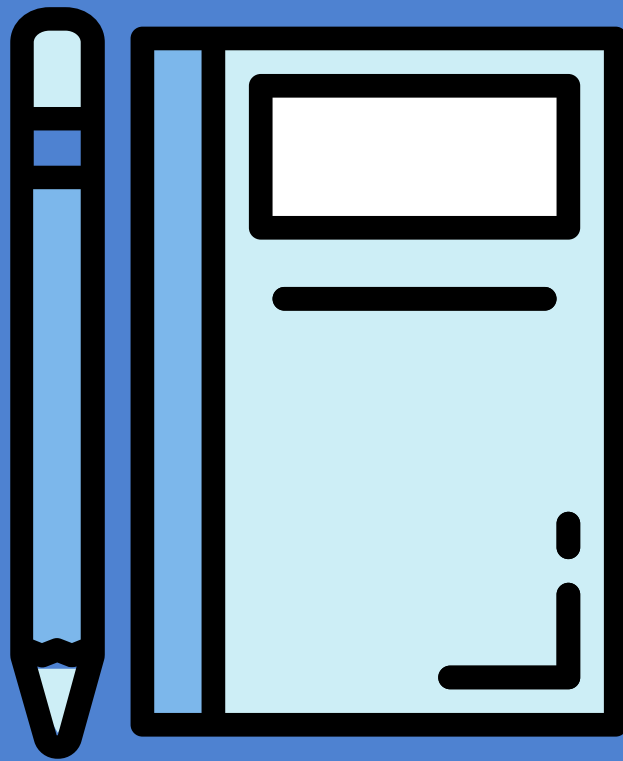


FUTURE

FUTURE WRITERS



**'The Lockdown Diaries'**  
**Anthology**



**F U T U R E**

Future U is a collaborative outreach project bringing together universities, colleges, schools and businesses across Lancashire. We are part of the Office for Students' Uni Connect Programme, which supports young people to overcome barriers to progression and fulfil their potential.

The global pandemic meant that we were unable to visit schools and colleges as we would normally, or run our usual range of events and activities. However, our team has continued to work hard to create alternative resources to help support young people and provide opportunities for them to improve their own knowledge and skills in an engaging way.

We know that for many young people, having to stay home and miss out on normal things like school and seeing friends is difficult, but it can also provide an opportunity to experience different things and spend more time thinking and creating. We wanted to create a project that allowed young people to express this creativity and potentially inspire them to pursue a career within the creative industries!

The Lockdown Diaries was designed to provide an opportunity for them to share the individual ideas, thoughts and imaginings that they had come up with during lockdown, and we were overwhelmed by the quality and diversity of the responses.

This anthology showcases the pieces that made the biggest impression on our judges, including guest judge Philippa Holloway, who highlights in her own commentary just how difficult it was to decide between the variety of brilliant entries.

There could only be one winner, and that piece sets the tone for the collection with its delicate descriptions and quiet optimism. However, all of the authors included in the anthology deserve credit for the quality of writing they produced; each piece offered something different and significant in its own way. We would also like to thank everyone else who entered the competition, it was a pleasure to read so much great writing.

**Congratulations to all of the writers - we hope you enjoy reading their work as much as we did.**

## Writing in Lockdown

I was absolutely thrilled to be invited to judge this competition, and to read what the young people of Lancashire wanted to express about the events of 2020. The pandemic lock-down has affected everyone in different ways, and I believe it is vital that we take time to think about, and process, its impact. Writing about the situation can help us all understand it, and ourselves, more clearly. Reading the stories and non-fiction submitted to the project not only showed me that The Lockdown Diaries has given voice to a valuable section of the community, but has revealed how the pandemic has affected, inspired, and influenced young people, and there is a huge variety of experience and ideas expressed in final pieces chosen.

It has been so difficult to select a winner and nine finalists for the anthology – each piece submitted showed creativity, insight and intelligence in their response to the lockdown. I am incredibly impressed with all the writers who chose to take part, and strongly encourage all of those who took part to keep writing, to keep exploring their world through creative expression, and to share their work wherever possible. This communication is key to understanding one another more clearly.

