

TO EASE STRESS, I DO KARAOKE SINGING BY MYSELF

Hideo (79) from the Kanagawa Prefecture, retired, married, lives in a condominium

INVOLVED WITH MY COMMUNITY

After the retirement at age 60, I worked as a teacher at a private university until age 71. But when I retired, I became president of the condo's management association. We all take turn. That was when I started getting involved with my community. Before that, my life had revolved around work, so I'd never been to places to eat or drink around here although I'd lived here for about 37 years. Since I took up a role as the president, I've started many things. I've coordinated the work of the association, and I've also been involved in a senior citizens club in the condo. There're about 200 households, so I guess about 20% of them join the club. We also have a group where we could get together and enjoy talking and coffee for a couple of hours during the day. Another one is a monthly drinking party, just for 12 people though. We have a tennis court on the condo premises, which can be another hub for people to get together. So, we organize tennis programs there. We've also organized a community golf club and have a tournament every month. Sometimes, we get as many as 30 people.

CHEERFUL VOICES

So, I'd been involved in these activities, but all of them just stopped because of COVID-19. It's like, we're forced to get used to the new ways of living: no more going out, no more meeting people, or no more body contact. That means, we can't do these even with neighbors. We're lucky to have a meeting place within the condo, but everything is closed now. Neighbors cannot get together because of COVID-19. That's really sad and stressful. But since schools are closed, I get to hear the cheerful voices of kids outside. We don't have that kind of opportunities too often. There aren't too many kids, but they play outside, like skateboarding. So, in a way, that lifts my spirits.

I CAN'T EAT OUT TO TAKE A BREAK

My wife has three siblings, and they talk on the phone almost every day. At her youngest sister's place, her mother-in-law is in a care home, but she can't visit that place. Before the COVID crisis, she would visit the home, bringing everyday items and all, and come to our place on the way back and have a small talk. She can't do that anymore, and I don't get to see her. I think my wife is also stressed out. She loves going shopping, like department stores, but she can't go out as she likes. We don't eat out as often, meaning we're always at home and she'd need to prepare 3 meals a day. When we all spend so much time together at home, I think we sometimes get frustrated. Actually, there's a

restaurant we've been wanting to go, but we still haven't had a chance. We can go if we want to. But I'm still not in the mood for that, like eating while laughing and talking loudly.

NO BATH TUB

There's a nice driving range in the neighborhood. They won't let you in unless you wear a mask. Also, the other day, I went to a neighboring prefecture to play golf, with my younger brother who lives nearby. On the golf course, we just played through without a lunch break. And after the play, we could only use a shower, not a bath tub. But while playing, we kept distance from each other and played as usual, so I didn't feel too different.

ONE FOR ALL, ALL FOR ONE

The meeting place in our condo will reopen soon, but with some conditions. Of course, masks and ventilation are important, but avoiding a crowd is the most critical thing. For example, we usually have seats for 20 to 30 people in the room, but we'll be able to have only up to 9 people under the new rules. Since we are all quite old, we're extremely careful. People are careful not just to protect themselves from COVID-19 but also to protect others. I think that's great. That's the spirit of "One for all, all for one." Everyone seems to feel like, let's work together for the shared goal. I'm impressed with that. So, we make sure to follow the rules.

KARAOKE BY MYSELF

Since I'm not working anymore, I don't need to face a pay cut. I can live comfortably, with pension benefits and savings. So, I feel as if I were in a windless area in the midst of the COVID storm. Financially, I'm saving money because I don't go out. So I guess I'm lucky I didn't need to face poverty because of COVID-19. But I do feel stressed because of the virus. To ease stress, I take a walk in the early morning once a week, and I do karaoke singing by myself. I have a large repertoire of songs I can sing at a karaoke bar, around 200 songs. So, I watch music videos of old songs on YouTube and sing along, remembering the time when those songs were popular. But looking back would do no good. Now, I see COVID-19 as a part of life.

DO SOMETHING

Everything is the same every day. Even when I read a book, I can't focus. Sometimes, I read books for fun. But usually, I read things for discussion with others. So I would take a note while reading them. But I don't have that kind of purpose now, so why bother taking a note? I get lazy. Since I just keep reading the books I can enjoy while lying on the couch, I don't use my brain much, which is not good. So, I think I am actually losing energy, to some extent. It's fine if I do nothing but watching TV every day. But I want to do something, and I feel I should do something.

COVID-19 AS A PART OF LIFE

First, I feel like, maybe, we can start returning to normalcy. Maybe we can restart what we stopped doing because of the self-restriction. Like going out and seeing friends, for example. I'm a member of a haiku poetry group, consisting of the former colleagues from where I used to work. We get together in downtown Tokyo. I've also started playing golf with friends. So, we are relaxing our own rules, little by little. It's true, we're starting to think, "Maybe we can restart things." So, I guess we are gradually returning to normalcy.

Hideo'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.