

THE SHOCK OF THE LOCKDOWN IN 2020 AND THEN THE HOPE IN 2021

In early 2020, there had been the announcement that the Covid 19 virus had multiplied in the UK, and people's lives were at risk. I was still going to my primary school work, helping Year 1 and Year 3 children with their reading, in one to one intense sessions. Also taking a group of Year 1 and 2 children in a library club, and sharing Collective Worship times.

At the same time I arranged the tickets for a retired group to meet for lunch and theatre matinees in London and other interest outings. This continued too along with Children's Church sessions at my local St Georges church where full church services and social gatherings were also available. And, for me, it was so good to see family members for lunch and outings as I am a widow and live alone.

As weeks went on and then every day, I was aware of the growing concern was noted for hospitals because of increased numbers of patients with serious illness who needed ventilators and intensive care. People were dying more than usually expected in wintertime. Older people were encouraged to take more care and travel less – and wash their hands more often.

One day, as I was reading in a classroom, it became clear to me, as a child was coughing, that as an older person I was at some risk being so close to the children during reading sessions. At the same time, I had to arrange a special birthday lunch in London with people I had worked with and known for years. Many invited would be travelling into London by train from long distances including Leeds and Essex and other areas beyond Greater London for a lovely lunch in Covent Garden off The Strand, then a champagne birthday toast at The Savoy Hotel. Separately I had arranged for a group of patients from my GP Practice Patient Participation Group to act as a Focus Group with E/Consult online service, and lunch and talk at the Bromley Library to exchange information. A valuable matter.

At this point I stopped attending school. There followed more concern and risks were highlighted about travelling and thoughts now to close businesses and other non-essential retail areas. So first the Focus Group lunch was sadly cancelled as the risk was thought rather high. Very disappointing for all concerned.

Next, some of the lunch-goers to the London celebration were too nervous to risk the journey on the trains, but thankfully a few did attend and we enjoyed the lunch and celebration. As we travelled back home we were aware of the number leaving London and felt that an exodus had begun in earnest – very scary.

THEN IT HAPPENED. The schools were closed and the churches were closed and all the non-essential shops and businesses closed, and we were told to stay at home unless it was urgent or there was an important reason to leave your property. A letter was circulated by the Government about the changes, and drawing attention to those who had been advised to shield who would receive food packages regularly, otherwise there were special priorities in terms of food orders for those who couldn't get out to shops. I was lucky to have Sainsbury's orders and although many of the items I ordered were not available, as people were bulk buying.

BUT SUDDENLY ALL MY SOCIAL AND VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT HAD STOPPED. IMPORTANTLY, THERE WAS NO WAY I COULD SEE MY FAMILY OR HUG AND KISS THEM ON SPECIAL DAYS.

So like millions of others, as this awful pandemic took hold and killed more and more people, I went into my shell and lonely world, surviving on family video calls and messages from friends. AND the wonderful daily on-stream midday services conducted by Father Richard Norman at my local church, St Georges Bickley. It kept me upbeat and there was contact with others tuning in each day which was so valuable. Also an occasional phone call too.

Then at the beginning of December that year, after several more lockdowns and changes, there was a welcome phone call, from the Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group, asking if I, as a person of over 80, would like to be the first to receive a new vaccine by Pfizer and be watched by the Prime Minister!!! Suddenly the next day I was in Guys Hospital, Boris Johnson was there, and I was the third in the country to receive the vaccination and probably the world!! I was in the news and on Good Morning Britain.

BUT FOR ME THE MOST WONDERFUL THING WAS THAT I HAD HOPE AND WAS KEEN TO SEND OUT THAT MESSAGE, TAKE THE CHANCE HAVE THE VACCINE. I REMAIN DELIGHTED THAT SO MANY HAVE TAKEN THAT CHOICE AND JUST WANT MY LIFE BACK AND BREATHE THE SAME AIR AS THOSE I LOVE.



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