The winning piece is a tale of optimism, friendship, and the appreciation of the natural world as a positive force for good mental health. The story cleverly reveals that the conflict at the heart of the narrative is not only the practical experience of lockdown, but the mental toll it can take. By choosing to focus on a singular event in which some of those internal struggles are finally resolved, I feel this piece offers us a beacon of hope in what is still a difficult and dark time. I was particularly impressed by the sensory details the writer incorporated that really bring the events to life – this is an author with keen observation skills, and these small concrete details bring a sense of reality and truth to the piece. Moreover, by highlighting how the simple things can help our mental health - fresh air, a favourite tree, a smile from a friend - it serves to show us the value of the things that matter most. Very short fiction like this demands the ability to zoom in close and capture in a flash a moment of internal change, and this piece certainly does that.

The other pieces were chosen either for their creative interpretation of the theme, their ability to comment on the wider impact of the pandemic beyond the situations they describe, and/or their honesty. Each displays a flair for language use and/or narrative that, if nurtured throughout their education and in their own free time, will serve these young people well in their adult lives. The ability to communicate complex emotions and metaphors, to balance humour with pathos, and to reveal some deep truths about humanity, society, and what the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns can teach us is to be celebrated here. I have always found that if we listen to young people, really listen and pay attention, they can teach us so much about contemporary life. These responses communicate an awful lot about the last six months, and can perhaps help us negotiate the challenges ahead. I urge you to read them. Listen to them. Pay attention.

### **Dr. Philippa Holloway**



*Philippa Holloway is an author and teacher, specialising in fiction. Her short stories and travel writing have won competitions and been published in the USA, Canada, Australia, Africa and Europe. She is the Writer in Residence at Hack Green Secret Nuclear Bunker and she has worked with artists and writers on special features and commissions for various publications. She teaches English Literature and Creative Writing at Edge Hill University, and during lockdown co-curated a global literary writing project that has reached over 100 countries worldwide (<https://100wordsofsolitude.wordpress.com/>).*

**“Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion,  
our most inexhaustible source of magic.  
Capable of both inflicting injury,  
and remedying it.”**

*J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

# The Winning Entry

## A Quarantine Story

She had never known a world like this. A world that was controlled by an illness, influenced by fear.

The shops were closed, parks empty, her friends and family had never felt further away.

But it got easier, the feeling of uncertainty had become more familiar over time. It was like a feverish dream, the state the world was currently in. It was like life had stopped, as though the universe needed a time out. But she began to feel as though she was mastering the art of quarantining.

But this was her first time outside, it was like a whole new world. Everything had changed in the last few months, but it felt like she had been kept in the dark and left out, unaware of what was considered the new norm. But the discomfort was worth it, she would get to see her. Her favourite person, her safe place.

Gingerly, she opened the door... and stepped out. The sun was shining, birds singing a lilting melody, a soft breeze rustling her hair. It seemed like a normal summer day, but it was far from that. She began to walk, the way was familiar, she knew the path like the back of her hand. They always went there - before the whole country locked down - it was their place. It had been so long, she forgot what fresh air felt like, it was freeing. Then, she began to run, she needed the exercise, the wind knotted her hair and the beaming sun made her squint. But she was nearly there.

She rounded the corner, off the footpath, through the gate, into the field. The overgrown grassland stretched as far as the eye could see, with a few towering trees dappled across its landscape. It was getting difficult to see now, the sun was ready to set and was low in the sky, like a blinding light. It was ok though, she knew the way. She strolled straight across the field, to the large, secluded tree right at the end. Finally, she got there.

The tree was old and grand, with thick branches perfect for climbing. Her initials were still engraved into the base of the trunk from all those years ago. She rested her foot in a small groove in the trunk and used it to boost herself up and she began to climb. As she was slowly making her way up to her usual spot she thought she saw a flash of familiar chestnut hair. Before she knew it she had reached her branch. It was worn and slightly flat from all the time she had spent walking and sitting and balancing. She sat down near the end and looked across from her. There she was; long brown hair gently swaying in the breeze, worn trainers with flapping soles (from many failed attempts at skateboarding), and those familiar big brown eyes smiling at her.

Almost instantly, the tightness in her chest - that she hadn't even noticed was there - fell away. She was overwhelmed by a sense of security and safety. It was then she knew she would be ok; this pandemic wasn't the end of the world. She smiled, for the first time in a while, a genuine smile back at her best friend as they watched the sunset disappear under the hill.

**By Poppy Larkin**

**"A word after a word after a word is power."**

*Margaret Atwood*



# Specially Commended Entries

## The Great Ascendancy

Maybe there is no such thing as an afterlife. Perhaps it's just something we made up to make the idea of our loved ones dying easier. Maybe death really is the cessation of all existence; like a lightbulb's power supply being cut off.

