

OLLI Friends, How has the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted your life? What are you doing to stay healthy and happy?

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Furman

# OLLILife

## Sheltering-in-Place special edition

Member Chatter during OLLI's Pandemic Shutdown



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What are you up to? Send us a note: [sue.renault@gmail.com](mailto:sue.renault@gmail.com)

OLLI member and longtime newsmen **Jim Hammond** calls himself,

"an old reporter whose restless brain can't stop seeing a story at every turn."

He grew curious about our current pandemic: has this happened before? How did folks cope?

"So I wrote a piece about the history of epidemics locally, gleaned from archives of the **Greenville News**," he says.

**OLLILife** is pleased to publish Jim's article, and we propose to make this just the beginning of a shared conversation with all of us who are "sheltering in place" together. Please send us a short note about how you've coped, what you've learned, what you miss. Also, feel free to recommend a favorite book, your best shelter-in-place take-out treat, an anecdote that made you smile, or a kind word for someone who's helping you travel this journey. Member Chatter.

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## For our parents, epidemics were common childhood experience

By James T. Hammond

Most people living today do not remember past emergency measures such as are in effect now around the world. But for people such as my mother, 95-year-old Callie Hammond, the threat of epidemic diseases was ever present in their childhood.

Callie recalled recently that it was not unusual for schools to close in the 1930s because of the threat of the polio virus. In her youth, millions of people worldwide died or were crippled for life by the poorly understood plague that seemed to revive year after year with the seasons.

In 1936, the Greenville County Health Department reported 396 "crippled children," victims of the polio virus.

In 1939, South Carolina experienced 269 cases of polio in the first six months of the year. Charleston was the hotspot for polio that year. Federal court closed during the summer because of the polio epidemic. Public gatherings were banned.

Tourists avoided the state's beach resorts, causing alarm among state business and political leaders.

**The Greenville News** noted that in 1939, the cause and infection method of polio was a mystery to science.

"Polio is one of the biggest question marks facing modern medicine," the newspaper reported.

In 1957, a mass immunization program began, and rapidly reduced the annual infection rate for polio from 58,000 to 5,600 cases. Today, the World Health Organization estimates there are between 10 million and 20 million survivors of polio alive worldwide, But today, new cases of polio are few.

Polio was not the only disease haunting the human race a century ago. In 1936, an epidemic of malaria broke out in Greenville County. State officials took dramatic steps to attack the mosquito-borne disease. The Greenville News reported that two streams, the Reedy river and Rabun Creek, were extensively dredged to reduce stagnant pools that might host mosquito breeding sites. Some 29 cases of malaria were reported in the county, a rate of infection the newspaper described as "alarming."

Jim's story is continued on page 2

# OLLivoices

ADD YOUR VOICE TO UPCOMING ISSUES OF OLLILife's  
SHELTERING-IN-PLACE EDITIONS. INFORM US OR AMUSE US!

Thanks, James T. Hammond for being the first of our OLLIvoices to share time spent Sheltering in Place.

Until the mid-20th century, malaria was an annual threat across the state. In 1929, approximately 40 people were stricken with malaria and state officials rushed to drain swamps and streams where mosquitos bred. In 1928, 13 people died of malaria in Summerton, S.C.

In August 1934, a malaria epidemic raged in Camden County, North Carolina, in the region of Albemarle Sound and the Dismal Swamp. The Red Cross sent five nurses from Washington, D.C. to help with the medical response.

In January 1937, the Greenville County Health Department issued a grim review of state efforts to stem viral diseases. The health department administered "prophylactic serums" against a variety of diseases, including 3,445 doses to fight typhoid, 3,297 doses for diphtheria, and 1,923 doses to prevent smallpox.

In the late 1930s, smallpox continued to rage, with 23,685 cases in 1927, 38,113 cases in 1928 and 41,459 cases in 1929. In those three years, 442 died of the diseases. Today, nations no longer even vaccinate young people for smallpox, a disease banished from the earth through the most successful public health war on disease in world history.

Perhaps the greatest failure of the public health system came in 1918 with the influenza pandemic. In January 1919. The life insurance industry reported that collectively insurers paid out benefits to beneficiaries of 120,000 policy holders who died of the so-called Spanish Flu.

One of the greatest failures to take the pandemic seriously took place in Philadelphia. The flu was known to be in the Philadelphia Navy Yard. The city had planned a war bond parade and rally, and despite sure knowledge of the existence of the flu, went ahead with the parade. It is estimated that 14,500 people died of the flu because the city failed to call off the parade.

This quick review of the art and science of epidemiology shows that collectively we can prevail over disease. It is one of the seminal traits of the human race. But history also shows that when leadership and science falter, we pay a high price in lives and treasure.

James T. Hammond is a retired journalist with 45 years of experience at newspapers including The Greenville News and the Wall Street Journal's international editions. He and his spouse Elizabeth are practicing social distancing at their home north of Greer, S.C.

**Our OLLI Council made history today** (March 20) by holding its first-ever meeting on *ZOOM*. Members logged in from their kitchens and home offices to share strategies for moving through and beyond our current Pandemic Shutdown. Per committee reports: OLLI budgets will be met and staff jobs are secure; procedures for spring refunds are underway; all trips have been cancelled (Iceland travelers will receive 100 percent refunds); following the Furman guidelines, we can expect all OLLI events to be cancelled through June 1. Many OLLI members have become Facebook Friends and are enjoying their news online. Look for **OLLI Notes** twice a week now. Peace to all OLLI friends.

