

The Cave People

2020 was a curious year. A life-threatening virus sneaked up on the world and changed all our lives forever. First, we were told that we were just having a long Easter break, but then it continued. We were isolated at home with our families, and not allowed to meet up with any friends at all. It is now 2058 and still we haven't seen any of our 'old' pals.

Nobody realised that the story about somebody eating a bat in China was actually a cover for the start of a chemical warfare battle between the superpowers. Their struggle for domination unleashed many new viruses with multiple strains.

Slowly at first, life altered in every way imaginable. After a few months, the original virus had taken a lot of the older people. I heard many sad stories about grandparents never seeing their families again, and dying alone with nobody to comfort them. Tragically lonely funerals with no one to say goodbye.

It didn't seem too bad to us children, because at least we had our immediate family with us. Even Dad was home all the time. As long as we social-distanced, we could play out on our bikes and go for walks to the beach just as we always had.

But it just kept going, relentlessly. We had our computers, so we were able to speak and play games with our friends online. We really missed being able to make plans at school to go somewhere together, and have fun as a group. We could make plans in an online game, but that was not nearly as good. Simple things like grocery shopping were fine to begin with. One member of your family could go and get what was necessary.

The first time they tried easing the rules so we could meet up with some others, it was amazing. We really appreciated the simple things, like playing in each other's gardens or eating food together. But it wasn't long before things got a lot more serious. We started hearing of people we actually knew who were dying during the second wave. I used to cry when I saw an ambulance speeding past our house, almost every day. Next, the military vehicles appeared, which for us young boys at the time was an exciting distraction. But the first time they arrived at our door and banged really loudly, they were in full chemical suits with visors and breathing masks that completely covered their faces, and it was really frightening.

Things only continued to escalate. Nobody was allowed to go outside at all. A week later our Mam was taken by those people in one of their transport units because they needed all the nurses at the hospital to deal with the crisis – it breaks my heart to think about it, but that was the last time we saw her in person.

As the months dragged past we kept being told that things would get better - a new vaccine was nearly ready, the second curve was flattening... it just went on and on. There was talk of revolution. Our Dad was always saying the government were making a mess of things. I remember his favourite phrase was 'all they care about is their offshore bank accounts'.

Eventually it was too difficult to control rural populations, so they started an emergency program, building one complex to house entire populations in each region... one for all of Shetland's families! Of course, this meant that each unit had to be tiny, and there was no storage space. We had to leave our things behind. I never realised until then that my most important possessions were little things that reminded me of something precious, a moment in time that is gone forever.

Dad used to watch lots of news, and we had endless entertainment options. But all that stopped in our 'temporary' living units. Now there is only one channel, still to this day telling us that a cure is around the corner! Our food arrives silently at a hatch in the wall. It is sealed and disinfected, and it all tastes the same. The air outside is dangerous, so the atmosphere inside is controlled and purified. Everyone has a treadmill for generating their own electricity. If all the people in one unit are feeling unwell you can't do your exercise, so you're in darkness.

These complexes are called The Controlled Atmosphere Virtual Environment buildings (C.A.V.E.s). They call us the cave people. I suppose we are the lucky ones, we are still living... or are we?

By Mason James Welsh (10)