

Grief in Isolation by Clare

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It's fair to say my emotions have been all over the place over the past couple of months. Before the UK went into Lockdown, my anxiety was very very high – I could feel this impending doom coming but was totally out of control to do anything about it. That feeling took me right back to the day Annaliese died, the worst day of my life. All the media coverage and chatter amongst people I knew was about infections, hospitals, death and it was pushing against all the triggers that I have now. Every time I turned the radio on, the tv on, looked at social media – it was there. I felt panicked, I was worried about it all, I didn't know what to do...

Then the announcement about lockdown came and at least the decision had been made and we settled into the new routine of having our youngest out of school and staying home. The first week or two were tricky, I was obsessed by the daily government briefings – listening to the facts as they emerged – our son was worried and unsettled too which is always hard to cope with. That first Thursday that we clapped for the NHS (I thought it was the right thing to do to set the best example for him) he asked me 'Why did we do that Mummy, because they didn't save my sister?'. I managed to hold the tears until I'd left his bedroom. We haven't done that since. Hearing about the NHS everyday has also been very hard – we are currently in the middle of suing them for failure of care, they let Annaliese down, they didn't follow process, they destroyed our lives forever... Don't misunderstand me, I think the people on those Covid-19 wards are incredibly selfless and brave – but I have a different experience of the NHS now, and it's impossible for me to just forget about that.

Isolation itself hasn't really been much of a challenge for us though, as many of you will know – this new life as bereaved parents prepares you pretty well for isolation. We don't really go out much (I work from home anyway), we don't really see friends much (the most contact I have with the outside world is in the school playground) and we have felt socially distanced and isolated for

almost 2 years now – so I guess that particular cloud has a silver lining.

I have found that spending all this time together at home has made the absence of Annaliese more pronounced, it's totally ridiculous to say but when her brother is at school, it's almost like my brain can kid myself that she's still there too. When we are all here together – I can't comprehend that she's not. Does that make any sense? I have spent time in her room– tidying (her brother uses it to play in now which I love), cleaning and rearranging. I am considering boxing some of her things up and putting them in the loft – I have all this time and I'm a very practical and 'get it done' sort of person, but it's such a big big emotional hurdle that I will only do it if I feel ready – there's no rush. I opened a drawer with a view to taking out a few things and spotted a little pair of knickers and just fell to pieces, shutting the drawer immediately. Some things are so painful, aren't they?

The second anniversary is looming for us, so that's weighing heavy on my mind. We won't be able to go somewhere special for the day, to try and keep busy, to distract our minds from the horrors that date holds. We will just have to grit our teeth and get through it – I know we will, doesn't stop the anxiety rising though.

So, for now, I will carry on as I have been doing for weeks. Trying to be kind and patient, limiting my news and social media intake (because it really helps), letting my emotions flow when they cascade over the edge, doing my daily meditation app, getting good sleep (I listen to the sounds of the waves lapping on my bedside Alexa which soothes my whirring mind and sends me off to sleep) and just waiting. Taking it day by day, just as I have done for the past 2 years. I'm not missing a social life, I'm not missing pubs and restaurants, cinemas and theatres, mooching round shops – I'm just missing my little Annaliese, as usual.