

COVID 19: The Conspiracy? Think again

The story of an ex-pat married couple, both aged 62 and living on Spain's Costa Blanca who contracted and survived COVID 19.

Written from the husbands' perspective, a man who twice tested positive for COVID 19 and who so very nearly lost the love of his life.

"Please help me" This was the alarming three-word text message that I received from my wife Sue at 07:56 on 28 March 2020. I took this as a last goodbye.

This is an account of how my wife Sue and I both contracted severe cases of Covid 19 and survived it, including various intimate text messages between us from our hospital beds. I have written this short piece after reading and hearing people talk about how the virus has been and is still being seen as a conspiracy.

The Coronavirus which lead to the COVID 19 disease was first widely reported on 31st December 2019 and the first known death was reported in Wuhan, China on 11th January 2020.

"This is for real Ian, I always said something like this would happen and that something like this would end the world, I'm really worried, I'm frightened for the kids and the grandchildren, it's not fair"

These were the actual words my wife Sue said to me when the news of Coronavirus broke and she kept repeating it hour after hour, day after day all through January, February and through to the March Lockdown here in Spain. I was laughing and joking with her about it, I didn't take it seriously, there had been other viruses such as SARS and MERS but these had never affected us. Sue was adamant and she was really worried that we were all going to get the disease COVID 19 and die.

THE BEGINNING

During a visit to London on 27th February 2020, I was passing through Chinatown in London's West End, on my way to a concert with my eldest grandson Tommy, we also went into two casinos earlier that afternoon. Tommy and I both decided to wind Sue up and take a 'selfie' photo to mock her about the coronavirus. In the photo Tommy and I are shown together with a background of Chinese restaurants, Chinese hanging lanterns and Chinese street signs that adorn London's Chinatown area and there were us, without a care in the world about what was soon to become a reality. Tommy posted the photo to his Facebook page tagging Sue in with the caption '*Sue Tanner, what do you mean... Coronavirus????*' Sue was not happy and replied to the post '*That's not funny*' a friend of ours also commenting on the post '*I think it's too late Sue!*' How poignant was that comment about to become?

We returned home to Spain a few days later and in early March 2020, Coronavirus outbreaks were happening on Mainland Spain, the hotspots were in Madrid and in the city of Vitoria in the Basque Country. The virus spread rapidly and on Friday 13th March, the Spanish government imposed a full lockdown which was to begin on Monday 16 March 2020.

During the early evening of Friday March 13th, and in preparation for the lockdown, government vehicles were driving around the streets with verbal instructions coming from loudhailers informing residents of what was about to happen and to stay calm, stay at home and only venture out for essential shopping etc.

This was the very beginning of the nightmare which was soon to descend upon us.

LOCKDOWN IS IMMINENT

It was during the week prior to the lockdown that Sue and I decided we would have a few nights out. We would normally only go out two or three nights a week to a restaurant or maybe a bar to take in some local entertainment. We had a good idea of what was to come and we sort of knew that the Spanish government would impose tough measures, we both wanted some 'fun' before lockdown. We went to a couple of restaurants during the week and then on the Friday prior to the Monday lockdown, we went with our youngest daughter Karen, her husband Ryan and their three children, Jack, Harry and Susie to a local pub for some drinks. This would be our last night out together for a while, we didn't know

how long for but we could sense it would be sometime before the lockdown would be lifted.

The pub was very busy, it was obvious that many others wanted that '*one last night out*', that '*one last drink*'. Many of the customers in the pub were all dancing together including us and we were all very close, there was no social distancing rules at the time and no face masks. Sue and I wanted to 'lockdown' the next day which would be two days earlier than we were instructed to do so, we were worried and had every right to be. An announcement was made in the pub that night informing us that all bars and restaurants had to permanently close at 12:00pm. All customers had to be out of the bar by 11:30 to give the owners time to clear up and close up. This was the very start of lockdown, there were police vehicles on the streets and it all seemed surreal. That night we took our grandson Jack home with us, he was intending to stay with us for a few days, possibly longer.

SATURDAY MARCH 14 2020

We woke up the following morning to a lovely sunny Saturday morning but to a completely different world. Although officially we were still allowed out of the house, we were adamant that our lockdown started today. Our daughter Karen phoned and asked if we needed any shopping, we needed a couple of fresh items and it wasn't too long before she arrived with them. We heard our front gate rattle and then Karen calling out, Sue and I both had a chuckle about what was just about to happen. I went out onto the front terrace to greet Karen and she asked "*why's the gate locked, you never lock it?*" I told her that we'd locked down and that the gate was staying locked and that no one was coming into our house, not even her! She thought I was joking, I had to tell her several times that we were really serious about this and that she really wasn't coming onto the terrace let alone into the house, I told her that Jack was welcome to stay as he was already here and it all got sorted eventually. Karen then said that she accepted and understood our situation and that she would do everything she could to help us to stay at home and to keep safe.

We both felt safe within our home, I had been shopping the previous day and stocked up on essentials. We had television, we had our music, we had DVD's and books. in fact, we had everything we needed and we had our grandson Jack with us for company. Idyllic is probably the word I would use to describe our homely situation, we were happy to stay at home until this virus passed.



Chinatown February 27th 2020



Our front terrace and the gate that was kept locked

Life for us though, would soon take a rather sudden turn and our idyllic little world would crumble beneath us.

