

# Care, compassion

As we enter the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic, we publish three moving accounts of wonderful care delivered in the most trying of circumstances and the lasting legacy the virus has on those left behind

## Waiting for closure

Jean Ryder's daughter **Karen Ellis** remembers her parents' time at the Royal Star & Garter, Surbiton, Jean's sudden death, and why she's still waiting for closure.

**M**y mother just loved people and she saw the good in everybody. She had polio as a young mother of two daughters and afterwards never wanted her disability to prevent her from doing anything. I'll never forget my husband and brother assisting her down the steep bank to the river when we went white-water rafting in Indonesia!

My parents moved in together to Royal Star & Garter, Surbiton, in May 2014. They used to visit a friend at the old Richmond Home for 10 years, so they knew it was wonderful. My father said he loved the ethos. I used to live abroad, and would visit my parents every six weeks or so. One day, my father said he thought it was time that they moved into a care home as he could no longer look after my mother and needed care himself. My mother, who was now living with



dementia, said she didn't mind as long as they stayed together. My father felt he didn't need to visit the Surbiton Home before they moved in, he just said that that they were going to Royal Star & Garter!

In January 2018, my father was diagnosed with lung cancer. Knowing that my mother would be loved and well looked after definitely helped him over his final few months. I also think being in the



Home helped 'heal' my father. It helped him face the shadows and horrible things that happened in the war. He'd only talk about the funny and light-hearted moments with his family, but in the Home there were a few people who had seen similar things he had so he could really open up with them. He faced some of those skeletons in the cupboard, and I actually think that made it a little bit easier for him to depart this world.

He died in 2018. My mother and I sat with my father for a while, we held hands and cried. I always thought I'd be by my mother's side when her time came, but I wasn't. Covid-19 was a step too far.

### Smiling and interacting

In lockdown, after visits had stopped, the Home arranged Zoom calls between residents and relatives. My mother and I really enjoyed these. We looked forward to them. The last time I saw my mother was on one of these Zoom calls, on Thursday (7 May) morning. The Saturday before, residents had been tested but there was a problem at the lab and my mother didn't get her result. In hindsight, my mother had a slight cough two weeks before, but she often had a little tickle. We thought that there was nothing to be concerned about even though she was a little breathless, we had no idea she had Covid-



# and kindness

19. I read her poems and a short story. She told me how much she liked a happy ending. We usually sang together but didn't on this occasion because of her breathlessness. She was in a good mood, she was smiling and interacting with our chatter. There were no alarm bells ringing.

Later that afternoon, the Home Manager, Helena, called to say she was concerned, and that they were putting my mother in isolation because she suspected it was Covid-19. On Friday her body started to close down. Helena rang and asked if I wanted to come in. I have underlying health issues and felt it unwise, and Helena agreed. I told her I would remember our final Zoom call. I just wanted to keep that Thursday morning with me, rather than what was happening in real life.

The Home was excellent. They kept me constantly informed. My mother died on Saturday morning nine days from her 89th birthday. From her point of view, I'm glad it was quick. Obviously, it was a shock, but I remember how she was in our last Zoom session, and that has been the biggest comfort to me.

## Only happy memories

I only have happy memories of Royal Star & Garter and I still feel part of the family. It was a huge part of my life for six years. I couldn't be there with my mother at the end, but the Royal Star & Garter staff (or family as I prefer to say) were with her, and that made it much easier for me. With this difficult time, I can only reflect that the staff put their lives at risk looking after my mother and I will be appreciative of that forever. The Home has been very supportive of relatives. It's part of the ethos, and what the charity stands for, which is so valuable to the resident and their family.

I can't wait until the Home is fully open again and I can go back and have my closure. It's really strange, because right up to the funeral part of me thought my mother was still living at the Home, I had sat with my father as he died and that made it real for me. I didn't see my mother in the short time when she was deteriorating, so I need to get back and say my goodbyes. ct

## Supergran

Betty Dawson served in the WAAF between 1942-1945. Her daughter **Pauline Dain** pays tribute to Betty, and discusses how hard it was to lose her Mum at the height of the pandemic.

Mum was a warm and thoughtful person, she was always interested in what her family was doing, even when she was 97. The fact she was known to her granddaughters as 'Supergran' says it all!

She was also an adventurer. She lived up north and loved walking and climbing hills in the Lake District. She was also very competitive, as anyone who saw her play scrabble at Royal Star & Garter will testify to. If she went swimming she would have to swim one length more than her friends. If she went for a walk, she'd have to walk furthest.

Mum was visited at Royal Star & Garter by her daughters, granddaughters and great granddaughters. The staff quickly learnt all our names and shared mum's joy from these visits.



*You're never ready to say goodbye to your mum."*

Mum had served in the WAAF during the war, and moved into Royal Star & Garter in 2016, when she was 93. She loved her time there. She really enjoyed physiotherapy, it appealed to her competitive nature, she always wanted to do more. A volunteer would come in every week to play scrabble with her, and that was a real highlight. She loved the music, the exercise groups, the many volunteers she got to know and all the entertainment that was organised. She made new friends.

Nobody wants to put their mum into a home if I'm honest, but it was amazing. It gives you your relationship with your parent back. Instead of being her carer, I could be Mum's daughter again, and that was amazing. You could tell she was loved by the staff.

I last visited mum on 13 March. A few days later the Home had to close its doors (due to Covid-19) and she died on 8 April. She had a respiratory condition and issues with her chest. We used to have window visits and speak over the phone, but these were very stressful and distressing for both my mum and me. I could see she was deteriorating.

I got to sit with her in her room the day before she died, on 7 April. I think she knew I was there. I wasn't there when she died, but a nurse she was very fond of ►