

## My 94-Year-Old Dad Talks About COVID-19 by Abbey Algiers

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Looking to the past for clues on navigating today and beyond...

How many of you started the year thinking your biggest concern might be to write out "2020" on important documents instead of abbreviating the year like we did in '19, '18?

Yeah, I wish that was the worst part of 2020. But it's dealt us a few more challenges. Like... this global pandemic and how it's changed every aspect of our lives. Beyond the obvious concern of contracting COVID-19, we've had to deal with isolation, separation from loved ones, and a complete shift in how we interact with the world. I don't need to remind anyone of the job losses, businesses shut down, economic crisis...and the physical, mental, and emotional pain that this has all caused.

I could go on, but quite frankly, I don't want to depress myself (or all of you) even more. Instead, I want to try to get a better handle on this global situation by looking at the past, to see how humanity dealt with similar challenging situations.

I'm not talking history books or documentaries- I'm talking about real thoughts from someone who has been around the block - namely, my dad (Dr. James Algiers), who at 94 has experienced many world events, and as a physician has treated thousands of people with all sorts of conditions. He's always been there to give me a perspective on all aspects of life, and even a global pandemic wasn't going to stop me from asking him his thoughts. Thank God for FaceTime and iPhones for making it possible to get as close to "face-to-face" as possible given the current situation.

Dad, your parents survived the Spanish Flu and the Great Depression, you served in World War II, and you've lived through many devastating world events. What do you make of the situation we're in now?

It's messed up. You can spell that mess in anyway you like. It's a very discouraging time, and we don't know how to respond to a problem such as we're faced with. We've never had to think about a world wide response. Although many people, many serious thinkers, have talked about something like this, no-one listened to them. And even those serious thinkers didn't allow themselves to think in depth or truly consider what it would mean to have a complete world shut down and a source of utter confusion. We just have never allowed ourselves to do that. We thought it couldn't happen, but now we find out it has happened, and we're in trouble. Big time trouble.

Can you talk about how it has affected those in your community, a senior residence? There are just no human beings who have had normal thoughts since this started - no normal thoughts. Nobody has really allowed themselves to imagine something like this. The elderly still cannot believe this is happening - we aren't allowing ourselves to believe it's happening. And in moments where we finally allow ourselves to think about it, we just can't believe that the world which we knew had a chance of exploding, did explode - onto and into itself. It just seems to be incomprehensible; it doesn't seem possible.

Although my generation has gone through heaven, hell and purgatory in its response to WWII, typhoons, terrible storms, and previous epidemics, this is so much different. This is something that we've never allowed ourselves to think down and think through. It's exemplified by not knowing how to address the element of society that says to hell with it, we are just going to live as though nothing is happening. There's an element that thinks it doesn't exist. That element has always been around, it's a group of hard nosed people who will never accept reality and if they accept it, they will object to it. It is going to be an element which will prove to be a greater problem than the problem itself. Their lack of cooperation and their obvious disbelief of what's happening is going to prove to be a very, very difficult situation for the younger people and the older people to manage. There's always been an element of radical people and it's just going to be redneck terrible.

Your family experienced a health crisis during the time of polio. Can you tell me a little what that was like?

Times like these leave lifelong imprints in one's memory and affect the course of their lives. By that I mean take for instance awakening one morning and finding your brother sleeping next to you moaning and crying in his sleep as he realizes he cannot move his leg and as he tries, he has exquisite, devastating, unrelenting pain. That was the awakening on a November day many years ago when my brother developed acute paralytic polio.

He was powerless to do anything about it, it was beside himself to accept that he probably had polio, he was smart enough to know that this was a terrible, life changing moment for himself. I well remember that he said something to me to the effect of, "But you don't realize what I fear. You don't realize that it's my leg that isn't moving and that it's so painful. We walked in the woods yesterday afternoon, and enjoyed the day. Today I can't move my toes. Today I can't move my leg. I think I have polio." And he was so right.

It was a life changing event - he had no alternative but to have insightful acceptance and he had hopeful probability that he was wrong. He cried! And he was right for the next 75 years - that his life had changed. He had changed overnight.

