**Poem 1: On overstimulation in between two coffees**

**Explanation:** This poem is about my inner emotional experience during level 4 lockdown starting from the announcement on the 23rd March / Māehe 2020. It tells of relative calm and a plan for the time followed by inner turmoil developed from reading too much about Covid-19. On reflection I see that underneath my conscious experience of a change in the world, the resultant shock, agony, and loss a fear of immortality was arisen.

**On overstimulation in between two coffees**

Seeking disengagement with solitude and coffee – flat white or cappuccino, I can’t remember

As company a feeling of needing to pass time like being told a flight has been delayed

An empty space in time and feeling

No cars driving out of town like in Independence Day

The evacuation here slow and inward

People hurrying about on foot locking doors of businesses, getting an urgent script the only pace to life.

The beginnings of what would soon bare resemblance to a shanty town

In less than a few hours the main street more like Waiwhakaataof the 1990’s than suburban Tāmaki Makaurau of the 2020’s

Society on the cusp of turning in doors, away, unseen, and unheard – numbing to the mind

Some had taken cover immediately

Yet some like me calmly were savouring a last coffee

The time captured perfectly by the words of a passer-by as she enquired” Are you having a last coffee”? To my reply of yes, she professed, “I am just waiting for my husband to pick up his prescription and then we are doing the same”.

The sharp recall of the surroundings indicative of being in the midst a flight response

Level 2-3 on an emotion thermometer of fear seen through behavioural and mental disengagement but not felt.

The new environment was still being interpreted

Emotionally people were moving at different paces

Locking the doors to her business a woman looked anxiously around and remarked “It’s scary isn’t it”

I was numb I had not got to that place yet – to a place of labelling the experience of going into lockdown scary.

For me, the worst news had already been delivered – borders closed

Jolting the brain like a plate shattering on the ground

The perception of current danger varying by salience, lens of focus, place on mental health continuum and of course defences

Yet a collective feeling of anxiety and set of behaviours shared that day on Monday March / Māehe 23rd.

Conscious unrealistic optimism a bound, “I’ll see you in a month” I declared to the Sugar N Cup staff

Well the countries that horrific scenes were coming from had not locked down until Covid had been allowed to circulate widely in the populations

It was just a flu, only bad in Italy and this early lockdown would prevent Covid talking hold

Covid – what is Covid well Covid -19 to be exact is the reason I had a last coffee.

What and where was this?

Perplexed how to be during this next month or so

Lockdown was just what I needed, I had a plan

The plan was to put a series of “stories” together to give as a gift

While others wrestled with the change, I was ok

Not alone in a life in limbo I felt part of the same race

Feelings of difference stopped, relief, and increase in control

Alas Covid-19 was all around the media, hard to avoid – this wasn’t about mental filtering

That is if you have a drive to seek information

Scrolling the internet more and more information about Covid appeared

Becoming an internet and news junkie maintained a state of omnipotence relieving the emotional pain and existential anxiety of the time.

Tension in my arms like 7 of 2 in a T20

Combined with traits, I was soon in a silo and indrawn

Unsettling blue light, escalating Covid cases - worldwide,

Tomorrow undetermined

Overwhelming catastrophic thoughts amidst fears for elderly relatives

The sound of breathing, feeling of my beating heart, warmth in the chest

Like being on an adrenaline drip, limbic system in overdrive, amygdala hijacked

Aa s cat hair standing on end frozen on high frequency startle response

Listening to webinars from the Royal Society of Medicine terrifying overtones carried through the Wi-Fi

Then Lady Wessely appeared on TVNZ documenting her experience of Covid.

The beginnings of an adjustment disorder

Gloom, hopelessness, concern, agitation, sparse concentration, collapse of routine, overcome and patchy sleep.

Trapped in a mind bombarded with sad information

Nicola Sturgeon became admired

The change in the world overwhelming to process

Nottingham Ice Arena being prepared as a temporary mortuary

A lukewarm sensation in the head

Even the Royal had Covid patients

In a daze there was too much to bear

Feeling for those experiencing life limiting illness of their cancelled plans– the story of Elliott Dallen

Uncertainty would children in hospital like Blakes Wheels be safe?