THE EARLY SIGNS OF COVID TURN INTO A NIGHTMARE

That first couple of days of lockdown started uneventfully for us. We kept up with all the news concerning the virus and just got on with life in general. With the new restrictions in place, we weren't allowed to venture out of the house which suited us fine, we felt safe at home and pretty certain that we wouldn't get the virus. Then.... '*BOOM*', between Monday and Tuesday, Sue and I both started to feel unwell. We both felt very lethargic, I was getting really bad hot sweats every time I dozed off and I would wake in a pool of water. Neither of us could walk up the one flight of stairs to our bedroom, we could barely move from the sofa. We called Karen on the Wednesday to come and collect Jack, it was impossible for us to look after him anymore. At that stage we really didn't suspect COVID, it was in its early stages here in Spain with only 11178 cases reported up to Tuesday 17 March. If we now say that this was the first signs of COVID (which it obviously was) then we could predict having caught it around 11th March and there were then only 2965 cases here in Spain. The official line of how long it takes for COVID 19 symptoms to appear is on average 5-6 days, however it can take up to 14 days. If I was to go back 14 days from when our symptoms first appeared, it's incredibly weird to think that I was in London's Chinatown with Tommy and mocking the virus on that selfie photo and on that day, **there were only 16 reported cases in the whole of Spain.**

Over the next few days both of us got worse, we couldn't move, we hardly ate, it really was getting bad. Sue seemed much worse than me and she began to question whether it was COVID, we still didn't think it was, we couldn't think of how we could have caught it, we had been sensible, we had locked down early, we had taken all the necessary precautions. But then suddenly on Sunday 23rd March, two days before our 42nd wedding anniversary, Sue took a turn for the worse, she managed to get herself into the ground floor bedroom and onto the bed, she was sweating profusely and in quite a delirious state and in pain. After a few hours of this, she asked me to call for an ambulance, I must have been in a state of shock as I kept asking if she really was that ill. Eventually, at about 9:00pm I called the 'Coronavirus Hotline' number here in Spain and asked for an ambulance to come. I had to answer some questions regarding Sue's condition and eventually after a few telephone conversations with various doctors and departments at the local hospital they agreed to send an ambulance. I managed to lie on the bed for a while to comfort her whilst waiting for the ambulance to arrive. I was up every time I heard a vehicle hoping it was for Sue as she was really suffering, she was crying with pain and it was very hurtful seeing her like that. Eventually, the ambulance turned up, it was around 6:00am the following morning and although we had waited a long time, it was such a relief when it finally arrived. It was pouring with rain that morning, hammering it down, the ambulance crew were dressed head to toe in protective equipment, it was like something out of a sci-fi movie, they wouldn't touch Sue, the nearest they got to her was when they gave her a mask and instructed her to put it on. She struggled to get into the ambulance, I was in no fit state to help, all I could do was stand in the pouring rain and watch hopelessly, crying and thinking '*was this the last time that I would see my wife*', was this going to be my lasting memory of her? Sue was taken away and I went back indoors sobbing but trying to remain calm and positive.

WILL I LOSE MY SOULMATE? I MUST WARN OTHERS

Sometime during that Tuesday morning Sue and I exchanged the following text messages:

Sue: *I was sick in the ambulance, it was horrible, I couldn't get the mask off, it was everywhere even in the mask.*
Ian: *Make sure you come home, I can't bear the thought of losing you xx*
Sue: *I will*

I went back to laying on the sofa or on the bed which Sue had just left, still feeling totally out of it and very sick, neither of us had eaten anything of substance since Jack had left six days earlier. Meanwhile, at the hospital, Sue was being examined, x-rayed and being tested for COVID 19.

During a conversation with one of the nurses, Sue mentioned that I was at home and unwell and the nurse told her that I too should come to the hospital to be examined, I think that I was still in denial and I refused to go. That day will linger in my mind for ever.

I am a big social media fan, I believe that it has major role to play in life and if used properly, there can be many benefits from using it. That very same day that Sue was taken to hospital, I put a long post on Facebook relating our plight with COVID. I wasn't looking for any sympathy, I just needed to get our story out to make people aware that this was for real. The post attracted a lot of attention from friends and family and from people who didn't even know us. It received nearly one thousand 'likes' and nearly eight hundred shares, the shares meant a great deal to me as this would mean that these 'shares' would probably be shared again by others and reach a lot more people. Nearly seven hundred people also commented on the post and we had well wishers from all over the UK and even from some from America and other countries, I was amazed at the kindness from so many people.

FROM LIGHT TO DARK

The following day was our wedding anniversary and after what was probably the best night's sleep that I'd had since this nightmare began, I woke up in amazement! Every bit of pain, every ache had literally disappeared and for the first time since this all began, I had no night sweat in the bed. I just couldn't believe that this was real, how could this happen after I had been so ill during the past week, I had come through it. The first thing I did was to phone my daughter Karen, it was about 7:15am but I didn't care, I needed to tell someone that I was no longer ill, that's how good I felt and for some strange reason, I asked her if she could bring me some lunch later. I then got out of bed, I made and ate breakfast, it really was an incredible feeling. I can't remember exactly how the rest of the morning panned out, all I can recall is that when Karen arrived with my lunch later that day, I opened the door to her looking like a dying man. How could I have gone from one stage to another and then back again in such a short space of time? I told Karen that I needed her to take me straight to the hospital and that is what happened.

When we arrived at Torrevieja Hospital, it was a strange and unusual sight. Apart from the hospital appearing eerily empty (the hospital was virtually closed apart from COVID and emergencies) the entrance to the A&E department had hoarding all around it and there were security guys guarding the entrance. Karen went in alone to find out the correct procedure for getting me in, it was obvious that you couldn't just stroll in.

Once Karen had explained the situation and the admissions staff had taken some details from her, Karen returned and told me that they were waiting for me. I struggled out of the car and frailly walked into the hospital. Before I was gone from Karen's sight I turned to wave goodbye and blow her a kiss, not knowing if that was to be for the last time. Karen has since told me that as I walked into that reception I looked a shadow of my former self, she said I looked like a little old man and that my face was sunken in, she didn't think that she would ever see me again!

