

Lockdown diaries: Love in the time of Corona can blossom too (anonymous)

In the week preceding the lockdown, Nancy* entered a clandestine relationship with her coworker Ira* and they embarked on a romantic getaway to a rural house in his home country and were there when the state of emergency was declared. With abundant wine and clean air in a serene location removed from society, they are exploring their feelings for each other away from the prying eyes of their colleagues.

Nancy is a 20-something-year-old who has been living in Madrid for two years. She pivoted away from teaching and became a copywriter at the international firm where she met Ira. Their fondness towards each other has escalated from covert cigarette breaks to safeguarding each other as the world crumbles around them.

*At the request of the subjects, their names have been changed.

What was your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?

Before the lockdown, my life was pretty average. I had recently broken up with my ex boyfriend/*pareja de hecho* with whom I still technically share a flat in Madrid. I've started

getting involved romantically with my colleague Ira after months of playful banter and subtle glances.

Our team has been encouraging us to get together for a while now, but we've been wanting to take it slowly to avoid outside pressure. They make on-the-nose jokes about us as they've speculated that we've hooked up already. They're an intuitive and nosey bunch. I look forward to finally coming clean and telling them everything. We plan on sending flowers to my manager as she's the one who first introduced us when I joined the team.



Now, I'm quarantined in a serene rural location with Ira, which we fled to after mutually declaring our feelings for each other. Our respective living situations in Madrid are less than ideal as they're not shared with people we would want to endure a strict quarantine with. We made the split-second decision to flee Madrid to visit his parents at their rural house in his home country.

I wasn't imagining the lockdown would last this long, and I had assumed I could easily get back to Spain if needed, but now it seems like I'm here in this countryside paradise until Semana Santa at least.

Thankfully, everything is working out. The anxiety I experienced on the flight was insane, I am genuinely happy to be where I am. We have more space and fresh air than in Madrid and are in a place with few cases of the virus and with enough wine stockpiled for the apocalypse. There is little else to do outside of teleworking, siestas, and NSFW activities.

Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?

Right now, I feel like my entire life is one romantic comedy a la "Love in a time of Corona." Since our coworkers remain in the dark, it's funny when they talk to us about each other while we're sitting next to each other.

We set up our teleworking stations in different rooms so that we could conference with our colleagues without blowing our cover, and it's always fun trying to playfully distract the other without anyone finding out.

How are you coping?



Wine. Lots of wine. Otherwise, talking to my friends back in Madrid and spending quality time with Ira and his parents, practicing their language, and helping out around the country house when I'm not clocked into work. I wouldn't call it "coping" though, as I am enjoying the beautiful countryside with someone whose companionship I savor.

What goals are you hoping to achieve as our time in lockdown continues?

Right now all of this feels surreal, but I'm beginning to get a workout routine, and hopefully, I'll learn more of his language.

Otherwise, I am so excited to see where this quarantine takes my new relationship. So far, it's been amazing and we're learning so much about each other that would have taken months to learn under regular circumstances. I don't doubt this will set the foundation for a relationship that is solid, full of trust, and long-lasting.

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

See my best friend and go out for drinks and spill all of the tea about what can only be described as a 21st-century romcom. We will dabble in 4/20-friendly fun as these resources are beyond our reach at this time.

Any advice for people in a similar situation?

My biggest piece of advice is to communicate with those around you. Ira and I haven't had much time to set relationship boundaries and guidelines and now we're thrown into this situation together where we are learning as we go along. Thankfully we're both strong communicators so that isn't too difficult for us but it's unprecedented for both of us to go from 0 to 100 so quickly with a new partner.

Make sure to take some "you time." It's difficult to be outgoing and engaged every second. In the mornings I always take time for myself to get ready for the day, despite not actually needing to go to work or leave the house. I listen to

political podcasts that allow me to remain an informed and socially conscious citizen while being so far removed from society.

We're also lucky because his parents' property is set up with a separate building for their guests, so "adult time" isn't restricted and I can go and hide for a few hours if I become overwhelmed by a language I don't speak and people that I've only recently met in an environment that I am still adapting to.

Have you noticed any acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

Recently, at the grocery store, with lines out the door, I saw several people make way for seniors and the elderly to let them inside first. It was cold and raining, and to avoid crowds inside shoppers needed to queue outside and had to wait patiently to be granted access. It was a human moment witnessing people let those more vulnerable to the elements enter first.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

Don't let economic factors drive your policy. The cost of human life is far more important. Keep the quarantine going for as long as necessary, because even one infected person can prolong the threat.

My hometown in the USA has no cases, but it's spreading in my home state. To everyone in my hometown, don't be stupid. Even if the mayor doesn't specifically call on people to isolate, do so. We've seen what can happen in a short period of time if people don't take this seriously, don't let your situation get as bad as it is in Europe.

Check out all [Madrid lockdown stories](#)

If you'd like to get involved and share a compelling story from this ongoing chapter of history, reach out to Daphne Binioris (daphne@veracontent.com) and Daniel Catalan (a96039@aup.edu)

Lockdown diaries: Dr. Victor de Benito Vellisca, bravely attending to COVID patients at a hospital in Leganés, Madrid

There will be many opportunities to serve your communities in the aftermath of this crisis, but for now, stay at home.

A shortage of medical aprons has forced some of Madrid's doctors to wear garbage bags while attending to patients, says Dr. Victor de Benito Vellisca, a medical professional with 40+ years of experience, currently working directly with COVID-19 patients at a hospital in Leganés. He can't even go near his family without a mask on. And he urges us all to stay home.

While Victor was a surgeon for most of his career, he is now working in a primary care unit, which has granted him insight into how the Spanish healthcare system functions as a whole. He says the medical community is working round-the-clock to bring this crisis to an end. They hear our daily applause at 8 PM as they bravely serve their communities.

* Victor's son, who shares his name, arranged this interview, translating and transcribing his father's answers.

How has your life changed since the lockdown began?

My life has changed drastically. I can't come closer than one meter to my wife, and when we're near, I have to wear a mask. I can't meet my children at home to avoid infecting each other. My life now consists of working in the morning and spending the afternoon at home.

What goals are you hoping to achieve as our time in lockdown continues?

My daily goals are to stay healthy to avoid infecting my wife. It is crucial for me to continue assisting my patients who are depending on me for their treatments. The medical community is working hard to find a solution to this problem and I am going in every day and doing my part.

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

We are overwhelmed with work. We are all under pressure and I have the feeling that I am not achieving as much as I would hope to. The strain on staff and the lack of supplies are apparent.

