

Gerry Beckley – The Quarantine Diaries

PART I

The Quarantine Diaries by Gerry Beckley of AMERICA
4.21.2020, Sydney, Australia



On March 11th, all our gigs were cancelled. We flew home from West Virginia, the only state that hadn't yet confirmed a Covid-19 case. I'd returned home to L.A. countless times, but this was different. Sal [Ed: his wife, Sally] was in Sydney, and Venice Beach for once felt very lonely. My boys [Ed: Gerry has two sons, Matthew and Joe from a previous marriage] were near and that was a comfort. Where to go, what to do? Sal and I, although 7,000 miles apart, felt we were both safe and should wait a few weeks as we all watched what developed.

May 1 was set and booked for my Sydney flight but a two-week mandatory hotel quarantine was imposed for all returning Aussie nationals. I was granted an exemption to enter being married to an Australian, a much-needed spot of good news but the quarantine was not negotiable. As weeks turned into a month, May 1 still seemed distant. Plan B...I booked an earlier flight departing April 17. There were/are now no direct flights from LAX so this meant an initial connecting flight through San Francisco. Packed and beyond ready, the day arrived.

A friend drove me to LAX where the surreal nature of it all kicked in. Empty terminal, empty lounge (!)—"is there anyone in here I asked... no, you're the only one." My flight to SF left early, with all four passengers onboard. Masks, gloves, wipes and gel... pockets were full. A beautiful sunset landing in SF and my second empty airport of the day. There was one little Japanese takeout open which I knew might be my only meal

until Sydney. The three-hour layover was again surreal as the few ghosts present practiced extreme social distancing. I'll admit I've been flying up front in the pointy bit of the plane longer than I can remember but as I boarded there were clearly very few passengers willing to fly in either the front or the back—they wanted to spread out. "40 passengers total" I was told after settling into my seat 2A; the 787 Dreamliner is usually configured to carry 250.

Most Australian flights depart late in the day (10:45pm) which helps if you can sleep. Which I did with a carefully measured combo of Valerian, Benadryl and Xanax. "Can I get you anything?" a masked flight attendant offered when I woke seven hours later. "Coffee please, black coffee," I asked. "I'm sorry sir, we're not able to serve that with this very limited service." I've had coffee every morning of my life for at least the last 40 years so this was again another first. Fine, onward—and I slept again for another two hours. Forms were filled, announcements were made and after 14 hours we approached Sydney over the harbor bridge. The entire entry process was very organized and barring a minor issue with my visa--my deferment was a few pages deep in my paperwork--we collected bags and were directed to one of two buses.



My Dreamliner landing in Sydney, Australia

We still hadn't been told where we were going although I knew the InterContinental Hotel was one of the six options and the only 5-star hotel included. Fingers crossed--a friend of the family had arrived two days earlier and was staying there. Would I also be so lucky? Yes I was (!) along with the other five passengers on my coach. Sigh of relief although we were soon after told the bad news: "You cannot leave your room for the 14 days." The windows don't open, there's no smoking allowed at all. Are any of you smokers? One guy in the back raised his hand... well.... "good luck" he was told.

I've spent half my life in hotels and often in far worse than the room I'd been assigned. I was accompanied by a soldier (Air Force) with my luggage but not issued a key. You are let in but not allowed out. Why would I need a key? I'm in room 2419 looking out over a massive city construction site that is still in full swing. I did a live Skype feed with the Australian "Today" show the minute I was settled, which was bizarre to say the least but host Richard Wilkins is an old friend and we thought what the hell. It gave my Australian family and friends a chance to see that I was here and in pretty good shape. Also... a tub! Bonus! Not all hotels have them anymore and I figured that's good for an hour a night.

"How to fill my time?" I'm a reader which has always served me well for my years on the road so I'd brought many books. "The Cool School," a compilation by the late Glenn O'Brien of beat and jazz writers, is top of the pile. I joked with Wilkins on the "Today" show that maybe it was finally time for Proust. I had downloaded all seven volumes of "Remembrance of Things Past" into my iPad.