These feelings were my internal reality am

A 12-hour stint of 4 suit spider solitaire, extreme arousal, still not having won collapsing into sleep from exhaustion.

Wise mind at risk of disintegration

Grounded by a series of Criminal Minds, Fritz Perl’s book, marking and level 4 cricket umpire training.

Todd Grande dropped his standard to make the most of the now housebound lay

With these remnants of active coping were maintained.

Staying in the moment on faced with stories of medicine and food shortages -this had not happened yet.

The stress of weighing up and thinking about the future would have become overwhelming

A month in I wished the last coffee had been a last pint

Stone age people were used to this way of being

We are not and have arrived at our current environment gradually

Suddenly we were submerged into a different context like entering a prison, hospital, new country

As emotions diverged from the earlier assessment of risk, they become my driver

All from the endless ingestion of news.

Emotionally and physically it was safer out walking

Fear maintained by empty, quite streets

I felt terror and the environment being deserted matched this there must be danger

No reference point, the flattening of the curve was a phenomenon in waiting

Ever present reminders of mortality

The fleeting nature of life was coming closer to the surface the existential pressure making it harder to repress

Reading and listening to news about the threat the worst possible thing for reality anxiety

Now if my attempts at omnipotence had been substance, it might have worked or even gardening – it is an addiction anything that regulates emotion can be.

With death anxiety aroused life can be embraced more fully.

**Poem 2: An hour or so of bliss**

Explanation: This poem is about the environment and my feelings on a daily walk during level 4 lockdown. It illustrates how the external physical world maintained the turmoil of my internal world. The change in surroundings was so extreme and out of place it was hard to enjoy as it could on a holiday to a remote deserted place. It was in this deserted place, physically alone with my emotions that I was faced with my own mortality. I was alone in the universe. The importance of being around human activity and life. That life on a desert island would not be that great.

It’s April autumn

A sign at the boat club reads “*This facility is closed*”

Melancholic, head down like a guilty verdict had been delivered.

Lifting the head to be greeted with contrasting blues of the sea

Thoughts of loss - more than that of summer

A glistening sea in the late summer sun the water renewed from the turning tide refreshing to the thoughts

I hold this view, the stillness, the moment

It’s a beach in the city

Standing still for a moment allowing the sand to submerge the feet

Foam better than bubble bath

A playground without children, a sea empty of boats and swimmers

Wearing a surgical mask

I want to be at a deserted beach but not this one

It’s lockdown

Walking on downcast

At times knee deep in the water

The laughter of a young man “*Clever wading is not on the list is it”.*

The list you ask.

The level 4 list of prohibited activities

Antisocial traits expressed

Searching for normality wading gave me that

It’s regression to the anal stage

Exclaiming almost in tears at minor violations of level 4

Here was, a rock people could still fish from

Fishing was on the list

Messages to 105 of helplessness, frustration, lack of control

Someone had to be responsible for Covid-19

It’s a public walkway

Vegetation, a pathway devoid of human life

Sunlight beaming through the tree branches

In the blur of everyday sensory overlay just ferns / huruwhenua

Today in the sharpness of the physical and natural environment brown, green, and grey ferns huruwhenua

A time for nostalgia – there is plenty of time in this place this time

Empty bottles a rare sight of something man made

Pain despair

Alone but for the sound of footsteps on dry grass

I want to go on a bush walk but not this one

It’s a road

Stumbling with words like having been given bad news

The loss, the change, the seriousness, the shock what this meant – staggering

Birds singing, dogs barking, the last of the cicadas the only signs of life

The occasional drawl of a vehicle as irregular as the sound of willow on leather of a four being struck in a test match

Rows of cars parked; it was as though their occupants had left

Soft toys and pictures of Easter eggs on fences, boats or stuck on windows

Like an empty classroom at the end of the day with just the signs of the students once present remaining

A shell of life before me

Sounds of aspiration, on alert

In the distance children’s voices break the silence and the solitude

I want this freedom to roam but not this type

It’s a park

Loss of direction, space, disorientated

Walking in this bliss the voice filled with despair, fatigue, and grief

The late summer sun a consolation

Ahead red, yellow, orange leaves, a fence falling apart

A new pathway encountered lifted the emotional tone up another note

Projects left unfinished abandoned, building equipment and materials scattered - like the cars it looked like the owners had left

A scene as though a town was under construction with the workers off for the weekend

Signs of life once been, a tennis ball floating in a pond, a forgotten skateboard.

