Throughout this pandemic, we have heard many heartbreaking and heartwarming stories of how we're responding and coping. Many of those have been about the elderly, accounts written by adult children describing how they miss contact with their parents, segregated from them by institutional living. But here is a first-hand account by an older couple in their mid-80s, who describe what they are thinking and living through during this staggering health crisis.

My generation, the Boomers, are not shy in expressing their opinions, but what about those of us, slightly older, the generation of the Korean war, so “inconsequential” that their name is “The Silent Generation,” lost between the Greatest Generation and the Boomers. Here is a first-hand account, of a couple, age 85 and 87, who at least in this instance, is silent no more. (I am publishing this under my byline to protect their anonymity.)

DAY 1. How can it be March so soon? We haven't had a winter, but daffodils are up, and the forsythia has green buds. Everyone is talking about the winnowing of the Democratic slate for president from two dozen diverse men and women to two old white men.

DAY 2. I call my friend who spent a year teaching English in China. "Wasn't it Wuhan where you
worked? It's on the news. They've totally closed it down because of an epidemic," I say.

"They couldn't possibly," she replies. "It's a huge city."

DAY 3. Laughing at the video of the whiny woman trapped on the cruise ship because of the virus who complains that her creme brulee arrived without burnt sugar on top. Are there no standards anymore?

DAY 4. The stock market is falling. They think it might be uncertainty about the virus from China. Our broker says it is a good time to invest our extra cash.

DAY 5. Lots of old people are sick in a nursing home in Washington State. Tom says it's our demographic that is most at risk from this new virus. I refuse to think of myself as vulnerable.

Day 6. A neighbor calls in a panic. There is now a case of coronavirus at the local hospital. 'Don't worry.' I reassure her. "Lots of people die every year from the flu."

DAY 7. We get a notice from the management of our senior community that they are shutting down the campus to visitors. This seems like an overreaction to me.

DAY 8. Maybe we should get to the supermarket. The news shows bare shelves. Tom buys six packages of mac and cheese and three large boxes of shelf-storage milk. I suggest we stop at a Chinese carry-out for lunch. This may be our last chance for anything but institutional food for a week or maybe two. We are ready.

Day 9. A memo announces that two employees of our adjacent nursing home have tested positive, and we are to shelter in our apartment. The governor has ordered all senior communities to self-isolate. Is this one of his political moves?

DAY 10. It takes a minute to absorb the words "world-wide pandemic.' The news from Italy is bad. My need to be an autonomous adult is moot. I am now a team player. I turn over decision making to the experts and my life to our community’s competent management.

Day 11. Our cooked dinner, mail, drugstore deliveries, grocery orders, and even the *Times* are dropped at our apartment by a masked courier who is far down the hall before we get the door open. Our management and team have thought of everything. I hope they know how much we appreciate their efforts.

Day 12. Is all this slowing of life on the planet good for the environment? The skies they say are clearing over China, but here the garbage dumps are filling with carry-out food containers. Dinner arrives in at least 10. Our chef keeps us happy with gooey desserts and yummy cookies, and we eat them all. Those of us who survive the virus will die of obesity if we don't get some self-discipline soon.

DAY 13. The sun comes out after nap time, and we walk through the woods to the beach. Everyone who can negotiate the gravel paths is out and wants to chat. Some carefully observe the 6-foot rule. I step back when they don't but this is not enough for a power walker who approaches. "Get away from the path," she yells and holds her breath as she runs past us. "I don't intend to die from this bug," she shouts over her shoulder.
Day 14. The novelty of being incarcerated with no schedule of daily activities is wearing thin. I feel our world is closing in. Once less than a decade ago, almost the whole world was ours to explore. Later airports and subways became overwhelming. Then driving on the expressway and now the circle has tightened to just our apartment and the paths nearby. What is next? Just our bedroom? Our son calls from New England. I tell him I’m feeling trapped and I’m afraid this will not end anytime soon. He says he will commandeer a boat and pick me up off the beach. It’s a joke, but I feel my panic is acknowledged.

DAY 15. I have no right to feel sorry for myself. I have a spouse, a roomy apartment, and plenty to eat and the ability to hike on uneven ground with the help of walking sticks. I think of people living alone with no one to hug them, people dependent on walkers or scooters or wheelchairs. I weep for the spouses who are forbidden to visit their loved ones in the hospital or health center. All I can do is tell them by phone that we are thinking of them. Jan tells me she can see the nursing home entrance from her balcony and watch the ambulances back up. Then one day it was her husband they carried out and the next day they told her he was dead. Mary says she never thought their 72-year marriage would end like this. A nurse called to say she is holding his hand as he dies. "I hope he thought it was me," Mary says. Ted says he’s doing fine, but his wife in Memory Care has been tested positive and is in hospice care. Several days later, she rallies, and it is he who succumbs.

DAY 16. I’m spending more time on the telephone than a teenager. Now, most of the world is at home, and we hear from distant cousins, kindergarten pals, and college roommates. We elderly have a bond of shared memories. These days are fearful, like the attacks on Pearl Harbor and 9/11. The quarantine reminds us of being kept home from school with all the childhood diseases before there were vaccines and the summer of the polio scare when responsible parents forbade us from going to the public pool no matter how we cried.

DAY 17. Our daughter-in-law surprises us with a Zoom session with all our kids and grandkids spread across two continents, now all together on the screen in front of us. Each of their lives is disrupted in some way, but they all look healthy, smiling from their separate warrens, alone but connected.

DAY 18. How long can we go without having our eyes checked, our teeth cleaned, our toenails clipped, our hair done, our apartment cleaned? What happened to climate change, immigrants, the Middle East, cancer, college costs? Covid-19 has eclipsed all our other worries.

DAY 19. On television, the talking heads are working from home, giving us a peek into their private lives. I almost miss their messages as I scrutinize the walls behind them. Faux old-world maps are popular, and there are often packed shelves, books neatly arranged by color or size. How disappointing the correspondents don’t wear their sweats or PJs for the broadcast.

DAY 20. At first, the residents here who died were people we never knew. They were moved to the nursing home before we moved in. Then the fatalities were people we knew who had been sick for many years. The latest deaths are men, all men, who added to the community, flirted with the ladies, chaired committees, gave lectures. The last one was not in the nursing home. He lived down the hall in apartments like ours.

DAY 21. Today the forsythia is in full bloom. We are starting our third week of self-isolation. Over
1000 people have died across the country. The governor says this is only the beginning. Maybe I will still have time to label those old photos stored in the back of the closet. …