I'm allowed deliveries and Sal is the best cook on the planet, so the first day I was feasting on freshly made carbonara, home baked focaccia & prosciutto, so yes, I know...I'm a very lucky man. Nothing is allowed OUT of the room, including yours truly so the new iPad I had brought Mrs. B will have to wait the two weeks as well. There's a knock at the door three times a day. A boxed meal is provided but as I mentioned I haven't had to rely on that yet.

A major issue--Sal had brought fresh things that needed to be refrigerated and yes my room has a mini bar. Unfortunately, before my arrival a glass bottle of Coke had frozen and exploded inside the box so the majority of the day was spent defrosting and carefully picking broken glass out of said ice. Haven't done that in a while (never)...live & learn.

It is now Tuesday, my third day confined. Sit-ups, crunches--all the things we avoid doing usually on the road now seem unavoidable. Why not, I've got the time. My stepdaughter Lil and her friend Alba delivered fresh baked goods this morning. Fantastic! I waved at them from 24 floors up, but they couldn't see me. I have a gluten deficiency so I'm on the baked goods diet anyway (joke).

This morning's good news: my departure date is 14 days/13 nights as of Saturday, May 2. Technically I'm allowed out at 12:01am Saturday morning. That's really late Friday night in my book so that's what we'll do--a midnight run!

I'll close with this...I've been blessed in that boredom was never one of the cards I've been dealt. Tedium is very real and surfaces regularly in the life I and my band mates live. I'd like to think I'm a little better suited to this drama than most having spent over 50 consecutive years in hotels and airplanes. Time will tell of course but for now I remain healthy, fit and unbelievably spoiled.

As we say in our band... ONWARD!

Love & strength to anyone who's listening from my 5-star Sydney quarantine,

Gerry

PART II

The Quarantine Diaries #2 by Gerry Beckley of AMERICA 4.26.2020, Sydney, Australia

My five-star quarantine Intercontinental Hotel has become a halfway house. By that I mean my personal lockdown of 13 nights is half over. It's now Sunday morning here, the 26th of April.

The good news first.

I've remained active although my room is not conducive to aerobic activity. Whoever is in room 2519 above me has at least been attempting some. That or a daily routine of rearranging the furniture. I've found that any signs of life--like the noise from above, my daily delivery of a boxed meal or the constant activity of construction outside my window--are comforting.

I am not alone. I've heard from David, one of the assigned Air Force guards, that all 500 rooms are full of fellow returning Aussie nationals. Apparently a few "guests" have tested positive and were quickly removed to treatment facilities. He also said there have been a few infractions for smoking in the rooms (not me...do candles count?). And then there's the theft (!) of my clean towels that are (supposedly) dropped every third day outside your door.

There's a certain element of "Hogan's Heroes" about it all for those old enough to remember the TV show. My wife Sal continues to deliver me wonderful daily meals, so I remain incredibly well fed. I hear rumor that my stepdaughter Lil and her best friend Alba are bringing freshly baked banoffee pie today, so my gluten deficiency is well addressed.

I started with the good news because I am of course still very connected to the real world outside. I have BBC, CNN, Sky News (Australian) and Fox in my limited list of cable channels. I, like most, have learned to limit my intake of daily disaster updates but also understand the need to stay informed. It's a precarious balance at the best of times if not managed well, but now it's even harder.

Fragile stabilities threatened daily. Care for our loved ones and fear for our collective futures is never far from the front of our thoughts, with or without quarantine. As any plans or hopes of our professional lives returning continue to recede over a distant horizon, I/we must focus on more immediate concerns. Health, physical and mental, for ourselves and loved ones. Help wherever possible for our needy friends and neighbors, and the ever-increasing challenge to keep a positive mind in these unprecedented times.

