



# NEWSLETTER

December 2020

European IFYE Alumni



## Content of the Newsletter

- Greetings from the President
- Season greetings from Scotland
- Trip to South Africa
- Greetings from the Midwestern USA
- News from Finland
- Congrats to...

## Greetings from the President

*From the magic and moist eyes.*

*The tree is decorated. Dad opens the balcony door, lights the candles, rings the bell. "The Christ Child!" Mom opens the sliding door, the little one's rush into the living room with wide eyes. "Where is it? Papa? - "I saw it scurrying out of the balcony."*

*– Oh*

In our country the "Christkind" (Christ Child) comes and brings gifts on the 24th (Christmas Eve). For me, this moment is special, when the children wait for this moment with joy and excitement.



It is so beautiful, this time of the year. Unfortunately, at some point, the Christ Child is out of his job, the magic is gone as children grow up. However, what consoles over the loss of the sparkle in children's eyes, is the love that unites us. It is a moment of peace and quiet, a moment to pause and think of our loved ones who cannot be with us today.

2020 is a year that will occupy a special place in the history books. It has been tough for all of us. However, I am looking forward with confidence to 2021. The daily news about vaccine availability gives me more and more hope for a successful future. Whether vaccines will be available for everyone before mid-June, however remains to be seen. Of course, the information I recently learned applies only to Austria. I am not familiar with the situation in your country, but I hope that there will be an improvement soon in your country as well. That is why I am confident that we will have a great conference in England in August 2021. By the end of March, we should be able to assess the situation enough to make a better forecast. Until then, I expect to see you at the conference next August.

I made a Christmas wish for you,  
for a holiday full of pleasure,  
friends and family all around,  
and memories to treasure.  
I wish for you a Christmas filled  
with joyous holiday cheer;  
I wish you a Merry Christmas,  
and a very Happy New Year

Dear friends, I wish you a beautiful winter and stay healthy. We will see each other again in England, in August 2021 and we will have a great time together.

God jul och gott nytt år! God jul og godt nytt år! Häid jöule ja head uut aastat! Hyvää joulua ja onnellista uutta vuotta! Schéi Chrëschtdeeg an e glécklecht neit Joer! Joyeux Noël et bonne année! Καλά Χριστούγεννα και Ευτυχισμένο το Νέο Έτος! Prettige Kerstdagen en een Gelukkig Nieuwjaar! Nadolig llawen a blwyddyn newydd dda! Feliz Navidad y un Feliz Año Nuevo! Vesel božič in srečno novo leto!

Merry Christmas and a happy new year!

Frohe Weihnachten und ein gutes neues Jahr!

Best wishes

Andi

IFYE from Austria to the USA, 2000

## Season greetings from Scotland

*written by Neil Brims (IFYE from Scotland to the USA, 2013)*

This year has been, and continues to be, most unexpected I must say. From reading about it in the papers as a distant issue, to settling into what seems to have been a never-ending lockdown of varying degrees. This has been the longest spell at home on the farm since becoming an IFYE - and my-goodness, has it passed quickly, I really don't know where the year has gone. Only the weekend before the lockdown began, we managed to have our Scottish YFA AGM. We were very lucky to get it done. This year has been work, work, work and we have managed to trial some new things on the farm too. I did however manage to get away for a long weekend, also to Skye. This was a long overdue step back from the day-to-day stuff. Like Mary, I visited Alan Duncan whilst I was there. I thoroughly enjoyed the walk across his croft and down to the peninsula where he keeps some of his sheep. The history of the place was really interesting to hear about. The Scottish YFA committee has managed a few zoom calls which have been great, although I can safely say we are looking forward to meet again in person whenever that is allowed.



---

*written by Neil Brims David Paterson (IFYE from Scotland to Northern Ireland, 1991)*

Like most of us, I haven't travelled much at all, though I did take advantage of the easing of restrictions, by visiting an old, sick, family friend on the Island of Colonsay at the end of July. With bad weather causing a landslip on The Rest and Be Thankful, closing the road, I had the chance to visit Nan McLachlan, as my detour passed her house. Unfortunately, there no one answered the door, so that didn't happen. I was pleased to receive a card from Elaine and Kirstie, and so I followed their example, sending cards around to thirty YFA/IFYE members that I would normally have a blether with, during the course of the year.



---

*written by Mary Turner (IFYE from Scotland to Switzerland, 1977)*

Over the many months I have enjoyed coffee with Robin Blair in his garden - the weather over spring and early summer was perfect for that. Once the restrictions were lifted at the end of July, I drove to Skye to spend a few days at Alan Duncan's place, as well as enjoy this beautiful island. Skye is a very popular tourist destination, but I was surprised to see so many Europeans visiting at this time. Being an island and remote community, there were mixed views from the local people on tourism during the pandemic. However, I felt comfortable with the situation that I wasn't putting anyone at risk. I did some walking and cycling and just enjoyed the beautiful surroundings. It was a great opportunity to spend time with Alan and I even gave him a haircut... Not really a socially distanced one, but it was outdoors with plenty of fresh air! In September, Meg Findlay and I met up at a garden centre in Perth for lunch, we felt totally comfortable and thoroughly enjoyed face to face contact after all these months.

