what he needed was care. Hard life in Chattisgarh, was held up by insurgents/freedom fighters who robbed them of all the money for her sister's marriage; state now bit better and 'progress' with companies moving in to exploit the natural resources there. Does not like living there though likes to visit, has a sister nearby in Mumbai. Will ask Susheela to pray for her.

All that noise by MPs like Hunt but BoJo pushed through H&S care bill, but as social care sector pointed out all the money is going to NHS not care, not sure how will help for example with nurse shortages which are delaying cancer treatment for 21% of patients.

Largest plant to convert carbon into rock started in Iceland- Orca, can deal with 4000 tonnes equivalent to emissions from 870 cars at cost of US\$10-15 million! Be a long time before the gimmick becomes reality, will it be in time to save the planet.

Herself went over to host the poetry group yesterday – seemingly went off well. Went for a walk last evening to do some chores and caught in monsoon torrents, Raman came in car to rescue. Twenty-three quid for two pairs of new lenses (spare and sun) and repairing of original specs – but otherwise not cheap to live by Raman's standards. Mumbai getting ready for the Ganapati festival- but very curtailed at present but may be later, anyway four days of holidays from tomorrow.

S**tometer: 3/10

10 Sep 2021

One night wonder- as medication failed and mum up all night, even though did not sleep in the afternoon and had been sitting all day, had hoped would be tired and zonk out. Hey ho. Brought her to the front room at 330, and sat watching over her. Weird situation, how long will it continue, what should one do- stop living personally, looking after her all the time?

Anyway, glad Raman and Aneeta taking time off- going to Goa and then to a spa for recharging and celebrate their Ruby Wedding anniversary. Supposed to go to Niru's with Ruchi et al today for Ganapati festival though talk of limiting travel for next few days to stop crowds.

Walked to Joggers Park last evening, seafront well developed now though the construction of coastal road has started and so may get messed up again! Took

three years to make the walkway and already some signs of wear and tear. Not many people around in early evening. Good to see masks everywhere though not worn properly often; is mandatory to have one whenever outside with police enforcing it.

Trying to keep busy but hard to concentrate. Finished Ocean Vuong's book – interesting story, of after effects of Vietnam war with GI brides and problems of identity for minorities, good style of writing. Learnt something new – Tiger Woods is the result of a liaison between a GI and a local woman in Vietnam.

Poetry Group's next theme is belonging so pen a short poem

Belonging

Just be

No longing

Started reading Christina Baldwin's Book on journaling: *One to one*, dated but still relevant – difference between diary and journal, latter more about inner voyage and intensely private. More keen now on building reflection work, feel on the right track.

First refugees from Afghanistan arrive in Wales, problems with tests for returning visitor from overseas in Wales- will have to check nearer time, Merthyr Tydfil Health Board bans visitors to patients with rising numbers and Scotland intending vaccine passport.

Boden (fashion catalogue) boss declares end of formal office wear though says women fed up of tracksuit bottoms and want to dress up. This year's Ig Nobel Prize include studies showing men grew beards to protect their faces in fist fights as absorbs energy, obesity is highly correlated with national corruption, transportation prize for airlifting rhinos upside down and that sex with orgasm is good for nasal decongestion –after self-observation Professor Bulut in Germany tested this! Lot more useful than Nobel prizes- keep it up guys. Herself says will have to wait till return for testing the last one! Promise.

S**tometer: 3/10

11 Sep 2021

Twenty years since 9/11 - BoJo tries to cash in on it too – defeated terrorism. Really, is the world any better, or carte blanche permission to USA to attack others and spread terror? Does one care? Not at the moment as far too much to think/do otherwise- when one's biggest joy is a successful trip to toilet, in time and being able to put on a fitting diaper on mum, then other things pale into insignificance. Very agitated yesterday, wanting to explore her assets, seemingly has been counting her money and jewellery every day until now, can't relax worrying it has been lost, can't seem to reassure her that Raman has put it away. Strange feeling being around her-

every now and then see glimpses of real mum, still hassles maid for making the foods 'he' likes and what will happen when 'he' goes back in a month! Not that any idea of what it will be like then, will she still be able to get up from chair or will have to stay in bed? Must look out for some things to make life easy- basics like drinking beaker, bib for her and mop and bucket for maid.

Good visit to Niru's to see Ganapati, great idea to give thanks to the God. Enjoyed lunch. Their flat more a show one than home, too much bling even though well done.

Looks like more work needed with the MH evaluation team, some lack of clarity about purpose and process, try and help as best as can; noting own inability to work anymore in the general work environment these days.

England India final match at Old Trafford cancelled due to covid in the team, cases rising in Wales though Drakeford rules out lockdown for now, GPs complaining about workload- very annoying as not sure what they do – guess it's the paperwork, it's a f***ed up NHS. Yorkshire care home resident, Frances Heaton, age 100, crying as not able to see family – 90000 can gather at Leeds festival and only one family member allowed, go figure.

Prince Andrew served papers by Giuffre's lawyers, hiding in Balmoral.

Ruchi wants to go for a drive today and so will go along, to get some fresh air and change of scene; not much sleep again last night. Otherwise, same old. Life has no meaning except surviving one day at a time. Baldwin's book on journaling quite good, useful personally and should inform work on reflection.

S**tometer: 4/10

12 Sep 2021

Raman and Aneeta's Ruby Wedding Anniversary – they are in Goa; Tamana made a very nice video card for them. Tell him to chill for a few days as keeps asking about mum. She slept well last night from 930-6 without stirring, not surprising seeing how she was yesterday. Very groggy this morning, struggling to get her up, kept sitting on bedside.

Missed the match but Raducanu made history from zero to hero – was planning to fly back to UK believing won't qualify and ended up winning US Open on first attempt- well done, girl.

Finished Baldwin last evening – lot of food for thought, diary vs journal. Started reading Amartya Sen's *Home in the world* book – Robert rated it so looking forward. Ruchi suggested Julia Cameron's *The Artists Way* after chat in the car yesterday- poor girl stuck between ambition/passion and reality; usual problem and hardly any/very few can hold their nerve and follow passion. More worried about future than doing what is right – take care of today and tomorrow will be fine.

Satoshi, the ship backed by cryptocurrency, to start a new society in high seas runs into problems and so will have to put up with the world as is, even though it is now

Disunited States of America and less said about BoJo and Westminster politics though Scotland and Wales better led. BoJo to set out winter plan for England on Tuesday, await Wales.

Adi helping sort out IT and new laptop – be good to have a decent one finally. Going to be another slow day – waiting for it to be over, to start again..... What will happen when go back question keeps coming up and no answer.

S**tometer: 3/10

13 Sep 2021

As expected, sleepless night, after the good one before, sat till 5am when relieved by maid but sleep elusive. Send frantic messages to known docs to review her medication; feel upset at lack of own medical knowledge now, esp as sensible conversations with docs very difficult.

Playing around with new laptop, better, will take time to figure it all out. Tidying up affairs incl decluttering laptop.

BMA to criticise government for its handling of pandemic, get in the queue. Raman asked if over-reaction to pandemic, hard to say from limited understanding though sure was not handled well.

BBC says record number of environmental activists murdered globally in 2020 – 227 people were killed. BAT bribed Mugabe another story, so what. 300,000 broke travel quarantine in England and N Ireland - nearly a third of arrivals; time to end the requirements? No passport in England says The Saj though Scotland starts on 1 Oct. Emma Raducanu victory not just tennis but for immigrants too- quick to embrace success, predicted to be a sports billionaire!

Ruchi et al coming for dinner this evening, so maid extra busy, drat. Will take turns getting a nap later- brain fog.

S**tometer: 3/10

14 Sep 2021

Following Umesh's advice upped the dose and mum slept through – till 6, just as well as personally was seriously tired and would have struggled, even the maid seems off- mum was really laying into her all evening, criticising her. Ofcourse groggy since then, and so will be interesting to see what happens tonight. Ruchi had upset tummy so dinner went awry, Adi came and took away food, after all the prep, so was another dampener.

Oldest person in Wales, Amy Winifred Hawkins, dies at 110, her secret: "Never go to doctors"! The Vagina Museum in London spurred others to start the Labia Liberation

movement – reject genital perfection and reclaim differences and celebrate outie labia! BoJo about to recommend boosters above 50.

Reviewed MH report first thing, to fill some time. Could do so much- meditation/walking but feel drained and not motivated, just sitting around. Even reading is hard, lack of concentration. Must do better.

S**tometer: 4/10

15 Sep 2021

Not as good but not bad either- as mum slept till 3, after slightly reduced dose, up since, hard to see slow but sure deterioration. Do not feel tired as got 4/5 hours though can't sleep more than an hour without going to check on her, just as well as found her struggling to get up at 3. Send maid to sleep and sit watching her. Will need to talk to Raman when he gets back- limited choices and need to ensure good care for her and also carers. BoJo's mum passes away- on principle sad for him, David B lost hers at 101 and $\frac{3}{4}$ and says misses her, was able to spend time with her at the end. Sadly, not much sensible conversation with mum now, much as one tries, hardly speak to Niru and Anita on phone. Try to get basic stuff for mum like drinking cup with spout – not possible, lot of fancy stuff but not useful. Anyway, the bib experiment fails as sees the pouch at the bottom as place to put food and feeds the pouch instead! Chat with maid about what next, has looked after similar lady in past, on present trend may not be able to get to toilet much, need Indian solutions.

Really annoyed with BMA stance on assisted dying – lot of senior docs write to them asking for change. Interesting quote from Sen's memoir about one of his relations who overestimated the power of logic/common sense and under-estimated the power of organisations, true- sadly often used against exactly those meant to serve. Sen also remained non-aligned in his life, felt would constrain him.

Covid boosters over 50 to start in Wales also and Covid passports not ruled out, SAGE predicts more hospitalisations in England- up to 7000 daily and asking for more restrictions not easing and also jabs for children.

Warning to tourists to avoid selfies with goats in Llandudno- dangerous, but then that is why they do it!

RaMa reflections site finally open, let us see what if anything comes off it. Anycase, more clarity on how to live now- Herself firing on all cylinders to sort out the house, sends a picture of own tomatoes and aubergines- lovely.

S**tometer: 3/10

16 Sep 2021

Felt a heel- mum had a few lucid periods, commenting that looked weak not sleeping and also chastising for being angry with her – had to shout to make her listen earlier

as very hard to get her out of chair – and not having visited for 2 years. Must remember to treat her as a normal person, even though confused and repetitive, and hard with lack of sleep. Up again at 3 – just as well have the tendency to get up every 1-2 hours to check on her, found her sitting by edge of bed, so sat around watching her, getting her to lie down every now and then and passed the time till 7 with leaking diaper. Finally got her out via toilet to chair in front room.

Continue with Sen's book – almost towards the end – do not see the relevance of title to content, a who's who of the academic world esp economics with lots of names thrown in. Could be accused of self-publicity with name dropping but guess had to do it to make sense, though would have liked to see what he was really getting at- did not see the meaning of book and abrupt end. Do envy him for having colleagues and friends as Yours Truly suffers from lack of any serious intellectual discussion – between ego and EGO of people around have failed to find any/some folk interested in genuine discussion, Gary Raphael is one but has moved away and anyway did not see him much. Sad state of affairs when people do not talk to learn, only to convert or show off. Oh, for the coffee houses culture of India of youth.

After exchanges with Ramesh and JS been thinking about time with BAPIO- and generally feel that own experiment to be a part of the club/establishment have been a mixed bag, the only other one was GMC. Too much of a free thinker, but not with mal-intent. Topic for conversation with Robert.

Happy to be asked to join IIPH Shillong and looking forward to discussing further with Sandra who seems genuine.

This year's ozone layer hole bigger than usual – not surprisingly guess as nature being killed in pursuit of mindless technology, iphone 13 being launched, still on 6 and which works well. Gordon Brown in the news with his aim to preserve UK union, and says Scots share English values exemplified by Southgate and Rashford, not by toffs – see what he means as press not reflective of public; personally feel Brown was a good guy who went wrong, and lost himself in his hate for Blair. The old school of Labour with Kinnock, Smith and Brown is gone for ever with opportunists taking control now esp after ditching Corbyn.

India may re-introduce tourist visas soon, good news though rising numbers in UK not so; see-saw situation. Wait and see, anyway nothing to be done at present.

S**tometer: 3/10

17 Sep 2021

Wonder if tablets are the problem rather than the solution – as asleep though fitfully but very groggy all day; Umesh says can't do much about restlessness in sleep unless any other physical reason and need to make her safe from falling. Going to try with no sedation today. Maid and Ruchi both confirm this is new- was active, getting up and feeding self etc till birthday; no other signs – bloods/O2 sat OK. Own sleep completely gone, at most 2 hours at a stretch, peeing making more difficult.

UK talk of easing international travel – plan to be unveiled today; BoJo gung-ho with cabinet reshuffle, tough guy image, talk of another election – F**K. Tell Herself about easing and in usual fashion starts planning travel, had to ring and explain no need to jump on a plane yet, be a while and was only advising re the procedure for visitor visa so could be ready to apply. Says Alison had to have the old retriever put down- do wonder if animals are treated more humanely; sad for them though.

Robert sends a very nice note checking all OK – really privileged to have him as friend. Started reading Nirad Chaudhuri's *An autobiography of an unknown India* – hardly unknown, some overlap with Sen in terms of Bengal, be interesting to compare. Finally made it to Title Waves bookshop last evening, not much caught eye except another book by Anuradha Roy; liked her previous stuff so got it- on reading pile.

Raman back today after his break, glad they could get away- hope had a good time. Will plan what next with him.

Prince Philip's will to remain secret for 90 years- seemingly what happens with Royalty, OK. Anyway, can't believe he left it to charity.

S**tometer: 3/10

18 Sep 2021

Distressing to see Raman's distress at seeing mum after a few days- big change for him, gets upset and starts rushing around wanting things sorted. Worry about him as impatient and know is very sensitive, will have a tough time. Would like him to come and stay in Wales for 2-3 months to chill. Had to tell him to stand back as Maid and self had a way of managing mum. Had to give her sedation medicine as got excited after Raman, spent the whole night sitting in chair; dozing intermittently. Bit less groggy this morning, even managed to feed herself with cornflakes. Need to have a proper chat with Raman.

Best to focus on things where can add some value like in Shillong, Salford, HLA and maybe CLN. Had a good chat with Elise to get EMHR back on track.

Waste from one bitcoin like binning two iPhones- wow, expensive, in all senses, currency. Fires in California worrying and fire blankets being put around Sequoias esp the oldest tree- General Sherman. Might as well party as world crashes.

BoJo announces opening up of travel from 4 Oct, so will be caught on 3rd, still unclear what is required, anyway have a few days yet.

Sunny day outside, after last few cloudy/rainy days, not that getting out anyway.

Carys leaving annex, and niece moving in – Herself sorting out. Will decide what to do when back, may be let the bungalow out as Air B & B. Will ask Son#1 for how to do it.

S**tometer: 3/10

19 Sep 2021

Thankfully slept last night till 5 – though does not stop self going to check every 2 hours, then sat mum in chair – drowsy though showed some spark of old as got off toilet and tried rushing out, had to be restrained. Blood tests OK except bit of low sodium and hypothyroid- Son#1 says complicated relationship between two, sends a detailed explanation from Skye where gone on holiday, and does not merit active treatment though up thyroxine dose; Umesh suggests drastic changes to diabetic cocktail esp use of combination drugs – just use metformin - and continue Alprazolam.

No luck with recliner, went to see one, differing opinion about usefulness; the big challenge being sleep at night as maid needs rest and takes two to move mum around. Raman frazzled, has his own ways, guess from long experience of managing people. Trying to source another maid to help current one, but compatibility key esp with mum's tendency to create tension. Think will go back as planned and if nec come back later – hard to sustain current arrangement, bone tired and brain dead. Guess everyone's experience is unique to them though phenomenon of looking after elderly (or disabled) universal – how one reacts very different to others. Not with standing should be a mandatory requirement as then only understand human values incl gratitude and joys of small things.

Rey's birthday today – going over for lunch, Niru/Subhash also coming. Have brought some presents from Ruthin and a card from Ifor and Delyth.

Reading up about easing of travel restrictions to UK- sadly start on 4 Oct, when due to arrive 3rd, damn. Will have to get tests done. USA doctors having compassion fatigue treating unvaccinated folk- major problem with antivaxxers, boxer Amir Khan taken off AA flight as companion's mask not appropriate – too much and too little following of advice co-existing. Prince Andrew story running – tactical approach by his lawyers by refusing to accept documents. No wonder it's a f**ked up world as no incentive to practise humanity, idiots in charge. Don't bother reading Indian newspapers as hardly any news, planted stories, score-settling by different factions.

Chaudhuri's book much more interesting than Sen's – just read a fascinating account of his father, who championed education for its own sake, not as route to employment and encouraged freedom. Resonates with self, and feel more strongly about being right about RaMa; not compromise for popularity's sake, stick with it. Education must change, only way to sustain mankind.

S**tometer: 3/10

20 Sep 2021

Same, same passed another day, atleast mum slept till 5, agree with maid that can be managed on that basis, have given up any thought of a proper sleep till back, not possible above 2 hours at a stretch. Mostly confused and quiet now, sad to see though occasional flash- wanted to give money to Rey for his birthday and keeps asking why sad despite attempts to reassure. Mother's sense? Both Herself and

Raman keep talking about next few months; no idea how the situation will play out, could be months or could be sudden? Just one day at a time and ensure not distressed unduly.

Herself went to London to see Simon's exhibition – happy for her. Raman off to Pune today to sort out his flat- finally sold it, at a loss but atleast no stress now, says managing property hard work. Watching religion channels- so many of them and astrology, looks like get lot of donations, gullible folk but maybe feel better for it – who is to judge? The Ganapati Visarjan went off quietly locally, though occasional processions, but not sure what happened elsewhere, and impact.

Australia, UK and USA sign a pact to challenge China, upset France who lost contract to build submarines to UK and end of NATO? Small energy firms going bust, will government bail them out or let the big ones swallow them and create monopolies. Interesting listening to young folk yesterday at Rey's lunch, feel so out of touch with the real world, it's all about big money and personalities, regardless how obtained. Embezzlement, at bold scale, accepted and few years in jail price to pay – the builder opposite mum's flat serving sentence as well as the chairman of the bank who approved loan, worth millions! Pyramid schemes flourishing, like the old saying – owing someone 100 quids is your problem, owing 100 million theirs. Money does not appeal at all, beyond what have already. Must get into spending some.

Buddhdev sends video of speech by Ravish Kumar of NDTV, one of the few left standing against the NaMo juggernaut.

Discover part 2 of Chaudhuri's book so order it.

S**tometer: 3/10

21 Sep 2021

Drat - mum did not sleep a wink all night, kept moving around bed trying to get out, maid gave up at 1 and sent for Yours Truly, who then kept vigil till 7. Really tired so went to bed for a couple of hours whilst mum alert, sitting, eating even rushing to loo. Funnily kept asking why not sleeping all night, easy to get angry and constantly remember its not her, but is hard esp when tired. Generally feel crochety as in unfamiliar surroundings. Not helped by difficult conversation with Herself who feels helpless, wanting to help but how, can't plan anything and will leave it till last 2 days before deciding whether to fly back on 3rd? GP says may go on for a while, is it bad to go back or should continue to stay? Whether like it or not, it is the wait for the end, but how, when and at what costs to others esp as never easy to get consensus in families on what should be done. Frankly it will be up to Raman as has to manage. Mum keeps asking when going back also. Try and get out for a walk to keep calm. Best option would be for mum to go back to Raman's but hard to see that- may be when push comes to shove and bed bound will have to be.

Not a good day today, feeling lost.

Another billionaire, Marc Lore, to create utopia - called Telosa as self-sustaining one, in another attempt to challenge government in American desert, looking for a place in SW USA. Why not pay workers and taxes and avoid need for utopia? Nigel Kennedy cancels concert with Classic FM who want him to play Four Seasons and not Jimi Hendrix that he wants, calls them Jurassic FM. Community wants to buy Old Forge in Inverie in Lochaber, remotest pub, 18 miles walk or 7 miles by sea crossing, trying to raise money. Energy crisis looms with rising gas and knock-on prices, warnings of misery with cuts in universal credit also.

Finish reading Madhuri Vijay's book *The Far Fields* about Kashmir -tragedy there, but then not the only place full of strife, sadly.

Interesting long read in The Guardian The body keeps the score book by Bessel van der Kolk – one quote: *“In the end, psychiatry is simply society in a white coat, the medical end of the norm-enforcement and denial of reality that drives individuals to suppress their trauma in the first place. Van der Kolk's life in practice has been to treat traumatised patients, but his life as an author is as an emissary from the world of PTSD, confronting his profession – and the world that created it – with what is actually happening.”*

Vijay could not get his PCR test on time in Cambridge so delayed return; scandal of testing; medical misery compounded by mishandling, the price has been high and more to come.

S**tometer: 5/10

22 Sep 2021

Been thinking a lot since yesterday, had a long chat with Raman too, agree best to go back as planned and then may be come back, with Herself if possible. Says will consider moving mum with them as sees the value of it.

Raining heavily but lull this morning so went off for a decent walk – first morning one – to clear head, not too crowded on the seafront, nice breeze and few rain drops. Mum slept after being awake for 36 hours, though fitfully – in bed till 230 and then sat her in chair. Released maid to get some rest and managed to snooze also as seemed to sleep OK in chair; may be should bite the bullet and get the recliner? Be more comfortable than the hard chair, but may not use it, in which case waste of money, but does it matter?

Biden does not see the special relationship as meets BoJo at White House, so no economic deal; insects vanishing from planet at alarming rate- in Germany by 76% and UK by 46% since 1976! Sharon Graham, Unite leader boycotts Labour Party conference, says has more important things to do- rightly so, Labour is just toffs with a different label. Best (*sic*) as another report shows over-prescribing of medicines; 15% people take five or more daily, GP prescription up from 10 to 20 per person! And Martin Marshall pops up and defends this- can't 'criticise' anything, always someone else's fault. Ground Hog day, do not they get tired of it?

Had a nice chat with Nikhil, maybe meet if possible. Snehdeep writes back with a polite message. Started reading Anuradha Roy's *The earthspinner* book, do like her, had seen her at JLF in 2019. Subhash had first cataract op yesterday, will need next one too later; may go and see him.

S**tometer: 3/10

23 Sep 2021

Repeat performance- take turns with maid and sit with mum from 3am; had a long chat – monologue – yesterday afternoon, kept talking about old days and how she made mistakes in life, quite insightful – about family and her relationship with dad who left it all to her. Do realise it was not easy for her and make allowances though still manages to 'annoy' – as keep criticising maid, and can be unrealistic with demands. All the more reason to form good habits before mind goes as then muscle memory will support one, being a sceptic Raman wonders if it will help so counter by what is to be lost by being mice and grateful? Anu rang and shared story of his masi-same, only worse.

Sandra gets back and asks to do the first session with students in Shillong later this month, Cefyn and Susheela happy with the development also.

Food shortages predicted over Xmas- due to Brexit and energy crises and WHO says air pollution even worse than previously predicted, the PM 2.5 causing lot of premature deaths and BoJo talking up COP26, as if. But then he can get away with it as Keir Starmer's essay setting out his vision does not seem persuasive – will build a better Britain for working people, without clarity on how. Does not look like Starmer has much of a chance, more like Andy Burnham who is keeping his powder dry, letting others do the dirty/necessary work, smart guy.

Herself busy with Carriage Works, another exhibition starts – sends a YouTube video, looks good and will see when back, and is busy for the family arriving on Friday. Not sure where they will sleep? Leave it to her and get out for walk.

S**tometer: 3/10

24 Sep 2021

How does one make it interesting when it is the same everyday- not much rest last night as Mum wriggled and tried to escape from bed and been up since 2am. Have another chat with Raman this morning who will fly by the seat of his pant, try and help him to make some decisions and use next week to bed things down, not easy conversations as being tired feel lousy and short-tempered; says Dilawez's mum bed bound now, Mathrani's both sets- parents and in-laws now gone and so moving back to USA, spent 12 years back and forth, had a good job to allow that. Mum manages to snooze throughout day and catches up but sleep eludes Yours Truly. Send SOS to two psychiatrists- must be a known problem for Old Age Psychiatrists, surely better medicines?

Tell Herself about private diaries but insists on reading every week then gets upset – why bother with diary if can't capture thoughts/feelings so can reflect later on?

No walk this morning, felt very tired- realise could be counter-productive, better to exercise. May be later. Vijay back and may go see him next week. Herself wonders whether good idea to celebrate Diwali in Ruthin – in two minds, low energy on one hand and need to move on other.

They are going where the sun don't shine, poo- smart toilet technology article in The Guardian, to get 'analprint' to monitor diet – man and machine inter-dependence, soon hard to see where one ends and other begins, Harari's predictions about Homo Deus? Meantime no gas as companies fail, blaming rising use in Asia for shortages in Europe- like Bush's comment about Chinese eating more rice, how dare they forget that the world exists for the white man! Covid may become like cold by spring says John Bell, meantime international argy bargy re recognising various vaccines and whether to donate to poor countries. More exposes about VIP lane contracts to chums during covid but shrugged off by ministers, no accountability anyway. On that happy note...

S**tometer: 3/10

25 Sep 2021

Can it be that got it wrong – over medicalising mum, at core are two issues: does not sleep in bed, which is about lying flat but does not have any other signs of dyspnoea though has heart failure with oedema of legs, and drowsy during the day which may be the drugs at night. Raman not keen on recliner, says will sink in, so may be a strong easy chair with good footstool for sleeping. No bed today and test it, and search for a chair. Only way as was sitting up when went to check at 1am, got her to lie down and found same at 2 then 3 and so transferred to chair, where slept with occasional call – more for assurance.

Parveen comes back after talking with Old Age Psychiatrist and also Amit Malik suggests a call to talk through.

So been up since 1, got about 3 hours, managed to think about next two sessions- with Mashaal and IIPH next week; need to help them as best as can. Hard working and committed folk.

Now it is Elon Musk's turn to separate from pop artist partner Grimes, after Gates and Bezos, but unlike them has been a serial and erratic husband anyway, married a few times incl twice to same person; son named an impossible X AE A-Xii Obviously did not listen to Johnny Cash and Boy named Sue song.

Medical mystery as covid hospitalisations continue to fall in UK – despite opening up of society; cause of celebration yet?

Dinner with Raman tonight as has invited his friends over, one of them relocating to Gurugram. Ruchi sent an email at 5am says has been having trouble sleeping – join the club, must follow Herself and listen to BBC Sounds, rather than scrolling

nonsense. Looks like maid having domestic issues – idle husband and demanding kids; hope does not escalate, be very hard to replace her.

