

Coping with Covid-19: Retired administrator now more productive at home but less worried about getting things done

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Senior Beat writers are reaching out to all of the people weâ??ve interviewed over the past couple of years to see how theyâ??re adjusting to this new, shelter-in-place lifestyle. We asked:

- How they feel overall about the situation;
- How their routines have been affected;
- If they know of anyone who has the virus;
- If people around them are adhering to the restrictions;
- If theyâ??re able to get everything they need;
- If they have any particular concerns;
- Whatâ??s been most helpful during this time;
- And how they think this might impact our future.

Sheryn Klein, retired law firm administrative manager

The virus situation reminds me of a forest fire.The fire itself brings death, suffering, misery and devastation. But in the aftermath, new growth emerges from the ashes, the earth replenishes itself. I think this will be the same. I have heard several interviews on the radio with people who said that before Shelter-in-Place, they were always on the go. No time for taking a breather, family, home, hobbies, etc. One woman said she doesnâ??t want to go back to â??livingâ?• that way, if indeed that was living. I think the virus will precipitate many changes both for individuals and for society, not only in the U.S. but worldwide.



Prior to the virus, I didnâ??t really have a routine. I retired just six months ago. I was having some issues with my â??routine,â?• especially knowing when to eat as well as with what I wanted to do with my time. While I have many interests, I wasnâ??t focused. Then in February, I had an accident â?? breaking a wrist and smashing some of my front teeth.

I was already pretty well confined before SIP went into effect in the Bay Area. I had to eat simply and found I wasnâ??t really hungry. I stopped worrying about timing â?? if I want something in the middle of the afternoon, I have it. I have no real schedule â?? for anything. Iâ??ve become more productive and am working through the long â??to doâ?• list I started creating last year when I made the decision to retire. Right now Iâ??m working on my family tree.

I reminded myself recently that if you want to move a mountain, you have to move one stone at a time. I have been making a small list of â??to dosâ?• for the week and crossing things off during the week. Iâ??m no longer worried about getting things done. They are getting done. And Iâ??m reading a lot, walking every day, watching movies and TV shows I missed. I think Iâ??ve created balance for myself.

People here seem to be abiding by the new rules. Family, friends and neighbors have all been wonderful. Iâ??m not worried about anyone in particular, but two people in my extended family died of the virus. They lived in New York.

Cleaning supplies continue to be an issue, especially in the grocery stores. I use environmentally friendly products, and they have been difficult to find. Fortunately, our local hardware store is open and

has a large section of cleaning items.

I think medicine will change radically, and more resources will be available online, which means more people will have access. I think business and businesses will change. Certainly, contingency planning will broaden to include situations like we are in that affect everyone. I think the educational system, which is already undergoing massive change, will be even more upended away from bricks and mortar. Many academic institutions will not survive the current situation. This, too, has the capacity to bring more people into the system. Government will also change, but that is a whole other matter.

Peggy Coster, videographer and wheelchair user

In some ways it has not changed my life. I had a lot of medical problems going on anyway, so I was just trying to get back to going to the senior center when this hit.



One of my In-Home Support Services helpers has stopped coming, I think primarily because her family is trying to protect her. But also because she was coughing. But my other helper does keep coming. I donâ??t know what I would do if she quit.

I go to the store more often. Itâ??s the only thing open. I canâ??t swim and I canâ??t do the same kind of exercises I could at the senior center. I do go out to the wharf most every day since itâ??s only a block away. I would probably go to the wharf every day anyway.

I donâ??t know of anyone with the virus, And most people in my area are heeding coronavirus

protocols.

I havenâ??t had any problem getting things I need, aside from getting to see the dentist and the doctors. But I can get medical help over the phone.

My sister has diabetes and lung problems, so weâ??re all worried about her. The rest of us are over 65 but mostly in better health. My friends and my helper, Mei, have helped me through this.

I think there will be a second and possibly third round of Covid, but I doubt they can do another complete economic shutdown. Officials may try to change the way businesses function, but the truth is I donâ??t think that will last.

Three restaurant operators in my neighborhood were talking when I went by one day. They donâ??t think they can do what would be required to stay open, based on what they have heard will be required â?¦ using the number of gloves and masks that may be required, and separating customers more. But I think after a while things will go back to the way they were.