---

## Trip to South Africa

*by Mary Roberts (IFYE from Wales to the Netherlands, 1977) & Alison Roberts (IFYE from Wales to Slovenia, 2015)*

On New Year's Eve 2019, our flight to Cape Town landed just before midnight to start a New Year and decade in the beautiful country of South Africa and join Alison who had already been travelling through the country for one month.

At that time Covid-19 was just another virus that started in China and little did we think it would change all our lives in 2020.

Being invited to spend time in the home of a local couple allowed me to learn more about South Africa's customs and cultures, rather like our IFYE experiences. As it was summer-time, outdoor living was the norm in a garden with a large swimming pool and a high fence! We learnt so much about food and that South Africans don't BBQ, they Braai. It's one of the tastiest BBQ's ever along with the BIGGEST steaks! We were treated to plenty of locally produced wine and one of the family we stayed with had a relative as a tour guide who took us to Franschhoek, one of the main wine producing regions with the most beautiful mountainous landscape.



We hired a car for our stay and found it the best, and safest way to get around at our own pace, as well as being able to cruise along the stunning Cape Peninsula. At Cape Point we took the Flying Dutchman and then hiked on down to the lighthouse and enjoyed some outstanding views across False Bay before exploring more of the nature reserve around by the Cape of Good Hope. Our return journey to Cape Town took us via Boulders Beach where we saw penguins in their native environment, they were tiny and looked so cute but they sure did smell! Alison also arranged a 2-night trip to a game reserve where we were able to see 4 of the Big 5 after a very early morning start.



Without doubt, the most well-known landmark in Cape Town is Table Mountain. There are many routes to hike up and across the top or take a guided tour but we opted for the traditional tourist route of using the cable car which has a rotating floor for a panoramic view. With temperatures being 35+ degrees when Alison suggested packing warm clothes I did wonder, but was grateful for the extra layer when we were walking in the clouds, also fondly known as the table cloth that sits on the mountain.

Whilst having many experiences we also thought it was a must to further understand the many different cultures and way of life. We were fortunate enough to be taken on a tour of a township and learnt how despite not having what a lot of westerners take for granted such as running water, the community spirit thrives and old customs are still upheld. We learned more about the Apartheid era and the struggles Nelson Mandela faced during a visit to Robben Island where he was imprisoned for 28 years.



We were so fortunate to have been able to join Alison for 2 weeks during her 11 week stay and so lucky that we had an opportunity for travel this year, where so many have had so much disruption to their lives. To make this trip even more special Alison not only was able to spend time with us, but Scottish IFYE Neil Brims had a stopover in Cape Town on his return from Antarctica and he and Alison were able to plan a beer and some sight-seeing together!



## Greetings from the Midwestern USA

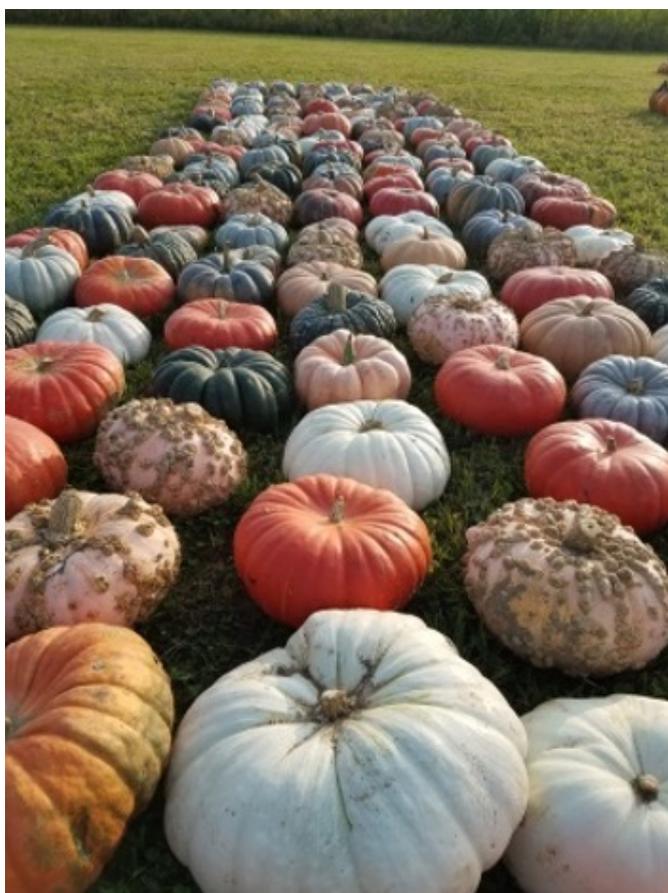
*written by Carolyn Gehrke (IFYE from the USA to Germany, 2010)*

Greetings to all my dear IFYE friends!