At some point just before we'd left the house on the way to the hospital Karen exchanged the following text messages with her husband Ryan:

25 March 15:09pm

*Karen: I'm taking my dad to hospital he looks dead
Mum has double pneumonia on her lungs still waiting for the result of the corona*

Ryan: Let me know what the hospital says

Karen: They are going to die Ryan I know it

The admission procedure went smoothly and I was x-rayed (chest) and had other tests including the PCR test for COVID 19. By this time, I was certain that I had COVID. I was very ill but I tried to conceal this from the medical staff, I didn't want to be confined to hospital, I was frightened that I would never return home. My chest x-ray was clear, I was delighted but I was still admitted to an observation ward overnight and this stay was to last for 4 nights. It was test after test, more x-rays all coming back clear, blood tests and more blood tests. I was put on a drip and was given the so called '*Trump Drug*' hydroxychloroquine, which I'm sure was partly responsible in saving my life. Whilst on the ward I was so tired, I would power nap but wake up in a pool of water and hastily try to mop up the water with one of the pillows to hide the signs of fever from the medical staff, I wanted to go home. I couldn't let them see that I had a fever and luckily for me my temperature wasn't really that high. When I had a visit from a doctor or nurse I thought that I was managing to keep my appearance looking well and conceal the obvious signs of fever, I struggled to keep the coughing at bay but somehow, I did. It's quite obvious now that I didn't look well at all, I just imagined it. In my head it was working, it was just my own little way of trying to escape the hospital confinement. I couldn't sleep or more to the fact I was too frightened to go to sleep, I really thought that I might not wake up. I was staying awake for as long as I could keep my eyes open. Karen had said that I could call or Facetime her at any time during the night if I needed too and I did, I was calling her constantly during the night just to keep awake.

THIS WAS IT...

During my second day in hospital I managed a group text message with our three daughters and our son Billy –

Thursday 26 March 23:13

Ian: This is now not good mum very bad and I just got positive result back, I think this is it for us both
Billy: Can you be together now. Dad just hang on in
Ian: Yes, they are taking me up to her I think soon
Lucy: Dad please don't think like that xxx
Ian: No other way darling its happening x
Alison: It's not it, pull through it together xx
Billy: When you're with mum give her a massive kiss from us and tell her we love her. Just stay strong and do this together

It was during my four day stay in hospital that I think Sue was really in a bad place but we managed to text each other:

Wednesday 25 March (our 42nd Wedding Anniversary)

Ian: Is your room big enough for two?
Sue: Yes
Ian: I'm gonna ask, can you ask as well please?

Later that same day –

Sue: Just pressed the emergency bell my chest is really hurting and I'm breathless
*Ian: Oh f**k me, I wish I could swap places with you*

Thursday 26 March 01:37

Ian: Are you awake?
Sue: Sort of

Thursday 26 March 08:09

Sue: Still here just tired
Ian: You can do this 👍 I've asked the kids not to call or text you

A little later –

*Sue: Doctor told me my veins are collapsing, so that'll be me f**ked*

I couldn't bring myself to reply to that last text straight away. I remember feeling totally lost and helpless, I remember lying back on the pillow, turning over and crying silently. Was this really happening, was I going to lose my wife without being there to comfort her, to hold her hand and to kiss her goodbye? It was also around this time that Sue called me to tell me that she had taken off her rings and had put them on her hospital bedside table, surely this was it. I was struggling to take it all in.

After several minutes -

*Ian: I'm still struggling to come to terms, why us?
Sue: Can you ask about us having a room together
Ian: I will once the test is back darling I promise*

26 March 23.04

*Ian: I'm Positive
Sue: I've still not heard, got bad pains in my back can't stop shaking
Ian: I think this is it darling I think they'll bring me up to you
Sue: Hope so x just going to call for pain relief
Ian: You that bad
Sue: Yes
Ian: Oh f**k*

Friday 27 March 06:35

*Ian: Are you still with us darling x
Sue: Yes, really can't take no more
Ian: Oh my lovely Sue please try x
Ian: I'll be with you soon*

Later that day -

*Sue: Still not got my covid result
Ian: crazy, do they need it! Where I am there are men patients coming and going and then more men in, its f**king horrible.*

Saturday 28 March 07:56

*Sue: please help me
Ian: Karen is trying her best darling I promise, I love you so much I'd do anything to help but I can't
Ian: This is so unfair
Ian: They said they are going to send someone to you*

When I got that text message from Sue that just read 'Please help me' I took this as a last goodbye. In fact, I telephoned our Children to prepare them for the worst. I could just imagine Sue lying there in that hospital bed, all alone and in pain, wondering why I wasn't there looking after her.

Although she knew that I was lying in a bed somewhere in that same hospital, I thought of her now being totally out of it and imagining me being sat at home on the sofa watching television, with all our home comforts surrounding me and not caring about her. Was she thinking that I had left her there to die alone? It was heart wrenching.

Later that day Sue's result for COVID 19 came back positive. It was around this time that her oxygen level was at an incredibly low 33 (the average level should be above 95!) and she was warned by one of the nurses that she might have to go into the intensive care unit. At this point, it was right to assume that she was probably being kept alive by that wonderful oxygen machine. I think miraculously, that the oxygen level regained stability within hours of the doctors making that possibly life-threatening decision. It was also confirmed around this time that Sue had double pneumonia, it was just getting worse for her. Later she would learn that she had also contracted hepatitis B, this disease affects the liver and can cause cirrhosis, it can even lead to liver failure, we thank God that this reacted to treatment and eventually cleared up.