If this is true, then why do we struggle to accept this seemingly simple concept? Is it that we believe ourselves to be too important to descend into eternal oblivion, never to awake again? In reality, the only true afterlife is the legacy we leave behind on Earth. So maybe there is something more after our time here is up, but maybe there isn't.

The main thing that has always set my society apart from yours is that we knew the truth, so we never had to fear the unknown.

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Creaking like the old man's bones, the wooden door frightened me. It was a strange sound; one I hadn't heard before. Blurry. The condensation of the warm air hitting the cool, green tinted jar made the already distorted world cloud over in front of me. My wings hummed, keeping me hovering as to not disturb the many creatures below me.

There, outside of the door, was a whole world. A lake covered in a blanket of mist, a forest of living antiques, their full, green leaves surprising me with the brightness of their colour, a parallel universe to the dystopia I had lived in for my entire life. No longer enclosed in the same four walls.

The old man who I had come to know so well throughout my life carried the jar in his hands. I glanced up at him to see a single droplet of water squeeze out of his beady eye; I didn't know what it was. He slowly walked towards the sparking lake, all of us who were inside the jar swaying back and forth with each step. Crouching down, I saw his wrinkled hand reaching towards the brown, cork lid that had held me hostage for so long. It was my time. My Great Ascendancy.

Once it was unscrewed, thousands of bright lights were released, we were free from the tiny jar at last. It was as if stars were shooting up into the air, settling above the forest. A silent symphony of fireflies illuminated the night sky. I shone the brightest.

Flying up high into the abyss, the wind whispered in my ear to the sweet sound of her soft voice:

'Unable are those who are loved to die, for love is immortality.'

That was it. We were gone.

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When we can't understand the science behind this world, we make up mythological reasons for supernatural experiences, rather than accepting the aura of mystery that comes with them. We personify nature, using our boundless imaginations to comfort us, giving us the feeling of control over things when, in fact, maybe the world is wider than we could ever know.

**By Emily White**

## Beauty in Isolation

She found herself stuck in the confinement of four mundane, white walls and a ceiling towering far too high above her for any comfort to be found. The days so far had been marked by the incessant ticking of the clock that, from where she usually sat at her desk, was in her eyes reach. It was a not so subtle reminder that one could never outrun time even if their mission were to be ignorant to it. All that accompanied her were the mountainous tasks and the deafening silence of her own apparent boredom, when somehow the list of tasks never became as long as they had looked on paper.

Her life had been the same, marked by hours and thoughts of the outside world which had once been so familiar to all of her senses, that were now dull and untouchable to what lay beyond her walls. But as she finally reached out to the handle of her prison she shook her head, turned on her heel and decided that things needed to change.

She very simply closed her eyes; it was a childish trick to do in order hide from the world, but nonetheless even now she could count on it not to fail her in times of need. With her eyes still closed she allowed herself to a place, one that she knew she was not a physical visitor or residence of deep down in her consciousness, but that no longer mattered to her. It was the place that was important no matter whether it was tangible or not to her or others.

Her mind painted the once barren walls with colour not even the quiet window could allow her to see. There were no muted sunsets, no disappearance of cars and people just the sweet, soothing songs of birds. So exotic in her mind, that not even the most avid birdwatchers could identify their mystery. Monkeys swung on branches, and just as she was with her arms wide open they basked in the golden rays that showered down from the corner of what had once been her dreaded ceiling.

Part of her wished to have people in her company, to join the orchestra of noises that were blessing her ears, but as she looked around her she found the company of nature held a grace that people could not hold despite how hard they tried. The outside world became a forgotten ghost in her mind as she chased butterflies and made paper chains of daisies that rested as a crown of beauty on her head. She enjoyed the luxuries that she had danced in as a young child, and up until now she had not been able to revisit those treasured memories.