Have you noticed any acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

Yes, I have noticed that the population is grateful to healthcare professionals. When we go on call to their homes or they come to see us, they don't stop thanking us for our work. The cheering at 8 PM every day is heard and appreciated by me and my colleagues.



Image from [@lablfoto](#)

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

The first thing I'll do will be to kiss and hug my wife. It pains us that we cannot be close while this crisis is happening. I'll also meet my daughter and hug and kiss her. I will greet my friends and people I know in the street by shaking their hands and I will congratulate my colleagues for the accomplishments of their work.

Do you have any tips for how we can help those in need?

There will be many opportunities to serve your communities in the aftermath of this crisis, but for now, stay at home.

Who are you in quarantine with? Any advice for people in a similar situation?

I am in quarantine with my wife. I would recommend that people in quarantine with their spouses find ways to keep themselves entertained to release stress, such as reading, watching TV, communicating with friends and chatting over the phone.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

The top priority right now is to control the spread of the virus. I would ask the government to be less lenient towards people who are breaking the lockdown rules in order to avoid an increasing death toll.

Do you have a message for your community?

My message to my neighbors would be to remain patient, stay strong and control the spreading of the virus. We hear you on your balconies at 8 PM, applauding us as we work for a solution to this problem.

My main tip is that people refrain from leaving their house except for when buying food and going to the pharmacy. Being

confined at home is the best way to isolate the virus and avoid it continuing to spread. Let's hope that soon this nightmare will end once and for all.

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Lockdown diaries: Alan, currently writing a book about modern day Spain

It's ok to be stressed, and it's normal to be losing it. Most of us are. But we are doing it together.

It's ok to be stressed, and it's normal to be losing it. Most of us are. But we are doing it together," says Alan McGuire, who used to be a psychiatric nurse back in the UK. Now a writer and English teacher here in Madrid, he's struggling to use this time to finish his book about modern day Spain. It's hard to concentrate. He's also observed that the grey pollution cloud above Madrid, known locally as the 'boina', has lifted off the city, but the clouds in people's

minds are growing by the day.

You can read Alan McGuire's written works [here](#).

What was your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?

When the lockdown started, I had already begun to prepare to work from home a bit. In a previous life I was a psychiatric nurse, so I had a feeling from watching the news that it would get bad. Seeing how China locked down the country and stopped their entire economy, the largest in the world, to try and stop the virus, it made me think. Then when Italy got hit, I had a feeling it would reach Spain. My wife's friend that I normally tease for overreacting agreed with me, that confirmed my suspicion that things were getting more surreal in the world (We have already had Brexit and Trump). Being a nurse you always assume the worst will happen, however I never expected it to be this bad.

If two weeks ago you told me I had to spend a month at home I would have thought '*great, I can finish writing my book and I don't have to see people or get interrupted*'. But since it has actually happened, it hasn't been great. It is getting worse by the day. I find it hard to concentrate and end up staring at bad news all day. To top it off I haven't written a thing. I have to say, this has started out as a depressing article!

What does the street look like?



I live in a commuter town south of Madrid called Leganes. Normally it means leaving a night out early to get the last train home or travelling for an hour on the last metro back at 1am. However now it is nice to be away from the busy centre.

I have a small green area with a woodland near me where I can walk my dog India. It has a great view of Madrid, but just looking at it makes me feel desolate. Knowing all those people are cooped up stressed in their houses, worried about their jobs and homes more than their health. I think it is a sad reflection of our society. The grey pollution cloud above Madrid, known locally as the 'boina' or beret, has lifted off the city but the clouds in people's minds are growing by the day.

Have you noticed any random acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?



I saw two dog walkers talking to each other outside my flat and one of the older neighbours started shouting at them to not stand close. I thought 'good on ya'.

I have also seen the local street cleaners putting out a large sign outside their depot, saying thank you for the applause that happens every night. **The applause is ramping up here with music and instruments, although it got a bit much when they started playing 'I Will Survive'.**

How are you coping?

I keep reminding myself we are all in this together to a degree. Reading philosophy has helped, and my e-book has been revived with many cheap or free domain philosophy books. Great time to catch up on the classics! Reading is a great form of escapism after staring at a screen all day whilst simultaneously entertaining 4-year-olds or correcting the pronunciation of sheep for the fifth time.

I hope that people stop pretending to be ok and stop this social competition of *look how creative I am* and *look how altruistic and relaxed I am*. **I think it is ok to be stressed, and it is normal to be losing it. Most of us are.** But we are doing it together. In solidarity and there is help if people need it. We just need to find each other. See, even people with dogs are struggling, it is not the golden ticket.

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

Of course, I would like to say go to the beach or visit the UK to see my family. But I won't have the money, I will have spent it all on baked beans as even the Spaniards won't eat them. It will be all that is left on the shelves of DÍA (supermarket) after the apocalypse. Well, that is how it feels at the moment.

In all honesty, I will probably be adjusting to hearing about things other than Covid-19. **I never thought I would miss the day Brexit was on the news.**

Oh and of course a beer on a terrace with friends.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

Keep it up and don't forget the people when the threat of the illness goes away. When the economic fallout happens don't forget to protect the people that you govern, the businesses that will be struggling and the services that have saved us.

- You can follow Alan McGuire on [Medium](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).
- Read Alan's article on [The Rastro's Political Flea Market](#), which he wrote for Naked Madrid just before the lockdown
- Also read his [recently published article](#) on the history of Spain and COVID-19

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Lockdown Diaries: Travis opens up about being quarantined with his ex

Not everyone has the good fortune to be in lockdown alone or with friendly faces. Travis Diamandis had a volatile breakup with his husband in the weeks preceding the lockdown, and now they're awkwardly trapped together along with innocent bystanders in the form of their roommate, dog, and cat.

Travis has been living in Madrid for four years and teaches English to young children while trying to see the best in people. He is often weighed down by nihilistic existentialism which he combats by partying, traveling, and forming meaningful connections with others.

What was your life like before the lockdown vs. today?

My life consisted of walking to school and teaching kids ranging from infants to 12-year-olds. I'm newly single so I was starting to enjoy that by connecting with guys and hanging out with them occasionally. Now all of that has changed.

A month ago, I split up with my Argentinian/Italian husband with whom I currently cohabitate and share the co-parenting duties of our dog and cat. Our breakup was volatile as our relationship had become toxic and our differences irreconcilable. I had intended to move out in April but now

that is no longer feasible due to the lockdown. The circumstances are as nightmarish as one would imagine.



