

Pandemic Perspectives: Jeffersonville Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic. Interview with Evelyn Peeler

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

pandemic, prepared, work, reach, zoom, folks, seniors, vulnerable communities, social worker, uneasiness, experience, intellectual disabilities, senior citizen, Indiana, fear, care, genealogical society, Jeffersonville, husband, rural area

Jen Weidner 00:01: Today is July 27, 2022. I'm Jen Weidner with the Jeffersonville Township Public Library, conducting interviews for *Pandemic Perspectives: Southern Indiana Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic*. This project was made possible with a grant from the Indiana Genealogical Society. I'm here today with Evelyn Peeler, a retired social worker. So do you remember when you first heard about the COVID-19 pandemic?

Evelyn Peeler 00:29: I did. It was prior to it reaching the United States. So I was hearing, I was hearing that other countries were experiencing great difficulty and people were becoming ill and dying. So several months before it reached the United States.

Jen Weidner 00:47: So did you think it would get here, get to southern Indiana?

Evelyn Peeler 00:50: I absolutely did. I absolutely did. And we began to prepare prior to people being diagnosed here.

Jen Weidner 00:58: Oh, what did you do to prepare?

Evelyn Peeler 01:00: We prepared to be at home for a long period of time. Being a country girl at heart, being raised in the country, kind of familiar with how to manage without leaving your home for long periods of time. And so we prepared with that.

Jen Weidner 01:18: So how did this affect you and your family besides staying at home, like what else changed for you?

Evelyn Peeler 01:25: I think that our new level of fear because we both are seniors, my husband and I are in the home, there's just the two of us. It brought a new level of fear for our personal health, our personal well being. So that happened but both being seniors and both working in service type jobs. It very quickly became we were not able to work. So I, I retired pretty quickly. My husband, being even three years older than I am and having some health issues, worked directly with folks with intellectual disabilities. And he immediately had to go into isolation to, to protect his health. And so he lost his post-retirement job as well. So we experienced that. In the long run, we came out in a better place. But that first year was very frightening.

Jen Weidner 02:26: So you mentioned that you guys both have some medical problems. Was it hard to get medical care during the pandemic, like during the heart of the pandemic back in 2020, 2021?

Evelyn Peeler 02:37: Oh, it was, very much was, and I actually, my background is a medical social worker. So probably more aware than, than maybe just another social worker would be because I have that little bit of a background medically. I kind of knew how serious things were. And my husband, being a disabled veteran, was able to get care, and I have nothing but good

words for our local VA. He was able to get the care that he needed, though we were switching from in-person to Zoom and and that kind of thing and for seniors. That's difficult. That's, it's not only, not only do you have this fear with a disease, but you have an uneasiness with the technology that we're using to take care of those. So it was an added, it was a learning thing and, but it was uncomfortable as you learn.

Jen Weidner 03:33: Yes, it was definitely like, yes, Zoom was definitely something that most of us were not comfortable with.

Evelyn Peeler 03:38: Right. And now it's just second nature, isn't it? Now it's, we do a lot, and I'm currently, I moved into kind of a different position. And I do a lot of my work via phone and via Zoom. I also work with folks with intellectual disabilities, adults, and I took on the title of crisis advocate, so they can reach me by phone. They can reach me by Zoom. And I do go out if somebody is, if somebody is diagnosed with COVID post-vaccination. I do not work face-to-face or do anything like that, but I make sure that they have the support that they need. And so my, my experience pre-pandemic and my experience with being prepared for us helped me be able to pass that on to those that, that I serve.

Jen Weidner 04:26: What have you learned from the pandemic good or bad or...?

Evelyn Peeler 04:37: I think that it's a double-edged sword as far as being prepared because having grown up very poor and in a rural area, I'd like to be prepared. That's always been, that's always been something that brings me comfort. But now I think that I'm more in tune to being prepared. Probably could stay in the house for six months without leaving my garden. So the good news is that I garden and that I do those kinds of things, but the bad is that you worry about it. I think that the most wonderful thing is that for many people, it brought out the best. One of the things that I did, I work with adults with intellectual disabilities. So those, many of my folks have very specific things that they will eat, and maybe it might be only five things that they will eat. And so it was vital during shortages that we get those things because they have folks that are eating for days. And so social media was great. Even people who were disagreeing about politics and those things were able to come together and meet needs. I had a group of young people who weren't going to school who reached out to me and said, "Let us know where there's needs and we will get supplies." They were at less risk going into the store than my clients or myself. And so they would go into the stores and they would get things and they would deliver it to doorsteps for me. And it was just amazing to see folks do that.

Jen Weidner 06:19: We all come together for the common good. Yeah!

Evelyn Peeler 06:23: Yes. Yes.

Jen Weidner 06:25: So once the pandemic is completely over, what are some things that you hope will continue?

Evelyn Peeler 06:30: Oh, exactly what I just, what I just mentioned, just the common good of the community looking out for one another. Um, I think that in some ways, it's helped some of us be more in tune with, with our health as well. And I hope that that continues to with my clientele. We've done a lot of work on, we've done a lot of work on personal hygiene and personal safety. And so I hope that, that, that was always needed, except that many folks didn't realize just how needed it was, and hopefully, we'll be able to continue that as well.

Jen Weidner 07:10: So what do you want people in the future to know about the pandemic? Let's say there were some people that come in here 20, 30, 40, 50 years from now and are doing pandemic research. What do you want them to remember about it?

Evelyn Peeler 07:21: That we weren't prepared, that, that overall, our country, our community, and our, us as individuals, we're not prepared, and we need to be prepared. We need to be listening. We need to, you know, prepare for the worst, hope for the best and know that it's going to land somewhere in between. And if we're prepared like good boy and girl scouts will get through.

Jen Weidner 07:48: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Evelyn Peeler 07:52: I am, I think that as a senior citizen, I had that perspective of being extremely vulnerable. And I was very touched when people moved in and said, "What can we do for you?" I've always been a helper and reaching out. So looking at our vulnerable communities and, and just saying, "What can I do here to support?" makes such a big difference that people just don't forget.

Jen Weidner 08:23: Thank you for being here today.

Evelyn Peeler 08:2: Thank you.