

ONE HEART

YOUR RAF BENEVOLENT FUND
NEWSLETTER

This is how we
are using the kind
help you give

FROM WRAF CAMARADERIE TO BEING ALONE IN THE PANDEMIC KEEPING ROSIE'S SPIRITS UP

As you can imagine, it would not have been safe to go and take a photo of Rosie (right) at the moment. So she very kindly used her iPad to take a picture for us. This is why it isn't quite as sharp as our usual cover images.

THANK YOU FOR
ENABLING US TO
MOVE SO QUICKLY
TO BRING HELP TO
THE RAF FAMILY IN
THE PANDEMIC



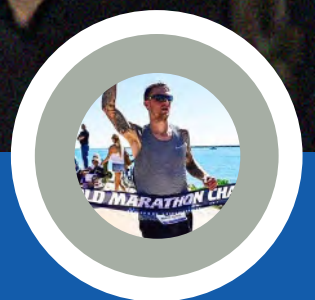
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How we are trying
hard to keep
everything else
going too



PAGE 3

Your fine support
enables us to move
fast to answer the RAF
Family's crisis needs



PAGE 4

It all comes down
to your wonderful
support

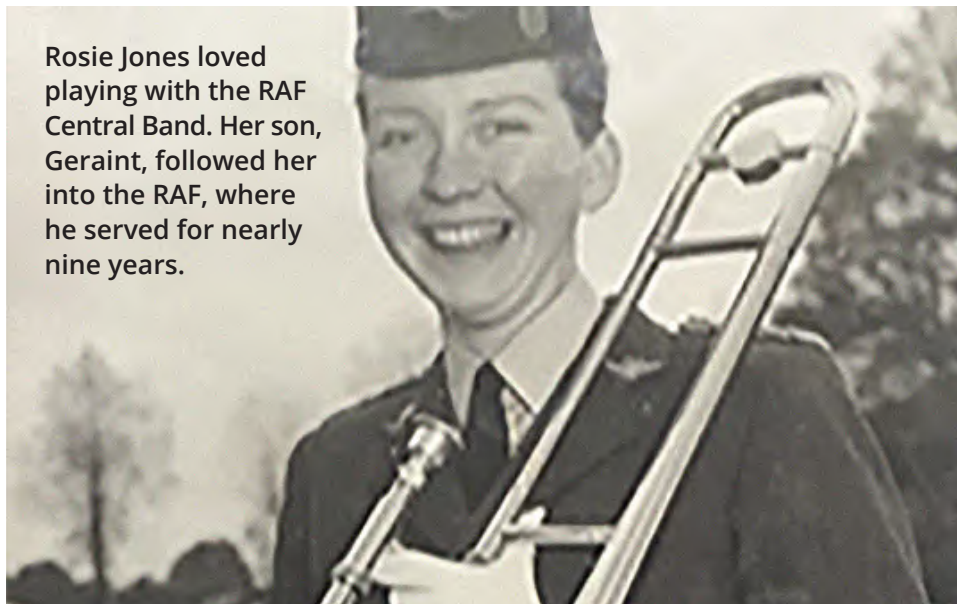


Royal Air Force
Benevolent Fund

OVERCOMING THE ODDS

"I DON'T LIKE GOING OUT AND SEEING EVERYBODY IN MASKS."

Rosie Jones loved playing with the RAF Central Band. Her son, Geraint, followed her into the RAF, where he served for nearly nine years.



Rosie Jones lives on her own "halfway up a mountain", and is one of hundreds of RAF veterans now receiving a regular 'Check and Chat' call – an emergency initiative we swiftly launched as the pandemic struck.

Since February, Rosie has been at home alone and will remain at risk due to her age and diabetes. "I really appreciate the check-up calls. I don't like going out and

seeing everybody in masks. I don't own up to being depressed, but I'm not happy. I'm not free anymore. I have an awful fear of my son Geraint becoming infected, it's a nasty big black cloud hanging over me.

