

## FFWPU UK: Heroes within Our Community: Gillian and Peter Schroder

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"Heroes Within Our Community" is a series of articles where we hear from those in our communities who are working on the frontline during this pandemic.



### **Gillian Schröder:**

"While you are all relaxing at home, I am working in a COVID-19 hospital. While my husband travels from East to West for work, I travel from West to East by train and since the lockdown, I usually have a carriage to myself.

Shortly after the first few cases of the virus were diagnosed, the whole of Queens Hospital (in Romford) was turned over to exclusively treating COVID-19 patients. From one day to the next, the whole layout of the hospital was altered. The main entrance to the hospital was closed to the general public, while staff entered through a small side entrance manned by a security guard who checks our staff badges to make sure nobody else gets in. Patients with COVID-19 symptoms either made a queue at AandE or were brought in by ambulance.

From that time on and for the last 11 weeks, I have not seen or spoken to a patient. I am no Florence Nightingale – I work in a small office on the first floor with four other women.

At first, the corridors felt empty and eerie, but we soon got used to it. When the first COVID patient died,

it was solemnly announced in the daily newsletter which we receive in our emails. Everybody was shocked. On 26th May, the death toll passed the 400 mark without attracting any attention.

To distract from the high death toll, management decided to emphasise the positives and painted a huge cherry blossom tree on one of the walls of the atrium and called it the 'Tree of Life' and we were given bumble bee stickers to stick onto it – one for each COVID patient who had been discharged – 1,200 at the time. From then on, each patient who was discharged stuck their own bumble bee onto the 'Tree of Life' as they left the hospital.

As for us, upstairs in our office, work continued as normal, interspersed with the washing of hands, the application of hand sanitiser and the disinfection of telephones and keyboards.

Occasionally, companies drop off gifts for us – Easter eggs over the Easter period and cold pizzas at lunchtime. On one particular occasion, we heard that Primark had dropped off a lorryload of grey hand towels. Seeing an opportunity for some fresh air and sunshine, my colleague Caron and I decided to go outside and queue up to receive some. It was worth it! Not for the grey hand towels, but just to stand outside in the fresh air for a few minutes with the breeze in our hair and the sun on our faces and thinking of ... nothing!"



**Peter Schröder:**

"Hero? Certainly not me! I am working on the London Underground. Every day I am required to travel from the Far East [Stratford] to the Far West [White City]. It's wonderful. The time of the 50-min travels has shortened. The Central Line ignores stations like Chancery Lane, Lancaster Gate and Queensway speeding with 5mph through these locked-down places. I am now always on time at White City!

The face mask is always on me and a small bottle of disinfection in my pocket. Luckily, in spring 2020 not so many people were travelling on the Underground; it was quiet. This will change now. June and July are knocking on the door; an increased workforce is expected to travel on the trains.

When my manager comes into the job, he wipes all items clean in his office. He disinfects the keyboard, the telephones and the doorknobs. With his fearless attitude, persistence and advice, keeps us safe and the Underground going! He is my new role model. I appoint him to be the hero of this story!

Finally, I had an idea: a measuring tape. Carrying always a measuring tape on me, partly for my protection and partly for my own entertainment, it will remind customers to stay away from me the appropriate distance – 2 metres.

Take care and stay safe!"

If you yourself wish to share your own experiences over these past few months, please contact: [pr@ffwpu.org.uk](mailto:pr@ffwpu.org.uk) or [fsfobbie@gmail.com](mailto:fsfobbie@gmail.com)