Whilst all of this was going on Karen was having to deal with an onslaught of phone calls, facetime calls and text messages from our family back in England. They were obviously extremely worried about us both being so ill and being unable to get to Spain themselves, they had to rely on Karen for all the updates. The hospital, was so inundated with covid patients at this time and they just would not take their calls. To be fair to the hospital regarding communication, they were fabulous with Karen and they also allowed our young niece Kirsty, who was brought up in Alicante and converses perfectly in Spanish, to be part of the 'network' of communication and this worked extremely well, it provided Karen with a bit of respite in a sense. The family back home were getting anxious and started questioning Karen's inability to provide every little detail, they questioned her as to why she wasn't getting in to see us, why wasn't she speaking to us more often all of which was beginning to have an upsetting effect on her. What they didn't and couldn't have realised at the time was the extent of security which was placed around the hospital, to say that it was like 'war-time' would not be an exaggeration.

HOSPITAL AT HOME – HOW COULD I?

After much deliberation between the doctors and nurses and after yet another chest x-ray and more blood tests, I was finally going to be allowed to go home to recover in isolation, the hospital called this 'Hospital at Home'. But going home for me meant a big sacrifice for Karen and her family. Unbeknown to me at the time, the hospital had been in contact with Karen about my 'Hospital at Home'. They wanted to know about my home circumstances and whether I had someone who would be able to care for me 24/7. Well my 'carer' (Sue) was at that point lying in a hospital bed somewhere not too far from me and she was in no fit state to care for me! Karen knew that I was desperate to get out of the hospital and took it upon herself, (after talking it through with her husband Ryan) to volunteer to leave her family to come to live and care for me for 14 days in isolation. It was a beautiful, but at the time a heart-wrenching and dangerous gesture on Karen's part to do this for me and one that I will treasure for the rest of my life. Prior to my discharge, both Karen and I were given separate strict instructions on how to isolate. I was given medication (hydroxychloroquine) and a finger pulse oximeter to take home, with detailed instructions on how to use it. The oximeter measures the oxygen level in your red blood cells, it is an important little gadget. The normal oxygen levels are between 95-100 but mine was hovering around 92-93 which was low but high enough to allow my discharge. Once I was at home the level dropped to 88 and we were struggling to get it higher. Karen used Google to find out ways of raising the oxygen level and this included eating the right foods and ventilating the room but it just wasn't happening. We were warned that if it dropped any lower or didn't start to increase soon, then I would have to return to hospital. Anyway, I left hospital that evening, I left Sue alone that evening, I couldn't tell her that I was going home, how could I?

Karen had been at our house the previous day and had spent the whole day cleaning and disinfecting everything that Sue and I may have touched. She threw away any loose coverings, together with pillows and cushions that we had been laying on, she steam-cleaned our sofa too as this had been soaked through with our constant hot sweats and had left an awful smell which we came to call the covid smell! This smell lingered on in my nostrils throughout my illness and is still even popping up to this day. When I got well enough, I tried all sorts of horrendous nasal washes to try to eradicate the smell but it just wouldn't go. Karen had also stocked up on food and essentials for the impending 14-day isolation period.

We left the hospital for home early on Saturday evening 28 March, the roads were completely deserted, we didn't see another moving vehicle or anyone walking around. As we approached a roundabout about halfway through our journey, we came to a police checkpoint with a police officer holding up his arm to order us to stop. Karen shouted out of the window "Papa, COVID" and we were waved through in a sort of 'get him out of here' manner! Seeing the deathly silence on the streets and this gesture from the police officer really brought home how serious this had become during my short spell of 4 days in hospital.

I spent the next thirteen days in one room and mostly in bed, it should have been fourteen days but Karen gave me one day off for good behaviour! Walking through the front door of our home just didn't feel right, it didn't even feel like home anymore. Within a flash, I recalled my 4 days in hospital... Had I really recorded those two videos on my phone, one to our family and one to my best mate, my eldest grandson Tommy to say goodbye and to tell them how much we both loved them? Had I really held a Facetime call to my eldest daughter Alison at around midnight on the second day in there and demanded that she wake her three children Tommy, Charlie and Libby so that I could say goodbye to them? I told the three grandchildren that I needed to say goodbye to them as they weren't going to see me again and I told them that I was saying goodbye to them from their nanny also, as she was too sick to do it herself. I must have been in a very bad place to have done those things, I must have believed that I was going to die that night, right there in that hospital bed.

I struggled up the one flight of stairs to my bedroom but decided to stay in the adjacent spare room. I asked Karen if she would sleep in our bedroom so that she was close to me, rather than her sleeping downstairs. I fell into the bed and just thoughtfully wondered where or when this was going to end. Whilst I managed to trick my way out of the hospital, I was in fact feeling very sick, I was so weak, my voice was miniscule and my body a shadow of its former self with my bones clearly visible on my chest. After a short sleep I woke up to begin the isolation period, assuming after fourteen days that I'd be free of COVID and back to my old self.

Karen had set the rules and we were sticking to them, I was to stay in bed and she wasn't allowed in the room except for bringing in my food and drink and to give me my medication. The bedding had to be changed at least every second day due to the night sweats. She also had to monitor my oxygen level three times a day, a record of this was kept and given to the nurse that visited every day during the first week and then every other day during the second week. At first the nurse wouldn't enter the house, I had to struggle downstairs and 'present' myself to her as if I were on

parade! It was a funny situation really, she would just take a look at me and ask if I had fever or if I was coughing, to which I would lie and reply... "no".

That first night home continued as it did in the hospital, I was still frightened to go to sleep and I've since learned that this has been a common thing with other COVID sufferers. Karen put a chair outside of the bedroom and would sit for ages with me during the day and long into the night, it was great really and the bond between us grew rapidly. We both downloaded some online games to our iPhones and these games would keep us amused for hours. We actually had proper conversations for once and talked for hours about her childhood memories and of her three-month visit to India in 2008 at age just 19, where she undertook charity work with young children. Although we had spoken about the India trip before, this time Karen went through virtually the whole trip with me and I got a wonderful insight of how she spent her time there and of how much she actually enjoyed it. During her 'captivity' with me, Karen would keep in touch with her family with Facetime and we would count the days down, leading to their reunion.