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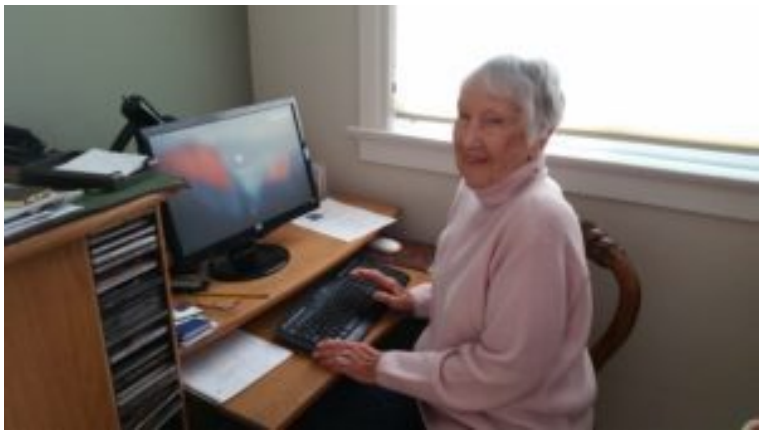
Rae Doyle, journalist, West Portal Monthly

I wouldnâ??t say the pandemic is a mess. Mess implies faulty human behavior. It is a catastrophic natural event. It is bringing people together and prompting unusual generosity.



Since I am retired, my routine has not been drastically affected. However, I miss very much grocery and other shopping, dinners and going to movies with my family and friends. I also have other events like neighborhood organization meetings and doctorsâ?? appointments which I miss. I do feel isolated.

I donâ??t know of anyone who has the virus, and I wouldnâ??t know about other people adhering to the restrictions because I am adhering to them and am staying home. My family keeps 6 feet apart even in my home. That is new because, originally, we didnâ??t touch but did not keep 6 feet from each other

People are being so kind and helpful. I have multiple offers to get groceries, etc. My family keeps me supplied. But I am very concerned about the future of my grandchildren and great grandchildren since this pandemic is unprecedented in my lifetime. And I am particularly concerned about how the SIP will

affect myself and my family financially.

But also, other unprecedent events are happening currently like the tornadoes in US, fires in Northern California, climate change, etc., etc. Is this Armageddon?

My family and media news have been the biggest help. As for the future, I have no answer except that it appears it is more uncertain than at any other time in my 94 years.

Marlene Hunn, blind, homebound former nurse

Shelter-in-Place allows â??everybody else to find out what Iâ??ve been living through for years,â?• but â??I didnâ??t want them to have to learn it this way.â?•



In the best of times, it has not been easy for Hunn. She lost a leg, toes, a finger and eyesight to diabetes â?? diagnosed at age two and kept under control until adulthood. Routines keep her sane, she said. She gets up, gets washed, puts on her artificial leg, gets dressed and makes breakfast. â??If I didnâ??t put on my leg, Iâ??d get lazy and never get out of bed.â?•

Though confined to a wheelchair, she got out once in a while for lunch or a cup of coffee and had regular visitors. She kept up with high school friends in Ohio and found local companions through the Shanti Project and Coviaâ??s Social Calls.

The Lighthouse for the Blind offered visual aids and the San Francisco Libraryâ??s Talking Books and Braille Center kept her in material to peruse. An avid â??reader,â?• Hunn had become friends with the staff. The library is closed now, but she â??still calls. I tell them I miss hearing their voices. And they return my calls.â?•

Aside from delivery people or the occasional home health aide, former visitors are only voices over the phone â?? a break from the television playing in the background. She still talks to her old friends but the mood has darkened. One fellow went through Vietnam, â??but the coronavirus has changed him more than the war. For some reason, he hates more people now. I try to tell him â??weâ??re fighting a virus, not a war,â?? but he doesnâ??t understand. Itâ??s scary.â?•

Her Meals on Wheels delivery person used to sit and visit for a while. Now, itâ??s just a brief conversation at the door, and â??he checks me out.â?• She typically gets six frozen dinners a week plus a bag with milk and fruit. Due to increased demand because of Covid-19, they wanted to give her two-weeksâ?? worth instead.

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But she couldnâ??t fit 12 dinners in her freezer. So sheâ??s filled in with take-out. A pizza, for which she tipped generously, provided four dinners. â??When Iâ??m alone and depressed, I want food.â?• She realizes sheâ??s fortunate in being able to afford it.