More than enough to focus on here as I count down my five remaining nights. This Friday at midnight (legally 12:01am but who's counting) I will be reunited with Mrs. B. It's something we've done often in our bi-hemispherical life, but this one will ring with emotions beyond our usual measure. What can I close with today? Do I need to mention don't drink bleach?! Unbelievably I probably should (mention...not drink). I will also thank Governors Cuomo & Newsom for attempting to insert some daily sanity in the otherwise immeasurable chaos unfolding in the States. And finally, the most love and strength I can muster to my immediate family, close friends and fans around the world.

Thanks for listening....
Ger









PART III

The Quarantine Diaries #3 by Gerry Beckley
5.2.2020, Sydney, Australia



It is Saturday, May 2. Last night at 12:01am I was discharged from my 5-star mandatory two-week hotel quarantine. 164 other guests checked out the same night, so for social distancing, only four could be in the lobby at a time. I was in the first group. I've

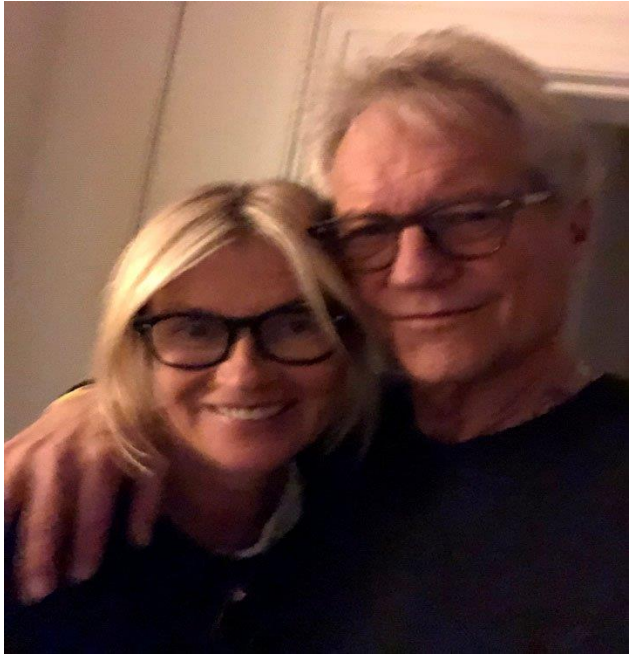
mentioned before that I felt luckier than most since my regular life often involves longish stays in hotels not of my choosing.



The Bronte-Coogee Aquatic Reserve stretching from the southern end of Bronte

There's no way to really measure such things, but I could feel the days getting longer as my release neared. My routine changed little over the weeks. Face-timing with family and friends, reading, attempts at exercise, (very) limited stretching and something I referred to as yoga. My wife Sal delivered fantastic meals daily that freed me from what appeared to be quite dismal boxed breakfasts, lunches and dinners. I was the envy of the police guards in the lobby who brought up these meals. Yes, you are correct, I'm a very lucky man.