**By Tyneisha Matthews-Gentle**

## THE YEAR 2020

Ghosts and shadows from the bygone days of the year 2020:  
The year where I finally found myself,  
Long gone, broken wings tear streaked -  
A confused mass of just impressions, lonely like  
A single tear upon a cheek  
At last, for once I could breathe  
I saw the sun for once in all its glory,  
Admired the stars at night, with purpose like  
A steady flame, ablaze, hanging, a constellation  
And as I looked, I saw the sun  
Get brighter and the stars  
Twinkled like a tears gleaming in sore eyes  
Spread generously across a blanket of darkness  
and every day as I looked:  
I saw the leaves get greener  
And the smiles in my house becoming wider  
I looked and I saw how strange the once forgotten earth, buzzing with people  
Like ants, gripping onto devices, scrolling their fingers endlessly,  
Hungry, searching and uninspired -  
Now lay so bare and I looked and I looked and  
I saw how strange:  
That we are now left with only those  
Few grams of metal, wiring and battery, yet  
At least we realized the purpose of individuals and family  
At last, we began to learn (and perhaps this is what God had in plan)  
Because I and you, and you and you  
All know deep inside that although in a world now broken,  
Wounded, severed, torn  
And vanquished,  
At least we are now healing,  
We are humbled and as everyday becomes a fight for escape,  
Everyday becomes a test and as I  
Open my eyes to a new morning  
I am grateful for another day of sun break -  
Shining through my room or  
The drops of H<sub>2</sub>O sliding outside - on the other side,  
As if they too are seeking escape, I focus on each drop, I see  
And I admire how even the sky is healing amidst the chaos  
And as I look, there's a bird that flies high today  
And the words in my head begin to unscramble

And the pictures of my frantic imagination running and pacing,  
Consuming, engulfing, runs like fire through my veins -  
This power consumes me and I  
Realize that I'm healing and so are you - finally.  
For a caterpillar must completely dissolve  
In order to grow wings  
And every flower must die in winter  
To be reborn in spring.

**By Muaziz Bibi**

## Isolation

Lockdown. Quarantine. Lockdown.

What a gift.

To be given the time and space to focus, and heal those open wounds, and appreciate people in a way you never have before.

To be able to uncover new sides of yourself, to learn new skills, to get to know your own heart.

To be alone, and scared, and vulnerable.

To learn to grow stronger, and wiser, and powerful as you extend your knowledge of a global pandemic.

Doing the same thing every day can be a tremendous challenge. You lose all sense of time and, more importantly, any sense of purpose. The painful only increases, and the joyful begins to slip away. The total disappearance of human connection, the contact that we crave.

At first there is an immense lack of anything at all. Your days are filled with joy from other worlds. Music and film. Watching other people's happiness is the only thing that seems to make you smile. And then the song finishes. Or the movie comes to a close. And that feeling is violently ripped from your grasp.

But there is happiness in your world. You have been given the opportunity to connect with who you are. To reach out and become friends with yourself. Find out what you love to do. Develop your sense of character and fuel your creative passions.

Purpose doesn't have to be lost. In fact, your purpose has increased a great amount.

Your purpose is to save the lives of yourself, your loved ones, and every human being on this planet. By staying inside, and bearing the unbearable, coming to terms with a harsh reality, and accepting the intense situation we find ourselves in, you are saving lives. The sacrifice of important plans, the avoidance of family gatherings, the missing out on life as we know it, is saving lives.

Use this time wisely. Do the thing today.

Learn that lockdown is a gift disguised as an annoyance. Whether you're working or not, discover the methods that provide you with comfort, support, joy, and purpose.

Choose to be a lover and love from afar.

Isolation does not have to be so isolating.

**By Anya Baxter**

## The Lockdown Story – A Positive Outlook Lockdown Diaries

The world has gone bad before 2020, I saw this virus as a blessing, I chose not be sad and not to dwell but use this as gift to grow and improve. The world has been crumbling much before this, a world of poverty and waste, anything was anywhere and I didn't appreciate smaller things. Families didn't speak while technology was growing; every child in sight seemed to have a phone. People's depression and anxiety was crippling and often people felt alone. Everyday our oceans took our damage and our climate was crying for help, our forests and wildlife being destroyed while all we seemed to do was drive around in our cars. World issues were overlooked by us all, and our minds were becoming narrowed.

2020 brought us a virus probably for acting in our foolish ways, this is our chance to change and grow as better people. We were told to stay inside, our outside lives were now put on hold, I think our fear forced us to grow. People started improving, clapping and being thankful for those who were helping us, reconnecting with our families, and people looked forward to walking and exploring our forests and beautiful nature. Seeing our friends again made each of us truly appreciate them and realise how lucky we all truly are. Some of us are baking, some of us are walking, some of us are trying completely new things and I think we have all had a realisation of how much we actually have to be thankful for.

We have all had months of bad news and fear but once lockdown is over I think we will go back out to a better world with a better outlook on life, an incredible Earth that we have taken for granted for so long. Lockdown may have been a struggle but it's also taught us so many new things and how we should act in kindness always and appreciate who and what we have more than ever. So my outlook on lockdown has been positive, not only has it given me a chance to grow as a person but to also see everyone around grow and improve too. This has been my positive lockdown story.