Can you elaborate on what it's like to be in quarantine with an ex? Any advice for others with comparable circumstances?

I share this flat with my soon-to-be-ex-husband and another roommate from the UK who has been living with us since August. He is an innocent bystander and mediator. I try not to involve him in the petty conflicts with my ex, but at times it's unavoidable due to the small space and thin walls of the flat. I appreciate that our roommate is with us because it gives me a much-needed confidant and allows me to distance myself from my ex.

My advice for anyone living with an ex is to avoid

confrontation and deescalate arguments as they arise in order to maintain peace. It doesn't serve anyone to bicker or add additional tension during this indefinite quarantine. I'd advise others who can relate to my circumstances to breathe, go to another room of the house/apartment and take any measures needed to get through this in one piece.

For an even more tense period, we were five people confined to the apartment as my ex's mother and half-sister were staying in the flat as they were visiting from Argentina. Fortunately, they left yesterday and I'm relieved. The rental contract is in my ex's name so I didn't have a say in whether or not they stayed with us, and I was worried that they would be trapped here. They were incredibly stressed, and understandably so. They were civil and cordial towards me for the most part. However, I was extremely embarrassed when my ex initiated a loud fight with me while they were within earshot. Fortunately, Argentina repatriated all 23,000 Argentinians who were seeking to escape Spain over the course of a three-day period and now we're three in the apartment once again.

Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?

The thin walls of the apartment cause my ex and I to overhear snippets of each other's video calls with friends, family and our respective romantic interests. Often, I catch him badmouthing me to his friends who we used to share and it's awkward to inadvertently overhear his skewed perspective of events. I take comfort in knowing that this chapter of my life will be a riveting story to tell my future grandkids, and more imminently on first dates after things go back to normal.

Do you have any tips for those in need?

Trying to keep distance within social distancing is not easy. I try to read, I walk my dog to get some fresh air, and I watch educational videos on YouTube so I don't feel worthless for wasting my time.

My tips for others would be to reconnect with family, old friends, coworkers, or romantic interests. Just because we're shut-in doesn't mean we have to be isolated from the world. It's important to safeguard mental health in times like this. In an attempt to lean less heavily on my roommate for emotional labor, I turned to the online community of the [Depression and Anxiety Support Group \(Madrid\)](#) to share my feelings in a safe space.

Those of us who are healthy but suffer from mental health issues or anxiety need understanding and compassion during these times rather than the go-to "suck it up" advice.

Do a few pushups, sit-ups, and stretch. Read a good book. Watch a movie that lets you feel what you need to feel. For me, that is *The Wizard of Oz*. It has been my favorite movie since I was young and it never fails to put me at ease.

What is the first thing you'll do once the lockdown is over?

I want to keep this PG but I'll definitely see some of the romantic interests I have been corresponding with in these

trying times. I'll have a belated birthday party or dinner because I celebrated my birthday alone in quarantine.

What's going on in your hometown? Would you like to send the people there a message?

My suburban Texas hometown is just now coming to terms with the gravity of the situation and I hope that they follow the measures that health experts are proposing. I want to beg the people of my predominantly Republican southern town, a place where the open carrying of firearms is prevalent, not to be paranoid and racist towards Asian-Americans and distrustful of health experts. The world is in a precarious state and being careless or vindictive will only exacerbate problems.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

I've seen a lot of older people still out and about like nothing is happening and that infuriates me because we're in quarantine with our lives effectively paused for their well-being. It is such a slap in the face. I'd want the authorities to focus more heavily on restricting their movements as opposed to what they're doing now: entering the personal space of dog walkers and grocery shoppers to gauge how far they are from their registered addresses.

Check out all [Madrid lockdown diaries](#)

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Lockdown diaries: Margit, founder of Walk and Eat Spain, tells us how the tourism sector has been affected

For anyone working in the tourism sector, the lockdown has been a devastating blow that has inflicted uncertainty for when things will pick up again, says tour guide and hospitality entrepreneur Margit Sperling. A number of tour guests have asked her to postpone their tours rather than canceling outright, which is heartwarming and tremendous financial help.

Margit is the founder of [Walk and Eat Spain](#), a neighborhood food tour company that gives tourists a window into off-the-beaten-path local eateries. Originally from Seattle, she has

been living in Spain for 13 years. As a chef and gastronomy expert, she has generously shared some recipes for those of us seeking to emerge from quarantine with elevated competency in the kitchen. She's also recommended some of her favorite local businesses to support right now.

What your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?

Before the lockdown I was busy doing food tours, researching new local bars, cafés, and markets to feature my tours, calling travel agents to confirm groups, emailing potential guests with tour plans, going on Madrid adventures to create content for my social media accounts, having fun market lunches with friends and generally being active.

I launched my food tour business in April of last year and was on course to have an amazing 2020 with 8 tours booked for March and a bunch of tours on the calendar for April and May and into the summer. Everything has stopped. All my tours for this month and the next to have been canceled or postponed. Who knows what will happen in the late spring and summer, tourism high season. I haven't had any new inquiries in weeks. For my business at least it's just me, and I'm not faced with the awful reality of having to lay people off.

What does your street look like?

The streets in my neighborhood are quiet. I live in Malasaña so it's pretty different as there are normally tons of people out, walking to a from the bars in the area, hanging out on

the street and generally doing the noisy business of life in a dense urban area. The quiet is simultaneously calming and ominous.

Have you observed any random acts of kindness or uplifting things around you?

A number of tour guests have asked me to postpone their tours rather than canceling outright which is heartwarming and tremendous financial help. I've been living in my apartment for about 5 years and I didn't know many of my neighbors. The nightly applause for health workers and other service workers has given us this moment to connect. We all say "hi" and check in on each other from our balconies. It's a really beautiful part of every day.

How are you coping and what are your tips for others?

I've been trying to keep myself busy. I made a daily schedule for myself with time slots for different projects and also a bit of at-home exercise (Pop Sugar Fitness has a number of dance class videos that are actually pretty fun). I made a list of items that have been on the bottom of my To-Do list to see what I can get through. When I launched my website, I aspired to have a food and travel blog, but I had only done 2 posts in a year. I put myself on a writing schedule and intend to produce a post daily. Phone and video calls with friends and family help me feel more connected. Mostly, I've been cooking and recording cooking videos. I've also had to remember to slow down and try to enjoy the downtime. I'm

trying to respect an 8 PM computer shut down to not just spin my wheels.

What is the first thing you'll do once the lockdown is over?

