Driving Home for Lockdown

I’ve been thinking a lot recently about family, and how far we will go to be there for each other in extraordinary times. In normal life, my sister Emily and I both live in Edinburgh, where she is a PhD student in neuroscience, and I run the mindfulness programme, in pastoral care, at the University of Edinburgh Chaplaincy. We grew up in Oxford, where our parents still live, just a few streets away from Emily’s partner Piran.

About two and a half months ago, as coronavirus was spreading, Emily and I began to think about heading back to Oxford. We saw how the lockdowns in Europe had happened suddenly, and didn’t want to get caught in Edinburgh, far from loved ones. So on Saturday 21st March, Piran drove 400 miles to Edinburgh, and the next morning, he and Emily pulled up outside my flat, the car piled high with suitcases.

‘Are you comfortable in the back?’ Piran said, as I wedged a bag from my fridge under my feet. ‘It’s going to be a long time.’

And it was. We drove out of Edinburgh, through the Scottish borders and the Yorkshire Dales. We drove down past Manchester, and through the Midlands, all the way into Oxford. I know because I looked out of the window the whole time, 7 hours in the car, taking us home, together.

The next day, Boris Johnson announced that the UK was going into lockdown. We had made it, just in time.

Many of us are digging deep during this time to look after the people we love, whether born or chosen family, and they are digging deep to look after us. It’s something to honour, especially when your feet are going numb from everything heaped on top of them. I know that for a long time to come, I will remember driving home for lockdown.