



Tips for getting through lockdown

From those who lived through World War II

Curated by SpareRoom



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We're living in really strange times right now.

COVID-19 has turned our lives upside down – many of us are still adapting to the new “normal” of being at home all the time, not seeing our friends and family, and finding it harder to get hold of our usual groceries.

According to the UN Secretary General, the current coronavirus outbreak is the biggest challenge for the world since World War II - [BBC news April 2020](#)

While you can't compare the horrors of a six-year global war to the current pandemic, there are arguably some parallels in the way people's lives have been turned upside down – and the generation who lived through the war could be our best source of inspiration and comfort.

These people were there in the 1940s when the streets were abandoned and anxiety was rife. When people sheltered at home with blacked-out windows to keep them safe. When restrictions were placed on movement. They queued up with ration books to get food. They had to make do and mend. The whole nation was focused on one thing: victory.

This generation are perhaps the only people who can navigate the current crisis with some kind of practical, relevant experience. So we decided they're probably the best people to help the rest of us deal with life right now.

We spoke to an inspirational group of people in their 80s and 90s and got them to share their experience of living through World War II – what they learned, and how that advice could help us all through the COVID-19 crisis. This booklet is the result of those conversations.

We really hope you find it useful and uplifting.

Stay safe, stay at home and stay positive!

The SpareRoom team

NB: The situation around COVID-19 is rapidly changing, so please ensure you refer to [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) for the latest advice and information.

Cultivating the skill of letter writing could be very beneficial

"I was a child in France during the war, but afterwards as a young man I caught tuberculosis. At that time TB was very difficult to treat and so I ended up in a sanitarium away from my family and friends for a year. Despite the physical effects of the disease and the mental effects of my confinement I was determined to stay active in some way. Studying during this time also kept me busy and kept my mind active. Something else I found very helpful was having a daily rhythm or schedule that I could stick to – and I would very much recommend this to young people going through lockdown today.

It also helped to put emphasis on staying connected and nurturing relationships – even though I couldn't be with my loved ones. Of course, email and text make communication far easier and faster today than when I was a young man, when we would need to stay in touch through handwritten letters. But cultivating the skill of letter writing could be very beneficial to young people's wellbeing at this time. With only a pen and paper to get across exactly what you want to say, the art of letter writing can feel like a very profound, meaningful and tangible form of communication while we are forced to be apart!"

– Jacques, 83



Make do and mend



Due to extreme shortages brought about by war, 1939 – 1945 saw strict rationing of food and commodities such as clothes. Consequently, as well as issuing ration books dictating the purchases people could make, the government introduced many campaigns encouraging households to become more self-sufficient and frugal. One of these campaigns was called 'Make Do And Mend': a pamphlet that advised on repairing and reusing clothes to extend their lifespan.

Sheila, 83, reflects on this time and how her experiences could be useful for people today during the coronavirus crisis:

"My mum always used to say to us 'make do and mend' - we used to grow our own fruit and vegetables and use the table as an air raid shelter as we didn't have one for quite some years. We 'made do' with what we had. I would encourage people at home in this crisis to do as we did in the war and explore how you can make the best out of what equipment you have at home, even try growing your own fruit and vegetables like we did all those years ago."



Flatmates living together today need to become like a family

In 1940 and 1941 Germany carried out an intense bombing campaign all over the UK that became known as 'The Blitz'. German planes dropped bombs on industrial targets, towns and cities, beginning in London. At this time the public often sought refuge in homemade air-raid shelters in their gardens or in communal shelters, like London Underground stations. Blackout curtains became a universal feature in homes, designed to block any light inside a home and remain unseen to German planes. It was during this two-year period of intensive bombing that the famed 'Blitz spirit' emerged, with British people seen to retain a sense of stoicism, determination and togetherness in the face of seemingly unending air raids.

Here, **Colin, 90**, tells us how he got through the Blitz and what comparisons can be drawn with today's crisis:

"Flatmates living together today need to become like a family. During the Blitz we had to look out for one another, from making sure everyone was eating enough to coping with the constant fear of bombing and the confinement at home and in air raid shelters. The rationing of food was a big issue; bread and eggs were scarce, much like how certain items might not be as readily available in shops now. But as long as we look after each other, like a family, we'll get through this."

It was just a case of getting on with it



Husband and wife Hazel and Gordon were together during World War II but had very different experiences. Here they recall their lives during the war, how they learned to cope and what lessons might be relevant to people now:

It was just a case of getting on with it - you had to keep going, because everyone else was. The shared experience of being away from family and working tirelessly created strong ties and close friendships" – Hazel, 94

"I was working as a nursing assistant at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital at the start of the war but soon decided I wanted to do more, so at the age of 17 I left Norwich for the first time to start as a trainee nurse at the North Middlesex Hospital in London. I had hoped to escape the 10pm curfew imposed by my father but ended up swapping this for a wartime curfew imposed by the Matron who managed the nurses' hostel where I lived. War-time restrictions on life were different from the current lockdown, but the way we coped with life back then is useful to getting through the crisis today. As a nurse all you thought about was eating, sleeping and working - not so different from those on the front line dealing with Coronavirus today.

"During the war I was a tank driver and was in action in North Africa, Italy and Greece. At that time it was important to keep your mind and body fit. Food was restricted so you had to eat what you could when you could. Everyone was afraid of the situation but we all did our utmost to stay positive. Making jokes, singing songs and having banter with friends and colleagues were some of the ways we tried to make light of life at a challenging time and that's exactly how we're approaching the crisis today" – Gordon, 97




Have hope for better days ahead

“Young people today just need to keep focussing on the days ahead as this pandemic will not last forever. It is only here with us for a fraction of our lives. Make the most of being with or speaking with loved ones and cherish them. When things get tough go for a walk and listen to nature as the world is still there for our enjoyment. After the Second World War, our country was bankrupt but everyone pulled together to make Britain great again.

Our lifestyle became the envy of most countries around the world. Young people can make Britain great again as I believe they have the enthusiasm and knowledge to do so. Have hope for better days ahead as they are just around the corner”

– Ilene, 82



It is essential to understand that the phase will pass

"I was born in January of 1939, just before World War II. I was only a small boy but have vivid memories of certain occurrences during that time. I lived in Madras (now Chennai), the situation was tense and we had to always remain alert. Planes would fly over India as they made their way to and from Europe and East Asia.

In order to be hidden from the rest of the world, there was a curfew at 6pm every day. Sirens would go off and you'd see people running into their houses as the nation would prepare for a potential attack. In times of struggle, it is essential to understand that the phase will pass and to just remain patient."

- Anonymous

Thank you

We'd like to thank everyone who contributed to this project – which we've pulled together in a time when we're all living in isolation.

Stay safe, stay home, and take care.

The SpareRoom team

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