



## Letters from Lockdown

### **"I'VE FOUND PARALLELS BETWEEN THE WAR AND NOW WHILE SORTING THROUGH MY MOTHER'S LETTERS"**

At Ageing Better in Camden we firmly believe in amplifying the voices of older people in our communities. Now, more than ever, we strive to support our members to raise their voices and share their experiences.

Far from being a great equalizer, the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed some of the deepest inequalities that have often remained hidden in our society. Our members have been writing a weekly newsletter for one another, to keep informed and connected in these challenging times. It has also brought us all closer together as we share our personal experiences of lockdown.

Here, Nikki Haydon shares her experiences.

Dear OPAG-VoCuS Friends,

I am an online member of the group who used to organise a variety of intergenerational activities while I was working in a school, and although I haven't been able to attend meetings, I do avidly read all the newsletters, participate in surveys and enjoy suggested activities when I can.

I am offering here some personal experiences of coping with lockdown; it may be that parts will resonate with some of you.

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*My tightly structured retirement schedule exploded with lockdown.*

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My tightly structured retirement schedule (the result of 45 years working in secondary education) exploded with lockdown. Like many, I needed a routine in order to cope with a very different type of existence.

So, I set up a daily timetable of cleaning, reading, exercise and online theatre (to replace weekly theatre visits) as well as regular postings on the family What's App and phone or FaceTime chats.



Nikki volunteers at Chalk Farm Food Bank

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*what about the volunteering I could no longer do, the regular weekends looking after my two-year-old grandson?*

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The latter have been particularly important for my step- daughter who as a respiratory nurse succumbed to the virus early on and has been at home recovering for a month. But some glaring gaps remained: what about the volunteering I could no longer do, the regular weekends looking after my two-year-old grandson from Bristol, and how could I keep my brain active?

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*I have managed to keep up a weekly session at the Chalk Farm food bank*

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I have managed to keep up a weekly session at the Chalk Farm food bank. With careful reorganisation to allow for social distancing for both clients and volunteers by pre-packing crates and arranging for some home deliveries, the wonderful manager has kept this vital lifeline going.

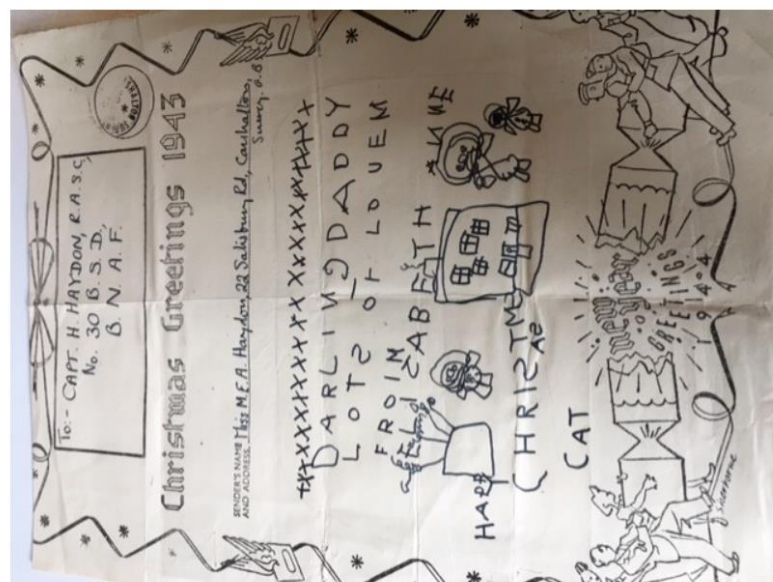
Along with many of you I'm sure, I signed up on-line for local volunteering hoping to do shopping for someone or phoning people at home, only to find it was very oversubscribed, so I was delighted when an OPAG member who contacted me to check that I was ok, suggested I 'meet' a lovely woman from West Hampstead.

I ring her twice a week and we have a long chat about The Archers, her passion for yoga and how differently we view the world now that we can fully appreciate our natural surroundings. It is so difficult for those who have no social contact now and important to able to talk.

