

COVID-19: Facing Uncertainty Mountain Residents Find Optimism

The Unemployed Working Class

BY ZEV BLUMENFELD

Reporter

In the lower unit of a two-story home, Crestline residents Ronnie Parker and his fiancé Priscilla Murphy are rearranging the furniture in their studio apartment to pass the time.

“We’re moving our bed to another spot in the room. We want to make the nursery bigger, so there’s more room for the baby,” Ronnie said.

The couple welcomed their son, Dillinger, into the world in January. Though it’s only been three months since Dillinger’s birth, a lot has changed since then.

Back in January, Ronnie worked as a dishwasher at two restaurants while Priscilla took care of their son. He recounted his routine before the COVID-19 pandemic as waking up, going to work, returning home and going to sleep. As a one-income household, the couple said they managed their monthly expenses on a shoestring budget, paying their rent on time and pur-

chasing the necessities.

But in mid-March, governmental bodies ramped up their response to COVID-19, forcing closures of mountain retailers and restaurants. Like many, Ronnie found himself unemployed, questioning how his family would pay the bills.

For families living paycheck-to-paycheck before the shutdown, the change has been daunting, stressful and worrisome. Many feel imperiled as they watch their bank accounts dwindle. Amid the financial squeeze, some find themselves dependent upon community resources like food banks and church-distributed meals.

How long the COVID-19 shutdown lasts remains to be seen, but families are trying to make the best of an otherwise hapless situation.

“At first, I felt a little panicked and anxious,” said Daryl Lohmeyer, a substitute bus driver for the Rim of the World School District. “Obviously, there’s not going to be a need for a substitute bus driver when there’s not going to be anybody to drive.”

Daryl’s supervisor informed him of the potentially imminent district-wide shutdown on March 13. A week later, the school district announced its closure. Daryl said that his supervisor’s warning enabled him to submit all the necessary paperwork to collect a final paycheck — a paycheck he and his family depend on.

Daryl is part of a single-income family. He lives with his wife Linda and their son James, who has Down syndrome.

Before the layoffs, Linda managed James’ homeschooling while Daryl worked as a bus driver — sometimes spending between 10 to 11 hours per day away from his family.

“I’ve seen my family more now than before COVID-19,” Daryl said. “It’s brought us closer together.”

The break from work has given Daryl and Linda more opportunities to communicate and coordinate with each other.

“Even though our son seems to want our attention every min-

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Ronnie, Priscilla and their son Dillinger get some fresh air amid the COVID-19 pandemic. They are one of the many families affected by the COVID-19 job layoffs. PHOTO BY MARLISA MCLAUGHLIN

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ute, we can get him interested in playing with his matchbox cars, drawing, reading or doing an online class video. When he's doing that it gives us time to talk and check in with each other," Daryl said.

COVID-19 has prompted many changes in family life. Both Ronnie and Daryl said they appreciate the abundance of time they now have with their families.

Ronnie and Priscilla described their routine as getting up, making breakfast and playing with Dillinger. After lunch, they walk around their neighborhood — exercise they normally wouldn't schedule.

"We're taking the time to take care of our home and do the things we haven't been able to do," Priscilla said.

They even eat meals with the people living in the apartment above them.

Despite spending more time with

their families, questions about paying rent and affording the essentials remain unanswered, especially if COVID-19 continues until August.

Daryl said that if the shutdowns continue into autumn, and he's without a job, he won't be able to pay bills.

The families were also concerned about making trips to the grocery store. "It's been kind of scary," Ronnie said about the changes. "We get food stamps once a month. So we try to buy stuff and make it last through the whole month."

While Ronnie and Priscilla said they depend on food stamps, organizations like Rim Family Services and food banks, they skip attending some services.

"I don't do it all the time because other people need it more than we do," Ronnie said.

