

WINE NEWS

Coronavirus and the suburbs — how we're dealing with social isolation in our backyards

By the Specialist Reporting Team's Nick Sas and Brendan Esposito

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PHOTO: Nathan Clissold mows his lawn for a very special occasion amid the coronavirus chaos. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

It is the picture of suburban Australia.

The lawnmower, freshly cut grass, brick house in the background.

But Nathan Clissold wasn't supposed to be mowing the lawn this week. In fact, he wasn't even supposed to be at home.

He was supposed to be getting married, in Wollongong.

"I remember watching the news two weeks ago and seeing those updates come in," he told the ABC. "I looked at my partner Alice and said: 'I don't think we're going to be able to do this!'"

It soon became much clearer. After months of planning they were forced to cancel their original plans.

Instead, his home — which he was sprucing up this week — is set to be the wedding venue.

And because of social-distancing measures, the wedding will look very, very different.

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RELATED STORY: Why these chalk messages could be 'really important' for getting through the coronavirus pandemic

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PHOTO: Nathan Clissold had to rearrange his wedding day. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

"It'll be me and Alice, our two mothers and the celebrant," he said.

"It is what it is. But it was bloody hard telling both our dads they couldn't come to our wedding."

Like millions of Australians, Nathan's life has been turned upside down.

Coronavirus update: Follow the latest news in our daily wrap.

The concept of going to a wedding, going on holiday, visiting friends or even just venturing outside is of a different time — a time before coronavirus.

As a nation, most of us are confined in the suburban bubbles we call home — so what is happening out there, beyond your four walls?

ABC photographer Brendan Esposito drove around a section of Sydney's suburbia to see how some Australians are adapting to this new way of life.

And it seems some are taking the pandemic more seriously than others.

In Mount Druitt in Sydney's west, a group of three young men — two wearing makeshift facemasks — questioned whether coronavirus was "real" and said they wouldn't be doing social distancing.



PHOTO: Three men, two with facemasks, and a trolley full of alcohol. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

The shops were shuttered up.



PHOTO: A closed bottle shop in Mount Druitt. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

Only a few people were around



PHOTO: Two women on a pedestrian crossing in Mount Druitt, Sydney. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

But chores, like the washing, still needed to be done.



PHOTO: The laundromat remains busy during the coronavirus pandemic. (ABC News: Brandan Esposito)

At his home garage barbershop in a nearby suburb, 18-year-old Hadi Ghadban was hanging out with his brothers, smoking shisha.

"It's a tough time right now," he said.



PHOTO: Hadi Ghadban in his home barbershop (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

"I have to go to work [as a barber] at the Parramatta Westfield. It's been cut back from five days to two.

"But I'm scared about it — I'm scared I'm going to bring the virus back home and give it to my mum and dad, or niece."

Down the road, Farah Ballah was sitting on his balcony, checking his phone.



PHOTO: Farah sits on his balcony, waiting for the phone calls that aren't coming. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

He's an on-call handyman. But his phone hasn't rung for a long time.

"I came back after visiting family in Sudan on March 11," he said. "People are scared. They don't want anyone in their homes.

"I have two children. I don't know what's going to happen."

Back to basics

For Margaret Mossakowska, the scenario of social distancing is eerily familiar.

Your questions on coronavirus answered:

- How did coronavirus start?
- What am I allowed to do at Easter?
- Is there a vaccine for the coronavirus disease?

Originally from Poland, the former statistician said in the early 1980s her country of birth banned large social gatherings during a period of martial law.

"But the communists did that," she said. "This is different."



PHOTO: Margaret Mossakowska in her kitchen with homemade bread. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

For her, the little things are the hardest.

"It's the silence," she said. "It's so quiet here at the moment. I had a talk with my neighbour from across the street and my whole suburb could hear me.

"And touch, I just want to touch and to hug people."

But like many reaching out across the digital world, Margaret is finding new ways for human connection.

Margaret, now a sustainability and permaculture expert, is going online to teach people in the suburbs how to grow their own produce.

"I hope people will go back to basics, and see how simple the world can be," she said.

This week she gave an online class about keeping chickens in suburban backyards.

Margaret was joined on the stream by Bridget Kennedy.

The two became friends online after an edible garden tour they were working on was cancelled because of COVID-19, and the project went digital instead.

Coronavirus questions answered



Breaking down the latest news and research to understand how the world is living through an epidemic, this is the ABC's Coronacast podcast.



PHOTO: Bridget Kennedy in her garden with a pomegranate. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

"We've built a whole new community online," she said.

What the experts are saying about coronavirus:

- The steps SafeWork Australia says you should follow if someone shows symptoms of COVID-19 while at work
- A breathing technique JK Rowling said helped her coronavirus-like symptoms could actually help spread the disease

Bridget runs a contemporary jewellery business in North Sydney which had to shut because of the coronavirus threat.

She said her anxieties — both financial and personal — were "skyrocketing" when she closed the doors.

But she said she had since found solace in her suburban garden.

"These are crazy times," she said. "But I've been spending a lot of time in our garden — we've been eating the food from it.

"I've come to terms with it now. The universe has said you have to sit back for a while, so we're doing that."

Taking it day by day

For Nathan, the weirdest thing during this period — apart from having his wedding being moved to his backyard — is not being able to shake hands.

"It's just what we do isn't it?" he said.



PHOTO: Nathan Clissold said he was taking life one day at a time. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

He and his fiancée are making new plans for a big party to celebrate their wedding when the travel restrictions are over.

They'll also be booking a new honeymoon due to their planned celebration in Fiji being cancelled.

Having had COVID-19 derail the biggest day of his life, Nathan had some sage advice.

"We've just got to take it day-by-day," he said. "Just try to live our lives and be there for each other."

Topics: covid-19, community-and-society, charities-and-community-organisations, epidemics-and-pandemics, house-and-home, lifestyle-and-leisure, lifestyle, diseases-and-disorders, australia, nsw, sydney-2000

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