**By Darcey Green**

Report, ever since I was stationed on this planet, I have had my concerns. The humans are impatient...they want to do everything so fast. It started with the industrial revolution from what I know, in a few years most of the world had changed. And now it is the lockdown: Covid-19 has slowed down our operations, and after 107 days the impact is noticeable. It seems that the humans' economy has, for lack of a better word, died. That is a problem for us, operation ██████████(b)(6)(b)(7)(C) will need more funds now! Shame, it was almost complete.

Well as for the state of the humans themselves they have descended into madness, so illogical, they seem to believe that they can endanger other humans because of a thing called 'rights'. For all the blabbering they do about them, I am beginning to think that the people doing the blabbering do not know which ones they have. While operation ██████████(b)(6)(b)(7)(C) has been working in the background, I have come to learn more about how they behave over the internet. You see most of the humans have receded into the depths of their online forums and videogames during lockdown. They are a dangerous place, full of different opinions and individual thought. Some of this is admittedly harmless, but some... well some people are talking about how 5G causes the coronavirus; and that drinking soap will cure it when used in combination with essential oils! People think this is not true, and it's best to keep it that way. While the people correlating them to coronavirus are wrong, we would not want our towers being taken down.

One notable thing that happened in the onset of the lockdown is panic buying! Yet again a logical fallacy: they were panic buying toilet paper and hand sanitiser to name a few; the latter being the only one that is useful. While we are not affected due to us not needing toilet paper, it did affect the other humans. People did not realise that there is no use for toilet paper as Covid-19 does not produce violent [REDACTED]. So, people resorted to online buying, which was of course taken advantage of, with the prices of literally paper skyrocketing to ridiculous levels. Other things panic bought included pasta, flour, and spicy pickled onions! Truly bizarre, it is almost like they thought that the government do not have massive stockpiles and farms.

However, I cannot blame the humans for not trusting the government. One rogue agent of ours stationed in America going under the name 'Donald Trump' said:

"So when we have a lot of cases, I don't look at that as a bad thing. I look at that as, in a certain respect, as being a good thing because it means our testing is much better".

When America had 1.5 million Coronavirus cases!

That concludes my report.

**By Rhys Hughes**

## The Story of the Raining Cats and Dogs

There was once a town, known most for its Tuesday Markets. Its name was Chorley. What you are about to hear is the story of the Coronavirus pandemic's cat and dog crisis.

The town was peacefully in lockdown, mostly adhering to the lockdown rules. The day was wet and misty, making it a nasty day to go for some exercise. Out of nowhere, lightning struck, and thunder could be heard all around. A sudden outburst of barking dogs and wailing cats could be heard echoing across Chorley and the surrounding villages. Police went out of the station, wondering what it could be. When they got to see, they all smiled in glee.

Cats and dogs were everywhere; lots all cuddling too. They all seemed to be homeless, but soon that wouldn't be true. Cats and dogs all round today, as the grumpy seem dismayed. The town was now knee deep in pets and they just wouldn't stop for anything. Cat food and dog food began to be a struggle, as the once calm town of Chorley, was overwhelmed with pets.

As all the cats and dogs were sold, the streets seemed to be empty. There were no more cats and dogs, they all had found their homes. Whatever happened, we will never know, but we know something happened for sure and it seemed to be quite big. The cats and dogs were everywhere, it was hard to see the floor. When the police saw this sight, they tried with all their might, to see the cats and dogs away, to their warm new homes.

This was the story of the cats and dogs and how they affected us all. They all appeared suddenly, and it gave us quite the fright. We all feel happy and joyful, all thanks to this great gift. The cats and dogs are happy now, and loneliness is a thing of the past.

As historians look back through the diaries of the townsfolk, they see a sort of standard. It was almost like an unwritten rule, for this sentence to be seen. The sentence was, to no surprise, 'The cats and dogs had struck!'. To no one, was the event usual, but to all it was remembered vividly. If anyone was feeling down, they would soon lose their frown, and the whole of Chorley was happy. Here is the recount of one of the eyewitnesses.

"I was out for a walk, just passing through Market Street to deposit my pay-check at the bank. Behind me, suddenly there was a flash and a bang! I turned and nearly fainted due to what I saw. A moon sized crater and a group of cute cats and dogs. At that moment, I ran to tell some friends, before remembering my pet allergies and fainting at the scene. The police were as confused as me, and I guess that's how it will always be in Chorley!"