Grocery shopping presents another consideration for Daryl. Linda has chronic lymphocytic leukemia, a cancer that starts in the bone marrow but moves to the blood. Though she's completed chemotherapy, Daryl said that her im-



James (front) helps his mother, Linda (back), sanitize their groceries. The family must be especially careful as Linda has chronic lymphocytic leukemia, a cancer that weakens her immune system and elevates her risk of contracting COVID-19.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DARYL LOHMEYER



Ronnie and Priscilla sew homemade masks. On April 7, San Bernardino County's Acting Public Health Officer Dr. Erin Gustafson ordered mandatory face covering when leaving home.

PHOTO BY MARLISA MCCLAUGHLIN



Daryl, Linda and James bond over a game of Candy Land. Daryl said that despite being out of work, he has appreciated the extra family time.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DARYL LOHMEYER

Easter Hope

from Pastor Bill Mellinger,
Crestline First Baptist Church

As we come to Easter Sunday, I am hopeful that the medical community is getting a handle on the fight against Covid-19.

I AM HOPEFUL!

I am hopeful that the government is discerning the best ways to get our economy going again.

I am hopeful that fewer people will get deathly sick from the coronavirus.

I am hopeful because people are reaching out to one another (in safe ways) and helping their neighbors.

I am hopeful because the message of Easter is that Jesus Christ conquered the grave through his resurrection from the dead.

I Am Hopeful!

"Live Worship" on Facebook,
Easter Sunday at 10:30 AM at
our website crestlinefbc.com.

We welcome prayer requests at
crestlinefbc@msn.com.
533 Springy Path, Crestline 338-1918

You are also welcome to get a cup of
coffee, soup, a sandwich or pastries at
Higher Grounds Coffee House. We are
serving "To Go Orders" only at this time.
23776 Lake Drive, Crestline 589-2772

"Buy One Get One"
free latte at
Higher Grounds
Coffee House

immune system is vulnerable to infection.

"I'm usually the one, that when we need something, goes to the store," he said. "We try to be smart with our shopping. We try to buy for a couple of weeks at a time."

He's attempting to abide by the mercurial changes in government-issued safety procedures. Daryl disinfects the shopping cart before shopping and cleans his purchases before transferring them into the car. When he arrives home, the family sanitizes the groceries on a designated countertop, before moving them to a 'clean zone.'

Daryl said his family also gets help through community food banks and churches like the Mountain Food Pantry and First Baptist Church.

"It's kind of ironic because we volunteer at our church, which hosts a food bank once a month. But here we are, feeling this end of it, being served as opposed to serving," Daryl said.

Perhaps most profoundly, the pandemic has exposed a system in which those who were living paycheck-to-paycheck before the shutdowns are now being forced to choose between waiting for governmental assistance or find-

ing new employment despite the safety warnings and negative health ramifications. Those choosing the latter put themselves and their families at a higher risk for contracting COVID-19.

Ronnie said he got a gig doing yard work, but it's not regular employment. For the time being, he is prioritizing his family's health over job hunting.

"I don't want to bring the disease into my household, and I'm not trying to spread it to other people," Ronnie said.

Others like Daryl must find work.

Daryl said that when the school district closed, he started applying for jobs on the popular job website Indeed. Though he hopes to find a job, he's worried about the possibility of becoming infected and transmitting it to Linda.

Initially, he sought employment within the mountain communities. He browsed for jobs requiring a commercial driver's license, hoping this would provide a seamless transition from his work driving school buses.

Driving a truck also means less person-to-person contact, reducing the susceptibility of infection.

Daryl said he did not want to work

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Years

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MT. CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH

27415 School Road, Lake Arrowhead • (909) 337-1412
(behind Rim of the World High School off Highway 18)

Senior Pastor: Randy Buecheler

Sunday Worship Services:

8 a.m., 9:30 a.m. (Contemporary), 11 a.m.

Sunday School: 9:30 a.m., Children's Church: 11 a.m.