S**tometer: 3/10

26 Sep 2021

Herself having a good time with family, weather good too, so happy there. Happ (ier) here too as experiment with sleeping in chair worked last night, stayed asleep sitting up from 1030-5 and both maid and Yours Truly rested. Quite with it as won't use diaper but then has to be taken to the loo repeatedly. Everyone worried what to do when not around, leaving on 3rd – agree with Raman to do certain things-order the recliner and get maid vaccinated.

Margaret Keenan, becomes the first person also to get the booster in UK, panic buying blamed for shortages as queues form at petrol stations, BoJo announces temporary visas for hauliers and poultry (!) workers. Starmer's big idea to tax private schools – does he realise that lot of parents who send children there are not actually rich, and just about manage to pay fees- Yours Truly was killed by fees and mortgage with nothing left for life. As the teacher would have said- needs to do better. Labour infighting about rule changes, with focus on preventing another Corbyn but do not get that Corbyn was peoples' voice, as was Bernie Sanders.

Raman gave *The Afghan book* by Frederick Forsyth – old one but still relevant with the situation in Afghanistan as Taliban go back to old ways- hangings in city to spread terror. Lighter read with Chaudhuri on the side, by its nature is a slow read, Part 2 is even bigger.

R says R had subarachnoid haemorrhage and needed emergency surgery, recovering; with his own health issues must be hard for them but says functioning. Chandrasekhar reminds that passing reference to him in the recent writings hid many hundreds of hours of work; lessons for self: how to show gratitude.

Making some purchases to take back – not in a mood to do too much shopping and buy gifts. Off to see Ruchi's new flat, being done up, ready by Nov hopefully. But first a walk to stretch legs and clear head.

S**tometer: 3/10

27 Sep 2021

Long chat with Ruchi yesterday- about extended family, could mum be managed better, can there be some consensus, with everyone contributing? Mum slept again on chair with medication; glad Raman has ordered the recliner, will be useful as can't be comfortable being on current chair for such a long time.

Dairy, salt and steak may be good after all reports a study from Sweden, some truth in it since current food police has led to 60% Brits being obese and 50% food being ultra-processed. Herself feels vindicated, pass the cheese please.

Angelas in news as Angela Merkel's legacy being scrutinised – just opportunistic or conviction politician and Angela Rayner calls BoJo scum and refuses to back down. More pressure on Starmer who tries to distance himself as others incl Sadiq Khan also round up on him, this time re LGBT community with cervix being claimed by trans- who can rightly be said to have a cervix - science vs politics and rights of majority vs minority? Too much PC, maybe scum but with BoJo clear who he is, whilst Starmer trying to be everything to everyone. Is it OK to call BoJo scum- is it insulting to the office or the person, Discuss.

Spend time preparing for the two upcoming teaching sessions, and getting ready for travel back- only a few days left esp as maid needs time off later this week also and so will be tied to home. May come back later this year though bringing Herself not a good idea yet, will be very challenging and will struggle to adopt even for a short time.

S**tometer: 3/10

28 Seep 2021

Hat trick- as mum slept through till 630 from 9, and not too bad on waking, gave her a good wash, the maid is really helpful. Does get lucid periods- had a long chat with Anita and insightful that is losing memory, laughs that can't remember ate what for lunch. Very concerned about Yours Truly, keeps asking about family. Also wants to send a present for Susheela. On the homestretch with few days before leaving so trying to see what else to do to help stabilise, Raman exploring options including getting another live in helper so the two of them can manage. Concern being dynamics between the two maids – try and safeguard as much as possible but only time will tell, and need to try it out.

Weird walking on the sea front, folk glued to their phones, ignoring nature, wonder why come out at all; all ages and all classes from the poor to the rich, all victims. Sad and only getting worse. Even watchmen in buildings stuck to phones- watching films, do not bother with TV anymore, maids want access to WiFi. Enabling or enslaving technology.

Starmer woes continue as shadow employment secretary, Andy McDonald, resigns on principle, says increase minimum wage. BoJo bringing in army to address fuel crisis – letter in papers says not shortage of fuel but shortage of leadership. NHS relaxes covid rules in hospitals to speed up care and address backlog. New Zealand health minister says people tired but still aiming for elimination and Sydney lockdown may be ending by month end. Schools opening next week in Mumbai, apart from masks no sign that covid is affecting life here.

Finished part 1 of Chaudhuri's autobiography, fantastic read – almost a must read to understand India, its history and culture, almost prophetic, can understand why may not have been universally liked as can be seen as critical of the prevailing Indian narrative about supremacy of Hinduism or the golden age. Really good chapter about learning from history- in scholarship chapter, very useful in clarifying thinking.

Feel own work lacks depth, although on similar tracks – must work harder. Good style and more about himself through his environment, how shaped him.

Danish artist, Jens Haaning, took the money and delivered an empty box with two glass frames titled: Take the money and run! Genius, even better than Banksy's prank of shredding his work.

S**tometer: 3/10

29 Sep 2021

Good session with the students in Shillong – though as usual whilst motivational and inspiring, their concerns are often very practical; reflection seems a luxury and it will be hard to convince about need to make it a habit, the background operating system. They are not alone however.

New live-in maid going to start today – anxious times. Mum not happy with arrangement and will sabotage it, was agitated last evening after meeting the new maid, Raman has his work cut out. Trying to 'steel' self about going away – running away from problem or done what is right?

NHS Highlands and Durham Universities in news for bullying cultures, surprising that anyone is surprised, rot is from the top. Keep calm and continue panicking mode of BoJo politics, who will finish it all off in next few years given no way to displace him, Labour infighting continues with Sadiq and Burnham having a spat about London vs North- levelling down or up, and party conference becoming a comedy show. Covid families finally meet BoJo, what will happen unclear and no sense of urgency as deaths still continue.

Off to see Vijay for lunch, Ruchi suggests going to some art galleries though not really in mood, focussed on must dos and get back home esp as first day of maids.

S**tometer: 3/10

30 Sep 2021

Rouchyka says her mum similar- had eight very difficult years, with revolving doors maids and sleepless nights, finds can't sleep now. Vijay's parents were no trouble at all, further confirming that easy folk have easier end. Good lunch at The Oberoi- how the other half live; says sold his Hussain painting last year due to business slowdown last year. Shame, though still has a great collection.

Trying to settle the new maid, just as well both from same area with shared background, the worry is more from mum, whether will accept them; first day seemed to have gone off OK after early tantrums.

Strange situation with Covid as numbers high, indeed Scotland highest numbers of hospitalisations since Feb, and trend similar worldwide and Laura Spinney cautions against covid lawsuits and blaming which won't prevent future pandemics – says

boosting solidarity more important than finger pointing; surely not an accuse for letting them off the hook. Next James Bond film, No time to die, to gross £1 billion, all about promoting Britain, despite the loss of empire still popular globally, must admit though seen some of them not a great fan; still think Sean Connery was the best with Roger Moore second.

JK Rowling's desk where she wrote in Edinburgh in early years (can't go out now as mobbed) almost destroyed in fire at the Elephant House Café- retrieved from the debris and will be restored promises owner. Fans will be disappointed as major stop on the JKR trail in Edinburgh.

US declares 23 species including birds, fish extinct; and Greta Thurnberg mocks leaders on climate change – does not care for blah blah.

Gathering and tidying up stuff in preparation for travel on Sunday, few things still to get, jobs for today.

S**tometer: 3/10

01 Oct 2021

Yippee- the recliner seems to work, mum slept from 930-630 non-stop except calling maid's name twice says she, and is happy. Usual saga with delivery, brought the wrong recliner first and this one damaged, too tired to argue so long as useful. Feel sad for all the young workers who have no basic knowledge/awareness and do things like robots – did not even check before hauling it all the way out of van to flat. Three men and van to deliver, how do finances work, by shoddy workmanship. So, the only thing left now is afternoon restlessness – not able to figure out. Need to get a spout beaker for tea as being drowsy spills, dangerous if hot; surprisingly mum called maid and told her to not give tea anymore but lukewarm water! Mind works in mysterious ways.

Interesting take on BoJo politics- fixing obesity by food shortages, climate by fuel shortage and pension deficit by killing old folk; ungrateful public. On the other hand, demand for private jets soar as the rich fly off to holidays, not wanting to mix with the unwashed. The PC brigade clamps down and bans use of ermm, because, basically, like, you see, you know..... in London school, oh my word! What's the purpose of language and is it static?

Had a bit (only two small ones) of whisky with Raman last night, tried the Indian ones, not a good idea, up all night. But thankfully not tired. Off to get pretravel PCR test then book the Day two in Wales- scandal. Scheduled to do a leadership session with Mashaal this evening – looking forward. Try and plan things with Raman, need to look at the whole situation and for everyone, and build things on the maids and Dr Pandeya- he is really good.

S**tometer: 3/10

02 Oct 2021

Phew – anxious day, went for pre-travel covid test and then waited for results, did not come till late evening; negative thankfully and so make further arrangements for day 2 testing post arrival and fill Personal Locator Form. One hand, good IT systems, on other quite a bit of work. Interesting to see that lab sent the results to Mumbai Council who sent a certificate also. Collate all the paperwork.

Mum more used to recliner and slept again, though confusing increasing; sad and hilarious when short burst of lucidity – says even she bored with same food everyday and worries about Yours Truly! Though do try variety but does not eat much. Atleast some systems set up and so do not feel as bad about leaving. Though worried what happens next esp as tit for tat politics as India introduces compulsory 10-day isolation for UK visitors, due to UK not recognising Indian vaccine. More breakthroughs in pipeline as another drug by MSD shown to halve hospitalisations.

Final day here and start packing- picked up a few things to take back. Niru wants to send some stuff for Niki in London too. Not sure what awaits, as BoJo orders military to manage fuel crisis, and Saj announces another shake up of the English NHS – this time by a forces general, typical mindset, not knowing NHS workers not like armed personnel- do not follow orders! Worth getting agitated about? Increasingly wondering whether to forget all that stuff – is it a good idea to go to the BAPIO conference and meet the same people, same issues. Is it ego- harking for past glory days though aware no one will pay real attention, apart from lip service? Joe Melton was right- should make a clean break, halfway house does not work given personality and need to change things. Much thinking, and importantly decisions to be made when back. Time in Mumbai has clarified more about what to do; life is too short for wasting.

More stupidity as Spanish court says unknown chap who filmed women urinating, for want of toilet facility, in street not guilty of putting these on porn sites showing faces also- is the law an ass or practised by asses?

150 days streak on Duolingo- getting somewhere it seems, and time for a formal course, and resume piano next week, ask Gwydion for an extended lesson- prime him to expect shouting/tears as not done any practice for 6 weeks. Anyway, there are two things to look forward to!

S**tometer: 3/10

03 Oct 2021

Finally, the Big day- time to go back, not easy at all esp as mum kept talking about going, thanking for coming, and up all night as did not want to miss seeing off in the morning – as if; nothing changed always up until came back from evening out or when leaving. Her face when first left for UK in 1980 at the airport etched on brain- thankfully Anil Dhawan there to support her. Not sure if and when will see her again- will she remember by then or get worse. How to explain the range of thoughts and emotions seeing one's parent drifting off, with roles reversed, feeding her, changing

diapers. Would not have missed it for the world, privilege but was it enough, should have stayed back to do more, but then how long might it go on for? Seems Raman appreciated as was not prepared for the turn of events- says went downhill suddenly on her birthday as if was waiting for Yours Truly to arrive before letting go? Reassures that he is now more reconciled and hope is true. Ruchi says not to rush, go back and recharge and then decide when and how to come back, says should resume chats- atleast weekly. Remember Dad, left him in Mumbai as slow march of stomach cancer, and duty called, and two weeks later it was all over- did not get back in time for funeral, as custom to cremate same day. Tell Ruchi may not come if sudden as no ceremony and what is the purpose – have done as much as could do, no way to change past and wish had done things differently, and know that she forgave everything, has always been blind to her first son's misdemeanours. Though Herself would like to come, not sure whether will cope, and equally do not feel like coming alone anymore.

Sitting in the lounge at the airport, morning time, mind empty or rather all over, just need to get back and good sleep. Raman advises to sort out own life, no point dragging things, close the past chapter.

Going to be a long day, three hours stopover in Dubai, Herself coming to pick up, says has enough fuel in car.

S**tometer: 5/10

04 Oct 2021 (Peniel)

Surprisingly smooth processes in India and all the way- fastest border check and baggage claim in Manchester; good use of technology, no need to carry paperwork and all done over the phone. The flight back, on A380, reintroduced recently, was smooth with as usual great service, unlike the lounge in Mumbai which was poor, seems change of ownership and now with Adani Group.

Tried not to think too much on the journey, saw a few films- *Land* with Robin Wright of someone coping with grief in remote mountain isolation and about the *Oslo peace Accord*, little mention in popular media of the role of the Norwegian couple who engineered it all between Israelis and PLO, whilst the big boys and esp America was messing it up. More relevant as reading Elif Shafak's latest book – *The Island of Missing Trees*- about the Greek Cypriot problems and division of Nicosia, she is a great writer. One passage struck: says difference between optimists and pessimists is that the latter can't forget; the great your powers of retention, slimmer the chances of optimism. Shares an old Cypriot curse, used by elderly women wishing ill on someone:

May you never be able to forget

May you go to your grave still remembering

Herself was there to pick up at the airport and got the house ready – surprised and delighted that decided to go to Peniel not Llanbedr, happy with her presents, loved

the dancing god statue sent by Raman. Raman says mum slept OK, and is trying to finesse things. Better than Yours Truly as been really troubled since yesterday, need to get mind in control.

Covid wise, scientists warning that worst is not yet over as numbers high though a Welsh report shows flat rate for last four days, more concern about young people – 15 years old girl dies on day was due for job, logistic delays. Another mess in the NHS as quarter of callers give up due to long delays in response from staff.

'Pandoras' papers with details of offshore accounts by the leaders published – what use though after previous such publications; Blair still got away with not paying stamp duty due to a legal loophole. Indians probably the worst, not sure whether things changed though survey shows Modi remains popular with the millennials – a huge vote bank, as they see him as themselves, not the 'western' style previous lot, misplaced? Get used as chances of displacing him remote, despite all the analysis showing country worse off.

Not raining and nice to be back in green hills, hope to get out for a walk later. One day at a time. And, better practice piano.

S**tometer: 3/10

05 Oct 2021

Oh boy, David was spitting tacks after watching Tory party conference- does not mince his words, and very angry with them; may be time to resurrect his Conservatory Party esp as the alternative with Labour not appealing either! Looks like lack of empathy, vacuous and self-serving pre-requisites for being a politician. Dropped in to see him on the walk in the afternoon yesterday, interrupted by rain, and saw his restoration workshop- wonderful facility and lovingly maintained; no one to follow him sadly, same with most older crafts people- they do not make them like that anymore.

Otherwise resting day at home, sorting out stuff, getting in touch with people and making lists of things to do, and not to do – must focus on latter, somethings are not meant to be anymore. Take Shafak's advice and forget- finished reading the book, enjoyable; Herself not into that stuff, does not like sad/sentimental stuff. Send Sumana Roy an email about the book, with tree as the protagonist.

6 hours WhatsApp outage, and lived through it- and so may be time to cut back scrolling on phone anyway. More trouble for Whatsapp as whistle blower, Frances Haugen, goes to the Senate – but what difference will it make? Anyone remember Nick Clegg, Former Dep PM, now spokesperson for Facebook, and Pandora's papers!

Welsh runner, Will Renwick, ran up all 189 hills over 2000 feet in Wales and finished at Conwy Castle yesterday- well done dude, raised money for charity.

Another slow day, with rain also, and need to post Day 2 test, may take 5 days for test result and meantime no need to self-isolate, no wonder hard to tackle as could

interact with many people meantime, not that intending to, only the must ones. Will do a lateral flow anyway.

Raman sends an update about New Zealand considering opening up and giving up the Elimination Strategy – well they tried. Says mum slept well last night. Not so Yours Truly, restless and tired.

S**tometer: 4/10

06 Oct 2021

Lashing rains yesterday, went to Llanbedr to look at the bungalow, all tidied up by Herself, do miss it – feels more like home, need to sort out garden esp the hedge, too big, must cut back. The vege patch has run riot, overgrown, weeds everywhere, apple tree completely bare but looks healthy, will have to spend a few days there once weather OK to clear up and prepare for winter. Also, the shed, Eric has disappeared and so maybe ask Tony for advice about boarding up. Do like the place but being in Peniel feel dislocated, not quite the walking distance from bungalow. Used up perishable produce and made tomato chutney and aubergine potato curry, plenty of onions and garlic still, and quite nice.

Interesting picture in Wales as covid deaths rise – 88 last week, 22 more than previous week, but cases and hospitalisations falling or stable. NHS Wales plans to tackle climate change with Bangor Hospital working since 2018 to run it more sustainably. Write to John about supporting AONB esp around health promoting National Park project – nature/climate/mental health all inter-related.

Best to focus on such things than worry about state of the world as BoJo going to make his usual bombastic speech about Getting things done at the party conference today, not worried about job losses and price rise -ofcourse not, does not affect him – will move beyond the ‘delay and dither’ approach of previous governments, both Tory and Labour.

Scientists discover Welsh Dragon dinosaur – the size of a chicken, related to T Rex and likely to have been the apex predator, called it Pendraig milnerae; another reason to get in touch with Tony!

Going to Old Colwyn for internment of Mair’s ashes in her ‘home’ chapel, Cefyn says a few people attending and maybe go for pub lunch after, and then scoot down for piano lesson.

Not sure how actively to keep asking Raman about mum, Anita talked to her last evening when she is usually more lucid and says misses Yours Truly; but what real help is possible now, only moral support. Must stop snapping at Herself, being distracted do not listen and then talk sharply, no fault of hers.

S**tometer: 4/10

07 Oct 2021

Wow- new lease of life, as mum walking in the flat- Raman sends a video, says has zest for life, eating and sleeping, well done. Tony's mum bounced back and then stuck around till her 90th, and passed away soon after the family reunion for her celebration; hard to predict with elderly. Anyway relieved.

Discovered that had not renewed home insurance in May- panic, start looking around for deals, what else has been missed! Need to get a grip of stuff, been bit preoccupied and wasting money also.

Herself takes charge of Diwali and start with establishing what's possible – decide by Monday! Will need some work then.

Surprise- both BBC News and The Guardian do not feature any headlines for Covid, first day. More about the Economically Illiterate BoJo – business leaders and Think Tanks say sums do not add up, forget the human cost. And breakthrough with Malaria vaccine RTS, S vaccine – WHO endorses use after trials in Africa; not a big effect esp alone though better in combination with antimalarial drugs. Everything helps.

Herself sees GP with lump in breast – possibly a recurrence of cyst but will have to wait; referred to clinic at GC, not sure how long wait. Felt a bit morbid and asked what will happen to Yours Truly; as if, more likely to outlast. Got to keep busy and enjoy whilst can, so gets on making plans.

Must get out for a proper walk today- maybe head to Denbigh Golf Club for a recce, in case join there. Overcast, but needs must. And piano practice – Beryl patient though not impressed.

S**tometer: 4/10

08 Oct 2021

What a wally: spent all morning in panic about home insurance and bought a new one, only at the end to find that had actually already bought it in May; thankfully the guy at Directline was helpful and forgave memory lapse.

Had a good chat with Herself about managing anxiety and understanding self, compared Gordon Brown than Tony Blair after seeing the documentary last night. Which one is Yours Truly? Lack the ruthlessness and too objective and tendency to sulk? Decide to go to BAPIO conference, as should help whoever asks.

Had an out of blue contact from Mike who got details from Amar Jesani and wanted Yours Truly to join the Democratising Work Global forum last night- did so but could not follow what the academics were talking about; all theory with no relevance to reality where work is getting more and more dehumanising. May be worth chatting to Mike to find out more- sounds like a good guy, 79 years old retired consultant and part of Keep Our NHS Public, there are still good guys out there.

Will need them as the mess continues, Saj pushing on with review – will be mayhem with the General in charge of review, having wasted billions in private sector- seemingly had block booked capacity and paid 400million a month! And hardly used any. Why? Because after all it was the same staff- private sector uses same NHS staff, geddit, and there were not any. Another report, Exercise Alice, obtained under FOI by Moosa Qureshi, shows the government had failed to act on past preparedness exercises- covid was not a surprise. Why are you surprised.

UK cuts the red list down to seven countries, to promote travel. Not out of woods yet and hence encouraging folk to take up flu and booster- except have not heard from GP yet. Did hear after asked for an e-consult about peeing- says will send for a scan to check waterworks and also recommend medication – will see what it is before taking it. Not keen on drugs, and also will push travel insurance!

Had a walk yesterday, felt stiff. Tony coming for another walk today- need to keep going and regain fitness. Raman pleased with mum's progress, so leave it there for now.

S**tometer: 3/10

09 Oct 2021

Not in shape to do two days running- did 10 miles with Tony around Peniel but stiff and tired; those 5 weeks in Mumbai have taken a toll. Need to build up. Was good to walk and talk anyway, mainly on the roads around here. One scary moment when the young bull came charging, Tony managed to shut the gate just in time. Excitement. Weather warm.

UK, Europe's hotspot, with highest number of cases, though not deaths, and pandemic worsened mental health globally. India opening for tourists by Nov 15, as more countries start on the road to living with Covid. Air India goes back to its founders as Tatas buy it off the government – will try it next time to India as supposed to be good service and VFM.

Another Facebook outage – outrage from affected, guess people dependent on it for livelihood now. No wonder Zuckerberg cocky as has got the world by the short and curlies.

Raman off to Khandala today, happy to see them get a break- be good for them. Says mum as good as can be.

Off to allotment later, after dance lesson for Herself, and start tidying up- Tony will help insulate shed there!

S**tometer: 3/10

10 Oct 2021

Started on the allotment – slowly but surely coming along, can see the way forward, with 3-4 more days there should be OK, and will look good. Then sort out bungalow also. Tried Himalaya, the new restaurant, open only for take aways and the manager is the guy from Radhuni in Denbigh which shut down- remembered and gave extras, too much, and said will think about helping with Diwali. So may be one less thing to worry about. Other things slowly falling in place.

Caught up with various folk also- Promod thinking of coming over before Papaji goes back at the end of month; Sukhdev coming around Diwali also and so thinking about accommodation – Peniel tight but bungalow seems odd, esp as annex occupied. Herself does not like the bed in spare room there also – has strong views on some things. Anu's wife finally arriving on 20th and may drop in to say hello on way to Birmingham, and Umesh and Dulcie finally put the dog down- was really in a bad shape and just before bit her again, should have done relieved him long ago, but guess Dulcie did not want it. Another subject with strong views- even animals who have the opportunity to be released can suffer due to humans imposing their views on life and death. Robert off to Tiree for a short break – after having the booster vaccine, says taken it though immoral as should be going to poorer countries. Lot of catching up yesterday.

Nothing major in the news with usual stuff around energy crisis, Austrian Chancellor resigns after corruption charges (imagine what would happen if the practice became more widespread- not being corrupt surely an exception), and Royals being encouraged to start rewilding their estate – own 14% of UK land and Duchy of Cornwall has only 6% tree coverage as opposed to 37% in EU, wow.

The medical school class WhatsApp group restarted to plan for the Golden Jubilee celebration in Dec 2022, and immediately factions form and the stuff that gets posted makes one wonder- obviously some folk have no life. Too far ahead to think about going yet, just focus on short-term.

Off to Anglesey today to see old friends of Herself for lunch, nice day so looking forward. Take mind off the peeing problem- pretty bad last night, need to break the cycle before gets established.

S**tometer: 4/10

11 Oct 2021

Great day out in Anglesey yesterday, lovely couple: Roger and Paula, discovered lots of connections given his dentistry background including having worked in Cork, and Paula knows Beryl from her music teaching days. Small world indeed. Went for a tour of the southern side of the island, weather good and managed to walk to the church in the sea – Cofwyn (check name******) near Rhosneigr. Should spend more time in Anglesey, may be coastal walk. Fascinating to see the difference it all makes when tide goes out- now you see the land, now you do not. Lovely house also.

Wales to keep homeworking, masks in crowded places incl shops and a covid pass for large events for now; Expert says uncertain winter with flu and covid – waiting for call from GP for jabs; and Australia lifts lockdown in Sydney- Dick says numbers will go up and so staying put in Wagga.

Make list of things to do- does not seem enough time to fit the basics of Duolingo/music/meditation/writing/walking (daily must dos- with meditation the usual casualty). Need to create structure. Herself advises Denbigh golf course and may be worth it, save all the driving to Mold? Anyway, do not play that much, may be that's the problem- should make it a regular feature?

Get on with Diwali today, and do some work to follow up the call with Raj last night – says put proposals to help CLN and NHS Digital.

S**tometer: 2/10

12 Oct 2021

So, it was not all right, seemingly mum had a fall, slipped from chair a few days ago, and has left sided weakness and some pain in wrist and not able to stand up, making personal care difficult. Obvious that Raman struggles and had a number of chats incl with Ruchi, Anita does not want to go and see mum- says too stressful, ask him to get the doctor out and also put her in bed to make it easier to care, change diaper as getting incontinent on standing up. So, in a bit of a fog yesterday not fully relieved by working in allotment. To go back or not the question, no easy answer. Go and for how long then, could linger (sad) and if not go and passes away then won't be able to get there for crem and in which case would it be worth going? Rather get Raman over here for a few weeks- he needs a proper break from all his stresses.

Spoke to doctor who came for house visit to see mum and agreed the plan – to get some blood tests and shift to bed or even in recliner to log roll for changing. Dr Pandeya is really very good, and is clear that its downhill from now, how fast anyone's guess- one day at a time.

Its official -biggest public health failure says the Select Committee report, typical government report trying to find positives, in the name of objectivity, and interestingly Cummings vindicated – the false group think that prevailed and led to herd immunity the worst mistake and even Cummings fell into it, but then if someone like him could not challenge then what hope for others. UK squandered its lead after developing the test for covid in Jan 2020 and went into permanent crisis – *“for a country with world class expertise in data analysis, to face the biggest health crisis in 100 years with virtually on data to analyse was an almost unimaginable setback”* just one of the quotes. The bigger question is what happens now, have lessons been learnt and what will change. Note the report is about England, wonder when Wales will produce one.

Got to keep busy to avoid getting down, so book a test game at Denbigh Golf Course and then decide whether to join there. Herself off to lunch with Sally at The Lodge and a walk, gas fitter coming to sort hob.

S**tometer: 3/10

13 Oct 2021

Success with Denbigh GC - guess makes sense as lot closer to home. Needed that to clear head as bit stressed with mum's situation, spoke to Niru- who will go regularly to see her and help and Anita – who has come around to going to Mumbai soon, hope gets there before too long. Niru says will manage with Raman and to calm down here, easier said than done, but equally not that keen to go back, having done goodbye. Will see how Raman manages, and take a call- meantime check logistics with tests etc as India rules tightened recently with tit for tat with UK, and Emirates flight prices rocketed.

