

First place: Hello Anyone – Helen Nicell

April 2020

Dear Whoever,

Congratulations on finding my time capsule, I hope it provides an insight into a very strange time in my life and the lives of everyone affected by the COVID-19. I wonder what the world will be like by the time you find this. Hopefully an antidote has been found to the virus and 'Social Distancing' is a thing of the past.

Before the 'plague', life was good: meals in restaurants, foreign holidays, trips to the cinemas and theatres, live bands in pubs, festivals and family gatherings, weddings, parties and much more. But most importantly, being with others, laughing, interacting, a kiss on the cheek as you came and went, a hug with loved ones. We were free to do whatever we wanted. Yes, there were concerns: climate change, Britain leaving the EU, a new Prime Minister, inequalities for the working classes and much more. But personally, my life was good, my family settled and with the arrival of a grandson, the next generation had started.

Then the virus descended and the easiest way to catch it was through some form of social contact. All plans were cancelled, all sports stopped. Scientists and governments from across the globe declared everyone should go into quarantine. Unemployment numbers rose to levels never seen before and stock markets crashed. Even the oil companies were unable to shore up prices as there was no demand for fuel.

The illness appeared in China, jokes were linking it to a lager called Corona, or a fizzy drink we used to have in the 1970s. In February the Covid King reached Italy, by March it had crept into the UK. Day after day the numbers of deaths doubled.

But what about my personal experience? There were periods of not physically seeing anyone. I could see loved ones 'virtually' via Facetime, my sons would contact me daily. I watched with delight as my grandson ate his first solid food. Quizzes with friends on Zoom. I continued learning Bridge, but online. Virtual meetings for our writers' group and I joined a sewing group making squares for a wall hanging with 40 contributors, recording our thoughts on isolation. But most of all, I enjoyed the peace and tranquillity, being in the garden, watching the trees turn from winter to spring and the bulbs bloom. Then the summer plants and vegetables

coming into life. It was finally time to sit still and stay at home – as Boris Johnson had asked us to do.

My vision is that some of what we learnt will stay in place, realising the importance of family time, community spirit, and being kinder to the planet. Only you will know if this is reality, I hope so, for my grandson and all descendants.

In my time capsule you will find today's newspaper, some embroidery, a skill I learnt in lockdown and a set of playing cards. Good luck if you try to learn bridge, I never did master it!

Virtual hugs

Helen