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I hope this letter and card for Christmas 2018 find you well and looking forward to another festive season – it seems to come around quicker every year!

This year our news is dominated by our politicians who can't seem to agree – nothing changes. Uncertainty around Brexit, the unpredictable Mr Trump and trade wars with China have all had a negative effect on stock markets around the world but politics usually only has short-term influence. Of more long-term concern is the issue of interest rates in the US that have been going up and the Fed has forecast 4 more increases in 2019 – if that happens (and it's a big if) it may lead to a recession in the US in 2020-21 and that may trigger a pause in the generally positive results markets have shown since 2009.

The tail end of a Bull Market is usually very profitable so there is a scenario in which investment returns could go quite well over the short to medium term. Time will tell and there is the small matter of Brexit to settle in the next few months first – a result before Christmas seems too much to hope for but it would be helpful and probably result in a rise in markets.

MPs don't sound like they want to approve Theresa May's deal with Europe so some hectic last minute negotiations seem likely. If it all stalls, I fear that the current white knuckle ride in markets may continue for a while yet.

Don't be put off, it's never been more important to save for your future and I'm here to help you. I am available to you – whether in person at my office, your home or workplace or by phone or email.

I hope you have a very Happy Christmas and a healthy and peaceful New Year!

Best wishes,

Nick

For the little darlings ...

Amongst the top presents for children this year are the Barbie Ultimate Kitchen, a snip at £50 and no sexual stereotyping whatsoever... Boxer Robot is set to become every kid's best friend (£93), it plays games and "can sometime be in a bad mood"! Slightly more traditional is the Paw Patrol Ultimate Fire Truck (£70) but who could resist the Poopsie Surprise Unicorn? It comes with a supply of glittering goo and, at £50, is gross and cute at the same time – a winner!

£902 million was subscribed to Junior ISAs in 2017-18 but in that time £69 billion went into adult ISAs. There are some very user-friendly options for children's savings, some even allow other family members to add money and leave a message.

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

You've probably heard from various sources about this new requirement for business to ask their clients to opt-in to marketing contact. These new regulations do seem a bit like the answers to 100 questions nobody ever thought of but, if you'd like to continue to hear from me, [please sign the enclosed Marketing Consent and post it back in the pre-paid envelope](#). Thank you.

Equity Release – good advice is key

Some large Equity Release providers have made some clever and funny TV adverts recently. They have certainly raised some attention but I get nervous when big organisations hard sell complicated financial products – especially when they charge VERY high fees. We believe in Equity Release – but of course it doesn't suit everyone or every family.

If you or anyone you know has questions about Equity Release, please get in touch with Michael. We are launching a new, ER-dedicated website in the New Year.

Women face a glaring gender gap

We've seen headlines about pay-gaps but did n you know there is also a gender gap in terms of pensions and life cover?

Many women take career breaks to raise children or care for elderly relatives and that interrupts pension contributions. Also, women tend to choose safer cash savings over more risky, but potentially more lucrative investments. In a decade of low interest rates, there has been little return from cash savings.

Workplace Pensions have, according to the DWP, halved the number of women in the private sector without a pension. But part-time workers can miss out if they earn less than £10,000 and are not auto-enrolled unless they choose to opt-in.

Around the office

Our fridge magnet collection was kindly added to this year by clients and contacts who thought of us while on their various trips around the world. Amongst others, we now have fridges from Mexico, Cuba, Australia and Ramsgate! Please keep 'em coming!

Both Lynn and I have daughters getting married in 2019 so the holidays may have to be curtailed while we save up!

We have recently become a Platinum Partner to Age UK Suffolk so I feel a sporting challenge to raise funds for them coming on – and its Michael's turn!