"I loved it in the WRAF, being with lots of people," says Rosie, 83. "At square-bashing, I saw a photo of the RAF Central Band, and passed an audition into the RAF School of Music in Uxbridge. I said I'd like to learn the trombone please. I still play."

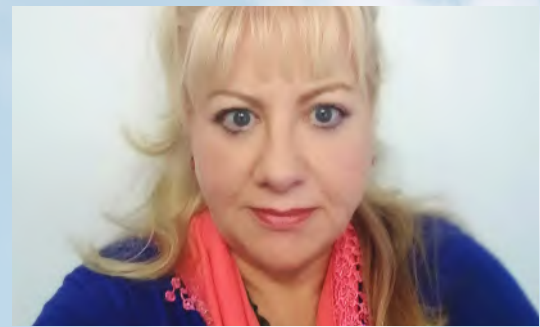
Rosie's conversation sparkles with RAF humour. "I remember the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) walking into the mess. They'd really improved the food for his

visit, and as I was carrying my ice-cream past him, he asked, 'Any complaints Airwoman?' and I replied, 'With respect Sir, may I suggest you come one day when you're not expected.' His entourage looked startled. A few days later, an RAF Officer asked 'Who was the Airwoman who complained about the food?' I thought I was in trouble, but he said 'Well done!'"

The first time Rosie met the RAF Benevolent Fund was when she found herself caring alone for her five-year-old son after divorce and leaving the WAAF. "I bought a teensy-weensy ironworker's cottage for £500. We didn't have a bath, the windows and door were hanging by a thread. I was given some help to fix them and was very grateful.

"Later, I played in the Astra band to raise money, to pay something back for the help I had."

It has been our honour more recently to turn donations into small things that make this veteran's life easier. "It costs £7 each way to get into Brecon with my Zimmer frame and big trolley, and my money quickly dribbles away. Without the help, I don't know what I would do."



CHECK AND CHAT: 4,000 CALLS TO RAF VETERANS

Vron Young is an RAF Benevolent Fund Social Engagement Worker supporting serving families at RAF Lossiemouth. "Check and Chat started as one-off welfare checks, but has evolved into a service sustaining 254 of the most vulnerable people we are in contact with during the crisis.

"Rosie is one of 22 veterans I call regularly. Another, Bessie, writes poetry in her head because she can hardly see, and she read one to me so I could write it down for her. They are both just wonderful.

"I was married to someone in the RAF for 25 years. That shared understanding means it's easy to talk. Some people have nobody else calling them."

ROAD TO RECOVERY

WE ARE TRYING TO KEEP EVERYTHING ELSE GOING TOO



As Leroy Francis comes to terms with not being able to return to work because of MS, we will continue to be here for him with your help.

While these strange new times have thrown up new needs, we have also been continuing to provide our RAF Family with help for all kinds of other reasons. This is thanks entirely to your support.

A life-changing new battle

For 26 years, Leroy Francis served on Tornados and Harriers as an Aircraft Weapons Systems Maintenance Manager. "I am passionate about what I did. My entire life was shaped by the military," he says quietly. I was in the Balkans, the Gulf, Germany for 14 years, and I travelled a lot.

At no time did he, or the RAF, ever imagine that minor health issues that cropped up from time to time were serious.

"I'd lost peripheral sight in my left eye for four months, but just carried on. Every few years there

CARING FOR OUR OWN

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR HELPING US DO THIS

Your support for the RAF Family has equipped us to move fast in the pandemic, to help people in new ways.

Elderly veterans and their partners

- Check and Chat phone calls to see what people need and fight loneliness.
- Video ‘visits’ to help people apply for help with immediate needs, while our volunteer case workers use reduced home visits to follow up if required.
- Renewals of annual grants without lots of paperwork.
- A bigger Advocacy team as more people need assistance in challenging Local Authorities to provide the right care for elderly RAF parents.

- Developing new ways to support elderly veterans in Sussex, as our respite break centre, Princess Marina House, has to sadly close.

