

Plenty of positives in lockdown, but...

And again. Sorry. But this time I'm determined to write positive things about the Great Covid Lock-up. Down.

The first is obvious. Although now a renowned right-wing writer, I have no hesitation praising Jacinda Ardern for her television appearances, which have been at once firmly decisive and warmly human.

Let's add Dr Ashley Bloomfield to the positive list, although media outlets are getting frustrated about his elusive answers on PPE, swab and flu jab shortages at medical centres.

What else have we got?

There's smaller supermarket bills if you can resist over-buying stuff you don't need to hoard. I can't offer any suggestions on what that might be, but empty shelves are appearing for the oddest things, like toothpicks, crackers, parsley paste and onion relish.

There's a positive in that last one. I'm now trying BBQ sauces I would never have looked at before. However, if the salted caramel dark choc runs out we're in big trouble.

So, what else? Peace and quiet, for one. Nearly all the barking dogs in the neighbourhood have shut up...or been abandoned in the countryside after their owners discovered what really goes on when they're at work. And there's way less traffic roaring through our street, a connecting route for boy racers.

There is a negative there, sadly. Household rows are more audible. Even the sound of a vacuum cleaner or a sanding machine is more noticeable.

Another positive is the friendliness of strangers, and the courtesy people show when you're out for a walk. Often, someone heading towards you on the same footpath will cross the street at the same moment you decide you should do the same. The Covid street dance.

Another is the absence of leftovers in the fridge. Everything is used up, reinvented in creative ways.

The lower cost of fuel - just when we're not supposed to drive anywhere non-essential.

The chance to get to know neighbours better, which I imagine could be a mixed positive, although that doesn't apply in my immediate neighbourhood. Mostly.

Facebook, for helping re-establish contact with old friends. The SOS scheme for small businesses.

Chalk street art. CNN coverage. Netflix. Soaps that we trail behind on. Fast fibre (thanks John Key – bugger, my right wing spread itself there).

Can't think of anything else, so my apologies for going negative now.

How's this for feedback from a retirement village resident:

“Two weeks ago, Jean Sandel went into lockdown. No trouble, I thought, I’ll order groceries online (for the first time). Priority given to those elderly or on lockdown.

“So, register - email, date of birth, phone. Wait. Number not valid. What! We’ve had it for 50 years. Address: Whalers Gate. Response: ‘Please register valid suburb.’ Onecard. Response: ‘Please register valid number.’

“Having climbed those mountains, I fill in the order. Flour - not available. Sultanas - not available. Right, to checkout: \$195 with \$14 delivery fee. Back to checkout because it’s got to be \$200 for a \$9 delivery fee. Another jar of honey. Right. Order placed.

“So, to delivery. Thursday – time slots full. Same for Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and so on until Wednesday. What’s happened to priority? No provision that I can see. Nowhere to go. Dead end.

“On to the opposition supermarket chain. Same procedure and result. Back to the first. Three days of logging in and I finally get a delivery date for six days later. And you thought you had problems, Jim.”

Well, there’s this: a friend was threatened when he paused to observe a family get-together in his street, one that didn’t seem to be in one bubble, given the abuse he copped from a young man who charged across and seemed to have a single dominant word in his vocab, one starting with “f”.

Lodging a 105 complaint to police didn’t exactly appeal to him after that.

Another is my own experience of trying to avoid a group of men out for a run through Pukekura Park, enveloped in their own cloud of sweat and hot air that enveloped me.

Idiots abound. Or is it mental illness, like that maybe suffered by the Shop Cougher?

Footnote: My description of supermarket shopping last week applied only to the one I go to. Another that is going to extra lengths during lockdown is New Plymouth's Pak'nSave, which is monitoring customer numbers to ensure no over-crowding and is keeping most of its checkouts open to ensure there's minimal queuing to leave.