Mr Roberts
Mr Roberts is 93 and a half and lives on his own in a bungalow in Market Harborough, where he has lived for 56 years. His wife, who he was married to for over 50 years, died 17 years ago. He lives a simple life and wants to hold onto his independence.

“I don’t like life in excess”
Family pride

Mr Roberts takes great pride in his two sons. "I've had two sons who had rather special lives". These days they are busy with their own families and their careers, having lived far away from home for a big part of their lives.

Phil, his older son, got his diploma as a teacher and taught for a while, before moving into HIV education, and later becoming a consultant. He lived in Algeria, Papua New Guinea and Wales. He has been married three times, had three children and is currently living in Bangkok with his third wife, who is Thai.

Mr Roberts’ younger son, William, was a diplomat and lived in many places around the world, spending four years in the UK and four years abroad. William and his family used to live nearby but they moved to Norfolk last year because he got a job in North Anglia University. Mr Roberts seems used to having his children and grandchildren living far from him and accepts it as it is.

“We were the centre and they travelled the world”

History

Mr Roberts speaks proudly of his time during World War II, when he trained as a radar mechanic, spending time repairing radars used to listen out for bomb attacks. When he retired he wrote a journal about his time in the army, narrating his experiences and documenting the evolution of radar technology.

After the war he became a teacher in a local primary school, it was the same school he studied in as a child. He worked there for over 30 years and became deputy head.

Mr Roberts likes to stay connected with the school. In 2007, when the school was celebrating their 100th anniversary, they invited him and he enjoyed the day. He mentions that the turnover of staff means he feels disconnected from the school, which feels like a missed opportunity for the local children to meet a knowledgeable man and great storyteller.

“The country was in such a state, I decided to join the army, aged 17. I was trained and became a radar mechanic.”
The close

Mr Roberts and his wife moved into the close 56 years ago and got to know their neighbours well, having all moved in at the same time and seen each other’s children grow and fly out of the nest. John has a great relationship with his neighbours, and they look after each other. “I’ve got marvellous neighbours. There’s a sort of informal neighbourhood watch where we look out for each other. There’s a signal in the street, if the curtains are drawn in the morning and not the next morning, it means there’s danger.”

He has a neighbour, Sue, who he is very close to, she is 80. Sue comes in often and helps him out doing some small bits of shopping, taking the bins out and collecting the post. While we were visiting, Sue came in with her dog, and brought Mr Roberts some shopping: two kinds of dark chocolate and shampoo. She likes to make sure he is OK and they chat about current affairs and their families. They care for each other and have a great sense of humour.

Sue Have you told them how we call the close?
John We call it ‘god’s waiting room’ and ‘the departure lounge’.

Home

Mr Roberts’ home is well looked after, with lots of pictures of him and his wife, his sons, grandchildren and great grandchildren. His house has been adapted for him to move comfortably and avoid falls. He has a beautiful garden where he used to grow vegetables; he changed the vegetables for roses when he decided growing vegetables just for himself wasn’t necessary and he couldn’t do it anymore. Now he has a gardener who comes in regularly. “My aim is to stay here. I have memories around, people around me. I don’t want to go to a care home. This is where I want to be.”
**Hospital stay after a fall**

Mr Roberts was able to do most things until he had a fall 3 and a half years ago, which meant he had to have a hip operation and stay in hospital for 6 weeks. “I was in the hall, I turned and I fell. I crawled to the phone, I pulled the cable and the base of the phone fell, but not the phone, so I was on the floor for a long time. My neighbour Sue came in and helped me out.”

After his stay in hospital, at 90 years old, he had to stop driving “it enabled me to go on a holiday in this country”, “my world is narrowed.”

**Holding down to independence**

Mr Roberts likes to do things for himself and forces himself to do the things he is able to do. During his stay in hospital they encouraged him to do the things he could do “If I can do it, I do it.”

He is proud of some of the things he can do, like turning the oven on, washing the dishes and ironing his clothes. He also likes to set himself challenges “I do a crossword every day” and he assesses how he is doing.

“I used to walk the hedge four times a year ago, it was a marathon for me, today I did it two times.”

**Cutting down on carer’s time**

After Mr Roberts came back from his hospital stay he had 4 carers, then he went down to 3, then down to 2 and now he only has one carer who comes in for 30 minutes.

“I went down to one carer because if I can do it myself, I do it.”

**Stimulating activities**

Mr Roberts has many interests and likes to keep his mind very active. He likes listening to classical music and loves sport. He is looking forward to watching Leicester City and The European Cup. He knows what’s going on and likes to hear the news every day after lunch “I’ve got time to think”, “I was keen to remain in.”
**Socialising**

He has spent his life surrounded by people; when he was in the army, then teaching in a school, and maintaining an active retirement. At the moment, living on his own, he doesn’t have many people to talk with. “I suppose that’s why I talk so much.”

Mr Roberts receives a call every week from a lady who volunteers at Royal Voluntary Society, to have a chat with him. “She calls up on a Thursday, to see if I still exist.”

Mr Roberts seems used to using his phone to connect with his family, having his family not around, he relies on the phone to connect with his sons and grandchildren. “We’ve got to try life as it is. It would be nice to have family around.” “We get on well together but we are like ships passing by, seeing each other every now and then.”

**Food as a necessity**

For Mr Roberts food isn’t a focal point. He knows what he likes and he likes to stick to it, not willing to try new things. His shopping list is always the same and he specifies the brand that he wants “400g white loaf, John West sardines, Schweppes lemonade...” He seems to like to have the effort taken out for him, as cooking was something his wife used to do. “Fortunately I married a good cook”

**Food routine**

For breakfast, Mr Roberts has cereal or porridge and a cup of coffee. He has a precooked meal delivered by icare at lunchtime and a light meal at 5 o’clock that he prepares himself: herbal tea and a cold salad or fresh fruit.
Precooked meals

He wants to keep his independence, and after his fall, he realised that he needs one hand free to make sure he doesn’t fall. That’s why he decided to order precooked meals. Mr Roberts orders his meals through icare, a service that brings him precooked food (by Apetito) every day and does some of the shopping for him.

Mr Roberts enjoys eating off of a hot plate, so whilst he does not prepare the food himself, he uses his oven to warm his plate up. He’ll do this about 15 minutes before a lady from icare comes to deliver his food. The lady comes in with a friendly smile, unwraps a meal, places it in the oven and serves it on Mr Roberts’ plate. “£6 a day for a meal and a sweet” icare give Mr Roberts a form to fill in on a Monday and he returns it the next day, filled in. They bill him every month via direct debit.

“Ladies are always cheerful when they come. They have 33 people to deliver so they don’t have much time.”

“We have the food of the world at our doorstep.”
**Medicines**

He has a pack sent by post with his medicines, that he manages himself. He takes pills for his knees and for cholesterol.

**Eating as a social event**

While we were visiting, he seemed to enjoy having a chat whilst eating, talking about his time in the war and about his family and friends. "I am a slow eater, and also I am talking too much"

When asked if he would like company whilst having his meal, Mr Roberts answered "it depends what sort of company" he wants people to come out of their own will "if you don't want to come, don't come."
Food for Life Better Care works with care settings, hospitals and in the community to tackle malnutrition and loneliness among older people. Good food and enjoyable mealtimes can dramatically improve health and wellbeing, and aid recovery from illness or surgery. However, supporting older people to eat a nutritious diet, and to drink enough fluids, whether they reside at home or in care, can sometimes be a challenge.

In July and August 2016, we conducted research with older people in Leicestershire to understand their day-to-day experiences of food. This story was kindly shared by Mr Roberts.*

*Names have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants.