Dear friends

In the Northern Hemisphere February weather tends to keep us in our wintery reality with freezing mornings and wonderful sunsets, whilst offering some wildlife joys that can keep us ticking towards lighter evenings and spring. As I write this note the local wildlife have starting to come out in force these past days looking for food to see them through the rest of the winter months. Also, the first sighting of Mallards returning this morning on the pond, plus woodpeckers searching the lawn for grubs and local birds of prey circling, swooping and sweeping the fields nearby in search of rodents and small animals. Now the hedges have been cut ready for spring it will be interesting to see the variety of annual birds returning looking to nest in the hedges and bird box again!

The Covid-19 virus sadly continues to demonstrate there are no global barriers to highly contagious diseases as we experience new worldwide challenges and imposed restrictions again hoping to contain the spread of the new variants of Covid-19. Since March 2020 individuals with general underlying health conditions or over 70 have been advised to stay at home as much as possible, to carefully follow the rules and to minimise contact with others. Yet, regardless of age I know many friends and colleagues who have started to withdraw from society due to fear of getting the virus and experiencing lack of self-confidence and motivation in going out again. Sadly, this is impacting on their mental health and wellbeing which is extremely concerning for their family and loved ones. *"Every day, think as you wake up: Today I am fortunate to be alive, I have a precious human life, I am not going to waste it." Dalai Lama.*

According to the World Health Organization most developed countries have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as a definition of an elderly or older person. However, whilst well and truly past the first "flush of youth" and looking on the plus side means being within the governments age and vulnerability grouping tier placed me fairly high on the eligibility list for the Covid-19 vaccine. On the bright side of life there are so many reasons to be cheerful, for example, receiving my vaccine appointment led me to reflect on my childhood, gathering in a line outside a hall to have my highly effective smallpox vaccine (developed in1796) responsible to date for the worldwide eradication of smallpox. The practice of immunisation over centuries changed the course of history of global epidemics and the lives of individuals and their loved ones who encountered Polio, Diphtheria, Cholera and TB to name a few so let's hope the Covid vaccine will be today's new generation vaccine game changer. *"Never give up. No matter what is happening, no matter what is going on around you, never give up." Dalai Lama*

Normally at this time of the year we typically plan our holidays, short breaks, visits to friends and family and milestone dates throughout the year for family celebrations and get togethers. However, even though we must stay at home, there are times when we feel our resilience stretched to the limit but there is much that we can plan from the comfort of our living rooms. An Australian friend sent me the wonderful display of flowers taken whilst she was out walking and enjoying the southern hemisphere weather which I found so uplifting to receive her photo on a freezing cold day here in Blighty!!

Warmest regards and stay safe and well

Ellie