

There's no place like home.

This sentiment is at the heart of Community Caregivers' mission--helping people maintain their independence and dignity at home as long as possible. It became the mantra of the Mendik family from Slingerlands as they assumed the role of caretakers for a beloved family member.

Two years ago Sherry Mendik called Community Caregivers to request respite service so that she could attend an exercise program prescribed by her doctor. Her husband Milton had numerous health problems that left him in a fragile state and Sherry did not feel comfortable leaving him alone.

The couple moved to this area eight years ago to live with their daughter Fran, son in law Dan and their four children. Following the move, Milton's health declined to the point where he required round the clock care. The family opted to care for him at home and although Milton received in home medical services, Sherry assumed the role of main caregiver.

Over time, the responsibility of caregiving led to isolation for Sherry and got in the way of making new friends. This intensive level of care also threatened Sherry's health and she was encouraged to join an exercise program to relieve stress.

At the time Sherry was asking for help, Anne Mastro, a retired elementary school nurse was looking for a way to give back to the community. "I knew I wanted to do something different...something at the other end of the age spectrum" she said. One day she read a notice about an upcoming Community Caregiver volunteer orientation and called to register for the session. "I saw it as a sign that this was what I was supposed to do and picked up the phone to call."

A few weeks later she was sitting beside Milton and listening to his stories. This marked the beginning of a series of weekly respite visits that would continue for two years.

"Milton loved to talk about his service in WWII and Korea" Sherry said. "He would tell his stories to Anne and when he tired she would tell him her stories in return. I started getting jealous...I wanted to hear the stories too" Sherry confessed with laugh. "I didn't want to go to my own doctor appointments, I wanted to stay and hear the stories." So Anne agreed to meet with her occasionally for lunch or coffee and conversation.

Anne enjoyed her time with Milton. "I loved listening to his stories. He led such an interesting life and told wonderful stories of his time in the

service during World War II and Korea.” She said that Milton managed to keep his sense of humor despite numerous health set backs and that he always managed to entertain her.

Milton passed away recently and Sherry reminisced fondly about Anne’s relationship with Milton. “He looked forward to the days she would come to visit. I had no qualms about leaving him because she would know his signals. She would know when he got tired and when to tell him it was time to rest.” At this point Anne would become the narrator and tell him tales about her time caring for little ones

“Anne is the most giving person I have ever met. She is warm and loving and a wonderful listener. It was our good fortune the day Anne walked into our lives.”

In recognition of Anne’s service Community Caregivers recently named her Volunteer of the Month for May. Her valuable support to neighbors in need is at the heart of what we do at Community Caregivers and we are proud to have her as a volunteer.

Community Caregivers would like to increase the number of families served by the respite program. Everyone benefits when compassionate volunteers unite to take care of their neighbors. This matching of time and talent is a win- win approach to building a community in which we all want to live.

If you are a caregiver who needs respite please give us a call. If you are thinking about becoming a volunteer you might consider Anne’s advice. “You don’t need any special skills really. You just need to be a good listener and have a couple hours a week for volunteering.” And if you are like her and are waiting for the right opportunity? “Just take the first step. Pick up the phone and call.”

It could be the start of a beautiful friendship.

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The next orientation for new volunteers will be held on Friday August 21 at 11 am, Thursday September 17 at 6pm and Monday September 21 at 11 am. Meetings will be held at Community Caregivers office at 2113 Western Avenue Guilderland NY 12084. Please call 456-2898 for information or email [info@communitycaregivers.org/](mailto:info@communitycaregivers.org)