

Cass, PiAP:

Welcome to this segment of In This Moment Stories from the UNC Partnerships in Aging Program, an initiative designed to hear how people are managing in this time of COVID-19. On June 1st, 2020, we spoke with Jean who is 77 years old and is from Durham, North Carolina. Thank you, Jean, for talking with us today.

Jean:

Happy to do so.

Cass, PiAP:

So my first question is if you could tell me about your experience of this current time in our world, since we've all been advised to stay at home and distance from others.

Jean:

Well, my experience is probably like that of some other retired people who are not working right now, outside the home. So I spent a lot of time at home or with friends or, um, doing things on my own. So, um, in some ways it hasn't been as different as it would be if I usually went out to work, et cetera. But it is also been, um, it's been tricky because you feel all sorts of impulses. Oh, I think I'll just stop by the library. No, you won't. Um, so there are all sorts of normal things that you do that you have to reframe. But, um, I live in a CCRC and so that means that I have a lot of support and help, and that makes it easier. I think a great deal about the people who don't have as much support. And that worries me.

Cass, PiAP:

Yeah. Yeah. That's a great point. And for anyone who doesn't know, a CCRC is a continuing care retirement community. Um, and you mentioned you've been seeing some friends. So I'm curious about how that's been working right now.

Jean:

Oh, well, I see them electronically or virtually. I Zoom a lot. I talk a lot on the phone and I write a lot of letters or emails, texts to people, you know, elsewhere. So in some ways it's intensified some contacts with longterm friends who write and say, you ok?, and I, of course, do the same for them. Um, but it it's made, it's made those kinds of contacts, um, really increase and that's been very pleasant.

Cass, PiAP:

Yeah. I've heard similar things from other people too. Um, thank you for sharing that. And so my next question is what in your life experience has influenced how you prepared for, or are managing right now?

Jean:

Well, I don't think any of us prepared very well because we weren't helped in that preparation as we should have been, but that's a separate issue. I have had a lifelong struggle with various leg issues. So I've been immobilized for long periods of time at four or five stages in my life. And I've found, I hadn't thought about this when we were first said that we would be isolated, but pretty quickly some of the strategies that I had used in the past, um, came to the fore. I don't myself remember the polio epidemic nor, um, measles things, which are what some people, my age or a little bit older remember. But I have,

um, been, um, laid up, not able to walk. Um, and so the strategies for that are pretty much the same strategies that we use now, which is patience above all else. Um, reading more than running. Um, the, uh, the chance to, um, just be grateful for what you've got rather than, um, rumbling about what you haven't got. Um, so I have found my, I have found myself thinking back to some of those times in my childhood and, um, realizing that this too will pass and, um, that I can, I can do it. There's no reason to get angry or frustrated. You just have to deal with what you're dealt. So I, I do think that my previous experience has helped me a little bit.

Cass, PiAP:

Yeah, that's really interesting. Thank you so much for sharing how you've been reflecting and a little bit about the past experience. Um, so kind of thinking about the future. Do you have any advice for future generations if they were to face similar situations like the one we're experiencing now?

Jean:

I, I can't help, but feel so strongly that we all need to know that these sorts of things happen. We, um, the, the pandemic of 1918, which is so parallel in so many ways to this is a very missing chapter in, in history. Where we're not, I happen to know a little bit about it because of the things my grandparents told me, but in general, nobody knows. And so I think the idea that these, that this is part of our history, these are things that have happened historically to people. And both policy leaders, and everybody needs to know, uh, just have that deeper sense of, of history that these things happen. And we have to be prepared for them at the policy level and personally. Um, understanding that you're not in control of everything or you can't personally control everything, I guess is the way I'd say it. That you need to know that things aren't, some things are beyond your control and you have to, um, roll with them as much as you can. I mean, you can try to change them and work with them, but things are not always under your control. And I think that the absence of historical, as well as policy preparation was devastating in this case. I, that, that I find very difficult.

That's really hard. So in terms of the future, what I would say to 20 and 30 and 40 year olds is, know that something like this could happen again. So be sure we have supplies and be sure we teach and talk about how societies are likely to experience something like this. We sort of have some sense that a war might come someday, but we don't really have any notion that something like this could happen. We, I think sometimes think falsely said you can control things and we can't.

Cass, PiAP:

Yeah. I've been thinking about that a lot too. Um, well that was really great advice. I was wondering just to wrap things up, if there was anything you were really looking forward to resuming when the stay at home orders are lifted.

Jean:

Yes. Hugging people. It's so strange. Um, I'm a member of the Unitarian fellowship in Durham, and one of the most wonderful things about going to events or to services or whatever is that you pat somebody on the back, you'd give somebody a handshake or a hug you're just in wonderful contact with people. And the idea that you can't touch, people that you care about is almost inhuman. Um, so looking forward, I'm looking forward to hugs.

Cass, PiAP:

Yeah. That's beautiful. Well, thank you, Jean, so much for taking some time to share your story and your insights. We really appreciate it.

Jean:

Well, thank you. It's nice talking with you.

Cass, PiAP:

You have a great day.

Jean:

Thank you.

Cass, PiAP:

Thanks.