



## 2020 - A Different Christmas

After a year like no other, Christmas was approaching, something to look forward to, but a second lockdown was declared in November with the message as before, “Stay at home, Protect the NHS, Save lives”. During this time there was good news of a successful vaccine developed by Pfizer & BioNtech - hope for the future. We also had the promise of being allowed to form a Christmas Bubble - a five day break from restrictions when three households would be able to meet indoors. So we began to make plans to have our usual family Christmas with nine or ten of us gathering together. However, in spite of the lockdown precautions, infections continued to rise at an alarming rate - the virus had mutated and the new variant was far more easily transmitted and was causing havoc. As a result of this the rules had to change and now we could only meet with one household and only for Christmas Day. This was a disappointment for so many people and my two sons, who live in Manchester and North London, decided they must stay at home. What should I do? Go to my family support bubble or stay at home by myself? I decided to see my family but OUTSIDE rather than INSIDE. Outside had always seemed a safer place to be, but I hoped it wouldn't rain!

So, on a very cold but dry Christmas morning, I put all the presents into a Father Christmas sack and drove along the M25 to Surrey, a journey of almost an hour. I arrived and made my way round the side of the house to the back garden. There I found a small table decorated with a Christmas tree and baubles, seven chairs suitably distanced, daughter, son-in-law and four teens & twenties grandchildren all dressed in cold weather gear. I was given a tartan travelling rug, a beautifully warm and furry hot water bottle and a festive hat and told to sit on a socially distanced chair. No hugs or kisses but lots of love and laughter! We enjoyed drinks, conversation and present opening, one of my favourites being a jar of home made lemoncello marmalade (delicious spooned onto Greek yoghurt as well as on toast for breakfast). Well over an hour passed quickly, with the only negative being cold feet! We then had a short walk in the local area and by the time we returned it was almost time for lunch. I fondly said goodbye and travelled back along the M25, this time with a bag of goodies and a plate of delicious food saved from their Christmas Eve meal the night before. All I had to do when I arrived home was pop it in the microwave, pour a glass of wine and settle down to watch the Queen's Speech! My memory of the following couple of hours is vague but at 6pm we met together on Zoom, ten of us this time, and enjoyed a Christmas Quiz with each person choosing a round to lead. There were no winners or losers, it was good fun and it was lovely to see and talk with everyone, even though it was only on a screen.

Christmas 2020 was certainly an unusual Christmas and, thinking how difficult and sad it must have been for so many people, I felt very fortunate and will remember it as “different” for years to come.

Pam Thomas