



Royal Star & Garter

Care with courage

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dementia Action Week: Judi recalls the pressure of caring for husband living with dementia

To mark Dementia Action Week, which runs from 17-23 May, Royal Star & Garter is supporting Alzheimer Society's 'Cure the care system' campaign, which is calling on the government to provide quality social care, that is free and easy to access, no matter where you live. Judi's story highlights the benefits of positive adult social care.

There were times when Judi Heath didn't know how she was going to cope. The strain and pressure of caring for her husband at home, who lives with dementia, was leaving her exhausted physically and mentally.

Her family feared the impact this was having on her own health. Although Judi was desperate to continue caring for her husband of nearly 60 years, she realised that at the age of 79, she couldn't.

Alan, who served three years in the Army as part of his National Service, is now a resident at Royal Star & Garter, a charity which provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia. It means he receives expert round-the-clock care in state-of-the-art settings, providing Judi with peace of mind that her husband is well looked after.



Judi meeting Alan at one of Royal Star & Garter's indoor meeting rooms

Judi said Alan first started coming to Royal Star & Garter's High Wycombe Home in February 2020 as a day care guest. She said: "Alan loved the days there and because of the military connection he would call it the Headquarters. When he was getting picked up he'd say to me 'I'm off to HQ!' That for me was absolutely marvellous. He enjoyed going."

It also provided her with invaluable respite: "It was absolutely amazing, suddenly I had time to myself. I could go shopping, see friends, play golf. We had a carer in the mornings but I couldn't be more than 10 minutes away. I was on call all the time, so having those few hours was amazing."



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But when the pandemic forced Royal Star & Garter to pause day care, Judi was left caring for Alan while his health deteriorated, and she battled to cope. She said: "I was struggling to care for Alan on my own. I was finding it hard and I was heading for a nervous breakdown. It was particularly difficult looking after him at night. I was getting more tired and upset. My sons could see I couldn't cope."

The family were offered a permanent place for Alan at the High Wycombe Home, and though Judi knew it was the right thing to do, she struggled with the thought of being separated from her husband and not being able to care for him. "I was in a situation where I didn't want him to go, even though I knew he had to because I couldn't keep going," Judi said. "Even though I knew it was the right thing for both of us, it was very raw for me. We've been together a long time and suddenly I wasn't caring for him... that was really hard. So the night before he went I wrote a letter and put it in his suitcase. It was for the staff, and I hoped they'd find it when putting away Alan's clothes. I wrote that Alan was the love of my life, and to please look after him. And they have."



Alan and Judi on their wedding day in 1963



Alan is now cared for at Royal Star & Garter

Judi now makes regular use of the indoor visiting rooms at the Home, where she's able to chat and hold Alan's hand while wearing full PPE, which includes a clear face mask so that he can recognise his wife and understand her better.

She added: "I miss Alan and I do shed tears, but those tears are for my loss. Alan is in a lovely Home being cared for by the most wonderful people. They are superb. My God, I can't believe how lucky we are to have Alan at Royal Star & Garter. Nothing compares to it."

Royal Star & Garter is welcoming new residents to its Homes in Solihull, Surbiton and High Wycombe. For further information, visit www.starandgarter.org



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Captions:



Alan Heath 1: Judi meeting Alan at one of Royal Star & Garter's indoor meeting rooms



Alan Heath 2: Alan and Judi on their wedding day in 1963



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Alan Heath 3: Alan is now cared for at Royal Star

& Garter

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About Royal Star & Garter

Our charity provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia.

Twitter: @starandgarter

Facebook: facebook.com/starandgarter

Website: www.starandgarter.org



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Royal Star & Garter
is a member of the
National Care Forum