From the sunshine of a fall day to the depths of despair of reality. That 24 hours changed the life of our family completely, irretrievably and definitely for the next 90 years. We in the family became aware of terms such as "quarantine," "South Milwaukee Contagion Hospital," and "polio." And the wonderment as to whether he would return or not. That was the "COVID destination of infectious disease of 1943," not nearly as infectious as COVID of 2020.

It was not as devastating as we are coming to realize the present illness has been, will be, and when understood, will be as difficult to accept as the polio of the 1940's.

I well remember the debates, the explanations of causality by a filterable virus and how finally, mankind began to develop awareness and eventual well thought out

solutions. But during the process, there were so many people who failed to accept the presence of the disease, the annual fear of the disease reoccurrence, and the potential each year that we may be victims thereof. This process of eventual solution of the disease - prevention of the disease, acceptance, and annual fear and hope, continued each and every fall from September until the first hard frost.

The annual fear was real. The changing fear of COVID is real. We must accept the presence of the disease and the potential for utter devastation. This is the time for cooperative action, not bull-headed defiance.

How do you compare what we're going through to hard times, such as WWII?

This is different from WWII. During WWII... we all came together. We fought together and worked together. We were united.

Now, we're alone. Totally isolated. I've never seen anything like it. We'll get through it by facing it. The greatest problem is to say it does not exist. The greatest hinderance is understanding itself. The greatest difficulty is going to be the awakening that something catastrophic has occurred. We have to accept the fact that we've had a problem that we've never had before. If mankind is to exist, mankind has got to adjust.

During WWII, we feared the unknown and fear itself. We didn't know what to fear, we just were frightened. The unknown proved not to be nearly as fearful as the present year of COVID. This is multiple times more severe. More fearful. More real. It's more real than the devastation annually of the polio virus. What we are going through now is unknown to mankind. And one wonders how we will eventually cooperate, if we are going to cooperate, to the ideas of the infection, infection control, and terrible, terrible consequences to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

This is serious. We need to ask ourselves, just how can we accept the concept of such a dynamic new threat that is and will shake up the world?

What is your advice as we move through this pandemic and out of it?

What we're going through now demonstrates that there is a control mechanism above and beyond us, and we had better recognize that there is a higher presence, so that we can begin to live, to understand, to develop.

We've all been granted time to sort of be punks, now we've got to be mature punks. It's time for the world to grow up a bit, starting from ground zero.

Only the mature people will be able to truly help the situation by accepting the fact that everyone has got to face the problems and do their small tasks every day. Only by everybody cooperating can the race continue. It's time for everybody to grow up overnight. This is your Pearl Harbor. This is your time to stand up and be counted along with the historians and along with the people who have always been talking in the past about Pearl Harbor.

The bottom line is, we have to recognize that everyone is confused. Everyone needs help. Help begins with kindness and understanding, and cooperation between families and between groups of people. Cooperation is necessary and if we don't have it, we'll get by, but it will be much more difficult. But if everyone cooperates, it'll be easier.

How can we look at life differently after life returns to normal?

We aren't going to have any choice. It is different, it will be different. Accept the fact that it is different. It causes people to act responsibly. People must act responsibly and cooperate. Help your neighbor next door. It's time to recognize what being a neighbor really means.

How do you suggest people get through this time?

Take some time to allow yourself to think that recreation is alright even in the depths of tremendous anxiety. If you can just allot a little bit of time for pure recreation, you'll experience spiritual regeneration, and spiritual regeneration means recognition of your being. Do some activity that you enjoy. Keep that five iron next to the door with balls so that when things are really tough you can hit that sucker so you feel better. Just hit some, and you'll feel better.

Finally, know that you're going to find out that you can be serious just so long. Seriousness has to be broken up by action, and humanity needs to realize that we're all in it together. If we recognize that by helping someone else we're helping ourselves, we can get by. It's so important to help the person next door. Because you soon find out that when you're helping the widow next door, she's making cookies the next day. It's a chain reaction. We've got to help each other.

Be aware. Be cooperative. Understand that it is happening ,and we have never experienced disease of this magnitude before. The question of survival of the species is very real.

Most importantly, we've got to Keep The Faith.