

A letter to myself, one year ago

Dear Doug,

I don't know how they have done it, but Open Age have arranged for me to write to you from exactly one year ahead. Sharing Lottery numbers, sports results and personal fortune telling are strictly forbidden.

I feel like some Dickensian spirit able to paint pictures and scenes of what the next year will bring you. Just like Scrooge in a Christmas Carol, you cannot change your past, but you will have choices in managing your future. Although your future is my past, they will not be exactly the same.

At the beginning of the year, news stories about a deadly virus from Southern China, began to circulate. Very quickly, the pandemic hit hard and governments throughout the world were forced to impose lockdowns, requiring schools to shut, most businesses to close down, and for people to stay at home. The UK was badly hit and has been in and out of restrictive measures over the last nine months. Today, we are back in full lockdown.

We all suffer from the fault of seeing what we want to see. By selective viewing, we reinforce our previous viewpoint and just consider ourselves. The last year has forced me to step back and reconsider what a shit shovel of a year this has been for most people. Life is capricious. People are not dealt an even hand and the news stories throughout the year have demonstrated this. Some news is important for reflection, too much is toxic. It all needs careful filtering.

An unforeseen side effect of the pandemic is that many homeless people have been temporarily rehoused. Charities and schools have stepped up to provide more food and home deliveries to those in need. An "Austerity" government has spent trillions supporting those unable to work and ploughed money into a health service they were previously running down. The frontline Health Service, poorly equipped, has battled against incredible odds. Unsurprisingly, a shambolic government has clouded matters considerably.

Personally, I am extremely grateful for my life and a bit more in love. Paradoxically, being forced to stay in, makes you look for new ways of looking out. Walks have been life enhancing, watching bats flicker at dusk by the canal or cormorants gathering on the river Thames. Observing Great Tits build a nest and fledge their young has been a highlight, even when we were driven inside by our neighbour's electric guitar or grunting family keep fit sessions next door. The allotment has been a second garden. Going out to volunteer has been really important as well as the virtual computer lessons offered by Open Age. I've even started reading and writing poetry. Remember time is not infinite.

And the days are not full enough
And the nights are not full enough
And life slips by like a field mouse
Not shaking the grass.

Ezra Pound

So, I wish you the happiest New Year you can manage and a fulfilled year

Doug