Also trying to fix consultation with surgeon for Herself, Dev arranges one privately – so will go see him on Thursday, with Promod's surgeon on standby. Promod banned from driving till Jan now and won't be able to come, and any case says it's not been like before with Papaji – the combination of his bereavement, pandemic and age means he is unsettled and seems like counting days till can go back.

Low mood in Peniel, with curmudgeon level up, stressing Herself. Trying to keep busy with some work.

Zero covid – elimination – strategy though abandoned by NZ, Australia and Vietnam was useful in preventing deaths says The Conversation; Negative PCRs after positive Lateral Flows causing concern about accuracy of tests, so another thing gone wrong; Care home staff shortages compound NHS problems as 'bed blockers' increase; London new year fireworks cancelled; and shortage of chips means less iPhones manufactured this year, also impacting car production – surely good news!

Interesting article in The Guardian about Time millionaire – those with time to have a life; and how pandemic has made more people realise this, hence vacancies as more people choosing not to/less work.

Overcast day again, Herself busy in Carriageworks this afternoon and so may stop by to see Susheela before piano lesson. Some interesting conversations with Mike Galvin about the state of the NHS, brings back memories, not sure have the energy or desire to get back to activism, but if not the older lot, then who? Says may stop by to meet on Sunday. Must be reason why he found Yours Truly- Celestine Prophecy?

Son #1 says wedding reception booked next year.

S**tometer: 3/10

14 Oct 2021

India rules relaxed – no more 10 days quarantine as UK eases first by recognising Indian vaccine, so one less hurdle if decide to go though not sure if do want to. Only chance when able to meet all siblings together, if Niru can overcome her problems

with Anita. Keep thinking/procrastinating. Much dithering tell Son#1 to get in touch with Raman and say hello (and goodbye) to grandma, kept asking about them, sadly.

William Shatner, at 90 oldest person in space – living his Captain Kirk role, albeit for 11 minutes only, courtesy Bezos who is raking it in with his space flights now. Prince William pours cold water saying should focus on saving earth not finding new places to inhabit- makes sense though what's the fun in it.

Tony persuaded Yours Truly to join Friends of AONB and had a chat with Andy, who has been in wars, quite a few injuries from walking/falling off ladder, about idea of making health a big theme for the National Park plan. So far so good.

Appointment today, through Dev's contact, at Spire Wrexham for Herself in the evening and until then got to distract self and keep busy, to avoid monkey going around, booked golf in afternoon. Beryl happy with progress so feel encouraged to continue and practice piano more.

S**tometer: 4/10

15 Oct 2021

Shitty day yesterday, mum took turn for worse and now in coma, Raman and Niru sitting by her side, maintaining vigil, does not seem too distressed. Got the call on way to hospital with Herself, and been on phone regularly since then. Not so good news at hospital either as surgeon tried aspiration but no fluid and so needs to get to next stage – says will check what the NHS situation is, but will need mammogram, scan and biopsy if not surgery at this stage. Dampener over the evening and sombre mood since, brooding.

Again, the issue of whether to go to India or not, esp with Herself situation, and what else can/not do – maybe cancel Diwali, no energy and Herself feels the need to avoid crowds etc in case needs to go to hospital. Will see what the surgeon says today and talk to Dev and then take the call on what next; do need to make some decisions. If not Covid then would have got on the next flight, the additional rigmarole – reason or excuse?

Read Sunjeev Sahota's *China Room* book about immigrants and life in Punjab early 20th century, sad tale in rural, uneducated communities in 1920s and price still being paid by immigrants. Why do people migrate and do they regret having done so, later on? Ploughing through Chaudhuri's tome and *Mountain Tales* by Saumya Roy about people living in and off the waste mountain in Deonar in Mumbai- the stuff gentle folk do not see at all, engrossed in their mindless pursuit of enjoyment.

Heard from Subhash Daga, says Achla passed away last year and he now lives in a senior citizen complex near Pune, must go and see him when next over- what an amazing couple and such selfless life, has written a manual based on his experiences about caring for poor children.

Going for lunch to Brian's still – says better to do somethings, does one go on living as planned or withdraw, as energy low – start by cancelling visit to AONB meeting,

will dial in on Zoom instead, one step at a time only. Will review tomorrow. Foreign butchers save our bacon says news headline – about allowing workers to come and work in abattoirs, ironic – result of Brexit, but laugh at the journalist use of title.

S**tometer: 6/10

16 Oct 2021

Finally- mum passed away early morning; Raman rang just before to say slowing down and then it was over. Looked that way yesterday as was wasting in front of eyes, breathing getting hard, Raman and maids taking turns keeping her comfortable, clearing constant drooling, atleast did not seem in distress for last 48 hours- relief. Strange how the body disintegrates, muscles going, mouth shrunk, with all effort on breathing – hanging on to life. Dr Pandeya came to certify and then it was straight to cremation – no frills, Raman and Adi went, Niru, Aneeta and Ruchi stayed at home as is customary. Spoke to Raman afterwards, says must not go to India and should look after Herself- both he and Ruchi very upset with news, tell them not to get ahead and become upset as do not really know what the lump is. Ruchi esp very tearful – had a long chat, in shock, was always special for mum- the grandchild who spent most time with her, remind her of it and to feel blessed, gave so much joy to mum. Kuki also rang tearful and very reflective about life.

Been up since 3 am, listening to Shabad Kirtan and writing an anthology about last 6 weeks with mum – sent it around to all. Something to console everyone, hopefully. Maids decide to leave straight away, not wanting to stay – guess may be superstitious, Raman says will look after them. Raman insisted on putting names of all family members on the obituary. Biggest regret that mum did not get to meet Herself; she had sensed over the years that things were not right but had never been told about personal problems, partly to avoid upsetting her; she would have liked Herself and would have been at peace that her son was in a good place finally,

Chat with Herself, cancel Diwali and focus on selves for a few days now, not look too far ahead. Take stock of what is important. Weather permitting off to allotment for clearing and a walk with mutts there. Had a good lunch and walk to Pincyn Llys with Brian yesterday – though bit preoccupied with stuff, had gone to some effort to make a great vege soup, and has done a fantastic job with the house. Really is such a clever man. Cefyn also rang to check yesterday. So grateful for all the friends. Herself suggests go and see Promod tomorrow- so will check.

S**tometer: 6/10



17 Oct 2021

In a fog yesterday, messages from lots of people amongst others long lost cousins popped up and close friends remembered their time with mum from college days onwards; was a special woman no doubt. Son #1 rang for a long chat, as it happens, he was off to wake of a close friend who had committed suicide. It's a tough world and need to spread compassion and love, not anger, and definitely not hold onto grudges.

Spoke to Raman and agreed not to go back now, see what happens with Herself in next few weeks and decide then. Says Anita not going to Mumbai anymore. Get the sense that everyone is withdrawing and retreating into shell to recover; Raman certainly can use the time and hope he does. Do wonder if mum felt it was time to go- feeling had become a burden, can one sense that one is becoming an unwelcome guest? Have the impression that last few months were not easy. What's the answer, learning for Yours Truly- basically same as life lesson and which is remain interesting and useful – add value relevant to that stage of life- and give thanks for whatever is given?

Went to the allotment to tidy up and then to Prestatyn beach to clear head for a long walk, letting the mutts run free finishing with fish and chips in the dark listening to sea, balmy evening. Went to bed at 8 and managed to sleep till early morning when pee problem resurfaced, had gone away for a while.

Off to Chester for a walk and lunch at Koconut Grove and maybe Liverpool if Promod available – Tony offered to visit, appreciated the thought.

S**tometer: 3/10

18 Oct 2021

As Robert pointed out we are orphans now – even at his age (*sic*) loss of parents not easy. Long chat with Raman to help him reassess things there and recharge himself- as the American Indian prayer says: look after the living now, and remember the dead fondly but not too much. Says had a day out with the family and happy for him.

Buffet lunch in Chester yesterday, good for meat-eaters, as not much vegetarian, Herself happy though Yours Truly felt short-changed- not even Sambhar for dosa, so cheap and essential part. Hey ho, Herself not a big eater, so did not get real value for money, unlike some other diners there- really big people tucking in. Walked the Chester wall, fully, beautiful – strange sight of a group of people with daschunds on the race course below, almost like a race formation in slow motion, hard to describe in words but was fascinating sight. Topped up with an ice-cream by the river. Not a bad day.

Back to real world now, with its usual problems as news about industrial chicken farming, another pandemic waiting to happen as another virus jumped species in Russia and had to cull almost a million birds; and which won't be the case as desperate and unscrupulous businesses will ignore the problem leading to spread. In any case having finished Ray's book on Deonar waste mountain, almost inevitable and even surprising that there has not been more of this so far, given how some humans are having to live

Lot of hand wringing after killing of another MP, David Amess from Leigh on Sea stabbed during surgery, being treated as a terrorist incident. Psychosis rates shoot up during pandemic and Wales launches drive to stop 'brain drain' with nothing for young people to do to sustain the economy locally- how? Off with Susheela to see the community police officer to talk about race relations, must not be too judgmental and see what happens.

Waiting to hear from hospital for Herself, Tariq rings to say NHS broken and was thinking of retirement recently, at his age!

S**tometer: 3/10

19 Oct 2021

Mum's 'Havan' this morning, Herself joined it on Zoom. Raman had kept it small, says off to Nashik tomorrow to immerse ashes with Ruchi, be good to spend time together for them. Now sitting, brooding, after early morning start, Herself remains worried and keeps asking what to do today - maybe go out though weather atrocious, just have to see the day out; more concerned about hospital appointment.

Covid cases in UK higher than this time last year when parts of England were in lockdown, soaring infections – more than 40000/day- less facemasks/loose rules/waning immunity or slower vaccinations, who knows but obviously covid off the news now. Still no news re booster for Yours Truly. Meantime life resumes.

Southend to be given City status, a cause, late MP Amess worked for, in his honour, remember the place, when worked at the Southend Hospital in 1981, be interesting to revisit it sometime? Or wait till the Metaverse starts, the virtual world Facebook is pushing for – Nick Clegg, remember him, says will create 10,000 jobs in Europe to build the metaverse, and for what reason, so all become zombies? Trying to make science fiction reality – not sure want to be around in that world. Interestingly Pam, on the walk, yesterday, said wanted to live to 120 to see what grandchildren will be up to; Yours Truly wants to do mainly to get his pension, having worked hard for it. Got a letter about winter fuel- going to get £200 this year – one hand, not take it and leave it for poor and on other, the jerks will waste it or give it to chums, rather give it to own choice- have a regular monthly contribution to Food Bank anyway. Wales sets up a commission to review about independent status- mind boggles, but can see the sense to renegotiate relationship with London.

S**tometer: 4/10

20 Oct 2021

Drove to Brenig in the rain and mist and gave up and came back to fire and tea, with a book – *The Starless Sea* by Erin Morgenstern, not a usual read.

Mulling over last few days about past, with a strange feeling of calmness, not sadness or anger, and acceptance; this is how it is. Have a long chat with Ruchi, more pressure on her as knows that rely on her. Plan with Ruchi to see if can get Raman to come over, doubt it though. Also, not sure when will be able to get there, Herself says should go over again and do some sightseeing with him, go to Goa or somewhere to rest, but no rest now without knowing what is happening with the breast lump.

Covid numbers really high with experts calling for reintroduction of some rules – not acceptable to BoJo ofcourse, only does U-turns never plans, and despite worries decide reluctantly to go to British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO) conference in Birmingham, Herself keen and would like her to see an Indian Tamasha. Spend time working out how to add value – need to come out positive. May be see Anu – and Kajal if arrives- and Umesh on the way, get an outing to take mind off. Tony rings wondering about Herself, and Janet sends message about

Yours Truly's situation to close friends on Ramblers group – who write back, and cards from Mark and Val, Julie and Robert and Ceinwen.

S**tometer: 3/10

21 Oct 2021

One silver lining as Beryl happy with progress and wants to push more – must say do enjoy playing, though hard to practice more than 20 minutes at a time, so spread it during the day. Says will connect with someone who wants to sell a piano as struggle with keyboard. Saw Cefyn also, concerned about news of Herself.

Trying to remember how it was during first lockdown, as had a structure – managed to fit the essentials: meditation/exercise/music/writing/walking, and watched films, and did not drink (though even now the amount is very small, as get drowsy); time to reintroduce the regimen? Need to accept and get used to this life. The main reason for India is gone now – can't imagine spending more than a few days in Mumbai, and better holiday places elsewhere, except maybe Shillong if the NE work takes off. Must rethink RICE also. Herself cautions to take it easy, not rush.

Covid situation not helpful; UK worst with cases in Europe; BoJo and gang head in the sand – not even wearing masks in crowded parliament, Saj says no Plan B, ignoring experts, Welsh NHS CEO talks about hospital pressures- hope Herself gets in before clamp down, worrying, may be the new AZ antibody treatment, IM injection, will help. WHO says pandemic will go on well into 2022. No doubt that UK has squandered any advantage it had from vaccination – Dick writes back to say perplexed how politicians behave and get away. Following Trump, it seems who set the new model, sunk to further depths, now trying to launch own media channel- has enough fools to make it viable.

Herself recounts own experiences with parents esp father as did suffer at the end- what's the purpose of life at later stage, only reason is if give joy to those around and once that gone and become a burden, time to go. The main sadness is because knew Raman was struggling and had planned to go and live there with Herself for a few months to help relieve him, and did not get around to it. Guess mum got the sense of it, especially after Yours Truly left, and let go.

Nonstop rain, but looks like a break this afternoon, so book golf in case, need to get some proper exercise and will try the back 9 holes. Though reluctant, looking forward to going to Birmingham. Great rainbow outside window over breakfast, sign of something? Herself comes up to say the lump seems smaller, fingers crossed.

S**tometer: 3/10

22 Oct 2021

In shell, surviving and figuring out what next- the meaning of life. Important as does not look like things are going to ease up soon – first time numbers cross 50,000 and

Tory MPs – acting like Trump supporters with no masks in Parliament and BoJo refuses to consider any changes, car crash BoJo- rushing ahead and then skidding and U -turning when late, acolyte Rees-Mogg, a detestable character, says do not need to wear masks as they know each other, and tries point scoring. F**kity, F**k

Slow play – people cutting in and strolling, well golf is a social activity except for Yours Truly – and then rain put paid to plans to play the full course, but made up by walking the mutts with Paul and Herself. Finally, watched a film on Netflix, *Hello, my name is Doris* – with Sally Field, Herself does not want sad stuff so looked for comedy, like Sally Field, about an old woman mistaking kindness from young man for more.

Did some more work on various projects, no way to force the pace, will take as long as it does, so start calming down.

Catch up on an old one from Maria about Normalcy and Breakdowns and liked this

“A breakdown is not merely a random piece of madness or malfunction; it is a very real — albeit very inarticulate — bid for health and self-knowledge. It is an attempt by one part of our mind to force the other into a process of growth, self-understanding and self-development that it has hitherto refused to undertake. If we can put it paradoxically, it is an attempt to jump-start a process of getting well — properly well — through a stage of falling very ill.”

and in more recent one talking about Bertolt by Jacques Goldstyn, she quotes the protagonist:

“Sometimes people don’t like what’s different,” he observes with the precocious sagacity of one who knows that other people’s judgements are about them and not about the judged, echoing Bob Dylan’s assertion that “people have a hard time accepting anything that overwhelms them.”

Oh dear, Alec Baldwin let off a pop gun on a movie set and kills one and seriously injures another.

Rain again, windy, not for outside today so far but may be later. Looked up Welsh Govt site for learning Welsh and looks much better as after 168 days streak with Duolingo not happy with progress- will try.

S**tometer: 3/10

23 Oct 2021

Another omen, as read Popova’s latest newsletter where she reinvents herself as The Marginalian, she talks about her own journey over 15 years:

“In the margins of books, in the margins of life as commonly conceived by our culture’s inherited parameters of permission and possibility, I have worked out and continue working out who I am and who I wish to be — a private inquiry irradiated by

the ultimate question, the great quickening of thought, feeling, and wonder that binds us all: What is all this?

More and more, the curatorial aspect — the “picking” part of Brain Pickings — subsided, as did the purely cerebral aspect — the “brain” part — giving way to the editorial, the contemplative, the full integration of thought and feeling that pulsates beneath all things creative and alive. “

So, it all comes back to same, contemplation and reflection, to find meaning; it may take longer or for some never happen, but that is what it is; reading and talking takes one so far only.

Modify the speech to BAPIO today- change of emphasis, no need to get into details and keep it high level. Herself really excited, happy to see her happy but also anxious, hope she likes what she sees.

Anita says its one week now and goes to the temple, wish she had gone to see mum. Raman in Mangalore and ask him to rest and reflect. Subhash resumes his daily messages, had stopped due to cataract operation, very clever and pertinent messages except does not act himself.

Sleep getting better as pee urgency much less though still getting up 2-3 times, but manage to get back to sleep after. But not comfortable as if body and mind not aligned- not at peace. Welsh govt course good, though mostly about work situation- and so may be dual learning with Duolingo! Need to get on as going to be a long day, weather overcast but supposed to be dry. First stop Llanbedr to drop the mutts as Karen looking after them.

S**tometer: 3/10

25 Oct 2021

No daily entry yesterday; went to BAPIO conference on Sat and whirlwind then; stopped to see Anu and new family in Wolverhampton, wife Kajal lovely and son Sunny, big lad – but Anu hyper as usual. Stopped at Umesh’s on way back on Sunday, Dulcy as usual made a fantastic meal- and looked at some old photos from College days; sad at how fast life had gone and at the stupidities of the past, to be fair Dulcie and Umesh never deserted Yours Truly, fault own, thanks to Umesh’s personality with not interfering and never refusing if asked, very sensible. Herself delighted and made a good impression too. So, happy outcome.

Rest of time in between taken up with conference, the usual chaos – running late and short time, two hours of planning meetings and all went out of window and had to ad-lib, dinner and evening full of speeches till late and missed the dancing and the DJ, as Raman B and Katie had enough by then, had gone with them – lovely couple, so another success. Really worried about Covid as no SD, no masks, tried not to get close or shake hands at the conference itself but felt as odd man out, and these were the doctors, going to be a tense few days – never again, did it as Herself keen

and needed a break from worries. To be fair, did want Herself to go and see Yours Truly's glory days when was Chairman - bit of an ego trip.

Glad went though as way of catching up with developments, having been out of NHS for a long time; hindsight only now whether was a good idea to drop out completely and in fact cut off from support systems. But that's past and now move forward. Told speech went well and may be some follow ups. Not surprised, though sad, same old issues coming up – would things be worse without BAPIO, or is it in danger of becoming part of, and perpetuating, the system itself? Is it time to step back and reflect whether need to change- keep doing same and expecting different results way of working? Is Yours Truly becoming arrogant or stupid? Must admit that Ramesh has done a good job, lot of hard work over 25 years.

Sekar going to see how to expedite care for Herself, need her in the NHS system fast, nothing more to be done now as have used up all channels. Fingers crossed.

Pressure building with demands for Plan B – in England where no rules now, felt strange driving into Edgbaston Cricket Stadium which was also the vaccination centre on Saturday and not a single mask in sight. Numbers up and BoJo and team are heads down in sand.

Herself got the driving job (*sic*) and came back tired but happy.

No time for Duolingo or piano either yesterday, must make up and today carpet fitters coming- so clear up the space, hope do turn up. Mild rain still and will see afternoon, if clears nip over for a game, as no walking either.

S**tometer: 2/10

26 Oct 2021

Anxious times, in limbo, Herself feeling the strain, concerned about soreness/ache in ribcage at the back, same side as breast lump and imagining stuff incl multiple myeloma that mum had. Have booked a GP appointment this morning, and will try and push for hospital appointment. Waiting for hospital letter everyday. Own worry due to being at the conference and possible exposure – next few days anxious as would delay Herself also.

The intruder

Like an unwelcome guest
unannounced, unwanted
too late to shut the door
already in and settled
no way to chuck out
may go away in time
but when anyone's guess

She may have it
But belongs to both

Which pain is worse
 One felt directly
 Or seen helplessly
 Sink or swim together
 Join forces to see it off

Had a long chat with Raman about family affairs and again advise him to come over for a while and get own time, stop being busy. Few challenges, affecting Herself who needs support but low energy, under other circumstances would have gone to Llanbedr for a few days to calm down.

Did get some golf and managed to walk the whole course, some interesting holes near the end, good views up to the sea. Watched next episode of Blair Brown- episode re Iraq war, failure of democracy. Another whistle-blower- Frances Haugen warns about the power of Zuckerberg, controlling 3 billion folk, F**K. Blow all you want, this one has left the station, till sixth extinction. Dick sends video of Assange case, but what's the point of watching and getting more depressed.

Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebrations to go ahead, also some predictions today that number will fall, though another one about new outbreak in China. How to make sense now? No news of booster jab yet, must book flu though.

Off with Herself to GP and then to Liz who wants her old carpet in her care home room, so will pick from storage and may take Sukhdev's carpet to Llanbedr. Waiting for lull in weather to do more at the shed- rain/wind not helping.

S**tometer: 4/10

27 Oct 2021

Guess was bound to happen, as crashed last evening, went to sort out Liz's flat, took her carpet and got really tired, had to come home and go straight to bed. Feel bad as Herself suffering too, the GP was helpful in one way as asked for blood tests and Xray but not able to get the hospital appointment sorted. If nothing happens next week then may get certain things done privately.

Was worried about going to Liz and so got rapid tests at home before going, no temperature, just tiredness, feel hungry enough and eating well.

Amateur psychologists saying too much with loss of mother, not having mourned properly and now Helen, on top of background, all baffling and draining. Is it true- and loss of mum is adding in the background- after all have lost the bolt hole, place could escape to. Wish could go on a holiday somewhere, nothing to do, just be.

For now, staying in bed for a few days, cancel the planned walk with Debbie and Iain- again, they understand, and recover. Anyway, Wales numbers going up fast. Plan C being worked in England but no concrete action even as Parliament introduces mandatory masks for all except MPs- now if there ever was any faith in politicians this must surely test it.

Herself has finished her Hindi course, over 500 days- blimey, except still very nervous about talking in Hindi, only way to go and talk to people!

Went to Denbigh library yesterday when Herself was at the GP and found Knausgaard's latest book – *The Morning Star*- as usual big book, under 700 pages, but like his work and so started on that. Had a good chat with Shillong folk and discovered another angle, with possible collaboration with NE around AONB and National Park; Sandra wants Yours Truly to meet the Environment minister too! Something to pick up with Andy and John, will arrange.

S**tometer: 4/10

28 Oct 2021

In bed all day yesterday, though not asleep and worked on somethings including writing about BAPIO Conference and following up with Jagtar re race discrimination – not sure how many likeminded folk are there as mostly people want to be angry rather than be constructive. Alternating with dipping into Knausgaard. Still tired though bit better, focussed on Saturday, would not want to miss lunch with Simon, so staying put whilst Herself buzzes around, once an idea comes has to be followed and latest is sorting out wardrobes as space short.

Care for Herself main preoccupation, had blood tests and getting an Xray today, but no news from hospital. Wonder if over-reacting, and need to slow down, the anxiety is draining, not being able to plan anything.

Need to be grateful as do have a number of useful projects and have reconnected with friends. So do them well and enjoy, rather than crave more. The loss of status affecting access to health care only one part and should not direct what life should be about. But do need to stand up a bit more for what believe in, not go quietly.

Looks like will miss seeing Papaji as going back on Saturday, unless feel better enough to drive there tomorrow; some miscommunication about whether to meet or not got in the way, should have gone earlier. Always best to check and not assume, as also happened with P where assumed he was not comfortable about meeting and hence no reply when reality was, he had a family health emergency – b-in-law seriously ill in India. Cefyn very supportive, keeps checking.

S**tometer: 3/10

29 Oct 2021

No more Red countries – England open from Monday along with Wales and Scotland though how to square with another report saying double jabbed as infectious as those not jabbed – 40 % chance of transmitting to unvaccinated and 25% to vaccinated. The strategy clearly being take your chances so long as health service copes (what is cope as huge backlog and other winter problems) – free for all. Niki rang as Simran caught it in school and very laissez fair attitude as no need to

keep sibling at home, only Simran and until symptomatic, seemingly situation in schools crazy.

What was all the fuss about – ofcourse the acute stages with deaths were terrifying but the rest of the time hard to work out what would/should have been done. NDTV reports on 37 billion wasted by UK – not sure why the report featured on NDTV in India two days ago, bit of schadenfreude. BTW no sign of Dido Harding these days, and the Immensa Lab in Wolverhampton returned only four positives from 2400 samples (0.2 vs 5-8%), so no quality assurance. Lot of money made by some folk, for sure.

Another day in bed, catching up with work and doing some reading, made dinner and got tired. Went to bed early so up at 230 – started on You're dead to me series on BBC Sounds, funny and informative. Resting again today so can recover and go on the walk on Sunday- looking forward to catching up with XXXX who is concerned about YYYY going overseas to see family even though personally not well – duty calls says YYYY. Herself has book club meeting at home and so running around tidying up, guess better to be busy since anxious about test results and still waiting to hear from hospital. Also happy as David brought back the restored hall table, too delicate a piece for a small house, should be in glass case! Hope does not get damaged.

Had a good chat with Andy about the AONB/Nat Park idea – something to work on, drop a note to the local DPH and see if responds. Anyway, make a list of stuff that can be done and people who care- and looks like enough there, so stop moping and get on with life, once know how things are with Herself. Had a good chat with Raman also, making progress and feeling better, so another thing to be thankful for.

S**tometer: 3/10

30 Oct 2021

Out of bed last evening, showered, as book club folk coming today, good meeting folk though typical book club, only a few read the book – Razor's Edge by Maugham, and meandered all over, well into the evening but jolly good fun. Had forgotten the book but got reminded and some parallels with the current reading of Knausgaard.

Covid worries in Wales as Drakeford does not rule out more restrictions to save Christmas, numbers highest in UK, already announced covid passes for cinemas, theatres and concert halls from 15 Nov. Must book flu jab next week, no news of booster yet.

Facebook rebranded as Meta, hey ho – new label, same stuff and more sinister as leading to metaverse; good article from Sam Wolfson in The Guardian - Mark Zuckerberg joins the 21st century robber barons, who having colonized huge swathes of Earth 1.0 and looking to escape to other spheres of reality; the others being Musk and Bezos leaving for other planets and Dorsey going for meditation. Metaverse, Mars and Meditation – rock and roll!

Scotland first in world to use new diabetes test – C-peptide blood test to see how much insulin is being produced, to help better diagnose Type 1 and hence avoid need for injection, about time as too much insulin being used at present.

