

Crown

There will be memories of "spot the masks in the street"
and discomfort when people come too close;
a vague recollection of not touching door-knobs
could remain.

But there may also be golden memories of a peaceful time
when life calmed down.

Confined for weeks on end, our sense of time shifting:
a bubble of childhood.

More hours in the day, a quieter life, a community;
children playing on the street.

Was it a simpler time than before a virus
brought us rushing to a halt?

Or a time of anxiety, uncertainty, and fear?

We can measure the tension and isolation,
the low-level dread and uncertainty.

But we can't go to the park,
because we are scared to go outside.

That grips me in my chest.

But still, the tempo was slower.

We were not box-ticking, but creating
this memory of life when the pace
suddenly reduced.

A bit of a gift of time.

FOUND POEM: SOURCE TEXT

'We've gone back several decades': What will the legacy of lockdown be for kids?

By Wendy Tuohy April 26, 2020 — 12.10am

For some Australian children living through times of COVID-19, there will be memories of "games of spot the masks in the street", or a sense of discomfort when people come too close on the footpath.

Even a vague recollection of not wanting to touch any door-knobs could remain in the minds of some, according to Victorian parents observing their kids' reactions, who spoke to *The Sunday Age*.

Midwife and mother Richelle Franklin has, with husband Matt, attempted to keep all things COVID-19 off the radar of their children, Henry, 6, and Emily, 4.

For others, there will be "golden memories" of a peaceful time, say social researchers, when life that seemed to be growing ever faster calmed down.

For the unluckiest group, the course of their lives could be permanently altered by the stress of job loss and insecurity for already thin-stretched parents. Even for adults confined for weeks on end, "our whole sense of time is shifting", says Dr Carla Pascoe Leahy, a contemporary histories researcher at Melbourne University and Museum Victoria.

"Our normal sense of being able to project into the short, medium and long term is completely on hold – we're living through a different experience of time."

Dr Pascoe Leahy, a mother of children aged five and seven, says the intrusion of such a vast international event into what is usually the bubble of childhood could produce both positives and negatives.

"For a lot of more privileged kids, strangely they may remember the time quite fondly; as a time of having more hours in the day with parents and siblings, a quieter lifestyle," she says. "As a historian of childhood, I'd say we're in a social regression, we've gone back several decades." And this is not a bad thing.

"One of the things we know about 21st century childhood is children have very scheduled lives ... they are constantly running from a tennis lesson to a piano lesson or an art lesson – now we're forced into an old mode of community, there are way more children playing on the street, partly because there are fewer cars and also because they have more free time."

Ironically, many children may reflect on the first half of 2020 as a time for which they feel great nostalgia, "a simpler time" than before a virus brought rushing to a halt.

Others may recall "anxiety, uncertainty and fear; children are very good at picking up on the emotions of adults around them, even when it's not explicitly communicated". They are, after all "not just the COVID generation, but also the climate change generation", says Pascoe Leahy.

Where many of their parents could enjoy insulated childhoods, this generation "will be the one that remembers global events infiltrating personal, familial and domestic life in ways that cannot be ignored. "We could not ignore the bushfires, and we cannot ignore this pandemic."

"What's interesting is the way the global is inserting itself into family life and home life, and a period in children's lives which is usually remembered as quieter, local and intimate."

To try to measure just how the tension and isolation of COVID-19 affects Australian children and family life, Dr Elizabeth Westrupp, clinical psychologist and senior lecturer at Deakin University, has just recruited 2000 families to study.

While isolation has not necessarily robbed children of what they need to thrive, including a sense of physical safety, emotional security, stimulation and love (and for those virus times may be no more than an "odd memory"), for those with stressed parents there may be a toll.

And many parents are feeling acutely stressed trying to do work and home school. "I wouldn't want to underestimate the impact of that, I just think it's incredibly challenging for kids and for parents," she says.

"The other thing is anxiety; it has been a fairly anxious time for many. One of my students described it as a low level dread and anxiety, particularly in first few weeks with such uncertainty." The families in Dr Westrupp's study will be asked about children's and parents' mental health and wellbeing, sleep and alcohol use in the coming months to help gauge lasting effects.

"For secure, middle-class households ... I'm sure there will be very fond memories about this time of having much more time with your parents and family and doing things around the house, cooking, gardening, games and other projects. I do think that kind of golden memory is quite a possibility," she says. It may be a positive to miss the hectic routine that goes with "cultivation of the child".

On the other hand, emotional stress in isolated households can be extreme and lead to permanent impacts: "If there's strain within relationships ... We know when Wuhan lifted their bans (on going out) a little bit a whole lot of people went out and filed for divorce."

Midwife, and mother Richelle Franklin, is trying to keep her children, aged six and four, completely cocooned from any effect of the pandemic and isolation. She has been able to continue to work her night shifts at St Vincent's Hospital and her husband, Matt, is still working as a carpenter, and both have made a conscious effort not to discuss coronavirus around the kids.

"They're sad because they're missing their little friends, and the routine as such that they know it is no longer, but we don't watch the news with them around and we try to really limit what they know about it," said Ms Franklin.

Richelle Franklin: "We don't watch the news around them."

"It's hard trying to explain to them that we can't go to the park because there's germs and the virus. But we have really tried to insulate them because we don't want them panicking and going to the other extreme and being scared to go outside."

The blanket approach is more difficult when children are in primary school. Jasmine Bourke, a communications worker and mother of two primary school-aged children, says the slowdown is a plus but the increase in exposure to technology as a direct result of isolation is keeping her awake.

"One of my children, who is eight, said to me over the weekend, 'Mum time used to go really fast!', and that gripped me in my chest. I felt, 'my goodness I never felt that as I grew up'. I'm a child of the '80s and the pace was a lot slower. We never had the pressure of a million activities."

"It was almost a pivotal moment to think I'm bringing up my children in a world where she's not having that sense of having time, of not being rushed, and we're creating this ... We're almost box-ticking in life, scheduling everything as we're told we should."

Ms Bourke, like other parents who spoke to The Sunday Age, is concerned that isolation life has pushed children otherwise protected from the influence of too much technology, such as her own 11-year-old, into habits they may be stuck with.

"I've been very firm with my children in terms of screen time, always. I still find it very hard to look at my children on screens ... and it's hard to reconcile that anxiety around screens [with the amount children need to use them now]. It worries me an awful lot." She fears a more screen-dependent life will become entrenched for children "seeking it to fill many voids as a result of social isolation".

Still, Ms Bourke's children, like so many others, will have the memory of life when the pace suddenly reduced, and for that she is grateful: "In many ways, this is a bit of a gift that we've been given, a gift of time."

<https://www.theage.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/we-ve-gone-back-several-decades-what-will-the-legacy-of-lockdown-be-for-kids-20200424-p54n18.html>