Although it was hard for Karen to have left her family, she kept her mind strong and looked after me as if she were a professional carer. I found myself really concerned though when on only the second day of this isolation, Karen was getting out of breath walking up the one flight of stairs to me. I asked her if she was ok and she just replied that she was unfit and that this walking upstairs would do her good! After a couple of more days of this, I think I guessed that she was most probably suffering from COVID herself. I didn't mention this until a few more days had passed and she agreed that she too had thought the same. And then, during the second week we both noticed that her husband Ryan was getting breathless and was continually coughing during the many Facetime calls between them. Now this was a worry, if Ryan were to have gone down with COVID what would have happened to the children? Karen was in isolation and we had no other family here to take care of them. We did however, have one saviour. One of Karen's friends Keiley Baglin volunteered to do our shopping for us and she did the same for Ryan and the kids. This would prove to be invaluable and we remain forever indebted to her, she really is a lovely person. Keiley works for the local radio station here on the Costa Blanca and was lucky enough to have a pass allowing her to leave her home, without awkward questions being asked if she were to be stopped at a police checkpoint.

At first it was a struggle for me to get out of bed to shower or go to the toilet but needs be, it had to be done. Taking a shower was so painful, I had no strength and my breathing was at its lowest point, especially during the first week. I would look at myself in the mirror after I'd showered and cringe at the sight of my dilapidated body, I couldn't see how I was going to survive. Karen was trying to get me to eat, she would suggest some lovely healthy foods for breakfast, lunch and dinner but the thought of eating just didn't impress me. I would ask for a baby portion, "no Karen" I would say, "half a baby portion" and at first, I couldn't even eat that, I think I survived those first few days on water alone.

One day Karen took a call from the hospital, they said that after reviewing my last x-ray that they had noticed a small viral infection on my right lung, they said that it didn't require treatment and that it would clear by itself. It never did clear up and I was later to learn that I'd developed double pneumonia and would end up with scarring on both lungs, more of this later. By this time, Sue had started to slowly recover her strength and was communicating more with all the family, this brought much relief to us all and it was around this time that I took call from her "*why didn't you tell me you were at home?*" I cringed and replied "how did you know?" "*Facebook*" I wanted to burst out laughing as this meant that Sue really was on the mend and I just explained to her that I couldn't let her think that I'd gone and left her in the hospital alone, I was forgiven of course! Although Sue was now on the mend, she was still on oxygen and during those many Facetime calls we had, it was a sad sight to see her with the oxygen mask on and struggling to breathe.

I was still struggling at night, I just didn't want to close my eyes and go to sleep. I was playing games on my iPad, something that I'd never done before. I sorted out a Netflix account and I began to watch up to three films a night, I would doze off during each film and then wake suddenly in a pool of water, it was awful and it continued like this for about ten days. My oxygen level remained low during this time and I used to say to Karen "*when the doctor calls tell them it's a little higher than it is*" she never did! As the days passed my appetite picked up, I was managing small meals and enjoying them, it was also getting easier to shower and at this point I managed to get on the scales, I was horrified to see that I had lost two and a half stone, this was an incredible amount of weight for me to lose as I'm quite a slim man, my usual weight being only 12st 3lb. This huge weight loss had a big impact on my body and left me feeling extremely weak for many weeks, thankfully I have now regained the weight plus!

Going back to the hospital stay, another problem arose whilst I was in there, I was drip-fed some antibiotics, I can't remember why they were administered intravenously but I can remember feeling immense pain in my left arm where the syringe entered through my skin, I called for the nurse and asked her to take it out but I think the language barrier proved to be a problem on this occasion and nothing happened. The pain was getting worse, I had a terrible burning sensation running through my arm so I pulled what I think was the emergency cord, it took a while for someone to come but come they did and thankfully the drip was removed. The pain did subside after a couple of hours but I was left with a hard lump on my vein which I thought was most probably a blood clot, I couldn't or more to the fact, I didn't tell the nursing staff about this, it would have been another reason not to allow me to go home. During those early days at home Karen let the hospital know about the lump and that we thought it may be a clot. She was told to get some ice in a plastic bag and I had to hold the ice on the lump for twenty minutes, wow was that cold! The Hospital said that the nurse would bring some medication which Karen had to administer three times a day. Although the swelling was getting smaller in size it was taking a while and during a telephone conversation Karen had with the doctor it was decided that I should return to the hospital for a scan to determine whether or not it was in fact a clot. Karen took me back to hospital the following day for a scheduled appointment and we both couldn't believe how empty the roads were, still no cars and still no people. At the hospital nothing had changed, it was still in a military-like state. There were security guards everywhere and you could only get in there if you had an appointment. The scan went well and much to my relief, no clots were discovered and after about six weeks the lump in my vein gradually disappeared.

MAKING PROGRESS

On 7 April, 10 days after I initially left the hospital, I gradually got some mobility back. At first, I just sat up on the bed for a short time to eat and then slowly but surely, over the next couple of days I was able to get up and walk a few paces around the small bedroom, it was progress! It was also around this time that we heard some fabulous news from Sue, the hospital was getting ready to let her come home. Once again, the hospital called Karen to discuss how this was going to happen. They wanted to know where she would be coming home to, who would be caring for her and who else was living at the property. Karen was told that Sue would have to isolate for fourteen days and that I too had to isolate for another fourteen days, we both needed care and there was only one person available – Karen! And this was probably going to cause a major problem and more heartache for Ryan who had been looking after the three

children and had been sick himself. We had been counting down the days until the family reunion which was getting closer and now Karen had to tell him that it wasn't going to happen.

