

Friendly visits offer mutual rewards

Pair just like family

By **Stephanie Hounsell**
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Every Friday morning, 92-year-old Helen Gundlack receives a visit from a dear friend. Sometimes the pair runs errands, getting things done that Gundlack couldn't on her own. Other times they visit the library. And sometimes they simply have a cup of tea, catching up on life.

It's a two-way friendship that's come to mean a lot to both ladies. And the decade-spanning age difference doesn't seem to matter one bit. In fact, maybe that's part of what makes the relationship so special.

"Helen is like family to me; I know her better than I knew my grandparents. It's important for me to have that relationship with an older person," explained Sandy Amodio, a volunteer with Acclaim Health's Friendly Visiting program, who was matched with Gundlack about four years ago.

The older woman was likewise full of praise for Amodio.

"I don't think there are any others like her," she said proudly.

The Friendly Visiting program matches isolated or lonely seniors with trained volunteers who visit from two to three hours each week. While some matched pairs prefer to sit and chat, for others it's an invaluable time to run errands and get out of the house for a little bit, explained volunteer co-ordinator Brenda Sales.

Instant connection

Sitting beside Amodio in her quaint apartment at a seniors' complex, Gundlack remembered the first time the pair met.

"I liked her right away," Gundlack said of Amodio. "She's a wonderful listener."

With Gundlack's husband having recently moved to Allendale, the older woman said her friend's visits have become all the more important. As someone who grew up in a large family, an empty house isn't something she's used to, Gundlack said. And her two children don't live nearby.

Friday mornings give her something to look forward to.

Often the pair visits the library together, where Amodio helps Gundlack pick out books on tape. Another of Gundlack's favourite trips is to the thrift shop to hunt for treasures.

Amodio said the way Gundlack has aged with grace and beauty has set an example for her to follow.

"Helen's got a great sense of humour. She's very young in spirit. She makes jokes about getting old, but she never complains," she said. "The way she's able to accept getting older I think helps me to have a positive attitude."

Amodio stressed the time spent volunteering doesn't feel like a chore — far from it. Both she and Gundlack — who's a member of the Milton District Hospital Auxiliary — know the value of volunteering and urge others to give it a try.

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SPECIAL BOND: Acclaim Health volunteer Sandy Amodio (right) visits with client Helen Gundlack.

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