

Cancellations and Isolation

by Claire G. Coleman

Novel writing is generally considered a solitary activity. And perhaps that is a stronger trend for me; someone who wrote her first novel in a caravan while travelling; while also homeless. Novel writing was loneliness, it was a salve for that loneliness, from 5 in the morning to about 7 when my partner arose; when we had breakfast and departed for the next camp.

I would not have imagined isolation in a house being problematic; spending time alone, writing in my study. At least I had a study or studio; five years from writing my first novel my writing has dragged me bodily out of homelessness. All I would have to do was keep writing, keep doing my work in the relative privilege success has bought me (at the cost of sleepless nights). It would be a dream for many writers, nothing to do all day but string words together.

During COVID19 isolation a full-time writer is inherently privileged; especially one who, like me, lives in the green almost-wildness just outside of a capital city. I had no job to lose, my primary work is isolated and isolating. I spend hours sitting at my desk lost in thought. Nothing made me imagine that isolation would be a nightmare until the first cancellation.

They rolled in one after the other over a couple of days; by email. Gallery closures, event cancellations, whole literary and arts festivals postponed or cancelled completely. It felt apocalyptic, that's hyperbole but also the best word to explain the feeling of an entire industry closing down.

A month after the cancellations was when I came to a strong realisation; promotional events and touring to promote my work were a major emotional component to my life and work.

Writing is indeed solitary, the work is so solitary for the most part that many of us display a genuine need for a less lonely component to our work. For me that was touring and events, talking about books (and about whatever else they want me to talk about) on stage. I love presenting my work to the public; speaking on stage, on radio and at book signings; touring has been my escape from the loneliness and solitude inherent in the work I love.

It took me a while to accept that I am an extrovert working in an industry more suited to introverts, doing an introvert's job and I need the extroverted component.

I have a love/hate relationship with touring and festivals. I love being there, at festivals, talking to a crowd. I hate sleeping in hotels, although I loved the novelty at first. I am not a fan of flying or airports though I don't hate them as

such. I am a big fan of green-rooms and behind the scenes shenanigans. The loss of touring has hurt me more than I am sometimes willing to admit.

This reminds me that in art we need connections, that artists need other artists both creatively and socially; our connections with each other make us strong and keep our work powerful. Connections are always important, during these times they are essential. We need to maintain what connections we have; we need to make more connections. Because alone we are not as strong.