

Cass, PiAP:

Welcome to a segment of In This Moment Stories from the UNC Partnerships in Aging Program, an initiative designed to hear how people are managing in the time of COVID-19. Today is May 8th, 2020 and we're speaking with Bonnie G, who is 74 years old and lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Thank you so much, Bonnie, for being here to talk with us today.

Bonnie:

Well, thank you for inviting me. It's seldom that an old lady gets a captive audience, so I'm happy.

Cass, PiAP:

We're so happy to have you. Um, my first question is just if you could tell me a little bit about your experience of this current time in our world since we have all been advised to stay at home and distance ourselves from others.

Bonnie:

Well, I, I do feel very vulnerable being a part of that group, that is, um, what 80% of the death rate. So it's feeling vulnerable, but trying to do everything that I can to minimize, um, contact with, with people.

Um, you know, I go to the grocery every couple of weeks, I wear a mask. Um, I want us to go loving, but that doesn't seem to be very much good. So I quit that. But, um, as far as solitude, I miss the library being open. I used to go to the Chapel Hill public library frequently. So I sort of miss that and I don't have wifi at home. So anything I do online, I'm dependent on my phone, which is why we're talking this way today instead of Zoom, but I have my little cat for company and I tend to read a lot. So I haven't missed, um, doing things with other people really. So maybe in that regard, I'm a little different than most. Um, but I think what may have prepared me for some of this, I am an only child. I was raised alone and I grew up in a very small, um, rural farming community.

So I was trained by, um, just that living conditions to be alone, much of the time and to entertain myself. And I have become, I think, comfortable most of my life with my own company. So this hasn't been as hard for me in that way. It's just the feeling of vulnerability that is hard. So, I can still, this morning, I just downloaded three eBooks from, uh, the Chapel Hill public library. So I can still do that and read a lot. And, um, I actually joined Netflix. So I watch a few DVDs on my phone, this little wet five inch screen.

Cass, PiAP:

It's amazing what you can do without wifi.

Bonnie:

I know, and I'm learning more and more. I have gotten much better acquainted with my phone than I ever thought I would, or I ever wanted to actually.

Cass, PiAP:

We're all learning different things right now.

Cass, PiAP:

Yeah. But it is a dreadful time. Now we're finding that children are after all being very sick sometimes from this horrible virus. So....Yeah.

Cass, PiAP:

Well you reflected on this a little bit so far, but I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about your past life experiences and if you feel any of them have influenced you and how you prepared for this or how you're managing the situation.

Bonnie:

I think, um, having stopped working in 2012 and I have been on a very limited budget. So the things I was doing exercise, I've always been into a lot of exercise. I've done marathons and all of that. I generally trained alone. And so any sort of long distance running, at that time, I was running, prepares you for a lot of thinking time, solitude. And I think I have always gravitated toward those kinds of things. And part of it, I think I worked a lot of different areas, but I had admin kinds of jobs that were pretty people intensive. So when I got home from work at night, I was just really glad not to see anybody till the next day work time. So, so for a couple of different reasons, I think, um, and stopping work, being on a very limited income, I didn't go and do things.

And I started reading anymore. Jogging has become mostly walking for me these days, but I do 14 minute miles. So that's pretty quick for walking.

Cass, PiAP:

Yeah.

Bonnie:

Yeah. And I spend an hour or so a day doing that. I play with my cat. I read, I cook a lot because I have been on a, for several years now, a whole food plant based kind of diet, no dairy, no meat, no eggs, no fish. So that involves cooking, you know, things from scratch and soaking beans, then cooking them, which takes a while and that sort of thing. So cooking type stuff. And actually the days go by rather quickly I think.

Cass, PiAP:

It seems like you were prepared with a lot of skills already for this.

Bonnie:

I probably fared with less discomfort except for feeling vulnerable, with less discomfort than most people. Um, and I still have friends in, uh, Washington and Oregon and I talked to them, which, you know, I didn't see them anyway. So we were always talking on the phone and I text with people and email and so except for working, which, you know, I hadn't been doing that for seven or eight years, um, it's kind of the same for me.

Cass, PiAP:

Yeah.

I was wondering what advice you would give future generations, maybe people who aren't even born yet, if they faced a situation similar to something that we're experiencing now.

Bonnie:

Well, that really is hard, isn't it? Um, I think always, it's very beneficial to really get to know yourself. Um, I tend to be an introspective person anyway. So I suppose, you know, that's a natural answer for me, but if you're going to have to like be under a stay at home advisory or order, you're gonna be, you have to rely on yourself, I think. You may be in a family with young children and that sort of thing, but still, it's, get to know yourself and get to be really comfortable with your own company, I think.

Cass, PiAP:

Umhmm.

Bonnie:

And accept as much as possible. Try not to fret, you know, do whatever relaxation techniques you can, whether it's yoga or meditation or any, any of those sorts of things. Um, read a lot, I think it was Proust said that reading is a miracle of communication while in solitude. And so I think that's another thing for me and could work for other people as well. Yeah. In reading, you are in contact with at least the author's mind who, whoever, whatever author you're reading. So it is, you're in contact and you're, I guess, still to feel connected to humanity. And, you know, the universe in general is important because even though we're not face to face, um, we can still be very much in contact and, and, um, strong for one another to help one another, even though we're not physically maybe hugging someone or patting them on the back or we can still be encouraging or that sort of thing, I think.

Bonnie:

Does that help?

Cass, PiAP:

Yeah. I think that's beautiful advice. Thank you so much for sharing.

Bonnie:

...question?

Cass, PiAP:

Um, no, that was perfect. My last, um, question is just, what are you most looking forward to when a stay at home orders are lifted or maybe when life gets back to some semblance of normalcy?

Bonnie:

Well, okay. Feeling much less vulnerable than being able to just go out anytime of day, instead of trying to dodge people on the street who are closer than 6 feet and aren't wearing a mask that will be really nice. And, um, to be able to use the library again. I used to belong to a gym, Planet Fitness, and that sort of thing. Um, just generally shopping when I feel like it, instead of, I always go during the senior hours and because everybody's masked and, um, most of us, I think we're feeling just as vulnerable. So we keep our good 6 feet distance and that.

Bonnie:

Um, so more freedom. I think I'm looking forward to.

Cass, PiAP:

More freedom, and I don't know if you would describe that vulnerability as fear, but I was hearing a little bit, you know, fear.

Bonnie:

Oh, big time fear, Scared out of my mind, but yeah, I did. Yeah. I have been very, very frightened of this. Normally, um, you know, I'm not really concerned about influenza, uh, you know, the yearly stuff. Although many people are very sick with that and die, but I'm not prone to being particularly frightened of those sorts of things. But this one is very different. It's very contagious and very deadly. So until we know more about it, I am afraid of it. Very definitely here.

Cass, PiAP:

Well, Bonnie, thank you so much for taking the time to share all these thoughts and your stories with us. We really appreciate it.