

All change

Eluned Rees is grateful that restaurants and small shops in one corner of Carmarthenshire were there when needed



Valans is a popular restaurant in the centre of the village of Llandybie. In March, suddenly, they lost all their customers. They had a good number of regular older people and many parties. Every table had been booked for Mothering Sunday. What was to be done as they saw their thriving business disappear in a second? Well, they changed their way of working, and now they prepare and distribute meals in Ammanford, Llandybie and Llandeilo. I enjoy one every Friday evening!

The new way of working has proved successful but they face an uncertain future. They have no outside space for customers, and the inside space is very limited, so it has been accepted as the new normal. But, not everything is doom and gloom. Remy, one of the owners, says that they have re-connected as a family, having more time to talk, play games and generally enjoy each other's company. Delivering to people's homes means meeting people and having a quick chat.

On the other hand, the newsagent's in Ammanford is thriving. They acquired over 120 new customers at the start of the lockdown, many, having time to read newspapers and magazines, wanted to have their papers safely delivered. Since then part of the shop now has shelving holding 'Warhammer' materials, very popular with young people. Diversification!



Martin the Butcher in the middle of town has benefited from the pandemic. Food shops were open from the beginning of lockdown. Martin took on two extra employees, and he delivers meat between Carmarthen and Cardiff, driving over 500 miles a week. The weather is a factor which has an effect on his business, and the re-opening of other shops has decreased his profit somewhat. Unfortunately, when he delivers to people's homes, some out in the countryside, he has to ring the doorbell, leave the meat and retreat 10 yards, so there is no chance for a chat. His two young sons help every Wednesday and have their father's company as well as getting used to the business and talking to customers.

But the most popular shops since the easing of lockdown have been the barbers and hairdressers. Strangely enough she never asked me 'Going somewhere nice on your holiday?'