It was an extremely difficult Facetime call for Karen to have to make and one which she didn't make until late the next day, she was going to find this a very emotional thing to do. The call took place and of course Ryan was very dejected but he took it on the chin. He understood that there really was no one else here in Spain who could look after us and we did need looking after, Keiley continued to do our shopping for a further two weeks.



Keiley – Our Saviour!
Entertaining on The Costa Blanca



Sue arriving home in an ambulance

9 APRIL 2020 – THE DAY BEFORE SUE WAS DUE HOME

I decided that I was now well enough to manage the stairs and move around the house, it was an incredible feeling. It was still hard work and I was still getting breathless but it was magical to be out of that bedroom and to be able to lie on the sofa and watch a bit of television. If I recall correctly, Keiley brought us some shopping on this day and she stayed out on the front terrace for a short while chatting to Karen. I got up and went out to say hello to her and to thank her for everything she had done and was still doing for us, it was the first time I had met her and it was a pleasure meeting such a wonderful young lady, it was just a shame that I couldn't give her a hug to say thank you. Of us course all three of us were wearing masks and keeping a distance between us. It was also on this day that I moved out of the spare room and into the ground floor bedroom,

ready for the 'new patient' to arrive. Karen gave - what now became known as - the hospital room a spring clean ready for Sues homecoming the next day. The hospital had delivered an oxygen machine and a spare oxygen bottle for Sue to use as she was still dependent on it and Karen was given instructions on how to operate it and on how to attach replacement masks which were needed on a regular basis. By this time my night sweats were receding and I was finally getting some decent sleep. We were looking forward to Sue coming home the next day but she was in for a big surprise in that isolation meant isolation!

UP YOU GO!

The following day all the family were calling and Facetiming, eager to see their mum and their nanny back at home. It wasn't until early in the afternoon that Sue finally arrived home in an ambulance, Karen had asked if she could collect her but the doctors understandably, wouldn't allow it. Having Sue step out of that ambulance and walk into our home was a wonderful sight, she had made a miraculous recovery and she looked extremely well considering what she had been through. When she walked through the front door she continued walking toward the lounge area and was met with a stern reprimand from Karen "*where do you think you're going? You have to go straight upstairs and get into bed, you've got to isolate for fourteen days*". The bewildered look on Sues face was a sight to behold but I had to agree with Karen, we had to abide by the strict rules as we did when I came home.

Sue was in a really good place at that time and in my opinion, she was well enough to re-enter 'normal life' and come out of the room. She too had lost a lot of weight, about 20lb and unlike me, she wasn't too pleased when she eventually put it all back on, typical woman! We were all isolating together so why Sue had to stay alone in that room I will never understand. However, we stuck to it but again Karen decided that for good behaviour, Sue could come out of isolation after only eleven days. During those eleven days Karen and I spent much of the time winding Sue up. She didn't want to take her medication so Karen virtually stood over her and watched her take it. She moaned about almost everything, that was happening. She didn't like being upstairs with us two downstairs, she could hear us talking and kept trying to join in on the conversation but we wouldn't let her, we just made everything worse for her in a funny sort of way, Sue knew what we were doing was just to wind her up and so she just went along with it! It was something we now look back on and laugh about rather than just think about the bad stuff. I would venture upstairs to sit outside the room and chat to her but just walking up that one flight

of stairs rendered me breathless and within a couple of minutes I had to get back downstairs to lie down, I didn't realise at that time that I was actually getting worse. It was lovely when those eleven days were up and Sue finally joined us downstairs. She immediately wanted to start cleaning and cooking but Karen wouldn't let her, I don't think she understood how dangerously ill she had been less than two weeks previous.

In amidst of all of this and prior to Sue and I being infected with COVID 19, Karen and I had put a deposit on a property which was to be Karen's new and permanent family home (she had previously been renting and had been moving from house to house on short-term lets) it was a new adventure and one which we were all looking forward to. The house purchase had to be put on hold for the time being and during one conversation I had with Karen, I expressed my desire that should her mum die, I would buy a bigger house with a separate apartment for us all to live together, I didn't want to live alone. I also said that should we both die then she should have our house as a gift – this didn't go down well! The purchase eventually went through and they are all very happy in their new home.

THE REUNION AND THE SECOND WAVE

On Tuesday 21 April, Ryan and the three kids arrived at our home. Far from this being an exciting time, apart from the kids being happy to be with their mum, things were still not good. We were still under lockdown and us being all together under one roof was far from perfect but we had no choice. The tenancy was up on Karen and Ryan's house and the new house purchase had come to a standstill. We contacted the solicitors and they promised to try to get the new house tied up as soon as was practically possible, they had power of attorney so if the legal stuff could progress, we didn't have to leave the house to sign anything. We kept our fingers and everything else crossed that the completion would happen soon. In the meantime, Ryan and I began to take short walks two or three times a day, always keeping within the boundaries of our urbanisation (I've since found out that we were actually breaking the law by taking these walks outside of the home!) it was during these walks that I started to feel a slight pain in the upper regions of my back, I was also getting out of breath very quickly. I didn't take much notice of this at first but each day the pains were getting worse and the walks were getting shorter! Just to emphasis on the word 'urbanisation'. Here in Spain most residential homes are built on mainly small developments or communities, most of these developments having communal pool and leisure areas with residents paying an annual charge for the upkeep of the area and these are known locally as urbanisations.

