



## *Why we all owe a vote of thanks to Mr Zoom – by David Jones*



Well, that's it, the lockdown is almost over. Phew! In some ways, I will be sorry it is ending, in other ways it can't end soon enough.

Before I start, I think you should all join me in a vote of thanks to Eric Yuan. Who on earth is he, I hear you ask? Well, to cut a long story short, he's Mr Zoom.

Eric Yuan is the founder and CEO of Zoom Video Communications. This Chinese -American engineer and businessman had the bright idea of Zoom after trying to get in touch with his long-distance girlfriend nine years ago. It's been a nice little earner for Mr Yuan – he's struggling by with a fortune of \$14 billion, which is growing larger even as I write this.

Joking aside, we (and the rest of the world) owe him a debt of gratitude because without Zoom virtually every business and countless other organisations – including u3a groups -would have ground to a halt.

I know that my opening paragraph sounds like a bit of a paradox, but I have to admit that I am not much of a social animal. This probably explains why I am always in the kitchen at parties.

While I have not exactly become a hermit over the last four months, the truth is that I have enjoyed much of the lockdown, for a variety of reasons, many of which will resonate with you. Lots of garden and decorating jobs which otherwise might have waited for ever have been completed; I've even been able to save a few bob because on many weeks expenditure except on the essentials of living, fell to virtually zero.

It's been good not to have to go to functions I didn't want to attend, or meet people I didn't want to meet. My life has been totally under my control, as much as it ever will be, that is.

I'm not saying I'm anti-social, but I prefer to be "social" only when it suits me, and only with the people I want to be sociable with. And in that respect the lockdown ticked all the boxes.

It has seemed at times like an enjoyable chill-out of monumental proportions. On the other hand, I have really missed not seeing our offspring and our grandchildren, in one case for more than six months. It's been difficult not to reflect that six months is a large chunk out of my life which I shall never be able to reclaim.

More than once my wife, who has sometimes hated the lockdown because she is much more sociable than me, said she feared that I was gradually turning into Howard Hughes, the American billionaire and recluse whose eccentric habits almost defy imagination. By the way, my wife was joking – I think. Also, by the way, I don't have any eccentric habits, at least none that I'm going to own up to.

I shall soon be joining a ballroom dancing class, so adept I have become at a quick shuffle to the right, left, or even backwards to avoid some idiot not wearing a mask passing close to me. I should now be a whizz at the quickstep.

I have developed long-distance vision to ensure there is no one at the other end of the supermarket aisle not wearing a mask before I walk down it. This is a recent development because it is only during the last few weeks that we have been anywhere near the inside of a supermarket.

I have become (reasonably) adept at Zoom and, like me, you had probably never heard of it until lockdown arrived. Before that, the only Zoom I knew was the multi-coloured ice lolly of the same name.

The curious thing about the lockdowns, and the latest one especially, is the way it seems to have created some sort of time paradox. Wheelie bin day seems to come around with astonishing rapidity. Surely it can't be blue bin day again already, I say to my wife. But events which took place around six months ago, for example the several visits the Isle of Sheppey U3A wine group made to vineyards during the summer, seem like ancient history. Perhaps the answer is that mundane tasks always seem to truncate time to the point where last week seems like yesterday.

It seems an eternity since I went anywhere meaningful. For months, a click and collect journey to Tesco, or a visit from the Iceland delivery man, have been among the highlights of my life. For many of us, the end of lockdown will seem like we have served our time and are now being let out with our sentence reduced for good behaviour.

Having said that, Lynda and I are indebted to the Isle of Sheppey u3a group, and its committee members, for all the hard work they have put in to enable us to have a bit of escapism during lockdown, whether it be the weekly quiz, French lessons, floral art or the Friday night wine group. Without all this to break the grinding monotony of lockdown, I think I (and perhaps a few others) might have gone crackers.

I haven't had a burning desire to visit a pub during lockdown, and I doubt that I will any time soon. But I will be looking forward to the occasional restaurant meal with friends.

I've been frustrated that it took far, far too long for the message to get through to people who thought that Covid-19 had nothing to do with them, even though there have been more than four million cases and 127,000 deaths. Once or twice I have asked people in supermarkets why they were not wearing masks, usually after ensuring that they were smaller than me. I have long since stopped doing this because I soon discovered it was a pointless exercise. I might just as well have been addressing the cauliflowers in the fruit and veg aisle.

I have been appalled at the way some people ( I know a few of them) who blatantly flouted the lockdown, especially over Christmas, putting their own selfish spin on the rules to justify their behaviour.

In contrast, the behaviour of the majority has been exemplary and for once, this little island of ours (Britain, not Sheppey) has set an example for the rest of the world to follow when it comes to the success of our vaccination programme.

The mistake none of us must make when the new “normal” finally arrives is to become complacent. Covid-19 has been a dangerous, cunning enemy, ready to strike whenever we lower our guard. Sadly, I think it's going to be with us in one form or another for a very long time, though thankfully we appear to be at the point of winning the current skirmish with the worst pandemic for more than 100 years.



Distributed by Isle of Sheppey u3a