

# Best friends for life

## Intergenerational friendship nurtures two special women

By Laurie Atwater

At nionety-nine, Betty Mangan has alot more living to do. She is charming, funny, engaged and full of energy. Some of that lust for life she shares with her good friend Chantal Hersey. Chantal is seventeen and a senior at Lexington High School.

An unlikely pair? Perhaps, but sometimes the very best things in life are found in the most unexpected ways. This pair is inspiring in the way they have supported each other and maintained a very special friendship.

Four years ago Lexington's Youth Services coordinator Becky Kosterman introduced Chantal and Betty as part of the *Friend to Friend* intergenerational program offered through the Human Services department.

"They came to me and said, 'would you be willing to take on a young person?'" Betty explains. When she learned that Chantal was a skater she said "I'll give it a try."

"Chantal and Betty were the finest match," reflects Kosterman. "Betty shared stories, Chantal and Betty talked about skating, and Chantal felt like she could confide things in Betty and enjoyed her perspective. Chantal enjoyed the relationship so much, that she surpassed the mandated volunteer hours set by LHS."

Never one to shy away from new things, Betty was fully prepared for a new adventure. After all her whole life has been one wild ride.

Born in 1910 on a farm in Vermont. Her mother was determined her daughter would experience some freedom in her life. "Her mother had held on to her for dear life," Betty says. "She made up her mind from day one that no matter what I would have whatever I wanted and that I was going to get out and get going!"



Betty Mangan and Chantal Mukai Hersey

At fifteen her mother sent her off on a solo voyage from Montreal to Chicago and California by train. She was to meet an aunt who had just returned from China! According to Betty her parents encouraged her interests and her education. After spending one year at the University of New Hampshire, she got a job in a millinery store for the summer. A Chicago based company identified her talent for sewing and offered to send her to a training program in Chicago. Betty grabbed the opportunity and eventually moved to Toronto to take a position in training with the company.

In Canada at the beginning of the Second World War, she met a dashing young man named Dan Mangan and they married. Dan, who had been trained as a doctor in his native Brooklyn, New York was another maverick who had left the states at the beginning of WWI and come to Canada to sign up for the British military. He ended up working in British Intelligence.

Betty and Dan had dual (Canadian and U.S.) citizenship for eighteen years. They lived in Ottawa when they were first married, in Toronto and "all through there to Vancouver," Betty says. "I know Canada quite well."

Betty traveled with Dan as an officer's wife and worried along with everyone

else as her husband served during World War II.

Then, Betty says one day Dan decided that he wanted to move back to the states. "He wanted to vote for Jack Kennedy."

They moved back to Brooklyn for eight years until her husband's work brought them to the Boston area and after one summer of trying it out in a Boston apartment they decided to move to Arlington in 1954.

"I'll never forget going into one of the shops and asking if there was any place I could find fresh vegetables," she laughs. "That's how I first found out about Wilson Farms!"

Although Betty never lived in Lexington, she worked for the Senior Center twenty-seven years ago. At the time Betty was in her seventies. One of the other staff members at that time was Linda Vine. Linda remembers Betty as a "no nonsense person" who "ran a tight program with well trained volunteers." At that time the Senior Center was just getting off the ground and Betty was the Nutrition Site Manager. According to Linda Vine, she worked from about 1984-1992 and she was responsible for the all-important hot lunch program that served up to sixty seniors each day. "The hot lunch was the focal point of

the center for attracting new seniors, so the early success of the senior center depended on Betty's ability to juggle many tasks, to warmly serve seniors, to handle the needs of the home delivered clients, to train her volunteers and coordinate with other program staff," says Vine.

Betty still shows great pride when talking about the Lexington Senior Center and the many programs that they developed over the years. According to Betty, the Lexington program has always been the envy of other communities.

Reflecting back, Linda Vine says that Betty "brought a sense of legitimacy to some of the younger staff with her way of coaching and mentoring us."

Coaching and mentoring is something that Betty has been doing all of her life. From working with young navy wives when her husband served in Canada, to helping a mother with her young daughter in a sewing class in Arlington, Betty has often been called upon to guide others.

Her motto is "one day at a time" and she says she's come to appreciate living in the moment because she's been close to death several times "and I made it!"

### Pros & Cons

"She is a fan of the "pros and cons" says her young friend Chantal or "pro-ing and con-ning" as Betty calls it. Betty has helped Chantal navigate many challenging times in high school using this method and lots of listening and caring.

Chantal has welcomed the relationship into her young life.

"What makes me a little different from the rest of my friends is that I really enjoy senior citizens," Chantal says. I actually look up to them and think they can teach us something," she says.

Chantal heard about the Friend to Friend program from her mom. "I've gotten along very well with both of my grandmothers, so I thought 'why not?'"

Chantal is the daughter of Chihiro Mukai and Stuart Hersey. She is a senior at Lexington High School and will be heading off to San Francisco for college in the fall. Chantal is also a committed member of the synchronized skating teams that call Hayden their home base.

Skating has been a huge part of Chantal's life. She has performed and competed all over the world. She is currently a member of the Haydenettes, but she has worked her way up through the Ice Cubes and the Ice Mates before she made the Haydenettes. She has been involved with synchronized skating for 14 years.



Chantal on ice.

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Betty and Chantal connected through skating. Betty has always been willing to listen to Chantal's skating stories and challenges. Chantal competed with the Haydenettes this year in Paris, France. "This kiddo calls me from Paris or whatever country she is in," Betty says proudly.

When Chantal was made team Captain, she was overwhelmed in the beginning. "I felt very defeated at times," Chantal says.

"There were some days when she was ready to give up on everything," Betty chimes in.

Chantal looks at Betty fondly and adds, "She really helped me turn my view around and by the end, with the help of Betty, I matured a lot quicker."

Their relationship is warm and teasing. I ask Chantal about the most rewarding part of their relationship and Betty looks at her with a sassy smile and says, "Yes, what is it dear?"

They both laugh, but Chantal says firmly, "Everything."

"I think I'm more honest and more direct," Chantal explains. "That's the way Betty has been with me. I've become more mature and I try to look at things from different points of view. My life would be quite different without Betty."

Seeing the world from different points of view is something that Betty is good at. Both she and her late husband Dan had a keen interest in psychology and Betty has made good use of her skills.

She advises other seniors who want to be involved in the lives of young people to "be open-minded and be willing to listen without being too opinionated or judgmental."

For her part, Chantal says, "I can't imagine life without Betty. I love her like another grandmother!"

#### LEARN MORE ABOUT THE FRIEND TO FRIEND PROGRAM

*The Friend to Friend program is available to everyone. Applicants meet with a staff member from the Human Services Department, and fill out a short application. We work to match the volunteer with a member of the community that have similar interests. A staff member will arrange a meeting with the "friends" and make sure it's a good fit. The program is supervised by staff, and all volunteers must have a criminal background check.*

*Anyone can be a volunteer. We have middle and high school students, mothers and children, high school groups, neighbors and retirees." If you are interested in learning more about the Friend to Friend program, or any of our volunteer opportunities, please call the Lexington Department of Human Services, at the Lexington Senior Center at 781-861-0194.*