On one particular day we reached the halfway point of our walk and I just had to stop and take in a long rest. I was devastated, that was when I finally realised something was wrong. Before COVID struck I was quite a fit man for my age, I had been helping out at my friends' gym three times a week and now I was unable to walk a relatively short distance without a struggle. When we returned to the house I told Sue and Karen what had happened and how the pains and the shortness of breath had got worse over the past few days, they both agreed that I needed to go to hospital. This time I was not suffering with the terrible COVID fever and I was coherent enough to remember that I had private health insurance. On Tuesday 5 May, Karen took me to the local Quironsalud private hospital in Torrevieja which was only a five-minute drive from the main Hospital.

Quironsalud hospital like the main hospital was in a secure state but I managed to get seen within a few minutes of arriving and after all the usual tests I was sent for a chest x-ray. Karen wasn't allowed inside the entrance foyer of the A&E department where the triage section was but once the initial tests and x-ray were done I was allowed to go and stand outside with her to wait for the results. It was much more relaxed here than it was at the main hospital and some members of the nursing staff were also outside chatting to us patients whilst maintaining all the usual social distancing measures. After a while, the doctor who sent me for the x-ray called me in, Karen also managed to somehow sneak into the foyer to stay within earshot and listen to the doctors 'verdict' in broken English..... *"your lungs are not good, I want you to have a CT scan so I can have a more detailed look at the damage"*. This was not the news I was expecting, remember I had four x-rays in the main hospital and they all came back clear with the exception of the last one, which showed up that small, supposedly viral infection! Karen and I both looked at the doctor in bewilderment, he then continued *"this f**king COVID is a 'and then another even worse expletive' it has f**ked the world!"*. We were both shocked by his outburst but could understand his frustration, after all, how many patients was this man seeing in this condition every day. I didn't have to wait too long before I was called for the CT Scan, now I was getting worried, what had COVID 19 left me with?

After the scan had been done I returned to the area outside of the A&E entrance foyer and waited anxiously with Karen who had earlier called Sue and explained what was happening and she promised to keep her updated as soon as we had any news. It wasn't long before the doctor came out of the main triage area and beckoned me towards him, Karen followed me in without any protests from the security officer. I didn't need telling... the look on the doctors' face told me it was serious. He told me that the scan result was very bad and that both of my lungs had severe scarring and that this scarring was irreversible. Before another barrage of expletives aimed towards COVID 19 as if it were a person or an organisation, he told me that I had to have another test for COVID 19 and that I would need an urgent appointment with a lung specialist. The COVID test was carried out within a few minutes and sent away for analysis, the result would be back in two days.

SIX WEEKS LATER
STILL COVID POSITIVE
WALKING THE STREETS
AND TOTALLY UNAWARE

It was actually three days before I got that call from Quironsalud, as soon as I answered the phone and even before I was told the test result, my whole body started shaking, Sue was standing next to me and I nodded my head towards my shaking self, she looked at me amazed at the force of my trembling body. "Mr Tanner, the COVID test, it is POSITIVE" I was upset and I was worried but above all I was angry. I was angry at the fact that I had never been offered a test to see if I was negative before being allowed to have my family close to me, to have them move into my house. I was angry that three of my youngest grandchildren were placed in a life-threatening situation, (Karen had told the doctor at Torrevieja hospital that Ryan and the children were moving in with us) I was also angry at myself for not being intelligent enough to have thought this through at the time. I should have been more aware of the situation, I should have insisted on having a test even if it meant paying for it myself and as a responsible parent and grandparent, it's the least I could have done. I was thinking about the people I had been close to since I believed myself to be free of COVID, of the neighbours who had approached me whilst out walking around the urbanisation to ask how Sue and I were, it was funny really as they kept their distance and I could tell that they didn't really want to be standing there talking to me for too long, I couldn't blame them. And now I had to isolate for another 14 days, so did Sue and so did Karen, Ryan and the children, thank God we still had our Keiley to do our shopping! Thankfully, I was to be tested again after seven days.

HOW IS THIS ALL GONNA END?

On Saturday 9 May I put another post on Facebook with a large bold title that read 'HOW IS THIS ALL GONNA END?' The post was a further warning not only to the doubters but to everyone, it was to warn people that once the so-called isolation period was up, that it didn't mean the virus had gone. It was now more than six weeks since my first diagnosis and I was still Positive. I wanted to warn as many people as I possibly could that no one knew how long COVID 19 stayed with you and to be aware, that unless you had a test that read negative not to take any chances. How many people were walking around COVID 19 Positive when they thought they were in the clear after their two-week isolation period had ended? This post gave me immense pleasure when the number of people sharing it reached nearly 1500 with almost 400 comments. Yet again, many shares and comments were appearing from complete strangers.

This second Facebook post attracted attention from one of the free local British ex-pat newspapers out in Spain, The Olive Press and in particular one of their young reporters, Joshua Parfitt. I took a call from Joshua, he said that he'd read my Facebook post and that his paper was interested in running a story about my plight with covid, he asked if I would be happy to do a telephone interview with him? Well of course I said yes, this was after all, the reason I posted to Facebook, I wanted my story out there in the public eye, not for attention, not for sympathy but for awareness, the interview went ahead the following morning. The story was published in the edition dated 14 May and it made the front page. However, I wasn't too happy with what I read on that front page, there was a colour photo of me and Sue which had a red banner across it with the word 'exclusive', that was ok because it was an exclusive but then in bold typeface the title: 'The Man Who Beat Covid Twice'. I had told Joshua my story in good faith and to the best of my knowledge, I can even recall contacting him soon after that telephone interview to correct a couple of things, I never said that I'd contracted COVID 19 twice. As far as I was concerned and even though I couldn't be 100% certain, the COVID had never gone away, it was the same COVID that put me into that hospital bed on that dreadful day in March, the very day after my wife was also taken into that very same hospital.



THUMBS UP!

