

A P R I L W E E K O N E 2 0 2 0



Kate's Chat

WEEKLY HULLO FROM IRISH AUTHOR



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Humans are resilient, still smiling and hitting their centenary years

Hullo from Killala, County Mayo, Ireland.

Well – this week proved we are unstoppable. In the U.S. a man recovered from corona virus in time to celebrate his 104th birthday and closer to home there was a slew of people celebrating their centenary years, including Bridie Shelley in Tipp and Margaret Lynch in Walkinstown, Dublin. It seems that 100 is the new 80 – looks like Michael D's gonna be busy sending those cheques over the coming months.

My mother, Moira, is delighted with these stories because she is planning on sticking around well after her hundredth birthday. She'll be wheeling me around – I tell her! Mam had been on her own in the house for a couple of weeks and is doing so well. In fact, she confesses, she is rather enjoying the peace and quiet. Mam, like so many of her generation, is a doer. She keeps herself busy and when things get slack, we are always happy to throw another couple of grandchildren in on top of her. I think the fact that she's seeing the cocoon as a break indicates we might have been overdoing it of late! A confirmed tech-phobe, we managed to set her up on video-chat before the lockdown but she still prefers the phone which has not stopped ringing. 'I'm barely getting time for my programmes' she complained last night. Every day our friend Rita calls by and stands back while Mum comes out and waves and chats at a safe distance. Rita whips a few daffodils from the front garden and leaves Mam's groceries by the gate. It's hard that it's not me ministering to her at this time but Rita's kindness reminds me that receiving help is as important as giving it. Stay safe. Keep smiling! Kate. x

A slice of cheese - laughing is obligatory!

Q What do you call bears with no ears? B! 😊



Moira's tips for cocooned living

- If you know someone is going to call by – make the effort dress up and don't be shy about having your picture taken. Other people need to see us smiling.
- My slow cooker is a lifesaver. Throw in veg and meat straight from the freezer, a stock cube and then forget about it. A simple home cooked meal that will last me for a few days. You can pick one up in any supermarket.
- Lots of lamps. Nobody to change lightbulbs and I'm not getting up on a ladder!
 - Looking after myself as best I can helps me forget what I can't do – and focus on what I can. We are stronger than we are given credit for sometimes. Proof? *I have finally mastered the TV remote! No grandkids required!*

A Lovely Cigar

The Husband and the Teen were away for the weekend in London, eating cheap asian food, boy bonding in art galleries and vintage vinyl shops. I spent Saturday hanging out with our youngest, Tommo, then, after our big supermarket shop, I dropped him over to Mam who had offered to take him for the night. 'What are you going to get up to?' she said, delighted to be giving me a night off.

'Are you going out with the girls?' 'No,' I said, 'actually, I was planning on tidying my wardrobe.'

'Oh,' she said. She seemed disappointed to hear that her babysitting skills weren't going towards anything more exciting than organising my sock drawer.

'What?' I said. 'You want me to go out and go mad,' I snapped, 'like go to a disco or take drugs or something?'

'No - just... Oh have a nice time anyway.'

Sorry for being so boring, I thought, but kept it shut.

When I got home the house seemed cold and empty. I can't remember the last time I was in it on my own. Mam is fantastic taking the boys every Friday so that Niall and I get a break and one lie-in a week, but with a busy family, I am rarely utterly alone in the house. I wasn't sure what I would do with myself but had the vague notion that I should be doing *something*. It was a miserable night. I unpacked the shopping then decided not to light a fire. There was no point with just me there. A picture popped into my head of what my husband does when he is left home alone when I go away with the boys. If he doesn't go to the pub, he puts on a fire and sits with his feet up, eating a takeaway and very possibly smoking fags, which are, of course, strictly forbidden indoors. He does not use the opportunity of being alone to tidy drawers or reorganise cupboards. I have no feelings of resentment about this. I just wish I was the same.

I ate two chocolate biscuits and convinced myself that was dinner, although I knew full well the rest of the packet and half a loaf of toast was coming down the line.

'Why can't I look after myself properly?' I thought. Immediately followed by, 'What's wrong with me? I should be OUT doing something FUN!' Except, fun is now something I do with my kids or, if I'm feeling

frisky, occasionally, my husband. Never on my own.

I went upstairs, put on the electric blanket for an early night then opened my wardrobe doors and wondered anew at how I have let my organisation-proof Sliderobes fall into such a state of sluttish chaos.

The first drawer I opened was my miscellaneous-mish-mash draw: travel hairbrushes, insoles, hotel shower caps - and it was there that I saw it, behind some broken headphones - a Havana cigar.

I remembered buying it on impulse in Dublin two months ago for my husband's birthday but had I forgotten to give it to him.

The last cigar I smoked was with a New York publisher called Ron Hogan in September 2014. We were following through on a social media acquaintance, born when he was a young book blogger in New York and I was a fledgling Irish novelist. One of my early publicity shots featured me puffing on a cigar and, as a cigar smoker, he had been looking forward to being me. The tour was cancelled due to 911 and a lifetime later he presented me with a Cuban cigar and took me to a dedicated cigar bar in the East Village to smoke it. It felt outrageously rebellious, especially in smoke-phobic Manhattan but I'll confess, I enjoyed every damn puff.

I slid my hand into the wardrobe drawer, picked up the orange tube and studied it. Corona from Honduras. Nice. I took it out of its tube, rolled it around in my fingers and had a good sniff. Chocolatey. Still fresh. Yum. I then ran downstairs, chopped the nub with a fish knife, grabbed matches from the mantelpiece, ran into the drawing room, pulled a chair over to the window and lit it. I smoked watching the rain sheet down onto the choppy sea of Killala Bay, under the shelter of the horizontal window, contemplating my good fortune in living in such a beautiful place with such a good life. It was, a celebration, of sorts. A one woman party. Although I'm not sure my mother will be impressed, I enjoyed every glorious moment of it.

And I never did get around to tidying my wardrobe.