**Carol’s speech for Age Concern Ball**

Now you know why we want a drop-in centre!

I would like to talk to you about my friend John Wright.

I met John when a friend of his contacted Age Concern. I was quite new to Age Concern at the time and I confess I was somewhat nervous about our first meeting because I had been told that John could be very difficult and had a history of falling out with people who tried to help him. John was 97 at this time.

John was distressed and confused about his will and the paperwork for his apartment.

We met with his lawyer and I discovered that his will had been made without his lawyer present. A British couple, named as executors in the will, had taken John to a Notary alone. The Notary’s office had no lift, so John couldn’t go upstairs. Instead, the couple arranged everything with the Notary and then just brought the new will down for John to sign. Thankfully the lawyer had been given a copy of this will.

John wanted the bulk of his estate to go to Cudeca, because they had helped his partner, Jocelyn, when he was terminally ill with cancer. Cudeca was not even mentioned in the will. There were some small bequests and £5,000 for the couple, as Executors, but they also had the power to disperse the remainder of the funds. It was not what John wanted at all.

This type of manipulation of vulnerable, elderly people, is unfortunately, all too common. It is often carried out by people they have thought of as friends for years.

The lawyer also told me that John had not understood that he had to formally accept his inheritance at the Notary, so half the apartment was still in the name of his deceased partner.

During the next few months, all the paperwork was put right, by visits to the Notary. But apart from me, his only visitor was Michel, a Frenchman who collected his rubbish once a week. Michel spoke almost no English, only French and Spanish and John only spoke English!

John was completely housebound, unless I took him out, because he was not able to walk well enough to go out safely on his own. I know **my** mental health would suffer, if I went for weeks on end with no one to speak to.

I visited John bevery week to take him shopping. We visited La Cañada, Corte Inglés and various other shops, as well as the weekly food shop. We gradually became friends and I learned more about his earlier life.

John was born in 1919 and spent WW2 in the army in India and qualified as a draughtsman Class 1 in May 1942 and remained until July 1946.

Back in England he attended Art College to gain further qualifications. He became an Industrial Designer and worked as a fabric designer for Liberty’s of London.

He was a Fellow of the Society of Illustrators, Artists and Designers. Some of his designs were nominated for Awards by the Design

Council. One of John’s most successful designs was used for carpets in

cinemas throughout the world. John had exhibitions of his designs, as far afield as Japan.

In 1979, he and his partner, Jocelyn, retired and bought Lanhael House in Polperro in Cornwall. They set it up as a small hotel. The dinner parties were legendary, with John cooking up a storm and Jocelyn playing mine host.

They were in the Michelin Guide as the best accommodation in Polperro, and featured in the “Best Bed and Breakfast in the World” Guide. An unsolicited review in the Los Angeles Times called it the “Best place to stay in Britain”!

When I met John, he was very lonely, having no living family and having outlived almost all his friends. Younger friends from the 1970s came once or twice a year from London but he was starved of company.

His partner died in 2014, and he struggled to come to terms with his loss. They had been together for 63 years.

He was a sociable character and I know how much he enjoyed his 98th birthday with Age Concern at Links Bar in Aloha, even being interviewed on Marbella TV.

He had a wicked sense of humour and was still so interested in design, often commenting on what I wore.

He knew if he had a problem he could call me and I would try my best to sort it out.

I took him to the bank when he needed to draw cash and to ensure there was money in the account to cover his regular bills. We fixed his intercom, which hadn’t worked for over 3 years, so he could monitor the people who rang his bell, arranged for a chiropodist to call regularly, a cleaner to visit when he wanted and my husband was able to fix various maintenance problems for him.

A few days before his 99th birthday lunch he didn’t answer the door. Eventually, fearing something was wrong, I called the emergency services. When the firemen arrived, they opened the door. John had had a fall and was lying on the floor, unable to reach the phone or his panic button.

He was conscious and chatty and knew who we were and what had happened. He was very relieved to have been found and quite insistent that he wanted to be helped to sit up but, of course, we couldn’t move him until the doctor arrived.

I went with John in the ambulance. There was just the driver, with John and I alone in the back. I held his hand and assured him that he was safe and he needn’t worry any more. Once the ambulance reached the main road, he just relaxed and closed his eyes.

I thought he had drifted off to sleep at first but he was completely motionless and I realised eventually that he had just slipped away peacefully. It was my privilege to have known him and I am so grateful that I was able to be with him, so that he was not alone or frightened when he died.

That is why I believe passionately in Age Concern, we are badly needed, so that no one should ever have to feel alone.