Working-age veterans

- Extra people on our Legal Advice Helpline to provide anxious callers with help about employment rights and state benefits as job losses crash through Britain.
- A new, online process that uses donations to respond to applications for urgent help up to £750. This can be used by the whole RAF Family.

Serving families

- More mental health support through our Headspace service for partners and family members of serving personnel.
- A new Listening and Counselling Service to help combat a rise in mental health problems among young people aged 11+.
- Activity packs to keep RAF children busy, while our Airplay youth programme on Stations has been suspended.



“I work in an emergency department so we decided that it would be safest for me to move away from the family home to protect the children.

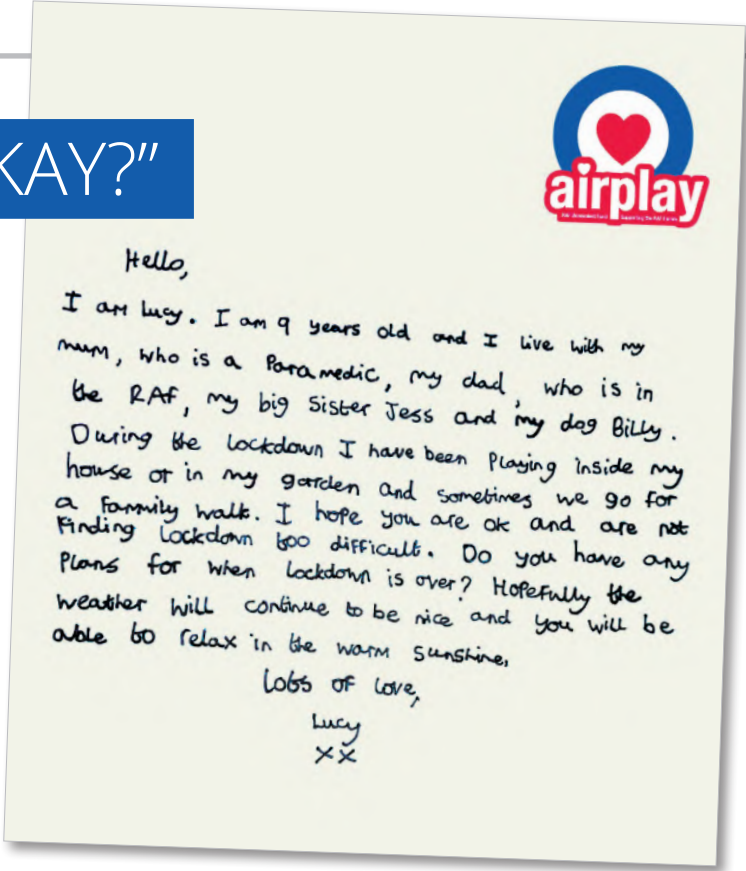
“The activity packs have been a big help. Our eldest has always found it hard being a military child, so the book helping with his emotions was a great way to show him ways to manage his feelings. The younger two had been harder to keep entertained, so these activities have really saved the day.”

Jemma Mullan, mother of three at RAF Odiham

“I HOPE YOU’RE OKAY?”

RAF children like Lucy came together during lockdown, through our Airplay programme, to write to older RAF Family members like Eileen Cockburn, the widow of an ex-serviceman.

Eileen said, “Please thank the children from the bottom of this old Essex lady’s heart. Receiving their letters was the best thing that could happen to a 93-year-old lady stuck indoors on her own for nine or ten weeks. I was feeling quite down but I felt so different when I started reading the letters.”



would be something else. But nobody put two and two together. It was only after leaving the RAF, when I had a major flare-up in 2010 while working in the rail industry that I found out I have Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

“The next big flare-up was last year. All my left side stopped working, and I ended up in hospital for five months. I couldn’t walk and now use a wheelchair. I’ve been off work for 16 months, and that’s not me.”

Many RAF people find it excruciatingly hard to ask for help. Leroy is one of them. “I was a very proud man. I didn’t want to burden

anyone. But when the RAF Benevolent Fund found out I was sleeping in the dining room and sitting on a stool at the sink in the utility room to wash, they wanted to assist.

