

life in numbers



IF I WERE TO describe my life these past few months in numbers, it would go something like this:

Days since Jack deployed: **91**

Days until Jack comes home: **91** (should be celebrating the half-way point but do I really have to do it all again?!)

Number of kids living with me: **1** (the older 2 are at boarding school)

Number of times our youngest has asked when Daddy will come home and why he won't be back for Christmas: **infinite**.

Number of times I go to bed with our youngest: **every night** (his separation anxiety since Jack left means he panics unless he can see me until the point of sleep)

Number of cuddly toys in my bed: at least **50,000**

Nights I'm woken by my 14-year old Lab pacing my bedroom or barking manically if I move him downstairs: **every night**

Times I have taken dog to vets since Jack left: **8**

Number of diagnoses: **3** (arthritis, separation anxiety or dementia, both worsened by Jack doing a disappearing act).

Medical treatments that have made a difference: **nil**

Suggestions by our 6-year old that have worked: **1** (his dinosaur night light now casts my bedroom in an eerie green glow, but the dog is happier. We have concluded he is scared of the dark and, like my son, needs to be able to see me at all times. I can't say I enjoy being this popular).

Journeys to my older children's boarding school for exeats/ holidays/ illness/ Covid-related quarantine and to settle our home sick son: **17** (it's an hour away

so that's **34** hours of driving)

Times I have taken our recalcitrant, second-hand, mechanic-loving car, bought on our return to the UK this summer, to the garage: **6**

Number of times I have cried myself to sleep: **2**

I am exhausted, grateful that my application for a job over the summer missed the deadline; I naively thought I would have the gift of time once five became two.

As we head into a new year, we can surely all agree that 2020 has been rough. I found myself walking our dog last week in tears, wondering where God is in this messy world, in this terrible year. My experience hasn't been nearly as hard as some people's, but my faith has been leaking away like a slow puncture all the same. Why can God be so elusive at times? Maybe I need to balance the books:

Number of times I have met with other Christians this year: **a handful**. Our move mid-Covid brought us to an area where we knew none of the local churches. For someone who hates Zoom (I don't like being stared at and I really don't like staring at myself), the lack of an established link created the perfect excuse for not joining one.

Number of times I have played worship music: **barely ever** (I do this at the gym but I rarely go there at the moment, or whilst driving but the bad car won't stream my music)

Number of times I have read my Bible: **33** since Jack left, according to Lectio 365.

On my walk, as I cut through the trees, I see a handmade sign ahead, hanging

from a branch, decorated with a rainbow, with the words 'Keep smiling'. I smile back. It feels like God is responding directly to the questions I am firing at him. 'Where are you, Lord?' I ask. 'Here, in the trees, in the midst of your questions, all around you.'

And I realise, as I stand back to see the wood for the trees, He has been with me the whole time. My mum says God can do all things without us, but He often works amidst and between us. Covid has made that much harder, with all its restrictions on social contact, and it's undoubtedly one of the reasons my faith has been floundering.

Despite having a six-year-old and a dog as my shadow, I have been lonely, spiritually lonely. But God has found ways to reach me. He's been on the walks I have done with my Christian friend from overseas who got stranded nearby in the UK. He's been in the times I have spent with the AFCU family who invited me to bubble up. He's been at the food bank where I help out, which is run by a Christian who has asked his church to pray for us and sent me the Zoom link for their next service. He is in the Starbucks my overseas friend interrupted this article to deliver to my doorstep, perfectly ordered to my liking.

Corona, meaning crown, might challenge all aspects of our lives but we have a God whose own crown never slips, who can reach each of us, wherever we are and regardless of circumstance.

• **Katie Kyle is married to Jack, an RAF Chinook helicopter pilot.**

You can read more from Katie on her blog: www.eagletswings.co.uk