

Marjorie Cole

Chapel Steward Marjorie Cole at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea tells of her life of Christian faith.

Marjorie Cole is everything you would want to be in retirement – energetic, spritely and inquisitive. Proud as punch to be a Chelsea Pensioner, her five years at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, have been packed with ceremonial occasions, royal visits and meeting celebrities. Her lively sense of humour sparkles through all of her stories, as she recalls the adventure of living in Chelsea. The slightly mischievous twinkle in her eyes belies the challenging emotional life Marjorie has had until recently.

Delighted to be a Chelsea Pensioner and wear the cherished red coat with pride, Marjorie arrived at the Royal Hospital Chelsea on 27 July 2009, to be one of only three women residents. She said, "Life began at 65 for me – my birthday was on Sunday 26 July, so I arrived on the Monday making Chelsea my new home."

Originally hoping to work in farming because she adores animals, Marjorie changed her mind and by the age of 17, she had taken the Queen's shilling and joined the Army as a Private in the Women's Royal Army Corps, eventually reaching the rank of Lance Corporal and specialising in catering. Her service life led her to Singapore and Malaya in 1965 to 1966, and she displays



her campaign medals proudly on her cherry red uniform jacket.

After leaving the Army, following the death of her father, Marjorie dedicated her life to nursing her sick mother, who eventually died from stomach cancer one St

Valentine's day and then her ill sister Margaret, who was to succumb to the same type of stomach cancer just six years later. Marjorie never married. She felt as though she had nobody left.

A devoted Christian, Marjorie was suffering from depression.

One week, feeling very low, she attended a fellowship group. She said, "We all held hands and I just felt an incredible warmth come through me. I started crying but it really helped me – just to know I was cared for."

Now a Chapel Steward at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, Marjorie said, "I will be in the chapel all day Wednesday. I welcome visitors and those coming to worship."

"I am always pleased to speak with people about the chapel and its history and about what life is like as a Chelsea Pensioner. I am also responsible for things like the alms boxes (which have been broken into on occasion) and for the service sheets. I can help out at weddings and funerals as well as regular daily services. Anyone can marry here – we are very lucky; we have some of the best musicians in London."

Full of life and joy, Marjorie's delight at being a Chelsea Pensioner is obvious. She said, "I love it! I write letters, give speeches when I am invited to, read and meditate. My faith definitely brought me here. I have loved and lost my mother and my sister and, in 2002, suffered a minor stroke as a result of the stress I was living with. I do believe the Lord has a plan for us. Only He knows what that is. My reward was in coming here. We are all God's family and we all serve the Lord."

Recognising how tough life



can be for the retired elderly, Marjorie said, "Life would be very difficult for me had I not come here. I would be worried about things like paying for electricity. I think I would be really lonely, but here at the Royal Hospital I am really busy and have lots of friends. My Army pension comes to the Royal Hospital to pay for my stay, but I keep my state pension. I am very, very fortunate. At the Royal Hospital, I pay for my glasses, but the rest of my health care is taken care of."

There's no slacking though. Breakfast is served from 0730 to 0830, lunch at 1230 to 1330 and supper from 1700 to 1900. Marjorie laughed, "Not everyone makes it to supper" she says, grinning broadly "We eat so much at lunch, not everyone has room for more in the evening!"

Life as a Chelsea Pensioner literally keeps Marjorie on her toes. Having tripped the light fantastic with BBC Strictly Come Dancing show star Anton du Beke, she has also

met a number of members of the Royal Family. She quietly confided, "Prince Harry is my favourite!" When Dame Margaret Thatcher's ashes were interred at the Royal Hospital, Marjorie was proud and pleased to have been invited to carry the ashes in their casket to their final resting place, meeting both of the former Prime Minister's children, Mark and Carol Thatcher on the day. "It was a great honour" she said."

Cheerful and delighted to be sharing her story, Marjorie said,

"The best thing about the Royal Hospital is the care and camaraderie here. It makes me proud to be British. There is no more worrying; all of that is done for me."

For more information about the Royal Hospital, Chelsea and its pensioners visit www.chelsea-pensioners.co.uk