

Jenny, PiAP:

Welcome to this segment of In This Moment Stories from the UNC Partnerships in Aging Program. Today, we're talking with Eva who's 69 and lives in Bethlehem, which is in Alexander County, North Carolina. Eva, we really appreciate you talking with us today. We wanted to ask you about your experience of this current time in our world, since we've all been sort of advised to stay at home and stay more apart from one another during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eva:

This period of time reminds me, somewhat, of the time in 1950s, when I had polio. I was only almost two years old, but when I was a little girl before the polio vaccine came out, we would ride in our car. And if we passed a swimming pool, we would roll the windows up because no one knew what caused polio at that time. And my mother would chase flies around and swat them. She would be in a panic before she killed the fly, because they thought flies might transmit the polio. No one near us or around us had polio, even the little girls next door that I played with every day. And my mother kept a, a yellow quarantine sign in my baby book that had been posted on the door. And no one could come in our house. I don't know for how long after I was taken to the hospital for my treatment for polio.

Um, in the 1940s in this area, the city next to us was called Miracle of Hickory because everyone in the area and surrounding area pulled together and made a hospital for children to be treated. And that was in 1947. And that was before my time. Um, and that no one should go there except the children to be treated and the people who worked there. It was quarantined as well. And everyone had to stay in their houses and they didn't have the news and telephones and public media to talk to one another like they do now. So it wasn't publicized as much except on the radio and on the newspapers. So people were more alone. Now we're able to talk to one another. And I try to keep in touch with my friends who live alone, because I feel like they must be very isolated. One thing that this has done is bring people together and realize that their families and the people that they know are more important to them.

And I think the people who have worked and ran a rat race, all their lives, realize how, important those that they love and their families are to them. And maybe they don't want to run that rat race anymore. And they feel like they would like to stay home with their families and work at home more. Some people feel that way anyway. Um, we have been homeschooling my grandchildren, and we're very happy that school is out right now, because it took us all day to do the homeschool. Um, on the computers, it was very hard. The Chromebooks are really difficult and not user friendly at all. Um, we try to keep in touch with, with our friends. I have Zoom meetings with my husband's veteran friends once a week. Um, it's very difficult for me to get treatment for my husband because he does not, if he can't talk with a doctor face to face, he doesn't want to talk to one at all. Having his, uh, diabetes and his Parkinson's disease from Agent Orange, it makes him hard to relate to anyone. He is also hard of hearing and he doesn't want to talk to anyone on the computer. So he has not been able to talk to his psychiatrist or any of his doctors at all. So he feels very isolated.

I'm thankful for my daughter in law, who can go out and buy our groceries and bring them home. She wears gloves and a mask when she goes out. Um, it also reminds me of a time when my husband was off in Desert Storm. We felt kind of isolated, although the community did put out yellow ribbons and a lot of flags everywhere. We still felt isolated from everyone else because they didn't feel the same we did because they didn't have any soldiers in their families and didn't feel separated like we did. Um, also when 911 came, um, my husband was gone and I was afraid for my family. And the people at work who wanted to hear about everything on the news while we were at work, and they didn't understand my feelings. All of those things remind me of now.

Jenny, PiAP:

Eva, you have given us so many things to think about. And I'm... I was really struck that you're describing some things that are easier or in some ways better by staying at home and some things that are made much more difficult by that, um, like your husband's connection with his doctors. I'm wondering if you look back to your childhood experiences and, and think about how they, have they shaped how you are responding in this situation or how you're helping other people manage it?

Eva:

I think, um, it gave me strength and helped me realize how other people might feel now. And I think it's important for people to build an inner strength in order to be able to handle things that come. So they can draw on that inner strength and develop an inner power of their own in order to handle whatever might come.

Jenny, PiAP:

It sounds like you've certainly done that over your own experiences. I'm wondering what advice you might give to future generations when they face the next pandemic, or maybe what you're already saying to your grandchildren?

Eva:

One thing that has happened, I have noticed that in our community, um, everyone has put out their American flags again and they realize how important healthcare workers are. And we have a, a star that here in our community that sticks high up in the sky. It's called the Bethlehem star and it's part of the Christmas celebration. And they light it the first Saturday of December. Well, the people in the community decided to light the star now as a symbol of hope.

Jenny, PiAP:

That's really, really touching

Eva:

And other people in other communities have decorated their yards, um, to give people hope as they go by. So I think it's very striking that people have or develop ways to encourage others, um, when things seem so overpowering. And I find it very sad right now that back when the economy several years ago was in the recession and we had just gotten it built up and now we're back in that situation. Um, I think people should always stay reminded that everything can't always stay peachy keen all the time. And we should be ready for whatever might come. Also, um, when I had polio and I got better, everybody thought I was better. And now I have post-polio syndrome. And with this COVID-19, the people who get it, some people are, are affected in different ways. And when they get better, maybe they should take into consideration how this has affected their body and take care of their body. Because when they get old, it might be affected again in some way as, as post-polio have affected us polio people.

Jenny, PiAP:

So that's a really interesting perspective. I appreciate you sharing that. I'm wondering if you, would you mind telling me what you most look forward to doing again or starting to do again after this pandemic has calmed down or hopefully gone away.

Eva:

Going to church and meeting with my support groups face to face instead of on Zoom.

Jenny, PiAP:

Getting to actually see people in person sounds like...

Eva:

Yes. And go and shopping at Walmart.

Jenny, PiAP:

Yeah. Those are all things hard to do and keep social distance.

Eva:

Yes. It's hard to wear a face mask all the time. When I, I'm a registered nurse, and I worked in an intensive care nursery. I, um, and if, when we had to gear in a surgical garb to do special procedures, I was always glad to get my mask off. And, um, it's hard to wear a mask. And I'm wondering when people wear a mask if they're rebreathing their own carbon dioxide. And I'm wondering if that is not harmful to people as well.

Jenny, PiAP:

It's a challenging situation, isn't it?

Eva:

Yes, it is. And I'm worried for my grandsons. If they have to wear a mask, if they go back to school, I'm afraid for them because they both have asthma. It's very confining to wear a mask all the time. And I'm not sure that's really good for people, even though it is protective.

Jenny, PiAP:

Eva, I really appreciate the insights you've shared with us today. And thank you for adding your story. Is there anything else you would like us to know before we close?

Eva:

That's about all I think. And if you feel like I've answered the questions you wanted.

Jenny, PiAP:

Yes. Thank you so much for your time.

Eva:

Well thank you for developing this and taking all the people into consideration.