Get the save the date notice from Son #1. Off to Liverpool for lunch with Simon for his birthday, and Herself wants to do some shopping – lighting for dining room. Not do too much as keen to get out on the walk tomorrow, need fresh air.

S**tometer: 3/10

31 Oct

Missed again to write, in a rush to get to the last leg of the Offa's Dyke walk so no time- anyway, mostly was spent resting.

1 Non 2021

The walk was good, glad to be out on the hills, surprisingly lot of climbing with undulating hills giving the wrong impression, arrived to wonderful cakes- Herself there to pick up. Something about being outdoors, did forget the world and just being and happy; must go back to it regularly. Caught up with T, anxious about V who is getting medical tests whilst with family overseas; has bought a plane- two-seater, and says will take Yours Truly up when all fixed up. Also, good chat with John about AONB and NE India- fount of knowledge, and made a number of connections on health side, all positive stuff. Not too tired though jaw sore, one sided TM joint, does not seem like infection, so wait and see? Slept well also- not much peeing, got an appointment for scan.

No news of appointment for Herself, so chase. Still no news of booster either, whilst in England, being offered on walk in basis- why the hold up in Wales.

Met Gareth Davies, AM from Vale of Clwyd, ex-physio and serves on Health and Social Care Committee, must follow up with him.

State of the world summed up by Caroline Lucas- Climate, Consumerism and COP26, says BoJo an absolute disaster, is busy posing with no real action on COP26; ironic that the trains from Euston bringing delegates to Glasgow cancelled due to storms – wonderful picture in BBC of crowds under the banner saying Thank you for travelling by train! Over in India, Designer Sabyasachi caves in to pressure from BJP about its ads, after Dabur, Fabindia, Manyavar – any hint of inclusion/diversity is interpreted as going against 'Hinduism' – how low can one get, shameful.

The inventor of Tiramisu gives up ghost as Ado Campeol dies at 93, obviously longevity due to Tiramisu, have another slice. Wonderful story of Rob Pope who ran five times across US, as tribute to Forrest Gump, vet from Liverpool, well done man. People like him makes one glad.

Rain outside, looks filthy, so homebound and start by tidying up – chores to be done. Sukhdev said will call afternoon, may stay overnight on 4th.

Interesting read from Popova about Chlorophyll: “Although *the human mind has puzzled over why leaves fall and change color at least as far back as Aristotle, chlorophyll — which shares chemical kinship with the hemoglobin in our blood — was only discovered and named in 1817, by the French pharmacist-chemist duo Joseph Bienaimé Caventou and Pierre Joseph Pelletier. In a lovely touch of humility that distinguishes, always, the scientist from the explorer — the explorer, so eager to name the lands and landmarks he has “discovered” after himself — they wrote in their landmark paper:*

We have no right to name a substance long-known, and to the story of which we have added only a few facts; however, we will propose, without granting it any importance, the name chlorophyll, from chloros, color, and φυλλον, leaf: a name that would indicate the role it plays in nature.

And then goes on to say more but one sentence caught eye: “*Two centuries after the discovery of chlorophyll, a new generation of scientists armed with a new arsenal of tools unimaginable in 1817, in that abiding way science has of only revealing new layers of reality when it lets go of its assumptions.....*” .

Prisoners of mind.

Finished Knausgaard, final chapter about death and life very interesting – how rather than seeing it as a part of the journey became afraid and started fighting death; better to be like animals with no concept of death, focussed on just being. Good writer.

S**tometer: 3/10

02 Nov 2021

Spent sleepless night, wondering about Herself as frustrated with lack of progress, Robert sent message and still in Tiree, looks like will stay- no reason to come back. Covid toll 5 million worldwide, and no sign going away yet. No news of booster- GP says Health Board managing it, but booked flu, take what one can. Umesh cancels Diwali saying many staff affected esp with school children and also daughter not coming- certainly helped people focus on priorities.

All the news about COP26, leaders agree end deforestation by 2030- will any be left by then anyway? Royalty- Queen and Charles- and Arnie from California latest to pile pressure, Greta Thurnberg not impressed with grandstanding by politicians. Even avocado going off menu – each takes 320 litres of water; called Blood diamonds of Mexico by JP McMahon, Irish restaurateur; being replaced with dips from fave beans, green chilli, coriander and lime or courgette and pumpkin seeds- surely sparked culinary imagination. France: UK standoff on fishing continues.

Need to recover fitness, tired after walk on Sunday- not good. Sun out and chores to do in Ruthin, will drop in to see Cefyn and check the new café at the Craft Centre. Must ring contact re piano.

S**tometer: 4/10

03 Nov 2021

Do miss Llanbedr, as like the bungalow and find it peaceful and natural, trying to adjust to Peniel. The combination of breast lump and mum hard to manage, esp as feeling low about lack of (seemingly) useful work – need to keep busy. Mental stuff causing more tiredness.

Tried calming with Cefyn, tea at the new (reopened) café at the Craft Centre and catch up on various things – the NE project is potentially exciting. The MS, Gareth Davies, also comes back – will talk on Friday and the AONB folk excited – have asked Howard to set up a meeting. So, all in all plenty to get teeth into. Started thinking about revisiting Milroy Lecture – something to think about, not negatively but positively. Stephanie says has to stop as grant coming to end and has to do more as staff leaving and the project lost momentum, and needs to finish off.

Climate preoccupation of media, with covid back seat though Welsh Health Minister worried about crowds esp at rugby matches. GPs in England calling for masks. Scary news as Republican wins in Virginia, Biden just hanging on and hamstrung-welcome to democracy.

S**tometer: 4/10

04 November 2021

Diwali today, so messages popping up, feel bad to be the party pooper as not celebrating, respond politely and nicely.

Tired again, though slept OK, only 2 pee breaks, after hard work cutting back ivy in the bungalow – has grown a lot, will take time to sort it and shift the cuttings, and drove in the rain for piano lesson; do enjoy playing now. The jaw ache and generally low feeling tiring, low no interest in things. And finally have an appointment for Herself to see consultant on Saturday- will see what happens. Poor Promod getting worried, asked to go over and spend the night, and get a break- even take the dogs. Not sure, will think, says Herself, who is bearing the brunt.

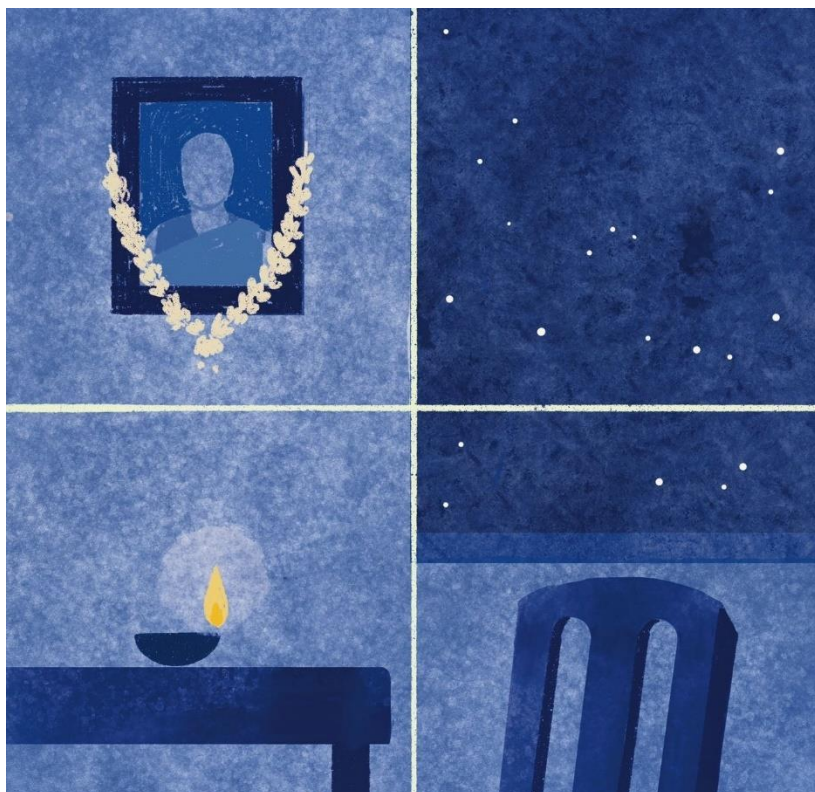
Had a long chat with Niru and Subhash- beginning to look old, and worried about them, do not take care, alone and even maid going off on leave, do not know why not move to Mulund and the big house, and keep telling Subhash to slow down as works too hard. Don't need the money, and so should spend on making life easier. Raman already found someone to rent the flat where mum used to live – moves in on 20th, is keen to get that side sorted, his way of coping by being busy.

Covid in news as Van Tam says hard months ahead with winter coming, and Jeremy Farrar resigns from SAGE – had tried to do so before also, must be a nightmare working with the politicians. Wallowing in sleaze as BoJo comes to aid of Owen Paterson, and MPs vote to change rules as did not suit them – one for them and one for us, even though privately Tory MPs says “Paterson was guilty as sin” and was “clearly over the line”. Hey ho, nothing new there.

Eleri sends BBC Sound link re poetry: The Poetry Detective, liked the first episode, got reminded of William Seighart, heard him at JLF in 2019, and on following up came across the Poetry Pharmacy, an actual shop where Deborah Alma prescribes poem instead of pills, based in Bishops Castle, Shropshire - must visit.

Can't let tiredness get out of control, so will head off to Llanbedr and finish cutting ivy, Sukhdev coming over later to stay- have booked a table at Nant y Felin, have asked Susheela and Phil to join.

S**tometer: 4/10



05 Nov 2021

Celebrate Diwali or not; muted affair by Raman and Anita also – no lights and no party, Yours Truly went out for dinner, enjoyable though did not like the food, like last time linguine drowned in creamy sauce, done it twice and so no more Nant y Felin; more of a meat-eater's place. Sukhdev good as usual, is an energetic chap at 80, though right thing to move to Sutton Coldfield- lost friends and misses countryside.

Susheela and Phil more determined to stay here and not move down to Dom even though big house. Well, not a worry for Yours Truly, not likely to have the choice. Ruchi made a very nice artwork remembering Mum on Diwali.

Still tired, funny one as all bodily functions OK, can even work/walk- did more clearing in Llanbedr but feel knackered, even slept 7 hours with two easy pee breaks; booked dentist next week and wonder if should start an antibiotic in case low grade mouth infection, as jaw aches. Or another mental thing with monkey out of control, which it is. Trying not to show to support Herself, though not a fool, knows struggling. Completely won Sukhdev! Has a way with people.

WHO says Europe again at centre of pandemic and encourages restrictions and speeding of vaccine, will BoJo listen – made another U-turn last night on Paterson who resigned. What a fiasco. Was sad, and surprised, to read that Paterson's wife had committed suicide last year, says quitting cruel world of politics. On the positive side first pill to treat covid – Molnupiravir- approved for use in UK, expected delivery in Nov.

Off to Harlech after breakfast, Herself wants to go out. Mutts escaped again this morning – dressing gown/wellies wild white-haired woman running in the fields calling them, crazy, why do people have dogs.

S**tometer: 3/10

06 Nov 2021

And another one- as M passed away yesterday, K distraught, will try and see her soon. By coincidence been reading Max Porter's book: *Grief is the thing with feathers* about a man coping with loss of wife and looking after two small boys with the help of a crow. Reminded of the crow that used to come and see mum – crow, crow, regularly on the balcony. Too much death and grief around at present. Got the book, and many others in a shop in Harlech - problem of going into shops; was a good day, busy but not crowded, walked on the beach. The recently opened studio/shop in Harlech lovely, started by an artist at age 72- dream job and place, overlooking sea. Went there after sending Sukhdev off with a hearty breakfast, do admire his energy at 82.

..... and had to stop writing this morning and go off to Glan Clwyd as Herself finally had the appointment.

07 Nov 2021

Life is not fair- it is C, Herself had the mammogram and US with biopsy of mass and lymph node, and now has to go back on 18th when will be told what next, more investigations incl CT and treatment - 06 Nov 2021 when C (must give it a name, Mair used to do it for her renal cancer, was it Bertie? and won't talk of cancer, miss her) was finally born. First discovered four weeks ago, though obviously some time in gestation, finally became a reality. Mind in turmoil, do not deserve this on top of

everything else, nonsense about pressure making one a better person, not sure how much better Yours Truly can aspire to, before giving up. What does being diagnosed with life-threatening disease mean- life itself is a death sentence and what guarantee as to how long one lasts, so why mind starts racing when news comes? Herself worried about being able to dance, certainly for some time esp with surgery will need to take a break as arm stretching difficult. Stop rushing, one day at a time and make sure the day well used, need to keep head and heart separate- scientifically breast cancer can be managed quite well with good prognosis, and any case premature to panic until more info in 10 days. Hospital well organised, extra Saturday clinic, and hence quiet and OP well laid out with SD chairs and not crowded as staggered timings- good to see one-stop model in action, remembering the time was on team to set the cancer strategy in 1998 – one of first Blair initiatives, did not believe its feasibility then and had under-estimated Blair's ambition, many of his NHS plans failed but somethings succeeded, for some time. And all staff polite and introducing themselves- Hello, my name is.... seems to have worked; forget the name of the doctor who started this initiative to welcome patients, sadly died very young.

Promod had asked to go over and see him, so drove up to Blundellsands, what a lovely house – beautifully done, art deco on golf course, sat and talked and then went for walk in the wind and rain. Being Bhai Dhooj, both applied Tikkas to each other to make sisters happy. Got fed and also given a take away. Another one with energy and always rolling with punches and keeps coming up smiling- at 74, and here is Yours Truly packing in at 66. Count all the friends between the two and feel very blessed, life is actually quite full/filling.

Drove back in autumn dark with rain, send messages to close friends, leave Herself to talk to hers. Read *The Slow Path* by Raynor Winn- couple who lost everything and became homeless and started walking and wild camping on the 630 miles South West Coast Path, remarkable story, not finished yet, and looked up to find has written another one – *The Wild Silence*, will order. Not quite like the Long walk of Harold Fry- read many years ago, when was in despair. Important not to give in, world loves a fighter, not a quitter – and sadly have done more of latter, need to stop complaining.

Greta blasts COP26 as failure, John Major attacks BoJo and the gang for bringing the party and politics into disrepute. The Guardian published list of BoJo's U turns; Holy Schmolly and the guy is still standing- people get the governments they deserve:

'Ignore Covid' to national lockdown

31 January 2020

The BBC quoted the prime minister as saying the "best thing would be to ignore" Covid around the time the first UK case was detected; a claim Downing Street declined to deny. Ministers soon had to take drastic action.

Mass community testing

12 March 2020

Mass testing was ended despite World Health Organization (WHO) advice that it was

vital. The health secretary, Matt Hancock, subsequently announced a target of 500,000 tests a day by the end of October 2020.

Bereavement scheme

20 May 2020

A scheme granting indefinite leave to remain in the UK to relatives of foreign national [NHS](#) staff who died from Covid-19 initially excluded cleaners, porters and social care workers. It [was eventually extended to low-paid workers](#).

Visa surcharge

21 May 2020

Johnson [backed away from a policy](#) requiring people coming to the UK to work for the NHS to pay a health surcharge.

Proxy voting

3 June 2020

Ministers dropped their opposition to allowing proxy voting for shielding MPs [amid significant opposition](#).

Marcus Rashford's free school meals campaign

16 June 2020

Johnson belatedly bowed to pressure to help feed hungry children outside school term time, insisting he had been unaware of his own government's concerted fight against the [England](#) footballer's campaign.

NHS app

18 June 2020

Several months and millions of pounds after backing an NHS anti-Covid app, ministers [finally acknowledged](#) it would not work.

Reopening primary schools

Advertisement

9 June 2020

Johnson insisted primary schools in England [should reopen](#). But ministers eventually agreed to listen to experts who had warned the plan was unworkable.

Face coverings in shops

14 July 2020

The government insisted face coverings should not be mandatory in shops because people would not be in close proximity for long. Weeks later, they [became mandatory](#) in England.

Huawei ban

14 July 2020

Johnson had ignored Washington's warnings that Huawei posed a threat. But he

backtracked and [it was announced](#) that Huawei kit would be stripped out of the 5G phone networks.

Local contact tracers

10 August 2020

Ministers finally agreed to adopt a regional approach to contact tracing – following the examples of some foreign nations – after months of pursuing a £10bn centralised contact-tracing model.

Exam results in England

15 August 2020

Johnson initially insisted 2020's A-level results were “robust” and the education secretary said there would be no U-turn on their calculation. Within two days, [the government U-turned](#).

Face masks in schools

25 August 2020

Days before secondary schools in England were due to reopen, Johnson [scrapped his government's plan](#) to advise against wearing face masks.

Eviction ban

20 August 2020

Ministers made a series of threats to lift the ban on evictions imposed during the pandemic – [including in August 2020](#) – and relented several times.

England's second lockdown

31 October 2020

Having ignored scientific advice in favour of a two-week national [“circuit breaker” lockdown](#) for England in September, Johnson announced a month-long lockdown for November.

Furlough scheme extension

5 November 2020

The chancellor had looked to wind down the furlough scheme. But he was forced into a series of embarrassing climbdowns because of the scale of the second coronavirus wave.

Marcus Rashford's free school meals campaign – again

Advertisement

8 November 2020

Ministers took up the fight against Rashford once again. And, once again, they backed down; [announcing](#) a £170m winter grant scheme for families struggling due to Covid.

Cancelling Christmas

19 December 2020

Johnson again tried to avoid making a decision on Covid restrictions and, again, was [forced to belatedly introduce them](#). The nation's Christmas plans were plunged into chaos.

Lockdown a day after opening schools

4 January 2021

A day after urging children to return to classrooms, insisting it was safe, Johnson announced it was not safe even to leave the house and [locked England down](#).

Health secretary's resignation

26 June 2021

Johnson accepted Matt Hancock's apology for breaching social distancing guidelines and [declared the matter "closed"](#) on the Friday. Johnson [accepted Hancock's resignation](#) on the Saturday.

Johnson and Sunak self-isolating

18 July 2021

The prime minister and chancellor were [forced to self-isolate](#) after coming into contact with the health secretary, who had contracted Covid. They had tried to avoid it, claiming to be part of a pilot testing scheme.

Foreign aid spending

13 July 2021

In his 2019 manifesto, Johnson promised overseas aid spending of 0.7% of GDP. About a year and a half later, he [cut billions of pounds from the budget](#).

Taking the knee

14 July 2021

Johnson [demanded action](#) against people guilty of racial abuse at football matches after being criticised for offering tacit backing to those who booed England's players taking the knee to protest against racial abuse at football matches.

Air passenger quarantine

17 July 2021

Plans to allow Britons who have had two jabs to return from amber list countries without [isolating for up to 10 days](#) were dropped in respect of France – one of the most popular destinations – [at the last minute](#).

The Northern Ireland protocol

21 July 2021

Johnson trumpeted the deal he struck over Brexit. But, within less than two years, his government was already [trying to unpick it](#), claiming it had proven unworkable.

Critical worker pingdemic

22 July 2021

An insistence that double-vaccinated critical workers would not be exempted from self-isolation [was dropped](#) as hundreds of thousands were pinged.

Afghan guards

20 August 2021

Ministers [backed away](#) from their initial refusal to support 125 Afghan guards who protected the British embassy in Kabul before its fall. [It later emerged](#) only one had made it to the UK.

National insurance rises

8 September 2021

Johnson was accused of breaking a key manifesto pledge not to raise taxes when his government brought forward [plans to hike national insurance contributions](#).

Vaccine passports

12 September 2021

Vaccine passport plans [were dropped](#) only two weeks after [Downing Street insisted it would press ahead](#). Within another two days, the prime minister [raised the prospect yet again](#).

Foreign lorry drivers

24 September 2021

With queues forming at fuel stations, ministers were [forced to rethink](#) their post-Brexit anti-immigration stance and invite thousands of foreign lorry drivers to the UK.

Sewage

26 October 2021

Ministers [announced a partial U-turn](#) after reject calls to place a legal duty on water companies to reduce raw sewage discharges into rivers.

Parliamentary standards and corruption

4 November 2021

Plans to immediately scrap the parliamentary standards system [were dropped](#) amid public fury, as the Tories were accused of acting to protect one of their own.

Cold outside but dry and even sunny, chores to do, may go to bungalow to clear up some more.

S**tometer: 7/10



08 Nov 2021

Finished *The Slow Path* yesterday – mentions crows also as harbinger of death but also with mystical powers, guess peoples' need to find meaning for things, always trying to understand and make sense; another remarkable tale of resilience, not giving up; interesting to see how Raynor became a writer, parallels with James Rebanks, both from rural farming background, it's not formal education but something more with lived experiences that makes one a writer, being able to observe and 'see', and talk?

Increasingly feel the importance and responsibility of bringing up children and relating to family, have to get it right first time; Herself says balance between nature and nurture. Not heard from Raman for couple of days and worried so ring him first thing, busy sorting out house, too much stuff, wish had gone and helped.

Meantime worry about big things like running out of Walkers Crisps, IT glitch slows down production, hey ho, rather than Tory plans to seize all important positions by appointing own to top jobs, insidious but systematic, and that people are dying waiting for benefits after terminal illness.

Will see if can walk with Tony this week- test new boots also. Herself came along to help tidy up Llanbedr yesterday, too much of cuttings with drive full, will need clearing up. Finding ways to keep busy; so off to do some more clearing later today, then meet XXXXX to talk about RICE and CGWM meeting this evening. Will go and see the piano one evening this week also.

S**tometer: 4/10

09 Nov 2021

Now its Mavis- Barbara texts to say her pancreatic cancer back and now terminal; remember her from the Jarrow March time when stayed with her, despite personal challenges, kept busy with archaeology and geology expeditions, quiet, determined type of woman.

Looks like up to self to make the most of RICE, not likely to get help, just words of support- will pick up once Herself sorted. Interesting CGWM meeting last night and opportunity to do something useful, even though not musical.

Lack of news or distraction as story of Llandudno woman, Elizabeth Lingard, who died of excitement in 1926 aged 90 -seemingly had thought she had a rare and valuable book, told landlady and then collapsed; no idea what happened to the book, but well-wishers have put a headstone on grave. Guess better than the usual stories with BoJo, following Trump and Modi, and tightening hold – never give anyone absolute power – interfering with Electoral Commission, quarter of Tory MPs have second, well paid jobs. Covid jab to be made mandatory for NHSE staff and Singapore to charge Covid patients who have chosen to refuse vaccine- guess will further fuel conspiracy theories? Wales to be smokefree in 2030- will there be a world by then, and any case air pollution worse than smoking and with climate change, smoking may not be the problem.

New Bollywood film – *Dug Dug*- the story of Royal Enfield motorcycle, seemingly there is a motorcycle temple with Bullet Baba; only in India but the movie getting raving reviews; send it to Tony, Dom, Anu and Asfahan, all fans of the Bullet, will look out for film.

Had flu jab and told should get pneumonia jab also- except supply erratic so will have to keep ringing surgery, and no news of booster.

Windy though sunny day, not walking today and so wondering if more hedge clearing and maybe golf? Herself seems low- who would not be, both not sleeping well.

S**tometer: 4/10

10 Nov 2021

Long chat with Ruchi, says feeling down, not sure what to say/do- pressures on young people with family in these times and then mum's passing, loved her grandmother.

It's what it is, though wish was different. Herself soldiering on, and feel bad as do not feel so good personally and becoming a burden on her; rather than supporting her, have become needy. Tiredness worrying and trying to beat it out by physical work- more hedge clearing than a short game of golf; thankfully sleep getting better.

Curry prices going up- Who ordered chicken spendaloo says The Guardian- as Brexit/transport/material shooting up; even Primark feeling the pinch from pandemic though plans to expand and revise range- the new must have Snuddie- snugly oversized hoodie for days when comfort clothes do not cut it! Pam does not like Primark says not eco-friendly and exploits cheap labour.

Covid pass extended to Wales cinemas and theatres.

Overcast but not windy, yet, and off to Ponderosa to walk with Tony, then piano lesson later. Herself busy with housework as got the new wardrobe and reorganising to accommodate Yours Truly stuff.

S**tometer: 4/10

11 Nov 2021

Drat, mistake, wore wrong socks and boots pinched- blisters +++ but did not want to stop as brilliant day and walking after a while so soldiered on; saw a beautiful fox caught in snare but no way to release it, gamekeeper would come along and shoot it later, circle of life. Herself upset when showed video, says should have released by throwing coats and pinning it down, used to do it when younger – was a rebel and tomboy, so in bad books.

Good thing not tired yesterday, must get back to regular walking. Had a long chat with Raman, seems much better and in control of things, off to Dubai also for Eisenhower, says will come over to Wales – be great; must get him fitted for walking.

Good chat with Brian – busy walking and going to music events with Paddy, seemed happy, and also with Mike G about love, families and the NHS!

Wonderful explanation about death in Popova's latest

"Death is our friend precisely because it brings us into absolute and passionate presence with all that is here, that is natural, that is love," Rilke wrote in contemplating how befriending our mortality can help us feel more alive. Nearly a century later, John Updike echoed this sentiment: *"Each day, we wake slightly altered, and the person we were yesterday is dead. So why, one could say, be afraid of death, when death comes all the time?"* And yet however poetic this notion might be, it remains one of the hardest for us to befriend and reconcile with our irrepressible impulse for aliveness. How, then, are those only just plunging into the lush river of life to confront the prospect of its flow's cessation?

The German children's book author and illustrator Wolf Erlbruch offers a wonderfully warm and assuring answer in Duck, Death and the Tulip "

Must get the book.

Herself feeling it a bit, disguises by saying more worried about Yours Truly, ribcage bothering, got to keep distracted and wait till 18th, going away will be good. Got a Penalty notice from Birmingham about not paying emission charge- £60 not cheap- will challenge it, the first month netted over 110k motorists for the Council – rich cash vein; the signage is appalling as if set to fail. Hey ho.

The world goes on- BoJo on defensive at COP26, says UK not corrupt, whilst being covered in ****

Medical stuff today- off to GC for prostate scan then dentist in afternoon, can't walk anyway with blisters on both heels. Sleeping better- getting more reconciled.

S**tometer: 3/10

12 Nov 2021

Must admit the service in the NHS was great; staff very helpful at the ultrasound clinic, clean and not crowded, also at the dentist – thorough check and did not want to do unnecessary Xray, and all manageable.

XXXX wife also going to have surgery for breast ca soon and today Herself's cousin had it; seems to be everywhere; Herself had a stressful tea with Julie who was in tears. No news of Cefyn, hope he is better. Need some positive news.