Wednesday Nights: Awana, Adult Bible Study, Youth Groups
www.mclutheran.com

OUR LADY OF THE LAKE CATHOLIC CHURCH

27642 Rim of the World Drive, Crest Park • (909) 337-2333

Daily Mass: Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.

Saturday Masses: 6 p.m. (English), 7:30 p.m. (Spanish)

Sunday Masses: 9 a.m., 11:30 a.m., Family/Lifeteen

www.mountaincatholic.org

SANDALS CHURCH

Real with Ourselves, God & Others

Weekend services are currently online and can be viewed at:
live.sandalschurch.tv

Saturday: 4:15pm and 6:00pm

Sunday: 8:15am, 10:00am, 11:45am, 5:00pm and 7:00pm

Ian Price - Campus Pastor

<https://sandalschurch.com/locations/lakearrowhead/>

SHILOH MESSIANIC CONGREGATION

170 South Dart Canyon Road, Crestline • (909) 338-4846

Friday Shabbat: 7 p.m.

Sunday Torah Study: 10 a.m.

www.shilohmessianic.com

ST. FRANCES CABRINI CATHOLIC CHURCH

23079 Crest Forest Drive, Crestline. • (909) 338-2303

Mass: Sat. 5:00 p.m. • Sun. 9:30 am English & 12 pm Spanish

Daily Mass: Monday - Friday, 8:30 am

Confession: Every Saturday at 4:00 pm or by appointment.

Anointing of the sick: 5th Sat. of the month* at 5:00 pm
Mass

TWIN PEAKS COMMUNITY CHURCH

26032 Highway 189, Twin Peaks • (909) 337-3011

Senior Pastor: Mike Whisner

Sunday Worship Service: 10:30 a.m.

www.twinpeakschurch.net

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in the foothill or high desert cities. But his applications have gone unanswered, impelling him to widen his search and apply to warehouse jobs in San Bernardino.

Deferring his student loans is another challenge. Daryl said he has made multiple phone calls to his loan company, but often waits on hold for over forty minutes. After being connected with representatives, he was given a morass of misdirection to information online, often unrelated to his question.

Filing for unemployment, student loans and job searching fill most of his day.

"I've probably been spending an average of two to three hours on the phone every day and two to three hours online. In between that, it's entertaining my child, helping my wife with homeschooling and [washing] dishes," Daryl said, laughing.

Faced with economic hardship and uncertainty, both families said they are trying to remain optimistic. Ronnie and Priscilla find time to exercise, pushing Dillinger in the stroller during their walks around the neighborhood.

"We spend more time together as a family because I'm usually gone, working," Ronnie said. "I'm just trying to be positive and I hope everything goes well,"

Daryl and Linda join in a daily bible study through video conferencing applications. He uses applications like Zoom and Facetime to update his siblings and parents who live in the Midwest. Daryl says video chatting helps remind him that other people are experiencing similar circumstances.

"We do weekly check-ins like,



Ronnie, Priscilla, Dillinger and their friend Marlisa share a meal. Ronnie said he and Priscilla frequently eat meals with their neighbors.

COURTESY OF RONNIE PARKER

"Hey, how are you doing?" he said, laughing. "So that's been encouraging — that's been good."

This technology has also made it possible for Daryl to continue leading a junior high and high school group from the Christian Service Brigade. They discuss future service projects and play games like scavenger hunts. One boy will think of an object, for example, a spoon. Over webcam, he will describe the object to the other boys. When the boys guess correctly, they run and find the object in their homes. The first one to find it wins.

Daryl said he has been grateful

to engage in the new norm of web-based communication.

"I believe that God's going to provide for us. Through the means of others and the kindness in their hearts is one of those ways," Daryl said. "At the same time, to be honest, there are moments when it doesn't seem evident that I'm going to be provided for, so there's that stress, that anxiety. 'What should I be doing?' 'What can I be doing on my own?' Even when those efforts seem to be somewhat hopeless, the only thing I have at the end of the day is to remain positive."