**By Edward Farnworth**



20th March 2020

"Happy Birthday to me!" Today was my birthday, the joyous day I turned 14.....it didn't really feel like a happy birthday. As I recall, all I could feel was miserable solitude away from the excitement and enthusiasm of my friends who would undoubtedly have helped me to celebrate. Instead Boris Johnson ordered cafes, restaurants, bars, and gyms to close. Hearing this made my heart sink, the thought of being separated from everyone had my mind spinning to insanity. That night I returned home wandering around the house aimlessly. I remember being afraid of this Covid monster, and I can still hear my mother saying, "Don't worry, it's in China, it won't reach us." However, I couldn't help feeling that each time it came closer, country by country, it was like it was punching away at my protection. But now, it's here.

23rd March 2020

The death rates grow to 15,426; the lockdown intensifies. Johnson announces nationwide lockdowns, enforcing mass unemployment. Luckily for me my mother is a full-time mum and can stay home too.

27th March 2020

Before today I felt safe and convinced the changes made would keep us safer from this terror, but then the beast penetrated the PM that we trust. All I could feel was anxiety of being defenceless from this Villain.

1st April 2020

Although the start of this year has been awful, filled with depression and fear, there have been positives, days that really lift your mood and fill your fading heart with contentment and sanity. This morning is one such day, April fool's day. I decided to play a little joke on my 12-year-old sister, Aimee. Throughout the morning I hid behind doors or cupboards so that when she passed, I could leap out and scare her. It was hilarious, the look on her face was priceless; she jumped confusedly like a kangaroo; I was surprised she didn't hit her head on the ceiling.

21st May 2020

This is probably the most fearful I have ever been in my entire life. My Cousin Matthew fell victim to the control of this monster. On the phone to his girlfriend, my mother related his conditions to me. "He is weak and motionless to the point he cannot even drag himself to get out of bed. He explains how he cannot smell or even taste the food he is forcing into his limp body. His chest is squeezed as tight as a rubber balloon. He is struggling beyond anything previously imagined." In shock by the dreadful news all I could do is hope for his and our future.

16th June 2020

The news we have eagerly awaited: restrictions to the lockdown are easing off and my cousin's condition improves. With renewed hope my thoughts turn to my holiday in Spain. I am really eager to forget the stress of this invisible killer. We all play the waiting game; all we can do is hope and pray for a better and safer future.

**By Lucy Jones**

08/07/2020

Dear Diary,

How long has the UK been in lockdown now? Is it really 16 weeks? Do you not think everyone is losing track at this point? Lockdown has been difficult. When you are stuck with the same people, looking at the same four walls and you're missing everyone you can't see all of the time. Don't get me wrong, I love my family, and I cherish my time with them, but I miss my friends so much. I have been staying in touch; it's not the same though.

At this point, I think every student can say they miss school. It sounds unusual, but it is so true! Even with all this, I can say that I am enjoying one thing. While we have the chance, I have been making the most of the time to enjoy the outdoors and the countryside. Personally, I think it is incredible to look at the scale of things we take for granted. It's just incredible that some of the procedures have now been loosened so that we have more flexibility in terms of what we are allowed to do. All in all, I can definitely see that we are beginning to come out of the other side of this terrible pandemic.

Honestly, I really do believe that I am being incredibly soppy, but I miss everyone including teachers, friends and family immensely. I think that the pandemic has taught everyone a lot, in terms of the fact that we shouldn't take the little things for granted. Things like being able to be with our friends and family, being able to go to school and being able to travel freely. As I recall, returning to school has been made mandatory for September which is amazing. However, will it be anything like normal? Will we be able to interact with our friends and teachers like normal? To be fully honest, even if it is not like anything normal, a return to school at all will be a huge step in the right direction. I can't wait to see everyone again!

In recent times, I have been lucky that I have been able to see my Dad and my youngest sister again, which is a huge step back to normality for me. My youngest sister celebrated her fourth birthday the other day, which I am still struggling to believe. I can't believe all of those years have flown by so quickly. For schoolwork, I have been using my computer which has been a godsend. I couldn't do all my work without it. I have also been communicating with some people while doing my work, such as my cousin and a couple of friends. That has been a massive motivation to complete work. It will definitely feel very strange when we go back to school and start working in classrooms and exercise books again, but I would rather that than anything else at the moment.

Thanks for listening as always.

Speak again soon!






Lewis.

**By Lewis Holland**



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