

The Best and the Worst

By Mike Trippitt

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Midnight. Champagne caressed and teased our senses, fizzing and tickling on its delicious journey inward from our lips. We hugged our friends, all smiles and laughter, sang Auld Lang Syne, and bellowed: "So Sally can wait, she knows it's too late, as we're walking on by" like we really were Noel or Liam Gallagher.

New Year. As we revelled into 2020 we looked forward in optimistic anticipation of the coming 12 months: our plans, our hopes, our dreams.

But at that moment, at that very moment, in a Chinese province unknown to the western world, the die was being cast. Within weeks, the greatest ever health crisis snared our planet. A new lexicon was born: social-distancing, self-isolating, lock down, and of course, Coronavirus.

People fell ill, health services were overwhelmed, emergency laws confined us to our homes, and thousands were dead. The extent of the global crisis, the speed at which COVID-19 ravaged the earth, the impact on the global economy, and the effect on our own daily lives is truly shocking.

But some things don't surprise us. World and national crisis - world wars, terror attacks, national disasters and now this pandemic - bring out the best, and sadly, the worst in our fellow man.

The nation watched news bulletins in disbelief of the selfish disregard shown by those travelling to the seaside and national parks in breach of travel advice. Our collective conscience was appalled by stories of a young woman spitting on an elderly lady for a bet, and of men threatening to cough on our police and emergency workers.

In a St Ives pharmacy, whilst decent folk waited in respectful obedience at the red two-metre markers laid on the floor, others ignored the

waiting queues, walked to the front and stood within breathing distance of the already hard pressed pharmacist. "Stand back, please. Stand back," he was left imploring forelornly.

One St Ives resident, an NHS intensive care sister, says that at Addenbrooks they have even had people stealing hand gel from wards, and unbelievably, prising sanitiser containers off walls.

But she says they have also seen the other side of human nature at the hospital: "Local residents baking for us, and takeaways being delivered to the unit by a company in Sawston. So much kindness being shown to our frontline staff."

Such acts of kindness have been replicated across our town and villages: food being delivered to the elderly, residents shopping for the vulnerable neighbours, and strangers dropping notes through doors with offers of help and support.

In a moving gesture of solidarity and support, St Iviens joined with the nation in appreciation of NHS staff by "Clapping for Carers", and countless people have given of their time freely to stimulate and entertain online the young and old stuck indoors. Nationally, thousands have volunteered to help the NHS. It is this Dunkirk spirit that shines in the darkness of a dangerous and naughty world.

When the pandemic is over we will be left with the cost to the economy, the holes in our pockets, the loss of jobs and the loss of life. But it is the good deeds, the triumphs, the kindness and our togetherness that should live longest in the memory. We must regain that optimism and hope that we shared so readily on New Year's Eve. And we must remember Sally.

"Don't look back in anger," I heard her say.