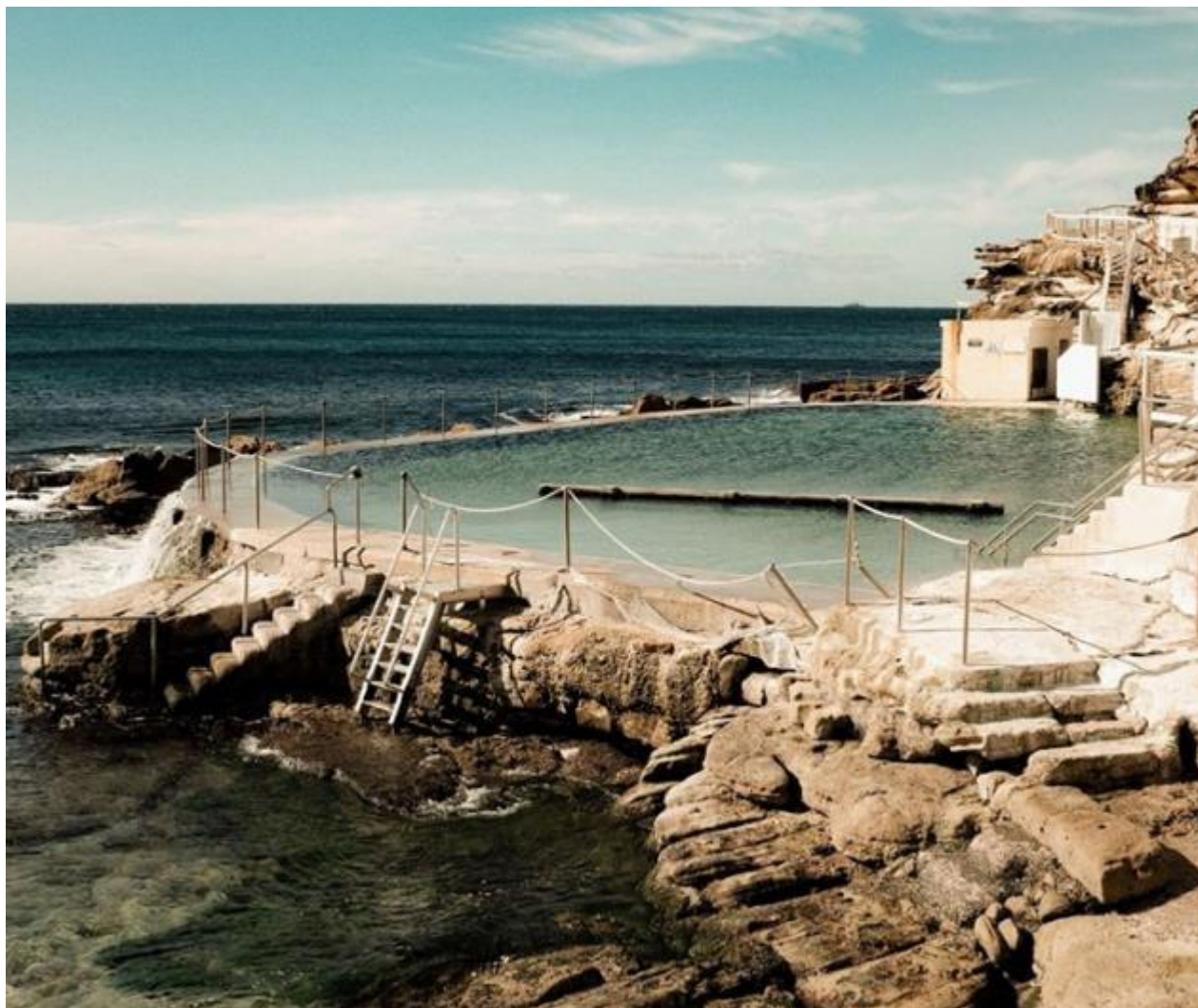
Also, there was what I call quality programming every day. My iPad, handy from day one, became a godsend. The usual options--Netflix ("Ozark," season 3) Hulu & YouTube--were great, but I'd also recently installed the Criterion Collection app--a foreign and independent film treasure chest. I have most of the collection on DVD, but they're now available for streaming, and that was a true lifeline. I screened a mini Truffaut festival with back-to-back nights of "Day for Night" and "Jules and Jim."



Sal to the Rescue

As this unfortunate but unavoidable chapter of my journey neared a close, I've had many a minute to review. My circumstances were certainly unique but compared with the uncountable hardships playing out daily around the world, there's no way to miss (again) what an immeasurable amount of good fortune has lined my way. Sal's was the first face I saw as I exited my confinement--and although winter is coming, the night air was fresh and our drive through the virtually empty Sydney streets was cinematically surreal. Sydney has been my/our second home for years now, and the many familiar facets of life here came rushing back. Unpacking my suitcase, full of masks, gloves and gels, could wait until morning. We slept fathoms deep with the windows open.

Thank you for listening. Love from afar,
Ger



Bronte Baths