Fortunate in other ways, too. â??I still have a voice. I can bitch and moan. What about the people who donâ??t swear, who donâ??t order a pizza? The people who canâ??t move. Who wear a diaper and need to be fed?â?•

She doesnâ??t see things going back to the way they were. â??Thereâ??s going to be a new normal. I wonder, will people learn they donâ??t need or want other people? Will people still be able to come visit me?â?•

John Grimes, president, San Francisco Lawn Bowling Club

Our collective focus on a common, empirically-based adversary, with ample time for empathy, selflessness and gratitude provides a helpful perspective on our narcissistic, hyper-material world. Our priorities in times like these reflect our *real* priorities.



John Grimes with champion lawn bowler Christine Raher.

Except for short walks, weâ??ve totally hunkered down, with groceries and supplies delivered, then quarantined in our flat along with mail for a few days. Itâ??s a great time for long calls and emails with loved ones, including a series of virtual happy hours. When life gives you lemons, screw the limes, make gin and tonics!

I assume there are plenty of people who, sadly, are still unaware theyâ??re contagious. Itâ??s taken a week or two, but people are finally waking up and respecting safe spacing.

Exceptfor hand sanitizer, weâ??ve got everything we need. A friend is shipping us large containers of alcohol and aloe lotion, which weâ??ll mix when they arrive.

Iâ??m worried about my 90-year-old mother-in-law and 72-year-old brother-in-law, both with health issues. Also, our pregnant neighbor and all members of our Lawn Bowling Club who may be at risk or taking risks. The list goes on but itâ??s of great concern that healthcare workers, grocery clerks, delivery drivers and many others on the front lines are not provided with the protection they need to stay safe and â??flatten the curve.â?• Yikes!

My partner who practices and preaches great caution and a dear physician friend who knows the science and probable outcomes have been most helpful. And, of course, friends and family who share

love and laughs in the face of uncertainty.

My rose-colored glasses have faded a bit, yet Iâ??m hopeful that universal healthcare, paid sick leave, affordable childcare and education, collective bargaining, and other requirements of an advanced society will be pivotal issues this November and beyond. Our country is an inequitable mess and we must face our polarization, decline and rebuilding head on under new generations of enlightened leadership â?? with more women and minorities at the helm. Donâ??t get me started on climate change.

Kaaren Strauch Brown, mystery/science fiction writer

I am resigned. This is a situation to be dealt with, not felt about. On the other hand, I am outraged by the behavior of our national political leaders of both parties for whom the word â??leadershipâ?• seems the same as the words â??self-interest.â?• And our putative Democratic candidate for President hiding in his basement â?? please.



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I donâ??t see anything good about it. I no longer have any cultural events to attend. No museums are open and at least two have exciting new exhibits. No movies, no restaurants. But Iâ??m not bored. I have enough undone projects in the house to keep me busy.

I do have a colleague who got Covid-19 and just got out of the ICU. My neighbors are all adhering to the restrictions, and we have all noticed how clean the air is and how quiet the skies are.

So far so good on getting the things I need. But, everyone in the city must be baking bread because yeast and flour are totally unavailable.

Iâ??m managing for now (except for having to deal with hysterical children who firmly believe I will be found dead in my bed unless they phone a lot). The future is so fuzzy there is no point worrying about it yet.

Martha Nell Beatty, independent travel consultant

We are in such a lucky place here at The Heritage. Of course, we are under strict orders not to leave except on essential errands and only employees (except for several exceptional situations) can enter. So, no activities except for a few exercise classes given by employees.



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We are still allowed to have gatherings of under 10, but seated a distance from each other. We are allowed in the dining room at this point. But the tables have been separated and there are only a limited number of residents at each table, each meal. This could change in an instant, of course. There is also the option of picking up your meal.

And then there is the garden. So, we can get fresh air and even exercise and really not worry about the six-foot rule.

