

Leanne Peacock

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To: CMS (Coleraine)

Dear Diary,

This is one of the most extraordinary times that we have lived through and as someone who has studied history I am acutely aware of the need to document and remember the unique experiences we are all living through.

I am not sure how many weeks of lockdown we are in but I suspect this is perhaps the 4th week of working from home and doing everything from home. It is very strange being an elected rep in these times with no council meetings to attend and doing all work via telephone and email. Assisting constituents continues as always and is perhaps more important than ever particularly for those older people and those with underlying conditions who cannot get out to the shop- the fact that we can help them with a weekly food parcel is invaluable and one of the most rewarding forms of assistance we can provide. The community effort is wonderful and in Rasharkin the GAA are leading the community effort- I have offered to assist in delivering food and medicine to the vulnerable however given that my father is extremely high risk with COPD I do try to stay at home to keep him safe. At the end of the day we do need to protect ourselves and our families- If we are infected or spreading we are no use to anyone and only adding to the risk. People are very appreciative and that makes the job worthwhile. Zoom meetings are the new norm and are being explored to replace our council meetings while we are in this lockdown situation. I think this could be something that companies continue long after this ends ending unnecessary travel and mileage claims. This may be the way of the future despite the fact that we were forced to use this technology in very unusual and unfortunate circumstances but I think this has made a lot of people and companies look at things a very different way and appreciate that things can be done remotely inspiring more trust in their staff off site and that this will lead to the continuation of some of the practices that lockdown has caused us to explore. That could be one potential benefit of this situation and flexible working or working from home could be more widespread on the other side.

Working from home while everyone is at home presents its own challenges especially with a hyperactive 4 year old nephew who is isolating with us burning off energy in and around the house but if your phone call happens to be interrupted by a crying child most people understand the circumstances and it can give them a laugh if he is shouting on his auntie in the background. There are days that isolation is difficult and feelings of boredom and irritability come into play as well as the odd family argument when everyone gets cabin fever but we have plenty to keep us entertained and the fact that we are all isolating together leads to plenty of carry on, attempted TikToks and lots of home cooking! We are very lucky that the weather has been beautiful over the last few days and we could spend time in the garden playing football, hurling, swingball and mammy just enjoys sitting there in the sunshine although I get bored! Daddy is tidying up the garden and has decorated the hall but the fact that the recycling centres are closed makes it hard to get rid of the rubbish that we would love to get rid of from the back garden. Sometimes one can even work outside which is a welcome difference. We have done many many pub quizzes with

each of us making up our own quiz and challenging the family, we have family bingo where we order some online prizes and print out bingo sheets online and use an online bingo caller and have houseparty and zoom calls with friends at the weekends.

We were to be in Liverpool on my friends hen party (kirsty's) this weekend but all had to be cancelled with flights grounded and she was understandably disappointed but given that they have had to cancel the wedding that was to be on 4th July and move it to March next year we will (hopefully!) get the opportunity again. We made her a video from home of us all and merged them all together and sent it to her on the Saturday night of what would have been her hen party and this delighted her. We got all dressed up to make our video so it gave us something to do for a while! We also had a few cocktails! Thankfully the wedding is moved as i am not sure i would fit into the dress as lockdown gives you a lot more time to eat and a lot more time to bake so there have been a few pounds put on over the last few weeks. Although we keep starting our diets and doing some working out with the stuff Sean Og has at home in his room with weights and squats- it just has not stuck with me as yet but I will keep saying the diet is going to start I am not sure that given the isolation that it ever will! My brother is due to be married in September and is very worried about if it can go ahead- they have said that if restrictions are not fully lifted they will not go ahead and it would not be the day they want if everyone could not be there and they had to worry about a virus. They just want a special day to look back on. My sister in law Catriona was due to have her hen party at the start of May also and we were to head off to Magaluf for a hen party in the sun but this is all cancelled as well and we are supposed to be getting a refund although we have had no word as yet. Jenna and Cara (sister i law and her sister) were due to arrive from Philadelphia on the 2nd May and it is all cancelled- we had such big plans for the start of this year but everything has been put on hold for the foreseeable despite the fact that I had started gathering up provision for their arrival (the coffee they like, some snacks and drinks) but we will make good use of them over the next while. I have cancelled all work holidays that I have booked and I just will not need a day off- there is no where that we can go! Going out out is considered the back garden!

Mark my eldest brother is in Philadelphia and is off work at home with the boys Cael and Jackson- the only positive that we all have is the time we get to spend together with nowhere else to be and nowhere else to go! New York is badly impacted by the virus and to me that is just too close for comfort to the American Family and I have no doubt that money is tight for them as Mark cannot work so I have sent a weekly shop using Instacart online to help them get by and make sure that they do not have to go to the shops and reduce the risk as much as possible. Jenna is a lab scientist is a hospital so she is at risk and this is a big worry- as her lab does not test for COVID19 she has been sent to the front door of the hospital some days to test temperatures and ask those trying to enter if they have any symptoms this only puts her further at risk but Mark's football manager in Philly dropped off some PPE to their house the other day that would hopefully help protect herself at work (they have a shortage of PPE just like we do and probably the whole world has right now). They are supposed to be coming in September for the wedding but again no one knows just where we will be then so we cannot hope to see them too much as we may be disappointed.

We also have weekly shopping deliveries coming and I had to work hard to get those slots as they are all filled up in 30 seconds and you have to wait in an online queue to get into the website to even see if there are any slots available. I had to go on a mid night when the slots are released to get the ones we got so far. Tesco have restricted online shops to 80 items which makes getting enough shopping difficult for 7 people but I managed to get a recurring ASDA slot that will come every Tuesday just the other day, you can get as many items as you want but only 3 of each item. Any other bits and pieces that we need Caitriona goes down to the shop to get and mammy goes to the chemist weekly on a Friday to lift prescriptions so we try and stick to those 2 going out and keep the rest in as much as possible.

Granny and Granda were a bit of a challenge and they thought we were over reacting at the very start about them staying in and not letting anyone in. They are a naughty pair and have always been rebellious (in their young days I dread to think what they got up to!) but I think we finally got through to them though when they seen the deaths coming in and we kept on and on. At least in Portstewart they have a nice view from the back yard! I have also sent shopping to them every week from Chill in Coleraine with dinner and stuff that they can just heat up and Auntie Frances bring them bits and pieces and leaves it on the front door step although granny did sneak to the Chemist one day at the start to get herself an at home hair dye- the thought of going grey was driving her to distraction but she got a good telling off for that move! I have a grey hair or 50 myself but I am lucky to be in isolation with 2 hairdressers who have ordered a dye online and will hopefully do my hair a day when the weather takes a turn- wouldn't want to waste a good day dying hair and no one can see us anyway apart from online and I don't think I'm at the stage where my greys would be visible online although maybe that is denial!

My one hope today is that we have hit the peak of this virus and are on our way down- the death toll was 18 on Friday and Saturday but just 1 on Sunday so my hope is that the downward trend will continue but we will see when todays figures are released at 2pm. A vaccine is also a distant hope and its the only way I can see any hope of normality returning so I have been researching this almost daily for updates.

As i sit at my kitchen table desk and write this in between calls the sun is shining and my family are healthy and well and that is all that i can ask for today.