The paranoid schizoid state a norm anyone could be infectious to be avoided and zoom not meaningful interaction forcing withdrawal

It’s a town centre

Unable to go in a shop stimulation essential of modern times denied

The occupants invisible as were those of houses

Quite enough that different bird songs could be distinguished

Confronted with an awareness of my aloneness in the universe

Impossible to resort to fantasy and illusion about existence

This was death awareness an awareness that not only am I invincible we all are

My friend John in a pub on our trip to Brighton in 2012 told me people come to these places for the light, sound, and connection to escape from being faced with their mortality

In quiet solitude it is difficult to escape the intolerable feeling of being faced with our mortality

Existential anxiety, a feeling of panic about mine and others existence is what I was faced and felt during these hours of bliss

This sublimation has come late.

**Poem 3: An awakening Written 18/9/2020**

This poem is about the first day of Level 3 Tuesday, April / Āperira 28th 2020. It tells of being consoled by seeing people about and signs of human activity. In doing so the poems intends to communicate the enormity of the lock down experience - of what was sacrificed.

Like the eyes adjusting to a change of light

For the mind, an arrival at a clearing

Senses nudged

Building sites were active,

Work people in orange, sounds of hammers against wood

A world more captivating than yesterday

Waiting for cars to cross the road comforting

Paddleboarders on the sea bringing - a surge of excitement

Novel like first experiences for a child

Freedom and connection to the emotions as water to the body at the end of a ½ marathon

Joy at life

Coffee and shops with occupants

The ids requests met frustration flies away

Relaxing under a tree

A forest dense with thought and emotion was lost in time.

**Poem 4: An unexpected turn near the end of the days’ road written August 2020**

**Explanation of the poem:** The setting is the level 3 “lockdown” in Auckland / Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa / New Zealand, August / Ākuhata 2020.

**Verse 1** There is anxiety, but it is finite and controllable.

**Verse 2** The change to the freeze state is caught before it sets in preventing depression. Then a return to homeostasis is assisted by nature and the certainty.

**Verse 3** I become adjusted to level 3, life stress nearly takes over and I conclude we need to live with this rather than yo-yo between levels or take one day at a time.

**Verse 1**

Repetitively collecting tips in Caféland, to the reality anxiety a saviour

When arousal is a slow yet constant flow like the speed of light

Sleep provides relief followed by a dose of certainty at 1pm

A perceived catastrophic outcome branching out along the neural pathways of the pre- frontal cortex is stopped in its tracks

Limbic system, avoided executive functioning in-tact I return to the backdrop of everyday neurotic and moral anxiety

Rather this finite 24-hour cycle than being on remand waiting for a bail hearing next week.

**Verse 2**

Get out, use the remnants of adrenaline before the freeze response subsumes

Walking, my ego is torn between behavioural modelling of 2m physical distancing and the contextual recklessness of the habitual norm

Using the sight of the level 3 **dissenters** I project on to deny the disdainful voice of the super ego scolding me over my disregard of public health advice

Moral anxiety subsides, the id frolics in excitement

The autonomic nervous systems helter-skelter ride over the last week soothed by the sensory gifts from a Pacific Ocean on the cusp of a storm

The window of tolerance in sight as the haze over the perimeters of Auckland’s August cluster clears a window of tolerance in sight

**Verse 3**

As content in lockdown 3 as a bed in a hotel room towards the end of a holiday

With playgrounds empty the environment matches the lockdown level – no sitting on a seat watching the sea today

The ego is settled in its new home, the id stamps its feet, the superego smiles

Overthinking a life in limbo nearly disrupts the balance

Grabbing the wet soap just before it slips from my hand I sit with tension as lukewarm sand in my hand

A new normal my heart pleads save me another adrenaline rich cycle of adjustment.