Won't be on Covid though as out of control with Austria restricting unvaccinated people, Netherlands introducing partial lockdown and new Chancellor in Germany pushing new measures, and New Zealand (the success story) getting ready for what Europe faced last year with mortuary fridges; all a mess. Not sure how the NHS will cope as main news item everywhere about pressures – unprecedented – with 6 million waiting for treatment; worried about care for Herself, need to see her through the next stages, hope does not get delayed. Mind buzzing again and wondering how to help the NHS- why so difficult to help, worth writing again to BCUHB, could do quite a few things, but would they listen; not alone as others struggled too to offer help. Hard to judge from outside, surely not stupid people in charge, but sometimes outsiders can bring a new angle, or release key people from non-urgent but essential work?

Elsewhere in the world, De Clerk dies and issues a posthumous apology for the pain of apartheid but Trump tries to block release of papers about attack on Capitol Hill to the committee; smacks of Nixon: whatever the president does is right- the arrogance.

Finished reading Namita Gokhale's *The Blind Matriarch* about a family during covid in India, light and interesting read. Still no TV, can't seem to get into it. Pensive mood, life seems out of control at present, need to calm down. Try and clear Llanbedr later, may go for the Ramblers walk, not with new boots though, need to test them a bit more.

S**tometer: 4/10

13 Nov 2021

Some personal disturbing news but otherwise was a good day yesterday, lot of tidying up of bungalow, good chat with Caroline in case wants her daughter to stay there, met Mark W from Mill Stream Cottage, medic in pharma research and then Chris M-J came over for cake and tea- enjoyed talking to him, what a nice person. And was giving thanks for having such good 'new' friends; the past seems like a foreign country. Woke up wondering why want to work in NHS or fight old battles-

why not bury the past, take Joe M's advice who gave up everything to do with work after retirement and took up painting, and is very good at it, in Minnesota.

May be start with George Resch from New York who sniffs out good news, to break doom scrolling habit; give thanks. How much more news does one need to decide that BoJo is a twit; this time for throwing Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe under the bus, her husband on 20th day of hunger strike. More than anything else, worry about his approach to pandemic esp as UK bucking the European trend where rules are being tightened; will UK follow suit and when?

Decide to go for the walk with ramblers, been a few weeks and be good to meet folk; like the bunch and missed it. Give space to Herself also.

S**tometer: 3/10

14 Nov 2021

Chacha Nehru's birthday – Children's day -today- as a kid in Delhi used to love the day as there would be celebrations, even occasionally bus trip to museum, Nehru name not PC now a days in India. Remembrance Sunday here- the Queen due to attend, Lest We Forget only in words, what did the world learn from the wars, nothing lasting.

Good walk in Dyserth yesterday, caught up and interesting conversations with Keith about mortality and Gareth about Faith. Keith sends the presentation he uses to teach care home staff about preparing residents for death.

Picked up the theme this morning over breakfast with Herself, very intelligent and well informed, suggests read up about Hildegard of Bingen. It's all to come from within, like art – true creation is hard and comes only to 'obsessives' confirms Popova:

"No one can build you the bridge on which you, and only you, must cross the river of life," wrote the thirty-year-old Nietzsche. "The true and durable path into and through experience," Nobel-winning poet Seamus Heaney counselled the young more than a century later in his magnificent commencement address, "involves being true ... to your own solitude, true to your own secret knowledge."

And goes on to quote e e cummings

"As for expressing nobody-but-yourself in words, that means working just a little harder than anybody who isn't a poet can possibly imagine. Why? Because nothing is quite as easy as using words like somebody else. We all of us do exactly this nearly all of the time — and whenever we do it, we're not poets.

If, at the end of your first ten or fifteen years of fighting and working and feeling, you find you've written one line of one poem, you'll be very lucky indeed.

And so my advice to all young people who wish to become poets is: do something easy, like learning how to blow up the world — unless you're not only willing, but glad, to feel and work and fight till you die.

Does that sound dismal? It isn't.

It's the most wonderful life on earth.

Or so I feel."

The problem of course being Yours Truly talks but does not do, living according to others still, not own life. Herself says need to free self from the cage. The world will go on, own life will be over before long- so make the most.

But will the world go on, as COP 26 finishes, Alok Sharma in tears at the end- usual result with nothing definite, well he tried.

Get on with more clearing in Llanbedr today, be good to finish tidying up there.

S**tometer: 4/10

15 Nov 2021

Managed lot of tidying up- all hedges cut, yippee, does make a difference. Sadly, the right heel blister causing trouble, so taking it easy with walking.

WHO Chief calls boosters a scandal- says should go to poor countries to stop the pandemic instead. Drakeford sums up COP26 as Hope delivered but delayed and not destroyed, makes sense as India and China blamed for watering down with no real action of stopping coal.

Darrell Meekcom from Kidderminster moons at a traffic camera, as part of his bucket list (*sic*) and then a presumably Banksy of Bart Simpson with pants down appears on the wall there – gotta laugh.

Book on Denbigh mental hospital, just up the road, published by Clwyd Wynne who worked there- might be worth getting, biggest 'lunatic asylum' in Europe.

Cefyn poorly with flu and so is Mahadev in Florida. Too much illness around. Off to Whitby for a break today to get away, Herself wants to stop in Hull, will be a long drive; can't see Anne as busy and not sure about seeing others, past is past.

Did not sleep, up at 3 so caught up with Poetry Detective on BBC Sounds, Raman sends a newsletter- More To That – about Nothingness of Money, resonated so looked up and now subscribed to it. Herself does not like heavy stuff, though does think about them, worried about Simon.

S**tometer: 4/10

16 Nov 2021

Arrived in Whitby last evening after a detour through Manchester as car warning lights on - Qamar tried to fix with no improvement so taking it easy and cut out plan to stop at Humber Bridge! Loong drive and over familiar route as used to drive from Manchester to York daily, and then covered the area up to Whitby!

Accommodation rubbish, designed by a cretin and very uncomfortable beds, and Herself struggling with LEDs- no way to switch off, covered with towels! Lovely town in twilight and dinner in The Star Inn in harbour, had the customary fish and chips with Herself having seabass, had two pints - not sure when drank these last time.

Herself in bad shape this morning, crying - so feel sad. Try and cheer her up, and take her for a morning drive first, beautiful quiet town, does bounce back.

No news today!

S**tometer 4/10

17 Nov 2021

Great day in Whitby- walked everywhere, on peer, beach and up to Whalebone arch, nearly 9 miles, Abbey fantastic, enjoyed Cook Museum- reminded of Cook's in Marton where used to go in Teesside, excellent Korean take away for lunch and dinner at Magpie's Fish Pie place, recommended by Cerisue- American size portions, average food and 1000% mark up on cheap wine. Hey ho but a good day overall.

Not so good accommodation- worst given costs! Herself had wanted to move, but sense prevailed and used the money to buy Whitby Jet ear-rings, rip-off at £195, but makes her happy.

The Guardian has series of essays on fixing the world post covid- bit like Keynes 12 essays a 100 years ago, may do one personally on the next big ideas?

Raman in Chikmaglur, sends lovely pics from coffee and spice plantations, beautiful accommodation, ditto Aneeta in Nagaland- both gone separately! whatever works.

Looks like may have to come back to Whitby as plenty to enjoy still, but today plan to go way back via Robinhoods Bay, Castle Howard tarted up for Xmas so give it a miss, too early for all that bling. Hope the car is OK.

S**tometer: 3/10

18 Nov 2021

Last day in Whitby yesterday another glorious day, walked on pier and into old town for coffee and croissants before heading out to Robin Hoods bay- went there when kids were young, one of their friend's parents had a place there, amazing old town, mazes and picture postcard; though sad as all holiday places no life out of season- same with Whitby, locals can't afford anymore. Stopped in Malton on way back, another lovely market town, Herself got some Xmas pressies and also picked up plants for the garden and allotment; bought potted shrimps for starters- never had them before, not sure liked them though crab linguine made for dinner was nice. Bit of lost feeling on the drive back as took back to own working days in Yorkshire and the dreams and the disasters then, but also preoccupied with past. Stress taken out on Herself, as usual. Picked mutts from Karen, happy to be back home too.

Slept better, no surprise after the Whitby accommodation, and was tired also. Big day today as find out- seeing consultant at 2 pm; Herself asks if worried- and not sure worry is the word, it will be what it will be, life is low anyway so can't be worse, though depending on what happens may be some setbacks like travel overseas.

Yes, yes, yes, New York subway can now advertise vibrators- parity now with boob jobs and erectile dysfunction pills- sexy or offputting? Walkers' crisps shortages – esp baked sea salt ones causing problems as due to an eating disorder four years old Ava from Narborough relies on them as a major part of her diet. Whilst fourth wave hots up in Germany and BoJo gets told off by speaker – you may be PM and here in parliament I am the boss! Theatre.

Popova quotes Simone Weil *"It is a fault to wish to be understood before we have made ourselves clear to ourselves."* And *"Keep your solitude... When you are given true affection there will be no opposition between interior solitude and friendship, quite the reverse."*

Few chores before hospital, and will dial into BCUHB Board meeting for a while to get a sense of how they work. Bought mackerel from Malton and will make it tonight, Chinese style with sticky rice. Must practice piano.

S**tometer: 3/10

19 Nov 2021

BIG DAY yesterday- finally got a name for the bugger, Invasive ductal ca, high grade, receptor negative and recommended plan is to have chemo after CT, and depending on that surgery. So going to be tough few months- best laid plans and all that. In haze since then and have told the close ones; prayers coming and grateful for support. Herself putting on a brave face.

Can't think of anything else. Gurpurab today so listen to Wahe Guru and off to walk with Tony. The world can wait.

Rollercoaster

Has left the station, no getting off
 At the mercy of the operator now
 Keep looking, screaming, crying
 Or hold tight, smiling, telling story after
 Enjoy the ride for now, it too will pass

So many plans, much to do
 Spent last two years surviving pandemic
 Living in hope of better times
 Travelling, culture, friends and family
 All gone may be, definitely on hold

Too early to talk of Swiss clinics
 One drip, two beds, side by side
 Find someone when gone and keep house
 Stop nonsense, throw away tissues
 Get out of bed and get on with life

S**tometer: 5/10

20 Nov 2021

Good walk with Tony- up Famau twice instead of Famau and Fenlli, lost way coming down Famau and ended up going back- hey ho; it's not the destination but journey. Went to see Cefyn- busy in studio, talked about Mair's celebrations, and visited Susheela and Phil who had trouble with new car. Herself had a ride in Paul's new car, had left Herself to own devices. YGC rang to say CT on Monday and so next week crucial. Got to stay strong.

Delhi choking as air quality worsens- 30 times norm, gas chamber; talk of pollution lockdown! Kamala Harris becomes first female President as Biden has procedure under anaesthesia - for one hour 25 minutes! NAO says UK Govt was not ready for covid- does one need NAO to state the obvious? Banksy's Seasons Greetings to leave Port Talbot for England- can't be kept in Wales: and just in time for Xmas: reminder as his art is a child enjoying snow on one side and on other its not snowflakes but ash! Can understand the ash part from hostel days in Delhi when the power station used to spew ash over old Delhi, can look like snow.

Off to Mold to drop car for repairs, bring Herself back and then to walk on Halkyn with ramblers. Weather OK.

S**tometer: 3/10

21 Nov 2021

Another great walk- good to chat with Janet and others, admiring views to the sea on clear day, Rod turned up after long time; newcomer Fiona, vegan retired vet, very nice and good chat about food/cooking, wants to try bitter and bottle gourds! Topped up with TV – yes, after a long time, watched the *Dark Horse*, true story of a community in Wales owning a race horse and winning the Welsh national, the central character, a cleaner in Asda, poking the establishment in the eye, remarkable can-do mentality. Normal people – often think of such folk, poor by material standards but such rich lives; where have we gone wrong as society, chasing success.

Got some ‘inspiration’ and start poetry anthology on living with breast cancer, had wondered about prose but stuck and so revert to verse, part journal, part reflection; something to do. Maria Popova, as before, rises to the challenge and provides much food for thought about death, loss and grief:

“Each loss takes a piece of us — a piece soft and alive — and leaves in its place something cold and heavy; each subsequent loss becomes the magnet that draws out those old leaden pieces, pulls them out from the reliquary of scar tissue where we have been keeping them in order to live, makes them rip through our being afresh. And yet the shrapnel pieces that surface are smaller and softer-edged than when they first entered through the open wound of raw bereavement, smoothed and contracted by the ongoingness of life.”

WHO very worried about Covid in Europe as countries start locking down and riots grow- having tasted freedom people not prepared for restrictions, life without fun not worth living creed, except playing with others’ lives also. But then common sense was never common and anyway not everyone as fortunate as Yours Truly with needs taken care of.

Sad to read about fire in Berwyn Books in Buckley, destroyed 400,000 books, many precious – soft spot for books.

Nice day outside, will go to Llanbedr and tidy up garden- Jarman talked about gardening for grief – and also start work on allotment; will keep one busy for a while.

S**tometer: 4/10

22 Nov 2021

Pootering around, clearing garden and drive in Llanbedr- Mr Jones says OK to burn cuttings in the field, Herself has other ideas for shed on allotment with expanding foam so will get on soon.

Nice chat with Parveen - very spiritual person and gets it about problems with society and need for new thinking, though pragmatic that not going to happen. May join forces to atleast give it a shot, if nothing else then help each other.

Tried watching film – *Le week end* - about older couple going to Paris for anniversary, did not get it so gave up, instead episode of *Black Books* Herself falls

about laughing. Had a bath (as a shower person) after a long time, nice feeling lying soaking.

Plaid Cymru and Labour form a pact with, on the face of it, some good policies incl free school meals, national care service and affordable housing- hope get implemented. Over in England £1 million a day still being spent on consultants for test and trace - shocking, the blood boils with BoJo's handling, £37 billion would have sorted the whole public health system for years.

Back to YGC today- family outing as Herself goes for more tests and Yours Truly to cough and show hernia; put mutts in car, arguing as Herself misses own car which is in garage. Time to change the banger?

S**tometer: 4/10

23 Nov 2021

Another one – as Mavis passes away, got an email from her will executors, feel sad so talk to Barbara – in Denver with daughter for Thanksgiving – and remember old times; dig out photos of Mavis from the time had gone to stay with her before the Jarrow March, such an unassuming and talented woman, with so many interests – geology, astronomy and music and great friends. Always respect and envious of 'normal' folk, just getting on, non-complaining and making a difference by touching lives. Don't have to be rich materially, as Clay Cockerill, therapist to billionaires points out also, talks about their problems with shame, guilt and fear, and worse is their progeny who get spoilt with no life skills having never worked at getting anything – no wonder fortunes get squandered.

Good experience at YGC yesterday – all went smoothy, off to Porth Eirias for walk on beach and nice lunch at Bryn Williams yesterday. Good chat with Raman also. Herself got a fancy Fortnum and Mason hamper from Dulcy!

Britons urged to delay festive plans – as Europe enforces stricter rules with German Health Minister issues stark warning – says by end of winter everyone will be jabbed, recovered or dead, and riots continue. Is UK far behind? Esp with BoJo who makes a hash of his speech to CBI- treating them like idiots with talks of Peppa Pig and making vroom sounds; if he can't even please his base in private sector, then what hope for rest; pushes through care policy with cap of 86k – so someone with 100k savings left with 14k whilst one with 500k with 414k, go figure justice. Never should have been given such a majority.

Anyway, enough of scrolling phones looking for news; The Guardian reports on a survey showing nowhere is sacred now- using phone straight after sex (40%, and may be during?) and on toilet (90%), with 99% using it whilst watching TV.

Wet outside, try and finish chores- have applied to get off GMC register, need to start new phase of life.

S**tometer: 3/10

24 Nov 2021

Reading Purushottam Agrawal's *Kabir, Kabir* book – knew somethings about poet Kabir but not enough, such an enlightened person; explains religion and spirituality well and challenges the current narratives in India esp the Hindutva ones. Send copy of book to Robert. Modi backs off from Farm bills after prolonged protests in Delhi, political move as concerned about upcoming elections in northern states.

No 10 says BoJo not unwell and has a grip on things – now then, denial means fishy?

Not Eureka but That's Funny the more common quote leading to discoveries as unusual observations prompt inquiry, quotes Asimov in article in The Guardian about some journalistic exposures incl what happened to migrant workers in Qatar – the most bloody world cup in 2022.

Pressure getting to both, waiting for hospital appointment – short tempered and lost in own world – feel sad for Herself who gets the brunt.

Tony might come over today and help shift surplus furniture to Llanbedr to empty the garden shed, will decide about Llanbedr later once Karen moves out. Must focus on what is important, not many years left and why waste them. Watched art programme about Matisse- reminded of his cutout work whenever see Cefyn's designs!

S**tometer: 4/10

25 Nov 2021

Finished Kabir book – one quote struck; Milan Kundera in his novel *Immortality*

“Woman is the future of man. That means that the world which was once formed in the man's image will now be transformed to the image of woman. The more technical and mechanical, cold and metallic it becomes the more it will need the type of warmth only the woman can give. If we want to save the world, we must adapt to the woman, let ourselves be led by the woman, let ourselves be penetrated by the Ewig-Weibliche, the eternally feminine!”

Agrawal uses it to point out one shortcoming in Kabir's work – men centric and not enough acknowledgement of role of woman. Not with standing, good read. Timely too.

Better than reading the rubbish news- as BoJo flouts another rule and does not wear a mask at Macbeth performance in Almeida theatre, even as reports emerge of more variants with high mutations in South Africa. Drakeford asks BoJo for consultation on covid probe after pressure to start the independent Welsh inquiry – with 2000 hospital acquired deaths in Wales questions being asked; surely local lessons? Disagree with Drakeford about not starting the local inquiry, though did handle better than BoJo.

Pigs injure golfer and force closure of Lightcliffe course near Halifax! Now that's news.

Good chat with Cefyn about NE India and Mair's celebrations, will follow up with CGWM. Watched the RIBA finals in Grand Design – some stunning and imaginative houses, though too modern and too much glass for own liking.

Getting booster on 5 Dec at 11:11, at the vacc centre; though things may change as Herself sees oncologist today; other appointments lined up, supposed to go into isolation after swab on Saturday. How long, and what about Yours Truly? Start getting deliveries? Will have to ask the doctor later.

Popova on gratitude; has this quote

"In his eighty-first letter to Lucilius, Seneca writes under the heading "On Benefits":

You complain that you have met with an ungrateful person. If this is your first experience of that sort, you should offer thanks either to your good luck or to your caution. In this case, however, caution can effect nothing but to make you ungenerous. For if you wish to avoid such a danger, you will not confer benefits; and so, that benefits may not be lost with another man, they will be lost to yourself.

It is better, however, to get no return than to confer no benefits. Even after a poor crop one should sow again; for often losses due to continued barrenness of an unproductive soil have been made good by one year's fertility. In order to discover one grateful person, it is worth while to make trial of many ungrateful ones."

Give thanks and live the moment. Thanks to Tony for coming over yesterday and shifting stuff, managed a quick blast around Gasyth too.

S**tometer: 4/10

26 Nov 2021

Dazed, as too much to take in – going to throw the heavy stuff at the bugger, with weekly chemo, and all that entails with blood tests and precautions – came out of consultation numb, so picked up car – fixed – and went out to Dinorben Arms for dinner to digest the info yesterday.

Wake up knowing it will be tough, but running headless not an option, got to stay strong. Spoke to Simon also, obviously very worried. Tony, Brian, Cefyn, Susheela, Raj all send good wishes and Herself talking to her friends. The sadness is overwhelming, but not going to dwell too much as have a purpose for now- to look after Herself.

As before, the hospital staff were wonderful, very caring and thoughtful. Herself keen to maintain status quo and keep going albeit knowing that activities will be limited now to minimise contact with others and avoid infection. Herself upset as will have to curtail own activities –no more ramblers walks for now, so remind her about being used to own company! The only break used to be trips to India but with mum gone

the reason does not exist- maybe she had premonition and left Yours Truly to focus on Herself?

Anyway, not sure of travel with covid surges as African countries put on red list in UK with new variant. GPs broken and exhausted, says new BMA GP Leader, but then has always been thus, though do see much reason for their frustration given how pandemic handled. And been really impressed with care given at YGC so far.

Saw a piano yesterday after Beryl recommended, but will check others before deciding- is a good idea to get one.

Storm Arwen – first named of the year- causing havoc, as strong winds and rain outside, hope settles as need to go to YGC for CT scan.

S**tometer: 4/10

27 Nov 2021

Goofed yesterday, did not read the CT letter about fasting four hours before, too much going on but thankfully staff ok and still able to proceed – though few weeks delay in reporting so will not know stage till then, worrying situation as the bugger seems more challenging. Managed to get her booster done yesterday, staff at St Asaph Centre, Katie, was fantastic – went extra, literally running down two flights of stairs to talk to manager, well done and thanks. The storm causing havoc, no way to get out for a walk, lit fire and sat reading. Got some books from the library – started on *Overstory* by Richard Powers about trees, reads very well.

Correspondence with Robert about Kabir- unparalleled globally and yet so little known in the West; says his writing going well.

Noisy, windy, lashing rain last night so not much sleep- Herself very worried and upset, what is best to say/do – it's what it is, not looking forward but what is the choice, will deal with things as they arise. Glad to see the offer of relief from Simon, says will come over whenever and in anycase he needs to do what he needs to do with his mum. Wonder what would have happened to Herself if not with Yours Truly- alone on chemo, terrible. But that would have been Yours Truly, and lot of lonely people, fate in case ill also.

Storm blows off the Covid testing centre so can't go today, rescheduled for tomorrow, hope break in weather as mutts need walking.

New variant named Omicron, already in Europe, Gordon Brown pitches in and blames rich countries for not donating to poor, increasingly divided world – Macron criticises BoJo for making policy via Twitter (guess where he learnt that) about migrants, but then BoJo not known to engage anyway as publishes plan for better links between Northwest England and North Wales except forgot to tell the Welsh Government! Is it a coincidence that The Guardian wants to bring back the Stupidest MP contest – big job as many contenders.

Grief overwhelming – Herself cries this morning, hard to see, so many things on hold now: that trip to India on A380 to see family, to New York and USA for friends and life. More read about the cancer, more depressing and working to reconcile – constantly reminding self about not the duration but quality of life left. Neither deserved this – after what both been through over years and just when finding some shelter, boom. Owe to both to come out well through the crisis- promise to do best. Offers of support keep coming- Alison, Cefyn and Mary offer their places for downtimes, and Umesh and Promod as always on standby.

S**tometer: 5/10

28 Nov 2021

Bit of retail therapy – for provisions, starting in Home Bargains and working up to Morrisons via LIDL, stocked up, as if under siege! Anyway, works and keeps both busy. Not much damage in Llanbedr, thankfully though quite a bit on roads with fallen trees everywhere, some really big- no wonder three people died due to them, and the mast of the ship in Whitby breaks; Arwen was strong.

Had a long chat with Sunil, is in India for niece's wedding, says Delhi is toxic and was not feeling well himself, November deadly time to be there. Anyway, patiently explained everything – as now only deals with breast ca – and agrees with the treatment protocol, calming manner, Herself listening in, as not met him, and both better afterwards. Once again, reminded of the kindness of people over the years, and sad at not reciprocating.

Omicron creates panic as countries start shutting down again, with even BoJo (re) introducing masks and tightening travel, now in UK, more or less deadly and whether vaccines effective unknown yet. Wales already had restrictions but now mandates PCR not Lateral Flow for arrivals- so Tony orders one for Vera who is due back next week from Indonesia. South Africa complains that it is being punished for identifying it.

May be answer is Nitrous Oxide- certainly popular during pandemic as 'everyone is gagging for it' says The Guardian; balloon seller makes money selling it outside venues, makes one laugh (*sic*). Meantime Snowdonia communities complain with numbers of tourists, they came, they climbed, ate their sarnies, littered and bugged off, leaving the locals to clear up mess; although it does bring £1.35 bn every year with jobs for more than 18.200 people (though seasonal and low paid).

Popova on Nathaniel Hawthorne about filling the interlude between youth and dying with meaning and happiness and joys of children, and her comments about *“Children, after all — like anyone we love — are mirrors for understanding ourselves, disquieting us most when they reflect what we most fear or struggle to comprehend in ourselves.”* True.

Off to get tested today, weather better, may walk on beach and get ready for Tuesday, Herself keeps worrying about hair- better to be proactive and cut short anyway?

S**tometer: 4/10

29 Nov 2021

Waiting - the worst part- to start chemo and to find out CT result, mind running wild, what if it is metastatic- Herself says feels it in her bones, hope not esp as recent bloods all negative. Will have to deal with whatever. Had the covid test- staff again very helpful, despite the storm damage, got the operation running quickly.

Went for a meandering drive - as rain and could not get to walk, brought the picnic back home and ate upstairs, admiring the views, lucky to be living here. The whole world has just shrunk - focussed on Herself and mutts in Peniel, and also exploded as feel so connected to everything, the universe, mankind, nature. Extreme of joy and grief co-existing - is that love?

Omicron panic worldwide - countries shutting down, will see more authoritarian states as will be used by clever politicians, waiting for science to come to the rescue; hope politicians listen this time, though hard to see an end as global cooperation, the key, is missing.

Herself keeping busy – says BBC Sounds useful and gives Yours Truly digest of whatever heard during the night; says has not slept well for years, since looking after husband and parents. Today get the low down on Humber Bridge. Do marvel at her interests and knowledge.

Off to get blood tests today before the D day and weather permitting walk on beach.

May call A as realise his wife had ca too, though each is different. Lovely story about man building replica of Taj Mahal for his wife in Madhya Pradesh, India and to celebrate secularism- good on you mate.

S**tometer: 4/10

EXTRA

Belonging

Just Be

No Longing

Grief and Joy – woke up with realisation of where I was finally – with wave after wave of grief interspersed with some waves of joys today; just keep looking at her, watching her talk, do things, occasional window to what's going inside when she lets the guard down, gets anxious and sad.

Has love come too late? Is it better than never? How much is enough – would another 10-15 years mean more than last two and next few? Is not life already

fulfilled, and what comes next is a bonus? Would life have been different if had met her earlier?

Tries to laugh it off when tell her. Says French have a saying about love and death being same.

Can not stop wondering, and worrying, if be able to overcome past, reminded of what Julian Barnes said about grief: *“And you do come out of it, that’s true. After a year, after five. But you don’t come out of it like a train coming out of a tunnel, bursting through the downs into sunshine and that swift, rattling descent to the Channel; you come out of it as a gull comes out of an oil-slick. You are tarred and feathered for life.”*

So, will things work out?

Worries will lose looks, plans to shave her head next week rather than let it come out in clumps; quick clean than slow, messy. But is not part of love seeing the person beyond the superficial – the inner beauty, and which will take more than cancer to destroy. And are not we running ahead of ourselves?