I'll go have too many glasses of wine at all my favorite bars on Calle Palma in Conde Duque. And check on the roses in the Rose Garden in Parque del Oeste. And have ceviche and *botellines* in Mercado de Mostenses.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

Please make sure that the help for *autónomos* is accessible and far-reaching. Many of us are really hurting. We're working on a Plan B (and C and D...) but we need help.

Do you recommend any small businesses that have remained open for us to support?

[Panic:](#) Great bread, call in advance to reserve your favorite loaf. I am partial towards the *Hogaza Integral*, the *Pan de Molde* is unreal and the *Pan Semillas* is a crowd-pleaser. @panic_madrid

[Quesería Cultivo](#): Amazing cheeses, shops in Conde Duque and La Latina

[Mercado de los Mostenses](#): This local market continues to serve its community, I implore you to comply with all health recommendations when navigating its stalls.

[La Carbonera](#): My favorite neighborhood restaurant, is offering delivery options for their wonderful seasonal cuisine. @LA_CARBONERA_MADRID

Margit's recipes for aspiring lockdown chefs:

I've been doing a lot of cooking. Mostly comfort favorites like baked pasta dishes, pureed vegetable soups, roasted chicken and vegetables. I also love baking. I'm trying not to just make tons of cakes and cookies... but, If you want a fun baking project that uses pantry staples, this apple bread is a good one!



Apple bread

You can substitute apples for pears, a mix of apple and carrot or zucchini. And a note about measurements: You can take a girl out of America, but you can't take cups and teaspoons out of the American (or something). I use an 8-ounce measuring cup and measuring spoons I brought in my suitcase from home when I moved here in 2007. You can now but all that stuff here. If you want, you can convert measurements to metric or use a "vaso chato" for the one cup measure and a little spoon (level) for the teaspoons.

Ingredients

- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup white flour (pastry flour is great here but not necessary)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups grated fruit (use the large holes on a box grater. No need to peel the fruit if it's in good condition, if using older fruit, you can peel off any imperfections. This is a great way to avoid food waste!)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sunflower oil
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 egg

Directions:

- Pre-heat the oven to 350/175.
- Mix the flour, salt, baking soda, and cinnamon and set aside.

- In a large bowl, beat the egg with oil. Add the sugar and mix well. Toss in the grated fruit and stir to combine.
- Add the flour mixture to the fruit mixture and mix until the flour is all incorporated (but don't overmix or the cake will be gummy).
- Pour the mixture into a loaf pan lined with parchment paper or a greased with a little butter/oil.
- Bake for 50 minutes. Test with a toothpick (a few crumbs clinging to the toothpick means it's done).
- Try not to eat it in one sitting.

Asparagus and mushroom tortilla for two



Want to make a tortilla but don't want to fry potatoes? This one is great. Feel free to substitute asparagus for other vegetables like a thinly sliced zucchini.

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch green asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1-2 inch chunks
- 6 mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 4 large eggs
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated manchego or similar hard cheese (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Olive oil

Directions:

- In a medium, heavy-bottomed non-stick skillet sauté garlic until fragrant.
- Add mushrooms and cook at medium-high for about 5 minutes, or until starting to brown. Toss in the asparagus chunks and cook for a 3-5 more minutes until bright green and easily pierced with a fork. Salt to taste. You can add black pepper if you like.
- While the veggies are cooking beat the eggs in a large bowl with the cheese (if using) and a pinch of salt (if using cheese be aware that the cheese has a lot of salt).
- Take the veggies off the heat and add them to the egg mixture. Reduce heat to medium.
- Pour a little splash of olive oil to coat the pan and then add the egg and veggie mixture. Move the edges around to cook the egg, giving the pan some good shakes so it doesn't stick.
- After the tortilla is almost set (about 3-4 minutes) put a large plate over the skillet (bigger than the diameter of the pan) and flip it onto the plate.
- Add another little splash of olive oil then gently put the tortilla back into the skillet to finish cooking the other side.
- Cook until its set, about 3 more minutes (you can

carefully poke the center of the tortilla when it's done it feels solid when you press on it).

- Enjoy! Serve with a plate of thickly sliced tomatoes drizzled with olive oil and a bit of salt or with a big green salad and bread. Lots of bread.

[Margit's website](#)

Check out the other [Madrid Lockdown Series](#) stories!

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Lockdown diaries: Leah, journalist & author of Madrid No Frills

Both of Leah's parents are retired healthcare workers who are planning to return to work to help with the crisis at home in the UK. She's very proud of them. One of the best ways many of us can also help right now is to support local businesses. As she always says, if you're fortunate enough to have nothing to

fight for, then fight for someone else!

Leah Patten is a teacher, journalist and the author of [Madrid No Frills](#). She's been living in Madrid for seven years, exploring Madrid's hidden gems and neglected spaces, and shining a light on the inequalities and injustices surrounding them.

What was your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?



I was in a no-frills bar (Wednesday night) with a group of

activists discussing how we were going to continue our activities under the impending lockdown. We were some of the only people in the bar – it was already eerily quiet, and we all knew that this would be our last outing for a while.

What does the street look like?



My street is quiet but for lingering dog walkers, lone shoppers carrying 'bags for life', the odd street cleaner and slowly patrolling police cars. By night, everyone is out on their balconies, not just for the *#aplusosanitario* but also

just chatting away – it's like radio patio but exterior. I love it.

Have you noticed any acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

My parents, both retired healthcare workers, are planning to return to work (where they met) to help with the crisis in the UK. I'm so proud of them.

How are you coping?

I'm normally out for several hours a day wandering Madrid's streets, chatting to strangers and having *cañas* in no-frills bars, but I'm fine. I'm just worried about everyone else and am trying to help. As I always say, if you're fortunate enough to have nothing to fight for, then fight for someone else!

One way in which many of us can help right now (if we have the income and are able to go out) is to support local businesses. As soon as lockdown is over, [disaster capitalism](#) will sweep through our streets and we'll see Five Guys colonise even the most overlooked corners of our neighbourhoods. But we have the power to stop this simply by shopping local – it's so easy. Many markets even do online deliveries, so you don't have to go out. And bonus point: no dystopian queues!



Avoid dystopian queues and order online from local businesses!

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

Run out onto the street and celebrate with all of my neighbours! I picture it being like when they announced that the war was over.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

Just one thing?! OK, I'll give it a go. Dear Pedro, you're putting a moratorium on mortgage payments for those affected by the coronavirus but not for renters? Is this a class war?

And then when the moratorium on evictions ends, presumably those tenants are out too, right?! This is bullsh*t.

