

Running in the time of Covid

By Julian Silverton

First, choose iPod music tracks.
Who will join me today, The Smiths, The Killers, Manic Street Preachers
or 500 others?
Check inhaler in pocket.
GPS on. "Do you want to record a run? Y, press start."
Here we go.....out into a strange lockdown world.

Start. Pavement by main road,
with no cars, runners and walkers
avoiding each other, using the empty street.
Squeaky gate into quiet cemetery,
past hundreds of souls, unvisited,
sleeping under dying flowers, under blue skies,
no planes, no vapour trails.

Then the road again, and on to
River Lane, "No Vehicles."
Overhead shade, path narrows
then crosses the river, twice. Stop
to watch it flow,
"Weak bridge."
A watermill once stood here, before pandemics.
The timer pauses. No free minutes.

On. Past families with children, freed from school, splashing in the water,
carrying nets on long bamboo poles,
dogs shaking themselves dry and causing
shrieks of laughter.

Empty residential roads, large cars
which haven't moved for weeks,
neatly parked.
Gardens immaculate with gifts outside,
"Please take a plant, have too many."
Thanks, no room in pockets.

Short cut, narrow footpath, room for only one,
and there they are, man and dog. One wears a blue mask.
Turn back and retrace steps, an extra minute
until the path is clear.
I smile, but no thanks for waiting.

Under railway bridge. No trains above.
Rail replacement buses which will be on time, and carry only key workers,
or nobody at all.
A long narrow path, "No Cycling," so why
tyre tracks in the baked mud?

Back onto main road.... a few cars, why?
are the journeys essential? A new smell, exhaust fumes and diesel.
Run across, not stopping, timer always alert.

The old town bridge. Orange brick, 14 arches span the river above
ducks and swans, cygnets and ducklings, squabbling for bread
which must be on sale again. The empty shelves are filling up.

Into the town, past a few open shops,
queues outside, face masks, gloves, tissues, empty hand sanitizer, yellow tape keeping shoppers
apart.

“Thank you for your patience
and understanding
in this difficult time.”

Cross the empty road, into the recreation ground
its grass recently mown and turning brown,
thirsting for rain.
Rubbish bins full and overflowing with
empty cans and bottles.
Is this a time to celebrate and party?

A few more minutes and home.
“Do you want to save the run? Press Y.”
Check the timer, 53 minutes
check the distance, 5.9 km
GPS off. Music off.
Stop

That was one run,
38 to go.....