The world is shrinking as do not see anything beyond her and the two mutts, up in remote and windy Peniel, overlooking fields, sheep huddled under trees; and realise that I am Home literally and spiritually. Maybe we are both dead and already in Heaven – how could anything be better than this? This time, sitting upstairs, eating the picnic indoors as too rough outside, is enough; the deep joy, calm, peace. Alive in the moment, savouring, giving thanks.

Did it have to be cancer to make one realise?

Listening to Sahale – Djinn <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eu4-bmoXG3U> and Rumi <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWwY6K5Vjyo>

Unsaid

Will I cope
Will I do the right thing
Am I strong enough
Mind racing
Inevitable not insurmountable

Think different
Sent to test, make stronger
Sadness, grief, loss
Help to appreciate joy
Life’s rich tapestry

30 Nov 2021

The BIG day today as Herself starts chemo at YGC- so drop her off first thing.

Yesterday spent walking on beach with Herself catching up on housework, to keep mind from wandering. More good wishes from friends – Poor Paul clearly distressed, comes with scones, cream and jam and Megan sends emergency chocolates and a beautiful lily in pot, and many calls. Yours Truly unable to concentrate so keep flitting between piano, preparing for talks coming up and reading – really enjoying Overstory, more read about nature more convinced about need to preserve things, begun to understand Prince Charles who was ridiculed for talking to plants/trees. More discoveries coming up with plan to map worlds' vast network of underground fungi- trillion miles of it, and the Conversation produces another piece on importance of spending time in nature from Catherine Wright who has written a book, and another article on the changing birdsound – the soundscape has changed over the years as species die. Becoming more excited about working with AONB- so many possibilities, hope will be able to 'convince' and start some practical stuff. The western civilisation biggest culprit in destroying nature – worst thing that happened in the last millennium, good to see Barbados becoming a republic though will stay in Commonwealth, Prince Charles talks about the history of slavery in his speech.

Sadly, the western supremacy attitude still persists and pandemic hard to control because of it- have to support poor countries, is it really necessary to booster everyone and lower the gap to 3 months- where is the science? The challenge of protecting an individual vs the whole world- sadly both interconnected, the problem has to be reframed in global terms – but not much attention being paid to WHO's concerns. Omicron is a bad hombre, and all in it together.

Moving deck chairs as Starmer reshuffles shadow cabinet - becoming more like Blair team. What's the point- the country needs an alternative, where is your ambition, what do you stand for, man. Do like Drakeford for putting people first, esp after deal with Plaid Cymru.

Not sure what happens today – won't be much change, as will happen slowly but can't help worry about Herself, and hope both will cope. Has been speaking to Simon who is keen to come and spend time with Herself, and totally agree. The big factor is CT result- hope it is clear, as hard to consider the alternative.

Finally pick her up in the afternoon, feeling well in Herself, chatty as usual, sharing what she listened to whilst getting chemo and sends video of The tiger who came for a pint from YouTube!

Came home clutching bag of goodies with instructions. Says gets easier with time, and anyway weeks when only paclitaxel not as tough. Hope so.

Only one word to describe the experience says Herself: Stellar, could not stop talking about how good the staff are, and has full confidence in them. THANKS+++++++

S**tometer: 5/10

EXTRA

Start of chemo today, did not sleep much last night, just as well Herself is so positive, says will grow from this experience- both will benefit. Today is the first day of the rest of life.

I wanted to start a weekly series of photos of her on Tuesdays (Tuesdays with Morrie!) at breakfast to see how she changes – withholds consent for this scientific study, says should rather take pictures of doing activity, positive ones not of slow degeneration.

Wants to drive over hills- beautiful day – to the hospital to drop here there, and recounts all sorts of stories to keep it positive- who is the patient here! Says there are only 16 sessions and will be ticking one off today, so only 15 to go and before you know it will be over. And sees chemo as something to be embraced, and not as a problem- it has come to help her, even though rough; tough love.

Come home after dropping her to find this WhatsApp from her

"It's all a mistake, I'm not ill! And we've won 8million quid and ten years of ageing have been reduced 😊 oh and the shit you see dropping on you is from the squadron of flying pigs going over 🐷🐷🐷"

Have a good cry at home, mutts also clingy – can sense it.

Listening to Bhajans – and Vichar from Maskeen Ji
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aw8dZV8Ye2A>

01 Dec 2021

Sorted out arrangements at home, whilst Herself at hospital yesterday; must be disciplined with medication and watch out as chemo starts working in 3-4 days, says will hit on Thursday/Friday after stops steroids, but thankfully next two visits – when only get Paclitaxel, as opposed to the combination with Carboplatin (CP regimen)– will be easier. No point thinking, will deal with what comes.

Worked on various projects- got two teaching sessions next few days and had a good chat with Wyn Thomas re CGWM – has given some ideas on how to develop own role as trustee and also about linking with Bangor University; very interesting and helpful conversation and hopefully something to build on.

Keeping an eye on Omicron as panic starts- jabbing being accelerated, government scales up operations as trying to get it to everyone, may be children soon too. Clearly spooked the world, and SAGE scientists here talk about requiring “very stringent response measures”. BoJo as usual, clownish and contradicts own head of agency about rules, whilst Welsh Health Minister warns against Christmas socialising. Going to be tough as public mood different, not ready for more controls, even the supermarkets backing off from enforcing masks as worried about staff safety from irate customers. Interesting news item about shortages of vets, and more pets, the immediate worry should be whether can rely on self-regulation and trust safety measures in place for animal farming, breeding grounds for variants and other

bugs. Going to be a scary winter- between panic and virus; just hope does not knock chemo off course.

Weather turned again, with strong winds- banging all night and cloudy and rainy, so no chance of working outdoors to sort the allotment.

S**tometer: 4/10

02 Dec 2021

Omicron – anagram of moronic, says WhatsApp message, and perhaps apt as more countries shutting down; govt here stockpiles jabs – but what if not effective against Omicron, money in the bank for companies. BoJo under scrutiny again for hosting party at No 10 during Xmas last year- all squirming and hiding behind banal statement: “all guidance was followed” and not answering the question. But will it stick - even Macron caught calling him a clown. Though good to see Rees-Mogg wearing mask in parliament.

Bloomberg Covid Resilience Ranking ranks India 26th in the monthly snapshot, which measures where the virus is being handled the most effectively with the least social and economic upheaval. Big change from earlier this year but wonder what will happen now as delays start of international flights. Anyway, Delhi is a doomed city as air pollution stays high with no end in sight.

Herself OK, though looks like reacting to something – with facial flushing and swelling, need to check with hospital; will see what happens later today and tomorrow as medication changes and steroids stopped then, worries that will feel worse.

Spending more time with Herself - and strangely find self laughing - has a huge repertoire of very interesting stuff and having lived a rich life; had forgotten what it means to just laugh. Not much news from Raman, looks like busy. Life changing here anyway- finally made the decision to stop GMC registration – 1 Dec 2021, after 41 years, finished. Getting the letter after passing the PLAB test was a surprise – not many would have predicted that, and have been living in dread that they will find out it was a mistake! And 207 days on Duolingo learning Welsh, busy with other stuff, teaching students in India later today about leadership.

Finished Powers *Overstory* book – such detail and interesting story/ies; send email to Sumana Roy in case has not come across. Been listening to Katha from Maskeen Ji – very rich and his voice is mesmerising. Weather better, atleast not raining, and wonder if can get away for a short golf game; been a while.

S**tometer: 4/10

03 Dec 2021

Bit of a bump- as Herself getting facial flushing and swelling, not sure of the cause- the challenge is due to synthetic HRT she is on, scared stiff about coming off and which requires additional drugs- clexane for blood thinning; OK during the day but then hit her in evening, upset. Sit and listen and do whatever, which is not a lot, trying to look on the bright side- already 4th day into the journey. Interesting article in The Telegraph about lack of cancer strategy in Wales – did not realise it though so far breast care seems well organised.

Compounded by increasing realisation of how alone one is, who to really talk to about life, loss, love, meaning – but on the other hand why need anyone? Or why not be thankful for what is there- as good chats with Umesh (Birthday on 4th) and Promod (birthday today); many friends and well-wishers. XXX was wobbly too earlier as partner just had operation also, said keeps thinking it's all a dream (nightmare) and will wake up to find all is well, know the feeling.

Must not let all this overcome – need to stay strong and fit; had a good session with Mashaal group about leadership, another one with Salford next week. Dick sends his book – finally published, humbled to see Yours Truly mentioned in acknowledgement; amazing guy, feel sad at what happened with Charity. Really good chat today with him- interesting to see how both have approached the problem of (poor) education; his analysis being external, world view, and managerial and need for change of system whilst Yours Truly being focused on accepting the world as it is (was, and will be), going within through reflection, philosophical and making self stronger. Complementary views, by two old geezers, for what it is worth. Will anyone care, but atleast trying.

Sleaze and corruption under BoJo again in the news, but what difference will it make, as retain another seat in Bexley by-election, a seismic shift in culture needed but hard to see it happening the way the world is now organised. Increasing gap between analysis and practice – the Bystander Effect, everyone knows things need to change and then go and perpetuate them, hard-wired into society. Dick says just need to see what is happening in USA where the Republicans are defining themselves with Fake News and anti-science.

Are parties allowed or not during Xmas, the big question, and confused messages from government, still few weeks when picture with Omicron may become clearer.

Australia the drunkest country in the world according to The Guardian!

Tried watching *The Conversation* film with Gene Hackman last night but could not hack (sic) it so gave up. Storm Arwen destroyed some very old trees in Bodnant Garden – sad.

Herself gets a few goodies from friends this morning, and bit more buoyant, cloudy and rainy again- will pooter around; need to get used to this way of life, going to be a while.

S**tometer: 4/10

04 Dec 2021

One day at a time- and everyday that passes uneventfully bonus, filled yesterday with various things, Herself calmed down re facial flushes and back on regular meds, read a good book: *Disputed Land* by Tim Pears about family in Shropshire, one section caught eye: about Thinkers and Doers, Doers doing the damage whilst Thinkers analyse and dream but can Thinkers become Doers and vice versa, or inbuilt in humanity; and power lies with Doers. Not new but reinforced yesterday's chat with Dick. Robert feels has a while to go before, if ever, the pendulum swings back.

Had a good session with The Truth Seekers- the group of doctors in India – about leadership, sharing personal perspectives; always left wondering what they make of it, as hard to get any feedback, partly an Indian thing when youngsters stay quiet.

First data shows Omicron increases re-infection, still not known whether more 'deadly' and whether vaccines protect; Wales finds its first case, no wonder spreading as antivaxxers go to extremes – Man in Biella, Italy tried to dodge vaccine by wearing a false – silicone – arm, jeepers. Tussle between scientists and politicians- former advise and latter decide, but based not on science but on what is good for them, in the absence of altruism.

Big clearance of Larches in Moel Famau starting this weekend – 4500 tonnes from 26 hectares to be removed; due to disease, will change the look of the area.

Still very windy, and Herself wobbles over breakfast – been reading about TNBC on line – so spend time talking, say things more for self, not trying to be a preacher, as the fact is the ongoing uncertainty, no idea what will happen and when. After some discussion, agree that will live each day as if last and can go to bed satisfied if do not wake up next day; the only thing then is to be good and live in other people's thoughts and memories; touch as many lives as possible. Raj sent a moving message after receiving a painting by Herself from the Tu Allan exhibition, and that is what it is about. Decide to take a picnic, on a meandering drive Wrexham way today.

S**tometer: 4/10

05 Dec 2021

Oh dear, Herself spoke to first cousin, 15 years younger with same cancer and secondaries- so freaked out, not easy, get out to Lynn Alwen despite rain, short walk and drive over moors; speak to Mahadev, very reassuring – feel sad he is not doing doctoring/surgery anymore as is very good – and later in evening starts calming down, will reconsider her medication. Make a curry to cure her constipation- a good depth charge for the known side-effect.

Start reading Richard Mabey's *Essay on nature writing* and stuck by Popova's observation about trees in winter- when see their true selves, shorn of foliage, the outer dresses.

Better than scrolling news – same old stuff, Jeremy Farrar says pandemic far from over, squandered gains; only way is global effort; Covid nature's warning to see it as one world and one health, but do not hold breath. UK tightens travel and Wales considering covid passes for pubs, already needed for cinemas, theatres etc.

Eileen Ash, world's oldest test cricketer dies at 110! Started in 1937 till 1949. Volcano erupts in Indonesia, killing 13.

Anita asks what doing today- reply: get up, survive and go to sleep, repeat! But not a bad thing, so long as can fill the day with something useful. Glad to see Raman enjoying Dubai, gone for a few days.

Filling own day with getting the booster- at 11.11am and walk on the beach. More reading, some writing Herself had a good night's sleep and depth charge worked, says will stop estrogen, though worried. Just go with flow.

S**tometer: 3/10

06 Dec 2021

Should/ should not – PICC line or not, now or later, HRT or not, anticoagulation or not and thus keeps going around in circles as ongoing preoccupation with treatment, feel sorry for Herself, trying best, so end up having another chat with Sunil who patiently explains everything. Except ball in her court again and so decided to sleep on it.

Had the booster, quite efficient system, and ended up with sore arm and headaches last night, good drive to Llandudno to sit on Orme and watch the sea below, quite cold but clear, short walk as Herself got tired.

Came back and watched the *14 Peaks* film on Netflix about Nims – the Nepalese climber who climbed 14 over 8000 metres mountains in 6 months and 6 days; the last one took 16 years; says did it to instil national pride; telling comment that if it was a white man the world's media would have been there. True as do not recall reading anything about it. Watched snooker, another win for the Chinese- Zhao Xintong, an outsider wins, repeat of last year. The Asians are coming, White folk need to watch out.

Good article in The BBC about pros and cons of mandatory vaccinations, except does not help make the decision- on the one hand and on the other problem, even though concerns that Omicron here to stay and future pandemics will be worse, and already moved from pandemic to endemic.

Trump media raises \$1 billion – not surprised though sad, not going away, has hard wired his philosophy in the Republican Party, and elsewhere incl Tories in UK who are being driven by Right. Power and money driving the world- even Suu Kyi loses out as the Generals now jail her for four years, should never have joined them, did not clean up, what a waste. Feel sad since had lived in Rangoon (now Yangon) in the 1960s and when it all started with the coup by General Ne Win.

Closer to home, money permeates care sector as majority owned by private equity, looking for quick bucks – Jeremy Hunt asks for inquiry; always fascinated that politicians who had driven the deterioration when in power call for reforms later – remorse or opportunistic?

Why Indian CEO predominate IT in USA as Parag Agrawal takes over Twitter – combination of education and circumstances having been born and lived in chaos in India, so better able to drive complex changes? But are Indians more humanistic, will they create more responsible organisations? Discuss.

Ah well, more to do today as Herself goes in to have her PICC line, having slept decided to go ahead. Will try and talk to the doctor about medication also. Weather warning as Storm Barra coming tomorrow, no let-up it seems.

S**tometer: 4/10

07 Dec 2021

Another stellar performance- Herself gushes about the nurse who put in the PICC line, knew her mother also, and came away very reassured, after a rocky start yesterday. Need to get used to ups and downs, dreading result of CT- do need a break, could not sleep, the wee problem started again, partly due to soreness and headache from booster.

Omicron everywhere it seems now, may replace delta as the dominant one, just keep watching the scene. Coroners in England had issued 16 warning notices – very unusual – to avoid future deaths during the pandemic, supposed to be acted on urgently, and still no sign any lessons learnt at political level. Mattdoor tries to make a comeback- says regrets his behaviour, so it is alright now, forgiven, lead us again into disaster. Meantime, political games go on – BoJo's spokesman says all guidance was followed re parties- stonewalling; bit like the Nixon stance- when the president does something it is right. Worse still plans to consolidate ministerial powers and overrule courts – democracy in tatters. Patel let off already as PM the final arbiter – did bully but not break ministerial code, mind boggles.

Over in US, Better.com chief Vishal Garg fires 900 employees on a zoom call whilst here Martin Sheen becomes a Not-for-Profit actor saying will use earnings to support social causes- The Welsh Boyyo, Proud.

No jokes, as Viagra found to help dementia patients. Rohingya sue Facebook for \$150 billion – for stoking violence, hands up everyone who believes anything will come off it.

Herself in top 1% in the world as a learner on Duolingo and Yours Truly in top 2% of Welsh (not all) – spent just under 6000 minutes in one year; and what has one to show for it, but it is fun.

Taking Herself for next chemo today, wonder if will get to know CT result; have the CGWM meeting then teaching in Salford, before going back to pick up. Storm Barra raging.

S**tometer: 5/10

08 Dec 2021

Second chemo done- 14 more to go, Herself came back very reassured having spoken to doctor also, almost like had gone for a friendly day out with mates, says pre-med helps. One day at a time....

Storm raging weatherwise but will there be a storm politically, as video emerges of No 10 staff making mockery of party, shocking does not describe it, and now really despise BoJo and his merry band. Allegra Stratton laughing and joking about it – Herself knows the family as relatives live locally. But having seen what happened with Iraq war and then own Jarrow March protests, nothing will change, the price of democracy, so watch own blood pressure. Wales expecting formidable wave of Omicron by January, so agree with Herself not to take any risks for next few months as even suspicion or mild disease will throw chemo off kilter. UKHSA considering legal action against Immensa Lab- behind the scandal of false negative tests.

Looks like Omicron is not enough as possibilities of US led wars with Russia around Ukraine and China for boycotting winter Olympics; hellbent on bringing forth sixth extinction. May be not a bad idea as the soil will not sustain humans in next two centuries; good talk on radio by James Rebanks as sat outside hospital. Shame on Yours Truly's generation for creating a worse world than we inherited.

Nice email from Chris M-J, asking what is happening with the folk up on the hill and wondered about wind turbines in this weather, is concerned about people stuck without electricity for days now. Lovely chap, weather permitting may be able to see him outdoors. Otherwise, life becoming more limited, but maybe richer as can/should use time to do what is important. Meinir got carried away and posted Yours Truly Duolingo stats on FB, pressure, better get cracking. Herself says piano practice not a torture anymore as there is some semblance of music- after two years!

Started reading Raynor Winn's next book – *The Wild Silence*, enjoying.

S**tometer: 4/10

09 Dec 2021

All will be fine now in the world as everyone has apologised- BoJo apologises unreservedly for the video of the non-party in No 10, Allegra Stratton apologises and resigns as advisor, Finland PM, Senna Marin, apologises for going clubbing after contact with Covid positive and even Vishal Garg, the CEO who fired 900 staff on Zoom apologises for the way he did it. So let us all hold hands and dance, Christmas is coming and peace on earth.

And then he stages the special evening news conference and when asked about the video spends more time paying tribute to Allegra for the great work she had done than answering Laura Kuennsberg's question, all hail BoJo, the great leader. Cynics

point out the timing of the news conference as distraction tactic and also not to come across as another U-turn as had announced all the measures that should have been, and have been in Wales, in place. Had to switch off the TV as was getting really upset. Whilst Omicron rages and scientists predicting up to 1000 admissions a day The odds of BoJo staying on narrowing with Sunak dancing into No 10, hey ho and there will be 'Ram Raj' and race equality. Any bets on how soon Allegra will be rehabilitated, perhaps a Baroness; she is Godmother to Sunak's kids. In frustration made a donation to Change.org for their petition about police inquiry into No 10 non-party though going by the inquiry into Dom Cumming, may be a waste of resources.

UK joins USA and Australia in the diplomatic boycott of China winter Olympics and Olaf Scholz takes over from Merkel in Germany, that is a real loss, one of the few true political leaders, though good as Olaf was her deputy and so maybe continuity- though beware as power corrupts.

One good news was the story about Rajan the last ocean swimming elephant -lived on Andaman Island and was used for logging work there till it was banned, died in 2016; there is a famous photo of him swimming. Yours Truly's namesake.

Otherwise, a good day yesterday as Herself full of beans as if chemo was a girlie's outing, dashing around the house, no going out as lashing winds and rain, till evening when energy dropped, with worry about what next, awaiting CT result, how to answer unanswerable questions? Is she looking different already, perhaps drawn face, or imagining- says taste affected, also bacon did not agree, had wondered if need more protein as has been mainly vegetarian with Yours Truly? The gobi pranthas did not work for Herself. Was already in pensive mood as had started reading the diary, coming to the end of the year, surprised to read many of the entries, really, year has gone by quickly but also seems a long time ago? Going to work on it to make it publishable, as part of covid collection. Make sure not to take liberties with people named- anonymise or dilute affects the narrative, needs thinking. Can't be an anonymous diary as then no value.

Make a deal with Herself, to ask before going to bed if did whatever could/should have done that day – and learn how not to waste any time. To celebrate this, tried hot toddy- with small whisky, nice drink but not sure good idea, peeing coming back as problem, need to watch out.

Weather OK this morning, so off to Llanbedr to have a look and tidy up garden. Also plan for Simon coming.

S**tometer: 4/10

10 Dec 2021

Relief – CT clear; was sitting working upstairs when heard loud crying and then Herself running up, tears streaming, heart stopped, to discover was happy, Dr Jones had rung to give the news. One huge weight lifted, not over by a long shot but seems lot more manageable to go through chemo now. So spent the day sharing news with friends. Promod mentioned a film too, and so watched the *Extraordinary Journey of a*

Fakir on Prime, light and funny, reminded of the 104-year-old man who walked out of a window book. All in all, a good day.

Even the mess outside could not dampen it, older Tories coming out to criticise BoJo- Chris Patten did not hide his disgust, says not the Conservative Party anymore, been hijacked; but then that is what Blair did too. It is not the leaders but the sycophants who prop them that are the real culprits, morally bankrupt folk who deserve contempt. BTW BoJo and Carrie have another child, a daughter- how many children does he have now?

Meantime pandemic goes on, Scotland asking people to cancel Christmas parties, what happens in England unknown as policy in tatters, distracted by other stuff, and await Wales news. Though news of Bird flu in Wales not good- emergency measures being put in place to contain.

Sad to read about the misuse of Terrorism Law in India to silence opposition – and Modi speaker at Biden’s conference on Democracy, go figure.

Korea way ahead to change how society works- the Untact approach to cut human interaction to prevent spread of virus, except create another ‘virus’ as people get socially isolated; going to have the first Metaverse. Example of unintended consequences as German court rules that fall on walk from bed to desk during home working is workplace accident – Covid that keeps giving to lawyers!

The Guardian has an article about the speeches that were never heard- featuring Hilary Clinton’s (potential) Victory speech, all those who never got the chance; almost like a cycle whereby people choose the worse one like Trump or Bush (vs Al Gore) as can’t see the upside without experiencing the downside? Wonder how the world would have turned out?

Interesting chat with Sekar yesterday – nice human being and a good surgeon – always interested in learning more; told him to stop looking outside and go inside- send him Rilke’s Letters to a young poet, after re-reading them, what a writer, and also suggest poetry. Time will tell, though quick fixes and impatience a problem- the next miracle would be to help people develop personally fast? Why this rush- slow is fast, less is more.

Another windy, rainy day out there, but maybe a window in the morning, so will head out for a decent walk, not done one for a while and need the break.

S**tometer: 3/10

11 Dec 2021

Oh dear, out of shape, as stiff on the walk – through Soar and back via Nantglyn, must watch out.

Found in Richard Mabey’s book, who attributes this to Virginia Woolf, whose view of a journal was that it should be like “some old desk.... In which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking them through. I should like to come back, after a year

or two, and find that the collection had sorted itself out & refined itself & coalesced, as such deposits mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life....”

Which just about sums up own attempt, started reading it, and fascinated to see earlier entries – how much has happened in one year, and equally how little in the sense that life seems limited to few activities only, but is not that enough? What else would have liked to do- apart from maybe travel, friends, eating out, theatre.... But will something come out of it, and for whom? Dare to put out publicly?

Not sure when life will resume as talks of more stringent measures, Wales to start weekly reviews; otherwise, news full of BoJo’s antics, can’t get anything right, even lighting of Xmas tree at No 10 which was also accidentally switched on by Labour MP trying to get in, mistaking the switch for call bell. Sums up No 10. Dom comes out alleging more to come incl photos – who needs TV, with such a rich show going on. More to come as backstage, race started between Sunak, Truss and Hunt. Stupid public as all that will change will be they will be shafted but not as clumsily as by BoJo, no let-up likely in any policies. To add more drama can look to USA where documents emerge on how Trump planned the coup on 6 January. Feel sorry for Assange as may now be extradited to USA, courts but US assurance that will be treated well – believe that, from one of the most brutal systems?

Need more like Banksy who has produced special T shirt to raise funds to support the four accused of toppling Colston statue in Bristol – good on you mate.

Today some work, CGWM and AONB related- could be good projects, and then Herself wants a walk, says must keep fit as cancelled dance lessons, and shopping, another rainy day.

S**tometer: 4/10

12 Dec 2021

Lies, damned lies, full list of accusations against BoJo (two days ago in The Guardian):

Christmas partygate

Wallpapergate

Brexit spending

Misleading the Queen

Hillsborough disaster

Extramarital affair

Journalism

New Hospitals

Is that all? Need to do better, as photos emerge of BoJo at party in No 10. With not much else to do, rainy weather, busy scrolling phone; study suggests major Omicron wave in January, care homes restrict numbers of visitors – 3 at most whilst protest in Austria against measures, and politics goes on as Lloyd Edwards, a LD Councillor in Ceredigion blames migrants for ambulance pressure. What else can they be blamed for? Here is a non-PC comment – as Italian Church apologies after Bishop tells children Santa does not exist (the red dress was chosen by Coca Cola!); when/if children should be told the truth?

Astronaut Alan Shepard's 74 years old daughter passenger on Bezos 10 minutes flight to space; Prince Williams urges them to look after this planet first. Hey- why would they want to live with the great unwashed on earth; go up is the new turn left?

Managed to sleep, only one pee call at 330 – not bad. Been reading Raynor Winn's book – got up to the time when she starts publishing, moving account of a new author, respect.

Had interesting and useful conversation with Sandra re NE India – and following up locally, will be good projects, energised as can see a way. Let Cefyn know. May go for a walk with Tony next week, weather permitting, will get busy afterwards as Alfie's school breaks up for Christmas. Today though off to Chester, Herself wants a takeaway from the Koconut Grove, may pop into the Indian store too, partly as provisions for Llanbedr as move there when Simon comes.

S**tometer: 4/10

13 Dec 2021

Good trip to Chester- listened to John Cleese on Private Passions on the way down, good music choice and banter, always liked him, says comedy harder than drama. Managed a short walk along the river on the meadows, admiring the houses- some serious properties there, how the other half live, Herself seems to be getting tired now. Back home and watched a rubbish film *A castle for Christmas*, mainly for the Scottish location.