Also, don't reprivatise all those public hospitals! Have you seen the state of the NHS, Pedro?!

- Check out Leah's inspiring platform, [Madrid No Frills](#)
- Read our [interview with Leah in celebration of International Women's Day last year](#)

See all stories of [Madrid Lockdown Series](#) here

If you'd like to submit your story, please email daphne@veracontent.com

Lockdown diaries: Cat, university administrator & mother of two in Seville

Cat Gaa is a Chicagoan and remote worker who is coordinating the outgoing communication for an American university in Madrid while raising two bilingual hell raisers in Seville. The higher education and study abroad industries have been severely impacted by the ongoing crisis and Cat is using her digital toolkit to keep students and their families closely informed on new developments in real-time.

What was your life like a week ago vs. today?

My life ago was vastly different: my two boys, ages three and eight months, got dropped off at daycare around 9 AM, and I had a coffee at a neighborhood bar in Seville where I live before sitting down at my home office to work. When the Comunidad de Madrid decided to suspend classes, my workplace was immediately affected. I felt so disconnected and unable to help with the avalanche of calls from concerned parents, study abroad partners and prospective students. But it helped me see that the same would eventually happen in Sevilla, so I stocked up on necessities like formula and diapers, bought some craft material and new toys and started planning homeschooling lessons.

This week, my husband is taking over the child-minding while I work ahead as much as possible. Even though I've been remote since returning from maternity leave in December, my coworkers are trying to carry on away from the office, which has presented a few challenges, but we're making the best of it. My family is quickly realizing how much food we eat, how many loads of laundry we put on each week and that toddlers have very, very short attention spans.

What does the street look like?

I live on a quiet street at the heart of the *barrio* de Triana. Most of my neighbors are elderly. My home office has a clear line of site to a bus stop, and we live in front of a tobacco shop. The whoosh of the bus helps me keep track of time because I've given up wearing a watch – nearly every bus is

empty as it passes by. There's usually a short line about four or five people deep at the tobacco shop, and I find myself looking out the window any time I hear someone on the street. Usually, it's someone on their phone, breathing in orange blossoms and chattering while walking their dog or toting groceries. At the moment, I haven't seen many masks because the rumor here was that the forthcoming heat would burn off the virus in time for us to burn incense. But both Holy Week and the April Fair are canceled and postponed, respectively.

Seville is a city that claims the street to be their living room. It's odd to not have the white noise at all hours.

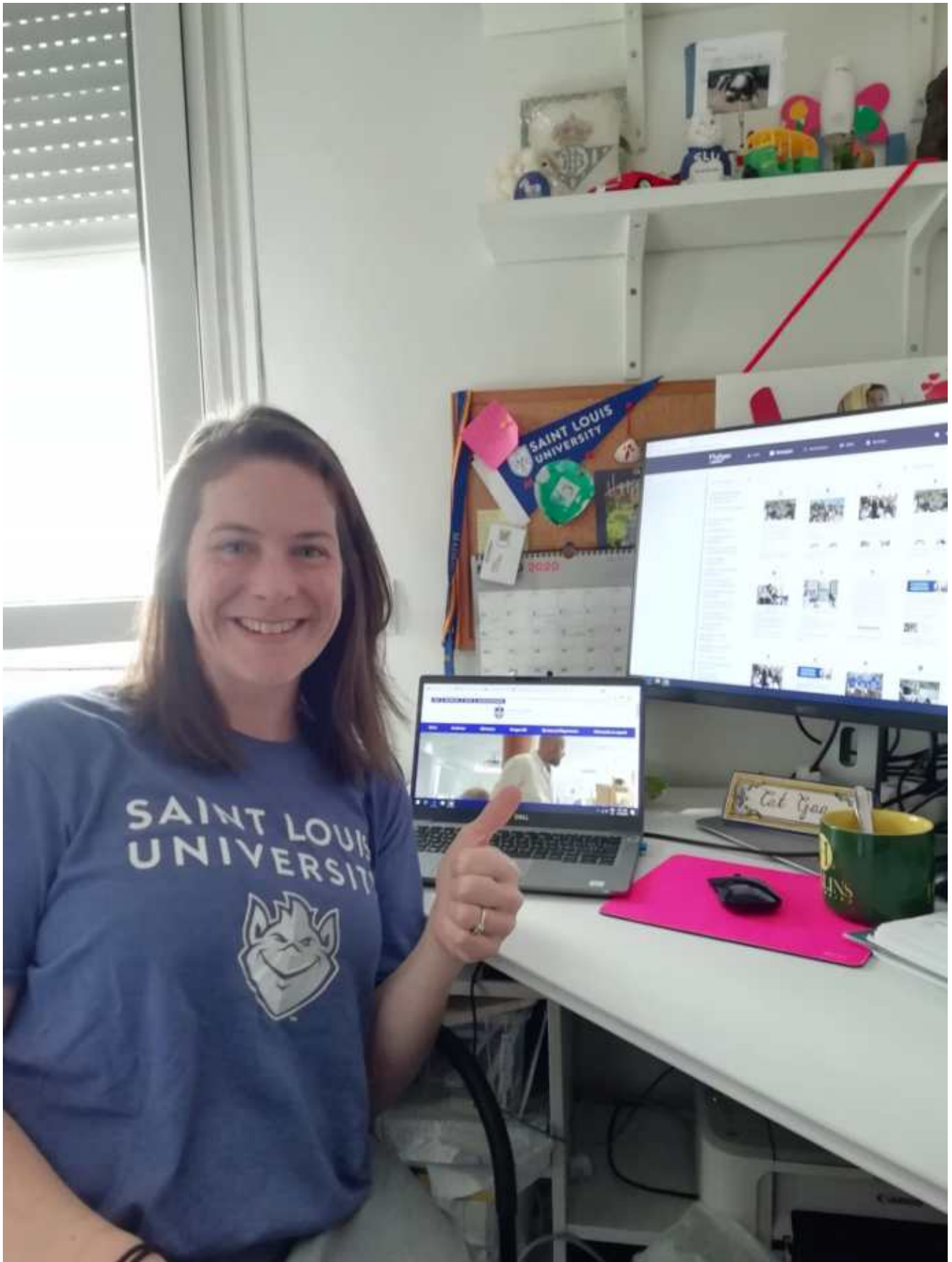


Have you noticed any random acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

I am part of a WhatsApp group with the other parents at daycare; in a class of 18 kids, two are medical professionals and have offered video consultations to rule out anything that doesn't merit a trip to the ER. Others have sent along material and games to keep this age group busy; I have helped some of the older children with English homework. Compassion for one another was severely lacking on a societal level, so I hope this situation brings people together. I have hunkered down in the house and not yet ventured out, and I live in a home rather than a *comunidad de vecinos*.