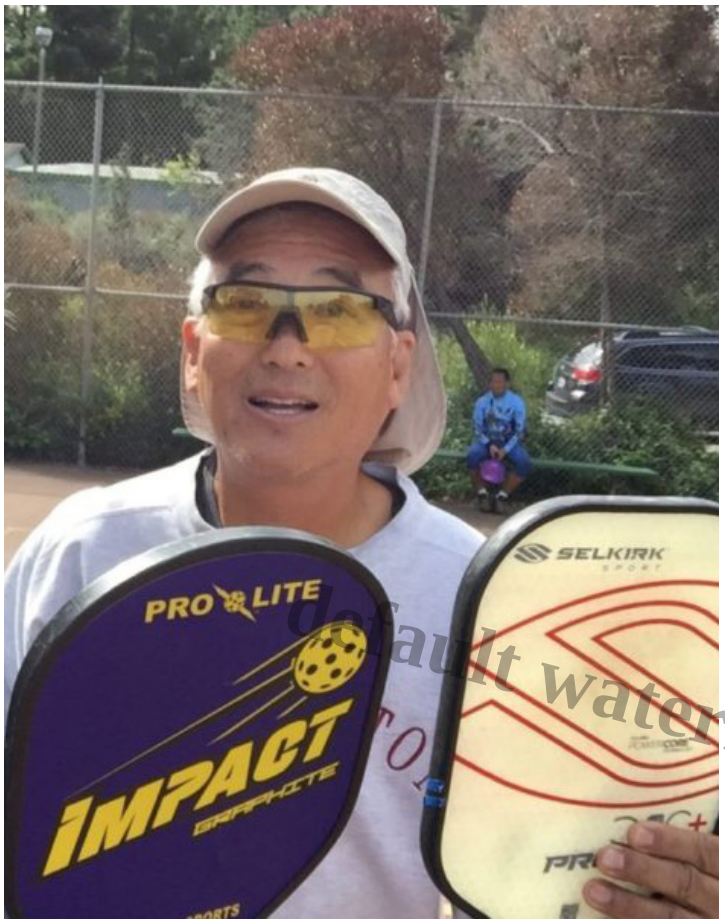
So far residents seem to be of good spirits.

I now have down time as far as business. So I am going through files. First business files. Not personal. And I have gotten myself into an emotional state. My son died 36 years ago and only now have I started looking through the files that contain his writing â??papers for school, poems, letters, post cards.

He had a very personal way of writing that reflected perfectly his personality and interesting way of thinking. It is painful but his way of expressing himself can also make me smile. This is why I have put off going through these files for 38 years.

Wellington Chen, promoter of pickleball in San Francisco

He is not playing pickleball these days, although he admits he initially didnâ??t understand why Rec & Parks closed the courts. â??Itâ??s not like weâ??re body-to-body, like basketball. Then I thought about it and realized it made sense. Weâ??re a social sport, people hang out and talk after a game. So, I put away my racket.â?•



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Not being able to see their granddaughter has been hard on him and his wife, he said. Before lock-down, â??we were babysitting our granddaughter up to four days a week.â?• And he was filing the hours with books from the library â?? until it closed. Since then, while his adult son reads eBooks heâ??s reading everything he checked out of the library before it closed and books he had at home. â??Itâ??s hard with the library closing.â?•

Chen has also been trimming trees. Usually he fits that work in between pickleball games, now heâ??s working slowly. His wife has begun clearing out the house. â??We have a large one and have lived in it for many years. Sheâ??s finding stuff we didnâ??t even know was there.â?•

While he knows he should start exercising, he admits, â??Iâ??m less motivated when I canâ??t go to the gym.â?•

A relative of Chenâ??s was tested and has the virus, even though she works in a hospital, a fairly high-up job where she doesnâ??t see patients regularly. â??Her parents are displaying all the symptoms, but they canâ??t get the test. Itâ??s lucky their symptoms are receding.â?•

Not all his fellow pickleball players went along with the shelter in place order. Some were trying to figure out how to snake through the order, he said, and one couple talked about driving up to Solano County, where they hadnâ??t yet issued that order. He told them that was stupid and they didnâ??t go.

As for food and medicine, he said, â??Weâ??re stocked.â?• But he is worried about the plummeting stock market and the possibility that some of his tenants might lose their jobs. While he knows evictions are suspended, landlords have debts, too, he said. â??Three days ago, (Treasury Secretary) Mnuchin said thereâ??s nothing to worry about. Now he says maybe 20 percent of the people might lose their jobs. Straight information would be really helpful.â?•

Talking with friends and hearing their stories has kept his spirits up. He was expecting another pickleball conference call and eager to laugh with his buddies how vendors are courting the pros. â??Pros who have always been with one company are moving to other vendors. Itâ??s getting to the point where a player will wear one shoe from one vendor and the other from another.â?•

Since the city has bought into pickleball by creating more courts, heâ??s not worried about its future here. â??Pickleball San Francisco will be fine. Iâ??ve taken a hands-off approach. Iâ??ve grown some good leaders. This next generation of leaders is really good.â?• Heâ??s less confident about the country. â??Will this next generation become more risk averse? I know smart kids who graduated from college in 2008 and couldnâ??t find a job. Theyâ??re boomerang kids, moved back home with their parents and just play video games.â?• He doesnâ??t want to see that happen to another generation of young people.