Interesting chats with Herself, shown video of children signing for Christmas, peace on earth type stuff and says does not like such things, as why shove it down kids' throats, let them be and play, why push religion on them; get it in terms of the rigid religion but surely some education re values/morality/humanity etc, and if not by celebration, then how?

Finished reading Winn's *The Wild Silence* – more about making of a writer and their love story – both personal and of land, but later part kind of lost it, the next walk in Iceland, contrived almost. Follow up always difficult? Herself has own views, without reading, that there is more than meets the eye- may be. The idea of walking, however, appeals to Yours Truly and sad not able to wild camp now, wonder if be able to go to Chile next year- Arvind wants to schedule the twice postponed reunion there, do not feel able to commit yet, will take a call in 2-3 months.

Yours Truly no one to talk, as struggling with writing; been looking at diary to see what to make of it and how/whether to put it out as part of Covid series; then reminded of Cavafy's poem: As much as you can

*And if you can't shape your life the way you want,
at least try as much as you can
not to degrade it
by too much contact with the world,
by too much activity and talk.*

*Try not to degrade it by dragging it along,
taking it around and exposing it so often
to the daily silliness
of social events and parties,
until it comes to seem a boring hanger-on.*

UK alert level up to 4 now and Wales to review weekly as BoJo calls Omicron national emergency as first hospitalisations happen and calls for boosters to all by end Dec – calling in Army, million jobs a day; serious stuff it seems; though some cynicism of BoJo – using a crisis to deflect attention? Over in India, Mumbai no deaths – second time since outbreak.

Debate in Oxford about AI, reported in The Conversation – can machines be controlled and whose ethics will prevail? Must confess to great worries, though will be after own time on earth most likely. Unless the war starts as Putin looks ready to attack Ukraine with G7 on the other side warning him, and in the background, China is eating your lunch – says The BBC as points out the WTO deal in 2001 when China invited in, the biggest geopolitical and economic event, with folk like Clinton thinking letting China join will enable democracy to spread in China. So maybe they world end soon anyway.

Herself needs to go for blood tests and flush PICC line at Denbigh hospital, and weather permitting may walk down and meet her there, need to stretch legs, and replenish reading- drop into the library. Herself worries about infections and diet.

S**tometer: 3/10

14 Dec 2021

Bizarre- had shared the earlier material on covid experiences with the National Library of Wales who were also maintaining a collection, initial email in March and no response and after phone calls asked to send another email four weeks later and then had a 'bland' response, and forgot about it, till yesterday when received another email to apologise for the delay, finally getting around to clearing up their backlog, and again nothing about own submission and suggestion on helping them. Not sure why admin staff, as NLW was shut anyway, not keeping up, working remotely- not judging but curious, as can't see an easy answer. Same with some other experiences including with Pensions.

On the other hand, Herself had another great experience at Denbigh Community Hospital yesterday- all OK. But worried with Omicron as news full of NHS crisis- hospitals full, first Omicron death recorded, cancelling elective work and Govt pulling out all stops to speed up booster, seemingly two doses with booster useless, pretty much, and the NHS website crashes as people rush to book and long queues outside walk in centre, lateral flow test kits running out. Just as well Simon got his booster done on Sunday. And asking for, wait, volunteers – WTF, no lesson learnt about planning, can't turn the tap on-off at whim; and take people for granted. Sadly, due to Herself's condition not going to physically volunteer, not that anyone wanted Yours Truly before. Anyway, big vote in the Parliament re restrictions and BoJo expecting rebellion, MPs not in favour, want freedom, guess due to economic necessity of constituents as life getting more difficult for the poor, half of UK families £110 (check symbol) worse off since 2019 whilst richest 5% \$3300 better off and today's talk of high inflation. Have become too cynical and do not trust media stories - is the Omicron emergency engineered by BoJo to deflect and also quieten the rebel MPs to push through his restrictions?

Walked to Denbigh with the mutts, the direct road through Lawnt still closed, repairs going on – saw six workers, none working, four sitting in vehicles, short stretches of new tarmac but is that 14 days' work? Anyway, had to carry the mutts across 20 yards which were tarmacked earlier as still hot, to protect paws. Tried another Christmas film with John Cleese, rubbish so packed it in and watched David Beddiel going on about the evils of SoMe, but then himself adding to it. He did confess was better when off it for a short time, so why not give it up?

Canada offers \$40 billion compensation to indigenous children and Pope going to visit to atone for the role of the Catholic Church. Good chat with Umesh but looks like R struggling – must be very hard for them with two young girls.

Off to Glan Clwyd for the third chemo session today, Herself packs a picnic for Yours Truly as will go to the beach to walk the mutts, and take a book in case- had picked a few from the library yesterday.

Sleep disturbed again, with some pee and jaw ache- guess clenching teeth at night and also a dry mouth with hoarseness. Drat.

S**tometer: 4/10

15 Dec 2021

Walked and then read Rose Tremain's *The Gustav Sonata* about love in its various forms, deep, late and unrequited, between parents, partners, friends and over time, quite poignant and easy read; surprised had not come across her before.

Better than worrying about Omicron as country starts shutting down- experts says could reach 1 million cases a day, as BoJo manages to push through restrictions despite revolt from own party, and so even if a fraction get serious illness the NHS will collapse and so look out for distractions and plenty yesterday. Former London Mayoral candidate resigns after attending a party; so how many have fallen on their

sword yet BoJo still standing. BMJ study shows rocket scientists and brain surgeons not necessarily more clever than general public; Bored Ape NFT (look it up) accidentally sold for \$ 3000 instead of 300000; talks about Ethereum the crypto currency used for NFT trades – a world so beyond own imagination, getting old; leave it for the rich who seems to have more money as research shows top earners give less to charity – why surprise, how else to make money, not by squandering surely? But there are some with large hearts as Tom Cruise sends two (yes, not one) of his special Xmas cakes to journalist Stuart Heritage who ‘stalked’ Cruise, seemingly sends to special friends by his private plane (wonder why the plane, surely not landing in the back gardens of friends though may be as rich enough). Leave it to them and take joy in the Hawthorn on Kippford in Dumfries and Galloway named the Tree of the year by Woodland Trust.

So passed yesterday especially as very doable, says Herself. Guess also putting brave face to support the Curmudgeon, esp as gone hoarse, can’t speak, who is the patient?

My girl

Very doable says she
 After one quarter of first round
 Three done, nine more to go
 Focus on diet, exercise, hygiene
 Leave medicine to experts
 Help them to help you
 Donot think second round yet
 In best hands now

Slept OK, not sure why feel surprised as hardly any messages on waking on WhatsApp or emails (the only two mediums used), used to get more but seems to be tailing off, may be folk leaving alone knowing about Herself, anyway what is there to say everyday? Plan to sort out Llanbedr for Simon’s arrival tomorrow, going there to isolate for a couple of days before coming to Peniel to stay with Herself. Need to watch the hoarseness also.

S**tometer: 4/10

16 Dec 2021

As expected, could not wait and so out came the clippers and Herself transformed with a perfect, hairless head, preening with her beanie on, have to make the most of such joys as can get; refuses to allow the Curmudgeon to join and shave in sympathy, for now. Forming a routine, being systematic and proactive, keeping up with all the housework, and busy knitting- anyone wants a woolly hat?

Not much talking with hoarseness, Herself wonders if pretended to avoid! Watch snooker on TV and listening to radio – Mark Steele on Whitby sends Herself off as feels is judging the town’s history with benefit of hindsight and today’s standards;

whale oil kept people alive then. Has strong views, and do agree, esp as no point judging past without learning lessons and sorting today's problems – Are we being good ancestors? What about slave trade now- sex trafficking and child labour and migrants? Poland building a wall along border with Belarus, which will cut through the Bialowieze forest, and guess what more likely to destroy animals and birds as barrier to their migrant patterns.

Whitty predicting more trouble ahead as UK reports highest cases since pandemic began, and Wales getting ready too.

Slept OK, though up by 5 and listened to You are dead to me on BBC sounds about ancient medicine- boy, were they dirty in ancient Greece, Xylospongium, sponge on a stick to clean after defecating. What are we doing now that will be looked on in horror by future generations?

Yours Truly keeping busy, bit of this, bit of that..... while reflecting on meaning of life remembering Frankl's writings, having come across Tolstoy's Confession – will order. Though the point is well known – there is no meaning, life has to be given a meaning. So enough for today, need a walk and get some more shopping – should have set up Click and Collect to make it easy, and later on meeting to discuss NE India links, should be good, something to work towards, and that's the meaning of life today.

BTW Bless her, Beryl rang up to check and to make sure still practising piano- reassure her, as do and enjoy it. Suggests get Book 2, great.

S**tometer: 2/10

17 Dec 2021

Herself suggests The Forum on BBC Sounds, another source of good stuff for late night listening when not able to sleep, as happened last night. Was OK after watching some exciting snooker – really good games with proper snookering and up to the wire- but in bed and wide awake. Good chat with Herself over breakfast – says now past the stage of being upset, why me, and having done the crying looking at the bright side – so much to be thankful for, good care medically and pastorally from friends and family. Decide to head off to sun and sea when this over. Though not sure when as Wales announces more restrictions with nightclubs shutting after Boxing Day; France restricts travel from UK; Queen cancels Pre Christmas lunch and even though BoJo says not locking the country, public mood low. Shoot the messenger school of politics as Tory MP, Joy Morrissey says Whitty should defer to elected politicians for decision making- after all is unelected – and UK is not a public health socialist state. Whilst patient waits 40 hours in Cardiff A & E ! No wonder have lost the North Shropshire seat, to Lib Dem.

On the positive front, first UK patient get the take at home pill for covid – Molnupiravir will be tested on 10000 people.

John Cleese complains over BBC interview about the deception, dishonesty and tone and the interviewer portrayed him as “old-fashioned, uncaring and basically harmful”. Does have strong views on what’s acceptable in comedy and had cancelled his appearance at Cambridge University after a visiting speaker was banned for Hitler impersonation. Says himself had done same in Monty Python and was therefore “blacklisting myself before someone else does”.

Mary and Graham visiting the area and suggest getting together outdoors – so off to the Lodge later, and meantime some writing, as overcast outside. They have got a pup and overjoyed, think their travels will be limited, especially overseas and so getting more organised locally.

S**tometer 3/10

18 Dec 2021

Herself reminds it is two years today since first dinner date, and so a totally pandemic relationship – given older with baggage and the times, to be still here together must be unusual? Certainly, one couple to own knowledge fell down much earlier; too much too fast. Anyway, personally glad and grateful.

Simon coming over to ‘relieve’ Yours Truly and to spend time with mum- has been isolating in Llanbedr, will do a swap today, the Curmudgeon will be released for next few days. Hopefully reflect, recharge and more importantly get on with the allotment-bit of a mess there, and no winter planting done.

Great outdoors lunch with Mary and Graham at the Lodge, staff very helpful and Herself enjoyed first outing for a while, though did get tired, says can feel the weakness now. Some nice messages from friends, and Joe from Minnesota reminded of joys of small things, and says looks forward to ordinary, uneventful days. Do admire him – such a nice person. Can’t say same of some here esp BoJo who has been ‘given’ an ultimatum by own party, talking of parties Simon Case been taken off the case (to investigate parties) as had attended one himself- be hard to make this stuff; anyway, the conclusion maybe there is no case to answer? Guess Case relieved, poisoned chalice to investigate. BoJo takes a leaf out of Trump book and slates media for the problem, how dare they ignore all the good stuff he has done for the country, well its quite easy PM.

UK reports another daily covid record and SAGE says more restrictions needed to manage NHS esp as staff illnesses rising too. Almost a repeat of last year.

Must pack up some essentials to take to Llanbedr today, going home in one sense but had decanted much of the stuff to Peniel, so almost like going away!

S**tometer: 2/10

19 Dec 2021 (Llanbedr- as Subhash says 192021, 19th day of year 2021, he does come up with interesting connections)

Home yesterday after over four months and to mark the occasion went up Moel Fenlli, beautiful day, sunny, clear though some low clouds which made it more enchanting, feel a personal connection with Fenlli, and glad as often on own up at the top as not popular with tourists.

One year since started writing this – 67 today – and looking back so much has happened – personally and yet so much is the same- as the pandemic rages. Herself had suggested, a few months ago, to make an entry each day about what would be doing on that day one year later. Could not get head around then but looking back on this day last year, do not think could have predicted how it is today – more likely to have written about being in India for the winter months with Herself. Rather than being in constrained circumstances, not just due to cancer, but also Omicron. None the less, going to be a good day; started with chats with all the siblings in India – well, and Raman says Mumbai almost normal, and with Herself in Peniel – who had a good day with Simon yesterday, and has planned a tea party for Yours Truly, so will head out there later today via Susheela who has gifts and a cake! And messages coming from friends and wider family members -adversity does bring (some) people closer. How can one complain, count blessings and give thanks.

Omicron sweeping through as Sadiq declares a Major Incident in London, and country after country in Europe shutting down, Arvind and Barbara say USA bad too – New York not coping with demands for tests and restaurants and theatres shut. The good news is due to three things the availability of anti-viral drugs, signs from South Africa where it originated that the disease is milder and recovery quicker, and Omicron though more efficient in spreading to others, does not spread so much in lungs where the danger is greatest, according to a report in The Guardian. Good news and in buckets for the bankers who are in line for big (really bigly) bonuses from the misery caused to businesses who failed – the mergers and acquisitions industry has been busy, and says have worked hard to earn it, sure, Georgie (Osborne) being one of the beneficiaries. May help BoJo decide to move, before get pushed out, no money in politics, better to leave it to those with money like Sunak or Hunt – the race (*sic*) has started, or is it a foregone conclusion? Is the country ready for an Asian PM – and any way will it be like Obama in USA, yes but..... Very interesting analysis by Gary Younge in The Guardian Long reads about what covid has taught about racism: “*No single event, or series of events, will remake a system centuries in the making, so ingrained that many do not even recognise it as a system at all. But such an initiative would be an attempt to convene in person, not just to protest, but to plan and ultimately strategise....*” So do not hold your breath as no way to unite, in a meaningful way, the disparate factions fighting racism. And the odds are in favour of Sunak, by the way, as going to be elected by Tory MPs not the public, and they won't think about race at all, only about what is in it for them. It has never been about race, only power and money.

Anyway, not much of a race last night in snooker semi-finals as Ronnie O'Sullivan wiped the floor with Bingham; interesting to see Ronnie still going, competing with Ray Reardon in terms of the oldest player. Herself likes to watch snooker, says reminds of dad who was into all sorts of games incl golf – captain etc, so was keeping company albeit from a distance.

Did wonder whether should make this entry, next to the one on 19th Dec 2020, so could see how two days, one year apart compared; in effect a diary that reads horizontally on daily basis and vertically on yearly basis; had a long chat with Herself yesterday, but could not get head around presentation. So, this is what there is, but only till 31 Dec, as not sure after that.

Now, time to get ready and get out to the allotment and sort out, need a good clearance, looks like a great day out there; must get some discipline going and hence (re) started the morning meditation and yoga earlier today - 67 now so need to look after self a bit more.

Finished reading Leo Tolstoy: *A Confession*, great read. Must have Faith – reminded of chat with Mair; the old saying about Believe and will see rather than will believe when see; somethings beyond senses? Reinforces the point about thinking too much, talks about milliards of common folk who go through life without the angst of the thinkers. Life is for living not navel-gazing.

What will be happening this day in 2022 – Herself recovered, no more curmudgeonly, life as should have been - having a proper party with friends, with must have balloons and the magician, hopefully.

S**tometer: 1/10 (but will it stay or the monkey get in, as the F***er does on big days)



20 Dec 2021

As birthdays should go, yesterday went well – bit of this and bit of that, on own and with others..... cleared the allotment, prepared one bed for winter sowing, must spend more time and use it, after all not going anywhere for next few months, so make it positive, caught up with Susheela and Phil – to get blessings (aka presents)- the saga with car goes on, lease car and Peugeot can't seem to fix the fault in a new car one month later, courtesy car not the same, concerned to hear that medical condition has recurred; and the grand finale in Peniel with Herself laying the tea, with first mince pies and then decorated the tree with help from Simon, who is a man after own heart as gave a most useful present – the much needed garden brush. Life does not get better than this. Watched snooker finals, good game till last stage when Ronnie O'Sullivan found reserves and steamed past Neil Robertson; the latter reminded of a younger Andy Coley, uncanny resemblance! The monkey tried but thwarted.. got you mate; Herself says getting better at it.

Does one feel any older after a birthday?

Bansal from College rang and reminded of the get togethers at his Roshanra Club – was meeting other friends there today, nice of them to host the Curmudgeon's birthday party there! Said the Club still has a dress code from the Raj days and men wearing Indian dresses – like Kurta Pajama - not allowed inside; so much for the hard-earned freedom.

Listened to BBC Sound Poetry Extra on the American Poet William Stafford- never heard of him, but a prolific and well-known writer; interesting to hear of his disciplined writing, at 3am every morning for..... 60 years; said do four things: write the date (to make a start); write what did previous day (to get going- routine); a one-line aphorism: In a war there are always two losers (may form material for later too?), and a poem of the day. Food for thought, but Yours Truly Truly undisciplined or disciplinable? Or can he- any ideas on what next after the diary?

Or easier be a commentator, especially on the news, and rant like when see pic of BoJo sitting in Garden with wine and pizza, and that's only the work meeting, wonder what they do when it is a party; one man's party is another man's work? While Saj getting ready to shift the blame as hits out at unvaccinated- many of whom would have it done if only they had any faith in leaders, no wonder conspiracy theorists have followings. Say "Not let perfection be the enemy of the good" – in response to advice from SAGE about restrictions, meaning what- OK to let some die? Better to read non-political stuff like the Japanese billionaire who spent 12 days on ISS, courtesy Russian space tourism, and describes the joys of small things in space – says peeing is easy, not sure will get space trip on the NHS for own peeing issues? Pret more like prat as promised and undelivered on the unlimited drinks offer – complaints pour can't be assed to make the smoothies that customers wanted; with staff shortages and anyway no way could the numbers add up, clearly a well-paid marketing consultant's advice? Was not there one like that years ago, was it to do with vacuum cleaner? Too lazy to look up on Google.

Have ordered a few books and also got some presents so should be OK for next few days, esp as weather seems to be turning, snow later this week. Better finish the outdoor stuff today, will burn the cuttings if no wind. Happy that Simon is with Herself and mum: son having a good time, and so leave them to it.

S**tometer: 2/10



21 Dec 2021 (or as Subhash says 21st day of 21 year of 21 century, aka the shortest day)

Must be the hard work on the field – cleared and burnt all the cuttings, after three attempts the fire started, and five hours later all gone, strange how green leaves and

branches go up in flames, in between cut the grass, turned one plot over and planted onions and garlic- late so not sure if will survive? Tired but happy, topped up with a beer, TV- train journey across Finland to Arctic Circle and started reading the book written by Greta Thurnberg and family – *Our house is burning* - had no idea her mum accomplished singer and about Greta's (and sister, and mother also, all on ADHD spectrum) struggles as children. Must say more one reads more depressed one gets with the state of the world and lack of real action on climate, only platitudes. In TOO difficult bucket. Anyway, slept very well with only one pee till 630, yippee.

Bit of a strange feeling as many old contacts not in touch after sent Christmas greetings including known phone addicts who (used to) respond quickly – is there something going on, unbeknown to Yours Truly? If friends from past no longer in touch, then are they not good friends- does being good means forever and ever? Or be thankful for the time together and now on own separate journeys – so let them go? Afterall lot has happened in last two years. And thank those still around? Like Judith and Carole with nice emails and updates, and Robert, Debbie and Brian on the phone, and that was only yesterday, good chats with all, travelling to children for Christmas though wary about restrictions.

Of which no clear announcements but much innuendo from governments; jabbing going at speed, nearly a million a day but then over 90k cases too. Planning to offer new drug – Sotrovimab - to vulnerable patients – will ask Herself to find out today as goes for chemo session. Moderna booster gives strong antibodies response to Omicron says The Guardian, so atleast one defence. Brown features again in the news about failure to vaccinate the world which will harm Britain, yes but not in the world of politicians wanting short term gains, and anyway BoJo does not care even as the pressure from Covid Victims' families mount about the 'Party/ies'.

Fame, as Herself, with the recent exhibition and Yours Truly as the new trustee, both appear in the FoCDV newsletter. Mum would have liked it.

Off to drop present for Alison – her birthday, strange feeling as remember last year, same but difference being Herself at hospital today, so go alone, and then get a few holes of golf.

S**tometer: 1/10

22 Dec 2021

Managed to plant the daffodils before going out yesterday, had picked them up in Malton but did not get around, was a big bag too, but do like them – hopefully “ten thousands at a glance, waving their heads etc” (Wordsworth poem) in a few months, and had a quick few holes of golf yesterday as waited for news from Herself who had gone for next chemo session, bit of a mix up and so ended up staying till late, so are human afterall and can get it wrong, but still says OK and the nurse was from Nepal so impressed him with her Hindi. Simon looking after her whilst Yours Truly on furlough.

The Guardian talks about things to be thankful for – the jabs, the jobs- as workers seem to be in the driving seat, arts and the fact that Trump coup did not happen and an end to hugging and birthday candles? Maybe, time will tell as for now England an outlier as most of Europe and USA shutting down, and even Scotland and Wales- Drakeford to announce more later today. Will BoJo follow suit- and in typical fashion do a fast U -turn? Or enough on plate with other stuff as Archie Bland in The Guardian piles pressure about the Downing Street Garden photo and asks eight questions including “What is the correct wine and cheese pairing for an important garden-based work meeting attended by a baby”.

Anyway, the whole situation seems odd, as Israel going for four doses of jabs and now there is the pill – Paxlovid – which seemingly stops virus in its tracks and reduces hospitalisations by 90%. So, what should be the plan to manage the pandemic, which is in danger of becoming a nightmare with almost daily tests and large numbers of sicknesses. The costs of the lateral flow tests alone must be phenomenal and no evidence of cost-effectiveness – wonder if NICE methodology was applied? Is there another way to deal with the pandemic? Who is doing that thinking and will they be labelled mad? One thing seems clear and which is to approach it as global not a country specific issue.

Going by the Thunberg family book- finished reading it last night- the above scenario of global cooperation seems unlikely; the struggle to get climate on the agenda is laudable esp given their personal backgrounds – it almost reads like a commentary on the state of Swedish society and especially the health system there. Few thought provoking quotes: “*When you are used to privilege, equality feels like oppression; Differentness is the basis of all art, and without art everything is going to slowly, slowly crumble into nothing; and Carbon offsetting is like paying poor people to diet for us.*” Not sure Yours Truly ready to stop flying altogether yet, but do support many of the other things mentioned, and talking to AONB Team about these today.

Carwyn Jones, the previous Welsh FM asks for less criticism of Welsh language learners; says to cut them some slack, get them to use the language and not to put too much emphasis on accuracy or worry about mutations; absolutely as Yours Truly struggles on with Duolingo. Used to see the FM in the past during BAPIO conferences in Wales, always supported. Though may take up the offer from Popeth Cymraeg and do their course esp their Unlimited learning via the Suggestopedia model!

After Walkers Crisp shortages it is McDonald’s turn as will only have small fries in Japan due to global supply chain problem – no more super-size me, maybe not a bad thing? And Hobnobs price to go up- the end is nigh!

Enough of that and off to Peniel to see Herself who seems to have manged the chemo yesterday, and Tony said Vera back and suffering from long journey, but glad home now.

S**tometer: 2/10

23 Dec 2021

7 am- with one interruption last night, if only, cracked it finally. On the home stretch says Herself on the short walk around Gasyth last evening – in good spirits after chemo though gets tired, last few months put things in perspective, and joys of small things as describes the landscape with hills and valleys from her artist's eyes explaining all the colours; the various shades of green, grey, brown, mixed with white, cerulean, and so on. Says has got the hang of the bugger, 1/3 way through first round after 4th lot. Good chat with Simon too, propping each other. Came back via Susheela to pick up Christmas cake, yummy and watched *The Unforgivable* with Sandra Bullock on Netflix, shot in Seattle – used to visit there; the scenes in the film at the fish factory reminded of Pike Palace there with the fishmongers putting on a song and dance display every now and then for the gawking tourists, before coffee at the first Starbucks!

The email from Iain Chalmers helped too- finally got around to replying to the message sent in March, says has been busy and wanted to do justice, one of the very few who must have read the *Homage to teachers* anthology, and as is his wont gave great feedback and shared his further work, good to see both fans of Dilbert management; must send the article to Dick. Does one crave acceptance/acknowledgement from mentors/role models – is not it normal? Not crave maybe but nice when happens, generosity of spirit important but then the recipient should also be ready, not all (give) take feedback well?

Omicron remains a puzzle as WHO says can't boost way out of it, BoJo wants to set field hospitals in hospital car parks- not the big nightingales as daily cases top 100k for first time, though studies showing virus milder with fewer hospitalisations and indeed may be the final variant. NHS Wales chief worries that one fifth of staff may be off work during January as armed forces support ambulance service and Drakeford announced return of some level two restrictions from 6am on 26 Dec. Is the bottom line that virus mild but infect more and so shortage of key workers? Mahadev says all is panic, the government machinery broken and wonders about cheaper and faster point of care testing; says planning to come back to UK in January from Florida.

Maureen Lipman adds voice re Cancel culture killing comedy, though no need for it as enough drama and relief provided by the politicians as Mattdoor makes comeback – even though totally helpless BoJo sends him to defend as others shy away from facing the media. Good article in *The Guardian* about Mattdoor antics, who is paying no attention to veterans suggesting a (long) period of silence.

Gay Santa ad in Norway goes down well, and talk of appointing a minister for women's health here, so may be some hope still? Reminder from Popova about the artificial divides between scientific and spiritual, physics and philosophy, subjective and objective realities quoting the greats like Einstein, Jung and Pauli who tried to bridge these.

Good email exchange via John with David Smith, of the Plas Newydd stonewall building project, about George Borrow's book: *Wild Wales*, seemingly Borrow learnt

Welsh and there is a section comparing Welsh and Sanskrit, will try and get the book.

Today however to experience a bit of the wild (not quite) Wales as walking with Tony from Graigfechan to Llandegla, says might drop into community café there- though feel reluctant about going into confined space so will see, but should be a good walk; much needed, weather looks OK.

S**tometer: 1/10

24 Dec 2021

Great 10 miles walk with Tony yesterday, catching up – serve as therapy session, also brainstorming – reminded of the chat few months ago about how things go wrong when the starting premise is false, eg, pandemic only solved at global level, and why AI not controllable as relies on humans knowing everything (unintended consequences otherwise) which is not possible; hence the need for the organising principle for solving the problem; will see if can develop this idea further, already see parallels with thoughts on NHS and race problem for example. Just like Einstein quote about given one hour to save the world, will spend 55 minutes understanding the problem! Not all serious though as wander into all sort out including gardening; how do you tell a good flavoursome garlic; you do not they do!