How are you coping?

So far, just fine. I haven't left the house since getting the boys from their last day of school on Friday the 13th. We have a patio and a terrace, and I am used to being at home – really, it could be worse. But I worry about the psychological effects that this might have on a growing toddler who will likely remember this. We've made s'mores and dressed up in old costumes and had family members back in Chicago read bedtime stories to us. It's a great time to bond and work on some of those *tareas* that I was saving for the summer, like learning to get dressed or roll over. I am trying to keep things as normal as I can with schedules but letting my toddler's creativity and free play take over.



Next week will be different, I'm afraid: my husband is a civil servant and considered essential services. He got a free pass

during the first week of lockdown but will have to return to Madrid for at least six days. This means I'll be alone with the boys – working in the pockets of time I have – at 6 AM, after they've gone to bed, or whenever they're calm and occupied. Handling the cooking and cleaning. Homeschooling as much as one can. I'd love to use this time to finally dust off my French book or organize my drawers but I know I'll soon be on survival mode.

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

Although I'd like to take an *exedencia* from my life for 48 hours and just go sleep in a hotel or have a few beers in Plaza Salvador, I think I will take my kids to see their *abuelos* when it's safe. They equate non-school days with spending time outdoors and with their grandparents, so explaining this situation to a small person has been difficult. I may just mandate that we see them outdoors, and preferably at one of those playgrounds next to a bar.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

No more knee-jerk reactions, and please make decisions on the whole. As a communications professional, I had to scour the news for the most current information, and many of the decisions seem reactionary as opposed to proactive. In times like these where bad or incorrect news travels quickly because of the technological resources we have, they need to step back and assess, and then use better channels for information.

See all [Madrid Lockdown Diaries](#) here

Lockdown diaries: Cepee, community builder & founder of She Hit Refresh

Cepee was in Morocco when the news started spreading that Madrid was going under lockdown and closing off its borders. Luckily she made it back in time, but three of the women she was traveling with are still there and are having trouble getting back home.

Cepee Tabibian is from the US and has been living in Madrid for over four years. She's the founder of [She Hit Refresh](#), an online community of over 5,000 women age 30 and over who want to break free from routine and start a life of travel. She's also the creator of [Madrid Blogger Network](#), Madrid's largest community for content creators.

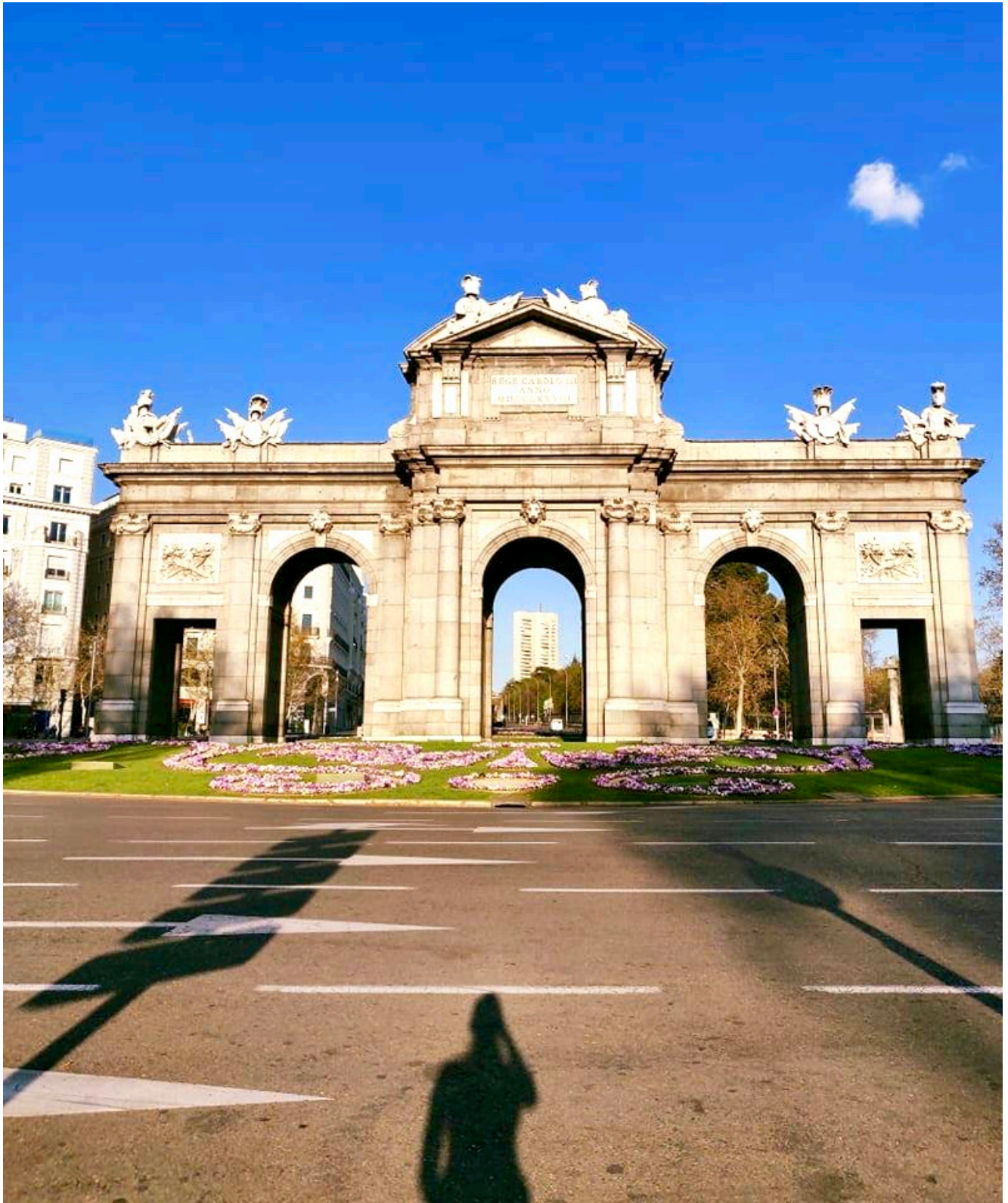
What was your life like a week ago vs. today?

