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PHOTO: MARK TROCKMAN

For more than 80 years, Myrtle Palmquist, left and Ginger Falk have been best friends. Both women live at Emerald Crest by Augustana Care, a memory care community in Minnetonka.

80 years and counting

Myrtle Palmquist and Ginger Falk have shared everything life has thrown at them. And they've remained friends through it all.

By Megan Kadlec
Reporter

From frolicking on the playground as schoolgirls to sharing jewelry and dining together as residents at Emerald Crest by Augustana Care, a memory care community in Minnetonka, Myrtle Palmquist and Ginger Falk have remained best friends for more than 80 years.

Falk moved to Emerald Crest, a facility that is comprised of three buildings and houses approximately 38 residents. Myrtle followed in December 2013, after her

daughter, Joan, came to the realization that they could not offer their mother the care that she desperately needed from home.

"We were very impressed by the cognitive care programming, and consistency in daily and evening programs," Joan said. "Mom's toughest times are after dinner and we loved that there were daily programs up until 8 p.m."

Joan recalled that Ginger was living at Emerald Crest; so, they took a tour, and Myrtle moved into Ginger's building shortly afterwards.

"My mom didn't have good friends where she was living before," said Joan. "Going to a place where she could be with a lifelong friend was incredibly helpful in making the transition."

Myrtle and Ginger had the same group of friends since grade school when they formed the "Original Screwy Screw-ball Club," according to Joan. The girls continued to get together years after their graduation, and were present at Myrtle's 85th birthday party.

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80-year friendship: A fulfilled life

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Ginger helped Myrtle through the loss of her husband in 1999, and Myrtle returned the favor years later when Ginger's husband passed.

"Ginger and mom both lost their husbands, years ago, and when they went through those rough times, I think they really helped each other out. The four of them, mom and my dad, Vern, Chuck and Ginger, would often go up to Ginger and Chuck's cabin, and they all got along so well," Joan said.

Even though the women are experiencing memory loss, they still remember each other; Alzheimer's and other dementia-related conditions often target more recent memories as opposed to those of their earlier life

experiences.

"It gives them someone familiar to be with everyday while they are in our assisted living and this gives them comfort during a time that can be very confusing and unfamiliar to them," said Krissi Barnett, an RN and residence director at Emerald Crest.

Emerald Crest, with locations in Burnsville, Minnetonka, Shakopee and Victoria, focuses on providing assisted living care to senior citizens with Alzheimer's and dementia-related conditions.

Based on her personal experiences with her grandfather's Alzheimer's, Theresa Klein created a specialized memory care program at Emerald Crest that focuses on individual needs.

"They are people like you and me who experience

changes or gaps in their abilities and need some assistance in closing those gaps," said Klein. "Once we start seeing them in terms of capabilities, we can devise activities that reflect their passions and personalities. Then we can open the door to a richer, more fulfilled life."

And a fulfilled life is exactly what Ginger and Myrtle have given each other throughout their friendship.

"The long-lasting power of friendship is what is so obvious when you see [Myrtle] and Ginger together," said Myrtle's son, David Palmquist. "After 80 some years of friendship, their eyes still light up when they see each other."

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