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Terri Wong, vintage afficionado, textile artist and singer

Itâ??s been a good time to slow down, reset and clear, to discover what is really important in lifeâ??family and friends. My grandmother taught me â??famineâ?• mentality so it is my standard practice to always have a fully stocked pantry/fridge/freezer and emergency closet.



To limit my exposure outside, instead of walking the three miles up and back to do my grocery shopping/bank/post office errands, my partner now drives me. Since my gardener is not able to do her routine maintenance, I have been doing my own weeding, etc.

I donâ??t know of anyone with the virus, and most people seem to be adhering to restrictions.

Between in-person grocery shopping and Amazon prime, I am able to get what I need. Because I work from home making custom knitwear and hats and restoring vintage clothing, most of what I need can be ordered on-line. My children, partner and I are pretty well set financially. We have always been extremely healthy. I have not been sick in almost 40 years â?? no colds, flu, etc. â?? and am controlling my allergies and boosting my immune system with Chinese herbal soups.

Being able to get together with my friends via telephone, Facetime and Zoom conferencing has been very encouraging to all of us. Working from home is so enjoyable with my Chinese canary and adopted cockatiel singing and whistling in the background.

This country and the world in general has to be much better prepared to handle pandemics and be willing to implement the lockdown/shelter-in- place protocol sooner rather than later. And please, no finger pointing. We are all in this together. Most of all, maintaining a positive and loving outlook and appreciating all the beauty around us is so helpful.

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Nicki Noyes, volunteer for Well Connected, a free program of virtual lectures, classes and group conversations by phone or online.

Noyes is busy â??on the phone almost all dayâ?• organizing weekday gratitude groups and story-telling sessions. â??Itâ??s so hard for people who are shut in. Thatâ??s who I feel sorry for, the people who canâ??t get out.â?•



Noyes talks with people from around the country, and they tell her their stories. Positive stories about neighbors helping neighbors, but also negative ones. â??A blind woman confronted by teenagers who canâ??t believe sheâ??s blind. They knocked her down and stole her cane.â?•

Itâ??s the people with physical disabilities who are feeling most isolated, she said; theyâ??re feeling more shut-in. Sometimes their caregivers donâ??t come, or they spend a full three hours â??waiting in a line before being allowed to enter the grocery store, only to find thereâ??s nothing on the shelves.â?•

Sheâ??s been getting her food delivered from Rainbow Grocery, including a special order for her favorite yogurt. She washes things down after theyâ??re delivered and places the carton on the curb for the garbage man.

Though she doesnâ??t know anyone who has the virus, she worries about her own family. One of her grandsons is â??highly asthmatic.â?• The thought of his getting the virus frightens her.

And, while sheâ??s happy she shares an apartment building with her daughter and her family, so they can visit, her daughterâ??s work is a problem. Sheâ??s a research nurse and still going to work. Her husband, a middle school principal, is home taking care of their 18-month-old. â??Sheâ??s the only one who gets out of the house, who can bring germs home. If anyone gets sick, it will be because of her.â?•

Noyes wants the hospital to give her leave. She still sees her daughter, but they donâ??t hug. When her daughter uses the bathroom in Noyesâ?? apartment, â??I wash the toilet and sink with bleach.â?•

Noyes has ventured out in her car but doesnâ??t get out of it until sheâ??s parked back in her own garage. Still, in the early days of the shut-down, she heard police were giving tickets to people just out for a drive.

Sheâ??s â??gratefulâ?• she has a yard where she can sit and read and that â??she has things to do and people to talk with.â?• Her involvement with Covia gives her an outlet for her energy and an opportunity to befriend new people.

Noyes worries about what will happen if the president is re-elected. â??Our country has become worse these last three years, people are meaner,â?• she said. But leaving aside politics, Noyes said she wants â??to live until Iâ??m very old. I want to live long enough for my new grandson to have babies.â?• Sheâ??s thinking that might be 40 years from now.

Staff writers Myra Krieger, Judy Goddess, Mary Hunt and Jan Robbins contributed to this report

EDITORâ??S NOTE: Feature image courtesy of John Darkow, Columbia Missourian

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