

DAY 1 OF THE CORONAVIRUS (CV) PANDEMIC 'GOING VIRAL' – the Dog Blog

This is the start of something horrible so I should say at once that this blog is NOT intended to belittle the crisis in any way but, rather, to remind people, who can be bothered to read it, that 'funny' is a precious social currency at any time but especially so when peoples' spirits are low; 'interesting and entertaining' are almost as much valued; communication, in all its forms, is the vehicle by which such matters are disseminated and, like the television or the radio or the newspapers or word of mouth or any other vehicle you come across, the tone will be enjoyed by some and abominated by others.

That is my disclaimer; even tea, the stock British palliative, is not everyone's cup of tea. So here we go – a summary of activities, thoughts and stories to help us keep our chins up.

Harking back (I love that expression – it's so very human) to just a week ago when life was still pretty normal, we now wonder what today's 'normal' is going to be. Just as spring begins to allow the bulbs to show their finery, the grass starts growing and the trees and shrubs come into bud and he needs assistance outside, I see him throw up his hands in horror. One of his 'abnormals' was the haphazard appearance of help and then, surprise, the 'gardener' rang out of the blue – to tell us he wasn't coming.

Frustrated by the vague and sporadic nature of the beast himself, and his timekeeping habits in particular, the Guvnor had penned a short ditty about him and sent it to his other 'employers'. This is how it went:

MACAVITY THE ABSENT GARDENER

*Macavity was called the Hiddenpaw,
The master criminal who defied the law;
Baffled the Yard, the Flying Squad's despair
At the scene of the crime, Macavity's not
there.*

*They say there's no-one like Macavity;
He's broken every law, including gravity.
His powers of levitation make a fakir stare
As at the scene of the crime, Macavity's not
there!*

*Seek him in greenhouse, shed or garage,
Or away in the pub with Nigel Farage?
But I tell you once and once again,
There's still no sign on Tuesdays at ten.*

*Of whom do I speak? It's 'Macav' the
'Gardener';
The traveller, the runner, the skiver the
promiser;
Winter's too cold, the ground is too hard,
And summer's too hot, so he 'works' in the
shade.*

*In autumn too many leaves have dropped
And in spring the pruning has to be
swapped;
Tea on arrival and at numerous breaks –
Drags on the fag, stretches and bad aches.*

*The excuses by phone come in thick and
fast:
"It's 'Macav' the Gardner; I **was** coming,
but Blast!
We're moving house; the phone's been cut
off;
I'm ill; my back's gone; I've a bit of a
cough".*

*Why do we bother? I'm sure I don't know
As he doesn't much help our garden to
grow;
But Belloc said 'It's the duty of the wealthy
man,
To give employment to the artisan'.*

*Basically, are continuity and loyalty
important?
No! His beliefs seem completely discordant;
He attends when it's convenient to him –
No contract, no arrangement, he turns up
at whim.*

*So getting an 'expert' in is all very well,
But a wise man carefully recruits personnel
Who can justify the money he spends
On skills, on energy and who regularly
attends.*

*Has the time come for a confrontation,
Or at least a serious, one-way,
conversation;
After all, is it the duty of the employing
pauper,
To give up disgracefully, like a lamb to the
slaughter?*

*Will life go on; out goes twenty four quid
For irregular attendance and poor work,
God forbid;
A decent enough chap but no real asset,
The most expensive 'artisan' we ever have
met?*

*Or is it goodbye 'Macav', it's not been much
fun;
And you won't earn much, just taking the
sun?*

To be serious for a moment, not in his nature, I know, we are lucky to have a garden and plenty of countryside in Spring to walk in. Imagine living in a tenth floor

flat without even a balcony and with nowhere to go? Aaaargh! I feel for them.

The Daily Telegraph's admirable Blowers' cartoon shows an elderly couple getting on with all the chores that had been left undone now they faced the prospect of incarceration for three months (this on the back of Boris's appeal to the Over 70s to remain indoors and take NO risks of mixing and mingling with anyone, thus reducing the likelihood of exposure to the dreaded 'carriers'). It shows seven activities:

1. He is hoovering the carpets, and underneath them as well
2. He is shampooing the dog
3. He is dusting all the books on the bookshelf and arranging them in the proper order
4. He is polishing all his and her boots and shoes
5. He is hanging pictures under her strict supervision
6. He is gungeing out the fridge and throwing away everything that is well past its sell-by date (PS – anything within a week or two and isn't brown/rotting/stinking is OK)
7. The two of them are sitting having a cup of tea at the end of the day and he says: "Only 111 days left to fill..."

Comments about hoovering the carpets always brings the Guvnor to fits of laughter when he remembers the Headmaster writing in about some of his schoolboys' howlers. One extract from a history essay ran: 'Initially, Queen Elizabeth 1 had some difficulty governing the country as she always sensed the ghost of Mary Queen of Scots hoovering in the background.' I expect the examiner had some fun with that one too.

The Guvnor himself remembers a comment from Mr Bliss, his French teacher: 'French seems to be a foreign language to this boy' and when his report for 'Swimming' that said 'he has spent most of this term submerged' appeared, strangely, above Maths the latter teacher said: 'For Maths, see Swimming'.

A few years ago, a newspaper sought out memories of their schooldays from members of the 'older generation'. One man wrote in: "Looking for something in the loft the other day, I stumbled upon a box containing some of my wife's old school reports. Flicking open the first one, I spotted the Headmistress's summary which said, 'Patricia is interesting; she has some intelligence, but she is a chatterbox and a fidget-bottom.' I can tell that Headmistress, if she reads this, that Patricia is now 72 and nothing has changed".

With empty diaries there is more time for listening to the radio and reading the paper. On the radio the other day I perked up to hear Ken Bruce ask a listener for his preference as to which Superpower he would like to possess were it possible and offered. The listener replied that he would like to have the power of 'hindsight'. "It is useless", was the comment; "It's history, gone, no point." "Well, I know that now," said Clever Dick.

The Guvnor throws things at the armchair warriors on the radio who criticise everything having never really done anything themselves but visibly relaxes when the Prime Minister introduces the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser; impressive, or what?

Dogs are a-political, meaning that we will vote for anyone who feeds us twice a day, drops the occasional titbit, allows us to lie on the sofa in a way that forces the Guvnor to perch on the arm so that when he falls asleep he bangs his head on the bookshelf, and takes us for at least one good walk a day. That said, I and Loopy my cousin who is a non-paying guest here and who came for a weekend in July and is still here at the end of March, approve of the unexpectedly grown-up way that Boris has led the counter attack on this extraordinary virus that has the world, and especially our own country, in a grip of fear and heartache and misery. He has been very ably supported by Dr Chris Whitty the Chief Medical Officer, and Sir Patrick Vallance the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government. These are extremely able people and when they fluently and confidently explain the situation to us in the afternoons we take notice, pin back our eras and listen. One of my favourite columnists, Harry Mount, summed it up for us thus: 'Just when it feels we're about to enter full-scale coronavirus panic mode, two quiet doctors have emerged from the wings – and have magically chimed with our national keep-calm-and-carry-on disposition.' Theirs is a respect rooted in intelligence and achievement, as well as their air of quiet, cool command.

And then the BBC goes and spoils it all with a fatuous, ill-informed phone-in on the Jeremy Vine Show on Radio 2 listened to by 7 million people and when the public is asked for its opinion, with most gainsaying the experts. This drove Matt, the famous cartoonist, to warn, 'If you show the early signs of becoming an armchair expert, you must self-isolate until 2021.' Hear, hear!