A week ago I was in Marrakech, Morocco. We were just a couple days into my retreat for my business She Hit Refresh. I was joined by seven lovely women – five Americans, one Canadian, and one Brit. When I left Madrid on March 5th, I believe Spain

had roughly 280 cases of COVID19. Movement to/from the U.S. and Europe was normal, except for possible quarantine for those who had been in high-risk countries at the time: China, Iran, Italy.

Morocco only had two cases at that point and they were in Casablanca, a city we were not visiting. We were able to enjoy the trip without paranoia but were mindful to wash our hands and use hand sanitizer. However, social distancing wasn't being practiced yet in our group or even in society. Life felt quite normal. The beauty of the trip was that Morocco felt very far from the coronavirus panic and hype that we were seeing on Facebook. On more than one occasion we commented on how lucky we were to be in our own bubble, away from the anxious energy.

Fast forward one week – the impact of corona caught up with us. The announcement of new travel restrictions in the U.S. for travelers coming from Europe cut the trip short for some of our attendees. A few changed their flight to leave Morocco that same day and when my flight back to Madrid was cancelled that evening, I started to realize that things were starting to change very quickly in Spain.



I made it back to Madrid via Zurich and hit the supermarket as soon as I got home as I heard rumors of a possible lockdown. Today is day 5 of the quarantine and my life is not too different from what it was before embarking on the retreat. I work from home and am used to spending long hours in isolation at my apartment. But at the same time much of my social life

comes from the many events I run and attend in the city; we're now navigating how to replicate that online.

I've been using the extra time to work on projects and tackle my to-do list. I'm also being gentle with myself and allowing myself time and space to just relax. I do get to have a short walk outside three times a day with my dog, who has been the best company and cuddle buddy during this lockdown.

While I feel calm here in Madrid I am concerned for three of our attendees who stayed in Morocco to travel after the retreat and are having difficulties getting back home.

What does the street look like?

I live in Lavapiés. My street is eerily quiet – minimal foot traffic and barely any cars coming through. There is a stillness in the air that wasn't there a week ago – *a very 28 Days Later feel*. If I do see anyone on the street, they are either walking their dog or going grocery shopping. Some are wearing masks and gloves, we keep our distance, and most don't even make eye contact when they pass by.

Have you noticed any random acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

Our daily expression of gratitude to the health workers at 8:00pm has become my favorite time of the day. Hearing neighbors near and far applaud and cheer from their balcony and windows is uplifting and heartwarming. It's a moment where

you can experience the best of humanity. Madrid is a social city and since we can't be together physically, banding together everyday for this one ritual makes me feel deeply connected to humankind.

How are you coping?

I feel like I am coping very well. Although I'm an extrovert, I enjoy spending a lot of time at home alone. My original plan before corona was to hunker down in March and April to work on a few big projects. I was going to limit my social time so I could focus, so I guess I get to do just that, but without FOMO.

I'm making sure I'm still physically active. While I can't run under the lockdown I can work out in my apartment and have been using the [7-minute workout app](#) on a daily basis.

I have plenty to keep me busy, my dog to keep me company, and a cozy apartment stocked with food to keep me comfortable. TikTok, online communities, and the internet in general keeps me entertained and gives me an outlet for escapism when I need it.

I have so much to be grateful for right now and by focusing on what I have, I'm not frustrated by what's lacking or what I can't do. It could be much worse and I know a few weeks (months?) isolation is a drop in the ocean in the grand scheme of life. I can do it. We can do it!

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

Go for a run! I was just getting back into running before the quarantine. In Italy I heard they can leave the house to go for a run and at the beginning of our lockdown I fantasized about running wild and free through an empty city, however, outdoor activities are not allowed in Spain.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

I have many friends who are *autónomo* (registered freelancers) in Spain and struggling with the loss of work. The stress about how to pay their bills, let alone how to meet the monthly *autónomo* fee, is heavy. My message to the government echoes what Daniel Catalan has said before me, please consider suspending monthly *autónomo* fees indefinitely.

**for all registered freelancers in Spain, you must pay a monthly fee of €280/month, regardless of income*

See all [Madrid Lockdown Diaries](#) here

If you'd like to submit your story, please send an email to daphne@veracontent.com

Lockdown diaries: Cris, freelance actress & teacher

Today on our [lockdown diaries series](#), we're hearing from Cris Vidal, who's a freelance actress and teacher. She's originally from Galicia (northern Spain) and has been living in Madrid for 16 years. All her work has been canceled until further notice, but she also sees this time as an opportunity for self-reflection, creative activity at home, and appreciating the people in your life.

What was your life like a week ago vs. today?

My life tends to be pretty hectic. I'm an actress, drama teacher, and English teacher. I'm also a registered freelancer and run my own business. Last week I was working in several different places that have all shut down. I was attending theatre lessons, rehearsing in a Centro Cultural because we were creating a new piece, and I was also hanging out with my friends.

Now I find myself at home, dealing with the "gestoría" (tax and finance agency) because I still don't know how to best approach our work situation (my workmates' and mine). I'm also in contact with my clients, thinking about how to reschedule pending lessons and gigs without really knowing when this is going to end...

What do the street looks like?

They look pretty empty, just people with dogs and loaves of bread, wearing masks and looking a bit confused.

Have you noticed any random acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

Every time I go through a rough situation I'm marvelled at how many people have my back. From texts and calls to videoconferences and offers to help, it's really uplifting to know you have great friends and that we're there for each other.

How are you coping?

It's been a bit of a rollercoaster: worrying about my work, then for my family, feeling acceptance and calm, excitement about having time for myself, then worrying again... **I've found out that watching the news ONLY once a day helps.**

Tips: make a list with every indoor activity you've never had time to do and go for it! Call your friends and family often. Treat yourself... I might even create a new script for future shows. Also, use this extra time to think about your lifestyle – what things should remain when all of this ends, and what things are worth changing or simply letting go of.

What's the first thing you'll do once the lockdown is over?

Once it's safe I'll take a train to Galicia to see my family because I'm missing them dearly. I'll also hang out with my friends as much as I can. I'm an affectionate person and not being able to hug my friends or high-five my students is hard!



If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

Please give simple and clear instructions. There's so much talk about the aid and assistance that the government is supposedly going to give us. Make that aid a reality, and for people to be able to actually access that aid without having to struggle through so much bureaucracy. Among all the sectors that are suffering in quarantine, please don't forget about

artists.

See all [Madrid Lockdown Diaries](#) here

If you'd like to submit your story, please send an email to daphne@veracontent.com

Lockdown diaries: Eva, HR manager at VeraContent, a multilingual content agency

Eva nearly got trapped in Brussels in the midst of lockdowns and restrictions on air travel happening across Europe. Now, back in Madrid, she tells us what it's like to be living in Spain under lockdown, while working remotely and collaborating with freelancers from all over the world.

