

Hello, my name is 'Adam in the Hat'. I am a singer and performer and quiz master; and this is the story of my year. So the pandemic hit. We went into our first national lockdown as we all know last March, and with that, pretty much my entire livelihood shut down. Because it is a bit hard when you are not allowed to get near to people, to be like a singer and a performer and earn; and, the kind of main bulk of my money came from function bands, because I did sort of weddings and things like that. I was very active in my church, singing in a worship band; singing hymns with people, leading the hymns. And yes, and then running a quiz at a local pub every week. So, all the things that I did to earn myself money involved being very, very social. On top of that I had a very active social life. I loved to go out and support live music and meet up with people and have catch-ups, and checking how other people were doing. And, that was my life and I am quite an extraverted character. I use my hands a lot when I talk, as you may already noticed! And then yes, all that was taken away.

And so I had to re-adjust very quickly to a very, very different style of life. I am also, on top of being a very, very social person I also quite like my own company. I like just sitting at home and watching a movie; watching a TV series and so I leant into that quite heavily. Like, if you name a streaming service, I have completed it! Do you know what I mean? If there is anything you think, oh I wonder if he has watched that? I have, I have watched that. And I did back into that which kind of made me force to come to realise that although I am extrovert, and I am also quite an introvert as well. I feel almost like a fifty / fifty, in that I love being around people; but there does come a time when I know that it is 'me' time, and I take myself off and just be alone by myself and my thoughts. And, I was able to lean into that a little bit more than I normally would.

And then I needed my extrovert kind of 'itch' scratched, and so I had to come up with new ways to do that. And there were two ways that I discovered during lockdown. One, was I started an online lockdown quiz weekly. So every Tuesday night on my 'Adam in the Hat' music Facebook page I went live just before 8 o'clock, we had a fun little quiz for an hour. At the beginning we, like had a couple of like a hundred people tuning in, and those numbers went kind of up or down depending on what phases of lockdown we were all in. But it was great, and people would like chat in the comments, and I felt I was getting a little bit of a social fix. And then, the other way I get that scratch for the 'itch' was that I would go for a walk. You were allowed out that daily exercise, so I would go down to Exeter Quay. I would do a double up of the Quay, and then go home; and that would be my exercise for the day. But I first lap was reserved for my trusty podcasts, so I could catch up on my podcasts. But my second lap was always reserved so that I would pick a new person every single day, just to ring up and check in on. And I felt that was the thing that surprised me that because it allowed me to engage with people one on one, whereas most of my time was my engagement with people was as part of a group. And it kind of allowed me the kind of just check into people and how they were doing, and get a real gist for the different types of things that people were going through this lockdown, that were very different from what I was experiencing, for example. But yes, it is kind of that I have become an extroverted recluse, which was the very odd thing for me. And then obviously, as the lockdown – as then when the year went on we went into tiers. The second I could, my Quay walks extended to being social-distanced Quay walks, where I would invite one other person and we would go round, two metres apart obviously, and had one to one catch-ups became in person which was really, really nice. And then with the tiers met up, and then with different tiers, you know, the rollercoaster that we have all been on.

I have learnt that I am better adjusting to change than I thought I would be. It has been an interesting one because almost the easiest way to get through it is to remember that there is a lot of people that were having a much worse time; that were struggling on and fighting through and actually making the most of their situations. And I found that quite inspiring for me, so when I was sat there on the nights when I was feeling actually I was quite lonely tonight, when I had not seen anyone in twelve weeks. In reality then actually I go 'but' there are other people who were going through so much worse and they are still trucking on, so I can! And it kind of gave me a little strength. My faith and my beliefs helped out with that as well. It is helpful to have someone to have a little chat with if you are feeling lonely. And you know, for most of whatever faith people are, I think that anyone who has a faith can find that quite a source of uplifting-ness, a source of hope to know that there is someone who they believe is always listening. It is very easy to get bogged down by all the negative stuff from the actual state of the world, but the one thing that I can see is that actually that the things I have seen is that people have really risen up to the challenge that this year has brought – there has been real – 'we are in love'. We have all been locked down and yet I have never felt such a larger sense of community than I have felt during this year. Seeing the things that people have come up with to help their neighbours.

You know, I have learnt more about mental health that I have ever heard in my life in the past twelve months. I think that is wonderful that it has been highlighted that people are not feeling so alone when they have mental health issues and maybe, especially in this year they had never experienced anything like that before. But I think that is where that all those things I see God. I see God in all the things that are helping the people that maybe otherwise would not have got help. I always feel that God reaches people in the places they least expect, and he is often there in the darkest times – is where we kind of see and feel him the most. I just imagine him there always just working in the background whether I can see it or not. Kind of working in the background whether or not I am feeling a little bit better. There is a lot of good to be had in what is essentially a horrific situation – you know – so that, that I think, has been the story of my year. That is quite a long answer!