Thanks to supporters, we were able to help. “Now I have a stairlift to get up to our bedroom, a shower, a recliner armchair and an orthopaedic bed. I was very happy when I was in the RAF to contribute to the Benevolent Fund, but it never crossed my mind I’d need help. I am so thankful for it.

“My new battle is MS. It is ongoing. I’ve been pushing myself

so hard to get back to my job, but last week, I’ve just made the hard decision to accept I cannot go back, and looking after my health is more important.”

If you would like to help make sure that we can still come to the aid of proud RAF people in desperate situations, please turn to the donation form and make a gift today. Thank you.



THIS MONTH IN RAF HISTORY

3 September 1939

Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and France declared war on Germany. South Africa and Canada entered the war on 5 and 10 September respectively. The RAF’s strength is now at 11,753 officers and 163,939 other ranks.



7 September 1940

The Battle of Britain fourth phase opened with almost 1000 Luftwaffe bombers despatched during the afternoon for an all-out onslaught on London. Night attacks followed in the next days.



RAF RESILIENCE PUSHED TO THE LIMITS



Luke's journey from life-changing injury in Afghanistan back to fitness and confidence was helped by people like you. We used donations to help Luke retrain for a job in the NHS.

Luke Wigman has literally come miles since he was seriously injured in Afghanistan by an IED in 2011, requiring ongoing surgery and rehabilitation. Just before lockdown, he completed the World Marathon Challenge *for the second time*: seven marathons in seven continents over seven days.

"The original plan was to run the first marathon in Antarctica," writes former RAF Senior Aircraftman (SAC) and RAF Benevolent Fund Ambassador Luke, "but poor weather conditions meant we had to run the first in Cape Town. Having not run a marathon for three years due to surgery, injuries and rehab, I was chuffed to manage 3 hours, 10 minutes for the first marathon of the challenge.

"The second day in Antarctica was the most brutal marathon I've ever run. I had a fall two miles into the race, cracking my head and elbow on the ice. The constant gale

force winds were exhausting. I was relieved that day three in Australia involved a relatively flat, 12-lap course.

"Day 4 was Dubai, day 5 was Spain. With only 15 hours recovery, this one was very tough. Day 6 in Brazil was 35 degrees and incredibly humid. Day 7, Miami, I was truly lost for words and over the moon.

"Having decided to take part just three weeks before flying out, I was proud to have been placed fourth in the men's category."

Luke has been helped by supporters of the RAF Benevolent Fund during his journey back to health. Donations paid towards the cost of advanced driving lessons after medical discharge from the Air Force so he could become an Emergency Care Assistant for East Midlands Ambulance Service, and also gave Luke a grant after rehabilitative surgery in 2018.

Luke has used his extraordinary feat across seven continents to raise money to help others in the RAF Family.

TELL US YOUR RAF STORY

There is a huge interest in the RAF Family in stories about people's time in the RAF, whether from a long time ago or more recently, from the person who lived it or from a proud family member.

If you have a personal or family anecdote about RAF life, please do tell your story here: rafbf.org/storylines

It could be about a close escape, a moment of camaraderie, a Christmas in married quarters, square-bashing in WWII, an example of RAF humour, or even a sobering moment which changed how someone saw life from then on.

We really look forward to reading and sharing it.

WHAT A GIFT IN YOUR WILL COULD DO

We have been receiving lots of calls from supporters who have been using more time at home to do the things it is so easy to keep putting off, like making or updating their Will.

If you might be interested in receiving our little booklet about how a gift in your Will could one day help someone in our RAF Family at a tragic or difficult time, please tick the box on the enclosed form, or contact Kate Galbraith at kate.galbraith@rafbf.org.uk or on 0333 355 1081.



Any gift you send today, large or small, will help make a lifechanging difference to members of our RAF Family. **The enclosed donation form makes it easy. Or you can call 020 7580 8343 or go online: rafbf.org.uk/oneheart**