2019 was a very challenging year for farmers in the Midwestern United States. I specifically remember toasting “good riddance” to 2019 on New Year’s Eve.....that seems so funny now!



I have been to Europe every year since 2013, and 2020 ended that streak. It was a disappointment that the European conference was cancelled, but I look forward to it next year. A few trips were still possible this year – I traveled to California to visit a couple friends for a few days in February, right before COVID shut everything down. I went to Yosemite, San Francisco, and visited my friend's walnut farm. My other trip was in August, when I visited another friend in Texas. I honestly felt very safe flying in August – both planes were very empty and I was impressed with the cleaning standards both in the airport and on the planes... In some ways it felt safer than being in a crowd in a grocery store! If it becomes safe enough this winter, I am considering going to Arizona to hike and see the Grand Canyon. It is so great that there are so many beautiful places to see in the United States, but I very much miss traveling in Europe! I definitely am trying to continue practicing my German to stay on top of it.



Farming this year had its ups and downs. Corn and soybean prices sank very low until the fall, but now they are at 4-year highs. We escaped a bad storm (there was a derecho in Iowa and parts of Illinois in August) and had good yields. My brother and I also have a pumpkin business called The Pumpkin Wagon (visit us at [www.thepumpkinwagon.com](http://www.thepumpkinwagon.com) or on Facebook!) There was a lot of support for local businesses this year, and we definitely felt that support. I think that many people just wanted something to do, so more people than normal came to the farm to buy pumpkins and decorate their houses. I feel lucky that my job, for the most part, continued as normal through the whole pandemic.



Fortunately, my family has stayed healthy this year and hopefully that will continue. We are really looking forward for when big family gatherings can happen again and of course also can't wait to stop wearing masks everywhere. While 2020 has been a really challenging year on many levels, I hope we can still take away some good from the experience. For me, I know this year was a constant reminder of how blessed I am to live somewhere with things like quality healthcare and a reliable food supply. It is easy to take many things we have for granted, and I think this year really put that into perspective for many people. And while, like many people, I'm getting tired of doing so many things virtually – isn't it amazing that we have the technology to do it and how fast we adapted?!

I'm so grateful to be part of a program like IFYE. This year has felt very divisive on many levels, and has shown even more the importance of organizations like ours that promote understanding, respect, and peace. This year was the 10 year anniversary of my IFYE exchange – I can hardly believe how fast the time has flown!

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a healthy and Happy New Year! Or, to keep practicing my German – Frohe Weihnachten und ein gesundes und glückliches neues Jahr! Many blessings to all of you from Elgin, Illinois.

---

## News from Finland

*written by Jenna Järvenpää (IFYE from Finland to Taiwan, 2018) on behalf of the Finnish IFYE board*

Warm greetings from Finland! As Finnish IFYEs, we were able to arrange an IFYE online pre-Christmas party on 21st of November via Facebook. There were 22 IFYEs present, which surprised us all. Although it was quite a tough year, Finnish IFYEs hold together. As you could expect, some Christmas elves were also seen on the computer screens as well as some hot and cold drinks with Finnish gingerbread and other snacks. Great IFYE experience still!

Moreover, we are looking forward to warmly welcome you and all European IFYEs to the IFYE Conference in Finland 2022. Please feel free to share the link to our short video below in the Newsletter.

Link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P72AumhARiR5VrM-43c5dEHUtgnty54y/view>

To understand more what happens in the video, we recommend all European IFYEs to get familiar with the Finnish sauna culture, inscribed in 2020 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. Please check more on the link to UNESCO: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/sauna-culture-in-finland-01596>

In addition, on behalf of Finnish IFYEs, we wish you and all European IFYEs a better, safer and more united year 2021!

---

## Congrats to...



### Marita Pynnönen

*IFYE from Finland to the USA, 1992*

### & Juha Ruotsalainen

Marita Pynnönen and Juha  
Ruotsalainen  
got married on May 15th 2020.

### Jonna

*IFYE from Finland to Northern Ireland,  
2003*

### & Antti Mönkkönen

Jonna & Antti to their daughter  
Senni Helvi Lyydia Mönkkönen  
born on January 23rd 2020




---

**Deadline next issue: 30th March 2021**

---

**European IFYE Alumni Association**

web address: [www.ifye.eu](http://www.ifye.eu)

e-mail: [newsletter@ifye.eu](mailto:newsletter@ifye.eu)

IFYE Europe Newsletter – December 2020

---

*You are receiving this e-mail because you are a Life Time Member  
or you have registered for the IFYE Europe Newsletter. If you want  
to unsubscribe, please notify us via mail*