On Tuesday 11 May, I took a call from Doctor Pasker who was the lung specialist at Quironsalud Hospital. He explained to me that he wasn't able to see me until one month after I had been tested negative. However, during this short conversation he seemed to be very positive about my situation and this eased my concern a little. I couldn't wait to get in to see him face to face. The next PCR test for COVID was arranged for Friday 14 May and thankfully the result came back negative. My latest isolation period was also coming to an end five days later on the 19th, at last I could see some sort of ending to this nightmare. However, the pains in my back were getting more frequent and more painful, I couldn't wait another month before seeing Doctor Pasker. I left it a few days and then made the appointment. This first appointment was basically a 'getting to know you' sort of thing, although the doctor did explain the condition of my lungs to me but reassured me that I wasn't going to die! I was sent for another scan prior to a follow-up appointment which took place around the second week in June. At this appointment, as soon as I walked into the doctors' room and even before I had a chance to sit down, the doctor gave me a thumbs-up and said "Good News". The lungs had improved, something that I was initially told wouldn't happen. It was during this appointment that Doctor Pasker also carried out other tests on my lungs which all proved to be satisfactory, things were definitely on the up. I just had to have a follow-up scan in three months and I left the doctors room in a very upbeat mood.

Whilst all this was going on with me, Sue was making great progress. However, she did go through a period of hair loss which was very worrying for her, thankfully this stopped after about four weeks.

COVID 19 is not all about the respiratory problems. Sue and I both suffered very similar conditions throughout our illness, one of which was seeing weird blue flashes and *'little blue men'* in our eyes during the very early stages of the disease, the flashes reminded us both of the 70's electronic game Space Invaders. We were both in separate hospital beds at the time and related the story of the flashes and the 'little blue men' to each other during our telephone conversations. We also had pains in our chests throughout the first four months, we both had tingling sensations in our hands and feet and still suffer from lumps and bumps all over our bodies and poor Sue, she has had a problem with her throat seemingly closing up nearly every day, something which we can only put down to COVID 19.

We are both now gradually returning to normality after nearly seven months. We still get pains in the lung areas and we still get out of breath quite a lot, this is something that I think we may have to live with for some time, if not for the rest of our lives.

SIGNED OFF – THANK YOU DOCTOR

On Tuesday 30 September, I returned to see Doctor Pasker at Quironsalud for the result of the latest scan on my chest. The result was what I wanted to hear, there had been a significant improvement. I was shown the scans from June and September side by side and the doctor pointed out where the pneumonia was. Although there is still a little pneumonia showing on the lungs, the doctor assured me that given time, this will disappear and that I should make a full recovery.

"don't go home and lay on the sofa feeling sorry for yourself. Get on with your life, do normal everyday things and you'll make a full recovery"

Dr. Pasker – Pulmonology Dept. Quironsalud 30.09.2020

I remember those very first days during late December 2019 when I was mocking Sue about COVID 19 and at a time when I really didn't give a damn about COVID or Coronavirus. I wasn't going to get it so it didn't concern me, how thoughtless. I now cherish the world we live in, I cherish my life more than ever, I cherish my family more than ever because after all, I HAD been on the brink of losing the love of my life and I HAD been on the brink of losing life itself.

Sue and I are both still alive and well and extremely grateful to all of the incredibly hard working and courageous doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, cleaners, security personnel and all of the staff at Torrevieja and Quironsalud Hospitals, who risked their lives and are continuing to risk their lives helping others to beat this virus.

On behalf of both of us, I would like to express a very big thank you to our friends, family and many people who don't even know us both in the UK and on the Costa Blanca, who constantly sent messages and made phone calls to find out how we were doing. The number of these messages and phone calls have really gone to show how much care and love that still exists in the world today.

Postscript 1st January 2021

And now for 'LONG COVID'
read on.....

When I first started reading on social media and on the national news channels about 'Long Covid' I was very sceptical and mocking of it, quite similar to how I felt when Sue was saying "we are all going to die" at the start of the pandemic. However, here we are now in January 2021 and both of us are still suffering, albeit nowhere near as bad as it had been during those hard months of March through to September of 2020.

In August of 2020 I had to go to A&E at Quironsalud as I was passing blood in my urine, something which had never happened before but, does seem to occur in men of my age, so whether I can put this down to COVID I don't know. I was well looked after by the hospital's urology department and on 11th September I had a minor op where a camera goes and takes a look, the result of which proved to be non-too worrying. I was also treated with antibiotics which had the desired effect and stopped the bleeding. No one seems to be able to provide the FULL answers to what COVID is doing to us because, no one knows.

Both Sue and I have had very similar problems since coming out of COVID, we both have small lumps coming up over our faces and heads, these lumps grow to a certain size and then disappear as quickly as they came. We both get attacked with sharp stinging sensations in our arms and legs and Sue has a constant sore and very dry throat, giving her the fear that her throat is going to close permanently which constantly worries her. For the past couple of weeks, I have been getting sharp stinging pains occurring in both eyes, these pains hit one eye at a time, sometime twice in a few seconds and it's so erratic that it makes me jump and jerk my

head at the force of it. Again, is this COVID? Chest pains, we are both getting them with Sue getting palpitations on a regular basis.

Breathlessness is big concern too, we both have to be conscious now of how far we can walk. Prior to COVID we were avid walkers, now although we do venture out for walks, we have to really take care not to overdo it and walking uphill is a big struggle even on the slightest of inclines. The pains in the lungs are still there whether exertion takes place or not but overdoing it certainly makes the pain more intense.

It goes on and on, so much so that I now believe in 'Long Covid', well it had to be given a name so why not?

My last thoughts on the matter.....

For someone who has suffered from this virus in such a bad way, I try to take in as much '*serious*' newsreel about it as I possibly can, without it driving me insane. I'm certainly not qualified to spout opinions on what is the right or wrong way to deal with COVID but I do think that **herd immunity** may be the only real solution.

I appreciate you reading this, thank you.