

I DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME LEFT, EVERY SINGLE DAY COUNTS

CHRISTMAS CAROLS CANCELLED

All the events here have been cancelled, like a singing club, an exercise program, movies and a flower arrangement class. Residents can use a TV and computers in the dining room, so we go there and get together because it's fun. Usually there're around 20 people. For Christmas, we have about 50 people and enjoy singing. Since it only takes 10 minutes to sing Christmas carols, we sing something else too. But all have been cancelled. Also, we used to do exercise together, about 30 of us, in the dining room for about 20 minutes every morning. But this one is also cancelled. So it's kind of hard because we don't get to do exercise.

RESIDENTS STAY IN THEIR ROOMS

I cook for myself, but other residents who use a meal service had food delivered to their rooms. Now, restrictions have been loosened a little bit, so partitions were put in the middle of the dining room, and residents would break into smaller groups to eat. The thing is, we can't talk with each other now. In this place, we have quite a few residents, about 1/3 of the total, from other prefectures all over the country. They've been brought here because their children live around here. But they have no friends, and they would say "I'm so lonely." So, they really enjoyed drinking tea together after the morning exercise. But now they don't have that, so they stay in their rooms, alone, and I guess that affects them mentally. The management company of this place hasn't lifted any restrictions, being scared that they would have to take responsibility if anything happened. We used to enjoy watching YouTube videos on the TV together in the dining room. But we can't do that anymore.

THE LINE APP

I've been recommending smartphones to everyone. You can use the LINE app, that lets you see your family members' faces free of charge and see how they're doing. Now it's hard to see each other face to face, so it will be reassuring if an aged parent has a smartphone. I thought our value systems were changing in that direction. But surprisingly, women seem to have some problems, like they don't want to show their faces without makeup. But when they're at home, you go downstairs every morning and say, "Good morning," right? LINE is the same thing, I would say. When a resident wanted to switch to a smartphone, I would go

with them to a large electrical appliance store nearby and help them buy it. They would need help at first. It would be nice if the store had older staff, but they're all young.

LOW DEATH RATE

What if the other person has the virus? Well, since there are so many COVID cases, there's nothing I can do about it. It's like a traffic accident. Also, the death rate is quite low among Asians, around 6%. Even if I get infected, I've already enjoyed myself for 85 years, so it should be enough.

MEETING VIA ZOOM

Since I usually don't go out that much, my legs are getting really weak. But I have so many other things to do, like working on a photo book, that I don't have enough time. So, in a way, the COVID crisis gave me some extra time I needed. We have a group of former research employees at the company I worked for and meet regularly at a hotel. We've been doing it for 25 years. Each time, 25 to 50 people would come to the meeting. Next Sunday, we are having a meeting via Zoom. Since we all attend from home, their wives will be there too. Some of them have a wife who used to work for the same company. So they'll join the meeting as a couple. I think it's a new pattern we're seeing. When we meet at the hotel, they usually come alone, saying it costs too much. So, this will be interesting.

NEW APPS THANKS TO COVID

Another interesting phenomenon is, when I invited these group members to join the corporate alumni association, the manager of the group told me it would be difficult. Since those former research employees are the graduates of top universities, they hate learning from other people. They got to be Number One, and that gets in the way. For example, I asked one of the former research colleagues why he was still using a flip phone. He said, "I'm fine with this flip phone. I have no problem contacting people with this one." I told him that things were changing from PCs to smartphones and he should go along with those changes. But no, he was so stubborn, wouldn't change a thing.

I also invited some friends from my school days to try the Sail app. They love it and feel revitalized. They're all 85 years old, but they enjoy it and they can keep going. The app was introduced on TV, so people across the country are now joining Sail. That's a new development, thanks to COVID.

BUSINESSLIKE

Unlike care facilities in general, this place is an apartment, so people can visit here as they like. My son lives in another prefecture, but I don't see him too often. He would just say, "When you die, leave a note on the front door to tell me what you want me to do. Then, I'll arrange a funeral as you wish." That's it. Men, we are businesslike with no emotion.

PHOTOS AND MEMOS

I'm now making a photo book so that I can leave it to my son and his children. I started with my parents' photos, but I don't know much about my mother's friends, surprisingly. I should have listened to her stories more. When my mother was 85, I took her from a care facility and took a trip to Hawaii together. She was so energized and enjoyed swimming. That's the kind of things I'm leaving to them. If you only have photos and albums, you would just throw them away. But if you have memos attached to them, you can understand them more deeply. That's what I'm working on now.

PREVENTING DEMENTIA

I've also been writing my personal history. It has three parts: my school days, work days and post-retirement days. I think everyone should write it. You can prevent dementia by doing this, remembering old days when writing it. People around me don't want to throw their albums away, but they don't know what to do with these albums. So I suggest them that they make a photo book, and I help them out if needed. If they are young and have children, they can keep a record of their children's growth over the year. Once I teach them how to make a photo book, which is quite easy, they really enjoy it.

THIS IS THE NEW NORMAL

If we use Zoom, we can have unlimited free one-on-one meetings. Well, for 3 or more people, we can use it only for 40 minutes though. You can now access Zoom easily with a smartphone, so I tell people that they can join meetings with their smartphone even if they stop using a PC. So, you can do pretty much everything with a smartphone.

A problem is the cooperation of family members. Some are positive, but others may say, "You're too old you can't do that," or "It's too dangerous," or "Don't give me any headache by doing something selfish." So, one of the challenges would be how to convince them, "This is the new normal."

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Fire TV costs 5,000 yen, just one time payment without monthly fee. The prime membership fee is 500 yen though. You can watch all kinds of interesting programs with that, like dubbed American movies and TV programs like Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes now uses a smartphone, so modern. They have the US version and the UK version. In the US version, titled Elementary, Watson is female, that's really interesting. When we watch TV, we usually take whatever the TV stations give us. But sometimes, it's nice to choose programs I like. You will need Wifi, but almost every place has a PC. Shipping is free, and the product is cheap. So, this is one example of how you can enjoy your life.

SMARTPHONE SUPPORTER

The non-profit organization I'm involved in, hosted a training program for smartphone supporters the other day, we had around 20 people. These trainees had made a list of what they liked to learn at the class, so I taught them what they liked to learn. We have only done it once, but I think it will be nice to expand that program. So, one of the things I'm thinking about is, I should do something to contribute to the local community.

NEW FRIENDS ACROSS THE WORLD

I've also been asked, via Sail app, to help people from Myanmar and Vietnam who are coming to Japan, not just within Japan but even when they're at preparatory schools in their home countries. Also, about a Russian lawyer I contacted before, she was stuck in Moscow because of the COVID pandemic, while her husband was in Turkey and her daughter was in the UK. So, we all communicate with each other and exchange information. I think it's interesting that we feel secure as we make new friends across the world via Sail.

PREVENT YOUR OWN DEMENTIA

There is a meeting room in this facility with dining tables. There, I play ping pong by myself. It's good exercise. I used to be a member of a ping pong club. Since you can practice by yourself easily, I also teach other residents how to do it. It can be anything, your hobby or whatever. You can be a little creative and do things you like. That can prevent your own dementia while making people happy. That's also a way to enjoy your life. Me? Since I'm almost 90 and don't have much time left, every single day counts. So I'd like to do what I like to do as much as I can.

Shigeru's story was shared with us by [International Longevity Center \(ILC\) Japan](#) – 国際長寿センター, member of the ILC Global Alliance, an international federation researching and advocating the vitality and the societal and economical position of older people. In the Netherlands, the ILC network is represented by Leyden Academy.