Also buoyed by another email, from John Chalmers this time, must be in 90s now – even children retired - but bright and writing on history of Edinburgh and created a great website, says with help of grandchildren, reminded of orthopaedic days. Topped up with *Sardar Udham* film on Prime about Jalianwala Bagh massacre, well made.

Did a couple of pressie drops, and got a BIG hamper from Cefyn, and Raman in Khandala, sends beautiful pictures of his garden.

But then Herself not feeling so good, says last chemo session disrupted and ended up with extra drugs, so facial flushing and swallowing difficulties; not sure if this or background S**tometer as poor sleep, probably teeth clenching as jaws aching this morning; Herself adamant about getting a mouth shield. Herself going to talk to Triage nurse also about own problems.

Omicron remains a puzzle, more staff sicknesses though hospitalisations seemingly 70% less, and researchers saying half the colds will be covid, and overall NHS waiting times shooting up. Going to be tense next weeks. Compounding misery for poor as energy bills set to soar by 50% without government action. Though Joe Lycett trying to lighten the mood in The Guardian write up - says likes to wind up boring grey people – had changed his name to Hugo Boss to embarrass the brand some time ago – and is Herself's favourite.

Time to stop pootering in Llanbedr and go back to Peniel for Christmas, so, put the house to bed today.

S**tometer: 3/10

25 Dec 2021

So, it is Christmas, like no other – cliched in one sense and so true in another; who would have guessed what it is like today, personally and generally? So many folk going to be alone- plans dashed due to testing positive, flights cancelled; Mary and Graham on own without the usual family and poor A in hospital and D on own at home – can't even get him up here. Herself thankfully OK, though rough last evening – fell sleep watching *All the Presidents men* (at own request) – and at night, and finally settled down with the additional medicines given yesterday, the nurse at YGC had a look to make sure was set for Christmas – really good staff there. Hope they get a good Christmas, deserve it. The Vaccination Centre staff have been given off for two days in Wales but not in England where jabbing continues.

So here is what is known about Omicron currently according to the BBC

- It's not like last year, as less severe restrictions
- Omicron is less severe
- But is spreading rapidly
- The case numbers are rising
- Do not know what will happen to the elderly
- Huge numbers vaccinated but immunity wanes
- Booster roll out increasing
- There are antiviral drugs
- The NHS and care staff are feeling the strain
- Next few weeks will be the key.

What will the Future look like? The Economist mentions 10 key issues

1. Democracy vs autocracy
2. Pandemic to endemic
3. Inflation worries
4. The future of work
5. The new techlash
6. Crypto grows up
7. Climate crunch
8. Travel trouble
9. Space races
10. Political footballs

Not sure how these will impact the Kingdom of Peniel atleast in the shorter term, and anyway subject for another time; there will be more futurologists popping up in next few days and most will be wrong?

Had gone around and met the neighbours and friends before coming up; great bunch of people though still some misunderstandings as mistake Yours Truly for the namesake in Glasgow! Poor Liz sad as stuck alone in Llys Awelon. Made some overdue donations – feel guilty about using stuff freely from the internet. And so now can focus on today, weather rainy windy, not white, and log fire going; Simon is the

head chef, did a nice dinner last night too, and looks like plenty of pressies under the tree. Looking back to last year, in better place and S**tometer down; time does help, along with life events and some TLC.

S**tometer: 2/10

Here is this year's message:

Nadolig Llawn a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda*



Joy to remember friends
 Give thanks for company
 On life's journey
 Each year more peaceful
 When count blessings
 More vivid with covid
 And various setbacks
 As one gets older
 Knowing time limited
 But ready for everything
 Stronger due to you
 Always in our thoughts
 Joining in spirit on the day
 Will raise a glass (or two) 😊

*With very best wishes
 Rajan and Helen*



*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year (Welsh, showing off as Rajan's Duolingo yearend report card showed he was in top 2%, mind you Helen is in top 1% worldwide for learning Hindi and is her Bharatnatyam dance teacher's favourite)

26 Dec 2021

So it was a white Christmas up in Scotland though not in Inverness said Rosemary, and a merry one with some useful presents like the slippers and neck gaiters, great lunch made by Simon followed up by the must have Christmas cake from LIDL with Brimstage (family recipe) cream; the Queen was very sombre reflecting on life with Philip and message of hope for others, and since no Christmas is complete without the mindless TV watched stuff incl the previously unseen Morecambe and Wise episode- folk were easily pleased in those days. And so passed another Christmas.

Not necessarily same for everyone – as Mumbai starts night curfew and Chinese close down Xian City of 13 million after 75 cases whilst here over 122k cases, over- or under-reaction as Wales, Scotland Ireland impose SD rules and limits to outdoors and indoors mixing, and guess England relying on diminishing virulence of Omicron presumably though BoJo probably more worried about further revolt.

May be the James Webb telescope, cost \$10 billion, successor to Hubble will come to the rescue of mankind – will know the meaning of life finally? But is this misplaced? As usual Popova pops up with relevant quote, this time from Oliver Burkeman

“This strange moment in history, when time feels so unmoored, might in fact provide the ideal opportunity to reconsider our relationship with it. [Older thinkers](#) have faced these challenges before us, and when [their wisdom](#) is applied to the present day, certain truths grow more clearly apparent. Productivity is a trap. Becoming more efficient just makes you more rushed, and trying to clear the decks simply makes them fill up again faster. Nobody in the history of humanity has ever achieved “work-life balance,” whatever that might be, and you certainly won’t get there by copying the “six things successful people do before 7:00 a.m.” The day will never arrive when you finally have everything under control — when the flood of emails has been contained; when your to-do lists have stopped getting longer; when you’re meeting all your obligations at work and in your home life; when nobody’s angry with you for missing a deadline or dropping the ball; and when the fully optimized person you’ve become can turn, at long last, to the things life is really supposed to be about.”

So, start visualisation if had one year, one day, one hour to live and get a focus on what's important. The critics equate it to nihilism and giving up but at deeper level beyond that, and more about doing the best without expectations – so not a prisoner? Never stop being curious and never stop doing what is possible. Bit like Desmond Tutu, who passed away at 90 – great man, was happy to meet him personally many years ago in London, radiated joy in the room.

Herself had a better night, five days after last session, and hopefully continue, has more energy, will drive down to Llanbedr to pick up last present and check on allotment – influenced by *Plot 29* book by Alan Jenkins, weaving allotment and his own life story, dark but well told and taking it slowly, a birthday present from Susheela. The stuff never goes away and the trick is to make it liveable; lucky (or unfortunate) is one without any life traumas. With that attitude help arrives as did Simon for last few days, Herself very happy to have the time with him, and now he can go back to his own life- well done and thanks lad.

S**tometer: 2/10

27 Dec 2021

Finished reading Allan Jenkins *Plot 29* – sad tale of broken family, abandoned and exploited children but also of fortitude and recovery, amazing how some people overcome adversity, resonated not least due to connection with allotments. Man's nature is shaped by the nature, spend time in it. So dragged the mutts around Moel Gasyth yesterday, dry and clear day, letting Herself rest, bit down physically – low energy - and mentally as Simon left, before going on a drive to Llanbedr and the allotment. Lots of folk out walking, working off the mince pies! Top up with some piano after a few days off, must practice for Hogmanay- party of two, but none the less.

Been quiet during Christmas, not much in news though worries remain including longer term impact as one in four Britons not confident of NHS being there for them – must say seems an under-estimate - and Drakeford reflects on the year – approaching 2022 with trepidation and optimism.

English team agony continues as collapse in the third Ashes test, game over it looks. Only question: how bad will the tour be, will they salvage a bit?

Overcast, rain outside, walk down to Morrisons for some groceries and otherwise a quiet indoor day – another one, get used to them. Been sleeping OK. Started reading *Paddy's Lament* by Thomas Gallagher; got it from Phil the other day. Not like Angela's ashes book, more about the potato famine and Irish immigration to USA.

S**tometer: 2/10

28 Dec 2021

Not much happened in Peniel yesterday, again, saw *45 Years* film on Netflix about a couple having to confront past on eve of their big wedding anniversary, interesting take on relationships and generally binged on TV incl University challenge and Stephen Fry show. Boring day? Though did manage to practise piano.

Had to search for news: India blocks foreign funds for Mother Teresa's charity, Taliban ban women from going solo on long journeys, David Lammy sorry for nominating Corbyn (remorse or opportunistic, will never understand why Corbyn not acceptable, possibly the last of the conviction politicians), just more examples of growing intolerance, and energy prices through the roof whilst the government stands by – nothing must interfere with business, the theme in Paddy's Lament book when the government stood by and let the Irish die while money was made. To compound the misery Australia thrash England in Ashes. So, a s***y day.

Will today be any better- raining outside though friends want to come, will rain stop enough for a walk? Also running out of steam with the Journal esp when same old, same old..... Fruitless Monotony more like. Some days.....

S**tometer: 3/10

29 Dec 2021

What a pleasant surprise- Herself got *The Ascent of Rum Doodle* book by W F Bowman from Rosemary for Christmas and as usual passed it on for screening- what a funny book about mountaineering, little known but almost at the level of Catch-22, so LOL yesterday as read it in one go. After Sekar and Laxmi's visit, took them for a walk around Moel Gasyth, lunch and then down to Llanbedr to show off Allotment, say loved the area and had been thinking about buying a bolt hole, lovely couple, hit with Herself. And so passed a good day yesterday.

Not so good elsewhere as record numbers of cases in France, USA.... and more restrictions globally though Saj criticises Wales for cancelling events like parkruns; the whole Omicron situation becoming impossible to make sense. Must be hard on people, already facing £1200 hike next year due to high prices and taxes when some can't even afford basics like tampons – as a school in Pembrokeshire donates them to poor girls.

Spoke to family in India- say things not so good there but seem to be coping as thankfully being the ages and stages not affected personally too much. Niru says Kuki and family staying till 5th before going back to Dubai.

Fifth chemo session today, raining so no chance of walking on beach whilst Herself in hospital so been driving back and forth; time to do some thinking as joined the My Death My Decision group last night. Was prompted by some recent email exchanges and any case been thinking about it. Must look up the Lancet Commission on Death too.

S**tometer: 2/10

EXTRA

Talk about death but no one does or want to? How and when does one want to go - sudden not in control but lingering one? How long to linger- when brain gone and not able to self-care, burden on others? How to go then – who can/will help? Can one prepare in advance – how, reminded of the story by the Buddhist American, a famous practitioner when struck seriously ill forgot all the training for facing death – can't remember his name.

Have read not just the Hindu scriptures but Sufism- poetry of Rumi and Buddhism- the Book of Dead etc and popular stuff like Being Mortal and on Near Death experiences, and tried to understand more about concepts like Doula, anywhere near clear?

But is there a plan, for the one certainty in life. One thing to read poetry like Gibran, but when the time comes- will one be ready?

Fear

*It is said that before entering the sea
a river trembles with fear.*

*She looks back at the path she has traveled,
from the peaks of the mountains,
the long winding road crossing forests and villages.*

*And in front of her,
she sees an ocean so vast,
that to enter
there seems nothing more than to disappear forever.*

*But there is no other way.
The river can not go back.*

*Nobody can go back.
To go back is impossible in existence.*

*The river needs to take the risk
of entering the ocean
because only then will fear disappear,
because that's where the river will know
it's not about disappearing into the ocean,
but of becoming the ocean.*

Thoughts muddled but do believe must have a personal say, not sure any collective, societal decision is possible- with the range of views and any case why certain subjects - death and abortion - should be governed by so-called democracy, the tyranny of minority? But how to fight it? No amount of science going to help? Just

like faith – I will believe if I see it vs I see it because I believe; which comes first? Having seen mum recently, more convinced about forming some habits now – is saying prayers enough, being helpful to others and showing gratitude; does take time to acquire these habits and become part of own nature, hard when undisciplined.

Found this inspiring

https://www.ted.com/talks/emily_levine_how_i_made_friends_with_reality?language=en

To be continued....

30 Dec 2021

Tribute to NHS staff as struggling between covid and holiday seasons – staff sicknesses and getting redeployed causing scheduling problems, Herself came back positive, the treatment better tolerated also. But the general news remains worrying as England starts with Nightingale (smaller versions) units also and over 180k UK cases yesterday, underestimate as shortages of test kits. Hope things do not go out of control for Herself sake- being selfish?

Spoke to Arvind whilst waiting to pick Herself up- full of beans, already planned trips to Peru, Switzerland/Norway and Chile next year; wants to pack it all before body fails says he, dampen his enthusiasm as can't commit and so agree he goes ahead with BL and will fit in if/when can, lot easier for them from New York to fly to South America but long way from Peniel. One day at a time.

Had not seen him for a while till yesterday, the old man always dressed in black with the black Alsatian in muzzle – Herself says he takes in violent dogs and retrains them; couple of old ladies too with old dogs walking around nearer town though, admire them for getting on with life. So long chat with Herself over breakfast – listening to wind which has blown over rubbish bin and scattered stuff – bottom line, it's what it is and live day to day, no longer term planning. Says if have 3-4 friends life can be wonderful, and do not hanker or run after others.

236 days streak on Duolingo this morning, and passed Checkpoint 2- yippee, but realising need to speed up so booked a 3 days immersion with Popeth Cymraeg next week, not being sure registered for the Foundation, one level above entry. Looking forward, especially as started reading *Wild Wales* by Borrowes – still only in Chester but can see going to be enjoyable book. Whether do a version of Denbighshire- follow up the plan earlier this year when visiting all the villages, from an outsider's point of view?

Otherwise doom and gloom in news, as Gordon Brown says the West sleepwalking into Afghanistan- wants West to put money; him and others before him, remember the film with Tom Hanks playing senator Charlie Wilson and at the end he pleads for a million USD for schools and gets laughed by the military officials who spent billions on stinger missiles and war. No money in saving poor women and children. Or in COP26 as more commentators talking about impending disaster and lack of

urgency, Alok Sharma makes it a shared responsibility with other cabinet colleagues as left holding the can, BoJo has distanced himself.

But some justice as Ghislaine Maxwell found guilty in New York, Andrew sigh of relief as not mentioned much in the trial though not off the hook as civil suit still going ahead. No justice personally as Herself heard from Birmingham Council rejecting appeal for fine for driving in the Zone – which may be OK- but why charge £120 instead of £60, surely the clock should stop when appealed? Herself says no energy to fight this – guess that what they rely on. What next for monarchy after the Queen – Platinum jubilee being marked with special coins next year, should look out and get some.

Over in India, worrying rise of cases and concerns about forthcoming elections in UP- will it be a repeat of last year? And split views on Cristiano Ronaldo statue in Gao- 60 years since Goa won independence from Portugal and became part of India; people tend to forget the Portuguese and French colonies co-existing with the British.

This and that today, Herself will keep busy working out WiFi and where to put the piano- may go to Piano Cymru soon – and weather permitting later, bit of a walk? Could be worse.

S**tometer: 2/10

31 Dec 2021

Spent last evening watching Jonathan VT on BBC four explaining Covid for last two days – aimed at kids but Herself glued, says good programme, JVT seems to be popular with media, the natural TV doc! And Billy Connolly tribute on his 75th year, did not know he has Parkinson's disease, still funny, loved his humour and Glaswegian accent. Otherwise not much happened in the state of Peniel yesterday; thankfully Herself coped better with chemo session.

So, here it is, the last day of 2021. For all its travails the year has gone quickly. BoJo says incomparably better than last year – and to some extent yes, with fewer deaths but the panic and disruption more, partly due to having tasted freedom for a while, and ongoing uncertainty. The pandemic, medically and socially, will go on for a while and may escalate given other challenges of climate change, polarisation and intolerance, poor leadership etc. Get ready then for the long haul? Personally, been a good year for bringing home some hard truths, and now to the future.

Yes, but first today, Herself wants outdoor excursion after hospital appointment, says feeling cooped up, but weather foul, whistling wind, and then the WiFi kit delivery in the middle of the day- seemingly not allowed to leave it, must be handed over, drat. Too difficult so some coffee.....

S**tometer: 4/10

Midnight 31 Dec 2021

Managed to get out earlier, went to Llaneilian to 'see' Mair- beautiful day, sitting in the cemetery, overlooking the sea, remembering her (and mum and others) and giving thanks, and then walked along the promenade towards Rhos on Sea to visit St Trillo's chapel -smallest in UK, seats 6! The world and the dogs were out on the beach, cafes and pubs full, Herself got tired so cut short the outing, and rested at home.

And now it is that time, Herself already in bed, a wee dram in hand, no festivities in remote, dark Peniel, distant fireworks earlier, watching Jools Holland's Hootenanny singing the Auld Land Syne, send messages to friends and family; remember the first Hogmanay in Lerwick, Shetlands in 1980 when the party only started after midnight, those were the days.....

Wonder if had any idea then how life would be 40 years later, and whether would have done things differently?



1980 on Unst, from Delhi to Shetland Islands

But before signing off time to take stock of the year? Worth listing all the books read, films seen, walks had, people died or about the 236 days streak on Duolingo learning Welsh, and by the way Herself has a 500 days streak for Hindi, and so on? Tot up losses and gains? Mourn some and thank others? Rejoice in the joys of small things?

Was the pandemic well handled? When will it be over? Is mankind doomed? Is there global leadership or are we stuck with the narrow minded, opportunistic, short-term politicians? Have lessons been learnt, will they be learnt, and in time as Omicron rages on? Overall was it a good year?

And what now for Yours Truly? Any New Year resolutions? Look at the anthology made last year with friends about life during 2020, was it much different in 2021 – did the plans work?

But too late in the day for all these, past usual bedtime; all that can be said is it was a (nother) year – and like all before it had its ups and downs, stuff happens. All one can do is try, give it your best shot.

“Have we have left undone those things which we ought to have done”; and “have we done those things which we ought not to have done” and are we ready “That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life”.

Suspect Herself would have a better way of putting it, practical, no nonsense, Welsh woman; time to write the ‘Book of Job’ (Helen Job, Geddit, and living in Peniel – all very biblical, must be a good story here)! Will ask tomorrow, meantime good night.

S**tometer: RIP!

Postscript

A journal should be like “*some old desk.... In which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking them through. I should like to come back, after a year or two, & find that the collection had sorted itself out & refined itself & coalesced, as such deposits mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life....*” said Virginia Woolf (I found this in Richard Mabey’s book- “*Turning the boat for home*”), and that is certainly the case with me. My journal will need more time to mature before the collection can mysteriously mould into something meaningful, but for now I have shared the relevant parts which describe one person’s life during the pandemic.

Personal stories always have an appeal, and although one can criticise them – one swallow does not a summer make – they can provide some sense of the zeitgeist. I pity the future historians who may want to make sense of this period as the amount of data, with SoMe etc, is beyond imagination (certainly mine). And here I am in danger of contributing to that (*sic*).

Some readers may find the diary entries repetitive and without any story line; I suggest to you that meaning only comes retrospectively while life is lived prospectively and a day at a time. To use the scientific analogy, what you have is the raw data, and from the strangest of times in living memory. So, read what you want but do not look for more explanations – the diary is what it is, about making sense of life for an older, retired, immigrant, during the pandemic in North Wales. Is it really about the pandemic, or loss and love, or loneliness and mental health, take your pick.

I am a fan of Karl Ove Knausgaard’s writings and ‘enjoyed’ reading his epic ‘*My Struggle*’ – not everyone’s cuppa as too monotonous sometimes with its details and too intimate with all revelations. But I do get his central point that (all/most) stories do have a personal element, even though may not be autobiographical – where else does ‘it’ come from, otherwise? However, I have not been as ‘brave’ about telling it all – somethings are best left ‘unsaid’, and brevity is better.

Cavafy puts it much better in his poem: “*As much as you can*”

*And if you can't shape your life the way you want,
at least try as much as you can
not to degrade it
by too much contact with the world,
by too much activity and talk.*

*Try not to degrade it by dragging it along,
taking it around and exposing it so often
to the daily silliness
of social events and parties,
until it comes to seem a boring hanger-on.*

Finally, to the reason for sharing it, why put it out for others including strangers, and why expose friends and family?

Here I draw on two of my heroes – Viktor Frankl, and to paraphrase him, it is up to one to give life a meaning by finding why they should live; and Leo Tolstoy, in *A Confession*:

“My question - that which at the age of fifty brought me to the verge of suicide – was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man from the foolish child to the wisest elder: it was a question without answering which one cannot live, as I had found by experience. It was: What will come of what I am doing today or shall do tomorrow? What will come of my whole life”?

Far be it for me to compare myself with these giants but their views resonate with me, and hence the answer I come up with is “In Case”. Guess that is all one can do, and hope for, that one’s work may help someone? To many I would be seen as privileged: after all I am ‘healthy’, have enough money, no boss or deadlines, few obligations and am living in a beautiful part of the world; what is he complaining about would be a justifiable question? What relevance has his experience got to do with that of the majority? But that would miss the two main points: one, that regardless of one’s station in life, one can have challenges – the usual privileges do not immunise against real or perceived adversity; and two, that lived life when scrutinised closely can seem rather monotonous – one gets up, fills the day somehow and goes to sleep. What one does during the day can vary, and giving this interlude some meaning is what we all aim for; some do and have loftier aspirations of their work and others try and survive that day or make a small different. The pandemic had just put another layer on these two basic tenets of life; yes, it had practical implications but fundamentally the pandemic did not change anything much (Alert, privileged one speaking) - it was the same ages old strifes played out in a different context, and one had to find ways of surviving and moving forward. Lurching from one meal to another, from one day to another!

For those looking for ‘the’ ending – did they find peace and joy, did they live happily ever after, and did he become less curmudgeonly; you can wait for future updates, IF I continue to write (not sure yet, especially about this way of writing) or treat this account as ships in the night or friends made on holidays, judge them as you found them then, no past and no future; snapshot of a particular time. By the way, the mutts are still here.

The journal itself, meant to chronicle the pandemic, wandered into personal, unsurprisingly since the only way to look at events is through one’s lens and associated biases and preferences. The more I tried to understand the pandemic and all the shenanigans going on, the deeper I had to go inside to make sense and more importantly find meaning for life during these times and to find peace and joy.

But continuing the journal may just prolong the past – poring over same stuff, allowing the scabs to be picked again and again; that can’t be right and not at this age. Forgiveness is giving up hope of a better past.

Overall, hard to believe that another year has gone by, since the pandemic started. Though had some idea, having read about past pandemics, had hoped that this one would be over sooner, and life would have returned to ‘normal’. What are the

takeaways then, any profound words of wisdom after year long reflection? And even now it is hard to see where this is all going, and so the wait continues. Did journaling work? Looking back on it what have I learnt, apart from noting that mind works mysteriously- how when I was writing something it made a connection with something else buried there, or when it was going well the mood dipped, or lifted! Obviously, there are very specific lessons, but overall I believe there are some profound yet well-known and simple observations, atleast for me.

It's what it is- accept reality of the world; you can read Steven Pinker or Roslings who will tell you how good things are or Chris Hedges or John Pilger about the conspiracies, but at the end of the day it will still come down to the question that Victor Frankl and Leo Tolstoy posed: why do you want to live and not commit suicide, and only you can answer this! Are you going to be a glass half full or half empty person? It really is your life. After that it is a case of do what you can with what you have and look after your fellow beings, and indeed all sentient beings, and become part of the whole; open yourself up to experiences, embrace the richness of life, be a part of the universe. Donot be a bystander and let life happen to you, be proactive and engage with the world; ups and downs then are a part of life. Most importantly, love and laugh – these are not zero sum, but multipliers, the more you do the more comes back and make every moment – whether good or bad – count, including by using adversity, like the pandemic, to get stronger and by living a 'richer' life. Preaching over. The answer really is 42.

All that matters

Do you take time
to visit yourself
to smell the roses
to stand and stare
to linger over meals
to laugh with friends
to make love with partner
to say thank you
to forgive and forget
to live in the moment
If not then why not
start now

What is older people's obsession – reflection and wish to pass on learning - is young people's aversion, as what do they know! Here is my poem on this (rest assured, the last one!)

Parent's lament

When they were ready to learn
you were not
now when you want to teach them
they are too busy
to talk to you about

love, life, loss, peace and joy

You missed the chance, they say
but how could I have taught them
without knowing myself first
now they must make own mistakes
find the hard way, its all avoidable
and the cycle goes on

If not Covid 19 then it could be something else, and the only way to ride these external challenges out is by following these profound lessons; you can learn them the hard way or the eas (ier)y way! Believe me, I was young once too.

Explanation, acknowledgements, apology, appeal

I used to read BBC news, The Guardian, NDTV (in India), Denbighshire free press all online, Wikipedia and Google for backgrounds, and subscribed to regular newsletters from Huff Post, The Conversation, Little Buddha, Daily Stoic, Maria Popova, Moretothat and some medical press. The local libraries in Ruthin and Denbigh have been wonderful.

In line with Wavell who says in his poetry anthology – made a posie of other Men's (and women) flowers - what I have done is pull together the bits relevant to my story from many of the great writers and I am grateful to them for sustaining, and enlightening, me. Unless indicated otherwise, as if it is not clear (*sic*), the poems are written by me, and to make it more obvious those from others are in italics; the 'Groom' on the backcover is by Piet Hein. I apologise if I have breached any copyrights and will make amends if brought to my attention.

I wrote in the mornings after first few days so mostly reporting back from previous day and after scanning the news. Just whatever caught eye. Not systematic.

S**tometer refers to the 'reading' at the time of writing the entry, with fluctuations during the day. For those who may see a dissonance between the text and the readings I should explain that this 'Public' diary is adapted from the 'Private' journal, some things are not for sharing. I have not 'tidied' up for publication as readers need to see the writing as it happened but have not included some very personal parts, which in any case do not affect the presentation.

I have tried to protect identities where appropriate, and I am sorry if I have taken any liberties. If I attributed something personal to anyone then I should point out that it was what I felt, but maybe I had got it wrong; and ask for forgiveness for any misrepresentation or inadvertent breach of confidentiality. I am very grateful to (our) friends and families for their (ongoing) support.

This is one of several documents made during the pandemic to help pass time, and hopefully add value. You can see all these here www.ramareflections.com under My Projects section.

Feel free to contact me on madhokrajan@gmail.com if you think I can be of any help.

I am very grateful to all the key workers who kept us going; and can only hope that some lessons will be learnt to help make it a better world, the over 150,000 deaths alone (at the time of writing this) should not be in vain. We could have done, and definitely should do, better.

I do not wish to plug any particular organisation, and do donate to some, and would urge you to do the same – some of us are in good positions to help those less fortunate. Be the change with your small change and which can make a big difference, give generously.



MEMENTO VIVERE

Love while you've got
love to give.
Live while you've got
life to live.



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