Originally from Galicia (northern Spain), Eva A. Movilla has been living in Madrid for four years. Before then she lived in Belgium and the UK. Now she's head of Human Resources at [VeraContent](#), a translation and localization agency, and a teacher at a Business School.

What was your life like a week ago vs. today?

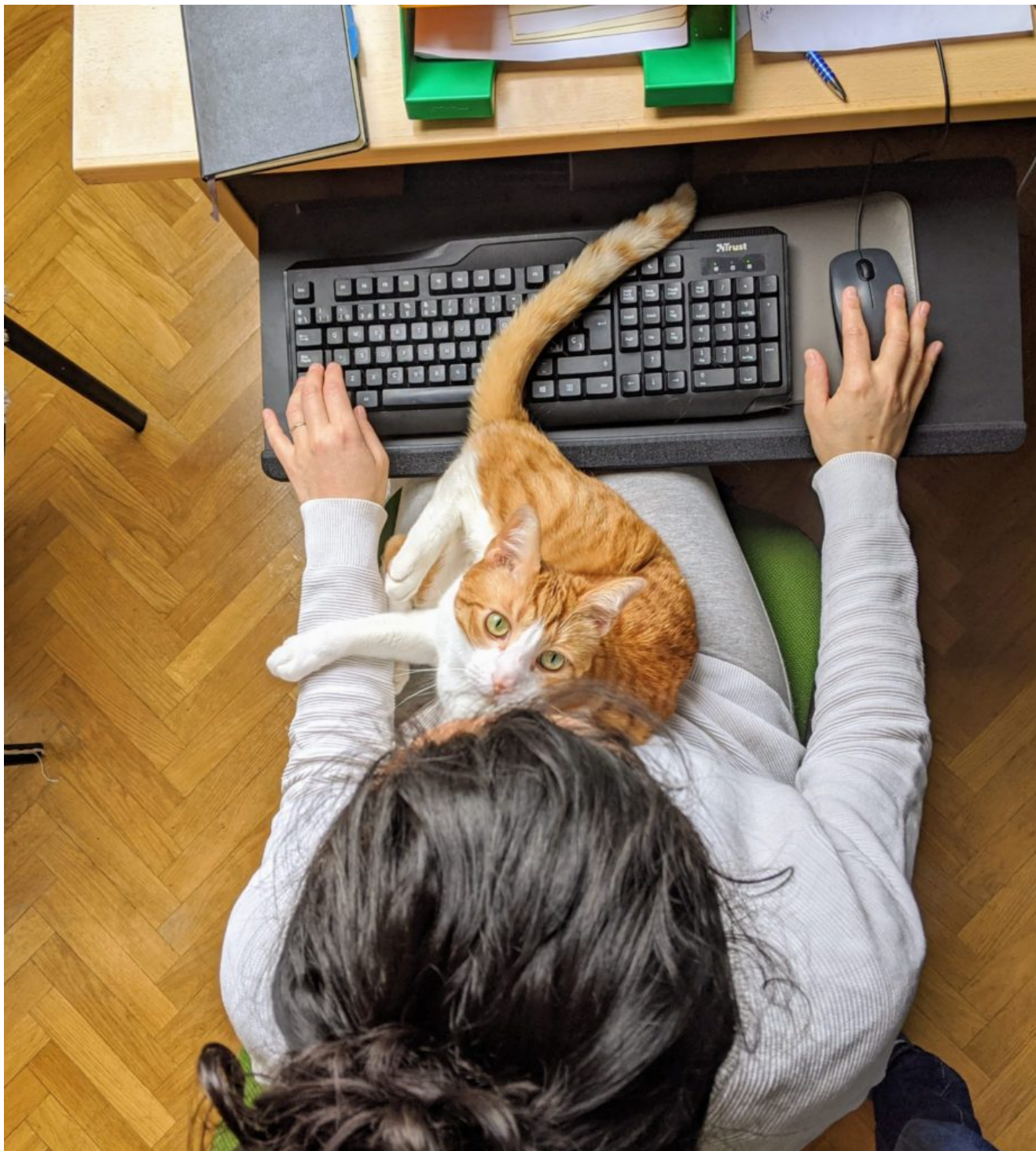
One week ago I was getting on a plane to Brussels. My husband is from there and I lived in the country for 6 years some time ago, so I like to organize a trip every now and then to meet up with family and friends from the old days.

It's incredible how everything changed so quickly. All our plans got cancelled as Belgium is undergoing quite a lockdown itself, we couldn't meet with anyone (not even close family), so we decided to move our tickets to this Sunday. When we landed, believe me, it was a completely different image from the one just 5 days before. The plane was half empty, the airport looked like a ghost town, and the few people we encountered were heavily protected with masks, gloves, and some even with sunglasses and caps!

At the company where I work, [VeraContent](#), we're masters of remote work, so in that sense it hasn't changed that much. I do miss the personal connection we have on office days – Tuesdays and Thursdays – and how we always have a good laugh over lunch or having drinks after work. But in the strictly professional aspect I don't really think we have undergone any major disruption due to coronavirus restrictions. I have noticed that freelancers and applicants are more responsive now, probably because they're all at home, glued to their phones and laptops at the moment.

Besides working as the head of HR at VeraContent, I also teach a class on teamwork & collaboration for a Business School and it has to be taught remotely now. Of course, it's not easy to

keep students engaged over a hangouts call, but I enjoy the challenge! Funnily enough last week's class was on how to collaborate remotely with teams located all over the world.



What does the street look like?

We live in a residential area of Alcorcón (a neighborhood in the outskirts of Madrid), always packed with families and children. The streets are pretty quiet and all the parks have been closed. You see some people wearing masks while running errands. Police cars are often patrolling asking people to go home through the loudspeaker. It does look quite apocalyptic, to be honest!

Have you noticed any random acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

It was a super emotional moment when people came out on their balconies and started clapping and shouting to pay homage to all health employees. It lasted for quite a while and you could really feel all that human energy. It was truly moving.

How are you coping?

I'm very much used to working from home so it doesn't really have a huge impact so far. Of course it's only been a few days... let's talk in a week.

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over ?

Go for a veggie miso at Ramen Kagura and have a vermouth on a *terraza* in the sun!

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

I would urge the government and all political parties to put politics aside and focus on the common good.

See all [Madrid Lockdown Diaries](#) here

If you'd like to submit your story, please send an email to daphne@veracontent.com