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*Perhaps my most rewarding activity has been completing a task I had put off for over a year: reading, dating, annotating and filing letters my parents sent to each other during WW2*

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Christmas greetings from Nikki's sister to her Father, 1943

Perhaps my most rewarding activity has been completing a task I had put off for over a year: reading, dating, annotating and filing letters my parents sent to each other during WW2 between 1941 and 1945, as well as letters sent by my father's mother to her son and my maternal grandmother to her son-in-law.

My parents corresponded at least twice a week and the letters describe in detail my three older sisters' home life, starting school (the same school I later went to), the flying bombs exploding on South London, daily evening trips to the Morrison and Anderson shelters and evacuation to Reading as well as giving personal insights into their feelings about the war and their longing for peace.

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*Many of their anxieties, hopes and fears relate closely to the way people in isolation and those missing loved ones are feeling today.*

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Many of their anxieties, hopes and fears relate closely to the way people in isolation and those missing loved ones are feeling today. Particularly poignant was reading about the birth of their third daughter in 1943 as she didn't meet our father till after the war when she was two years old.

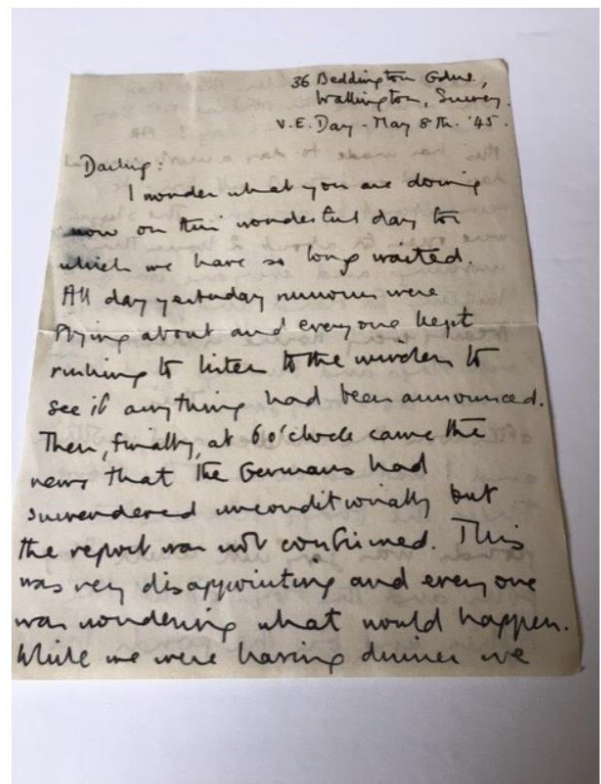
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*she describes her excitement on VE day with all its joy and celebration. If only the end to the pandemic could be celebrated globally in the same way.*

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In those pre-NHS days, my mother had to pay the doctor for performing the caesarean section and raised concerns about how much she would need to pay for convalescence in the nursing home afterwards. In one letter, so relevant recently, she describes in detail her excitement on VE day with all its joy and celebration. If only the end to the pandemic could be celebrated globally in the same way.

And so back to the present, and my lovely grandchild, who will be welcoming a new brother at the end of June. FaceTime and Zoom don't work well with two-year olds, as I discovered when I showed him one of his favourite London toys on screen. 'Bring it here, come now!' he demanded, and it took a long while for his dad to console him.



A letter in which Nikki's mother describes the celebrations of VE Day, 1945

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*To keep in touch, I have videoed reading him one of his favourite 'London' bedtime stories each week*

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To keep in touch, I have been regularly sending a small parcel of surprises and have videoed reading him one of his favourite 'London' bedtime stories each week. He answers the questions I ask and searches for things in the pictures on the screen.



Watch on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBfa3TwJwxs>

A few weeks back I was still hoping that lockdown restrictions might be lifted by the end of June so that I could travel to Bristol to be with him and to meet his baby brother. But as luck would have it, I'm 70 half-way through this month - and my husband is 84 - so despite the fact we are both fit and healthy, the possibility of meeting family members looks increasingly remote.

But for many people this has been a really tragic time so I know I can't complain. Hopefully, we will all eventually be able to move forward into a wiser and happier future.

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