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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 11, 2018

FATE BRINGS TWO DUTCH WOMEN TOGETHER: DUO BECOME BEST FRIENDS AND ROOMMATES FOR MORE THAN 60 YEARS

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. April 11, 2018 – When Coby Verheij and Bev Dirksen, residents of La Posada retirement community, think back on their 62 years of friendship, the story begins in Holland. Verheij and Dirksen both grew up in Holland during the midst of World War II. From 1940 to 1945, the Nazis occupied parts of Holland including The Hague, a large city where Verheij and her family lived. Although the family was not Jewish, Verheij's father was taken in the fall of 1944 by the Nazis while traveling to work on his bicycle one day. He was a welder and the Germans needed people to weld, build parts and assemble machinery for the war efforts because every German adult was needed to fight on the Russian front. He was transferred to a work camp in eastern Germany where he lived for a little less than a year. His family did not know what happened to him and, thinking he had been captured or killed, they assumed he would not return home. One day, Verheij's father woke up and realized the German guards had fled the work camp and he figured the war ended. He and fellow workers made their escape and started their journey back home. Eventually the Canadian Red Cross met up with them, confirmed the war ended and brought them back to Holland.

"When my father came home and rang the doorbell, I peeked through the upstairs window and alerted my mother that a man stood at the door," said Verheij. "I was nine years old at the time and didn't recognize him because he was wearing different clothing and had lost a lot of weight. After a quick glance, my mother said, 'that's your father' and opened the door. Upon seeing his face she said, 'Albert, you're back.' We all started crying because we all couldn't believe he came home. At that moment, my father looked at us and decided we should move to Canada to avoid going through another war."

Verheij moved to Canada with her family at the age of 16, and upon arrival in Edmonton, Alberta, she met a woman in customs who made arrangements for her to work at the local Catholic hospital. Verheij was hired right away and began working in the kitchen and diet office. They valued her ability to speak English, French, German and Dutch. Verheij did not anticipate that she would become acquainted with another Dutch woman, Bev Dirksen, who also moved from Holland to the same part of Canada. Dirksen's brother was already living in Canada and urged his sister to join him, offering her a place to

stay. When Dirksen arrived with very little understanding of English, she got a job working in the kitchen of the same Catholic hospital that Verheij got referred to as well. While both ladies were working there, a supervising nun suggested that Verheij take Dirksen under her wing because they both spoke the same language and she could help translate for her. The two became fast friends through their close working relationship. During this time, Verheij met her husband, Johan Verheij, who had also emigrated from Holland with his family. The couple met through a church social group and was married in 1957. After the wedding, she became pregnant with their son, Rick, who was born in August 1958. Dirksen frequently visited her and her family outside of work.

“We spoke in Dutch during our visits, talking about our previous lives in Holland and our new experiences in Canada,” said Verheij. “I was a city slicker, and she was from a small country town. After living in Canada for a couple of years, my husband and I decided to move to Montreal. When I told Bev we were moving she expressed interest in going as well and said she did not want to stay in Edmonton. I was taught to help others and look after people that you get along with, so we suggested that Bev move with us to Montreal. My husband and Bev worked while I stayed home with Rick to raise him. When my husband and I decided to move from Montreal to the United States, Bev asked if she could come with us. We gladly agreed, and we all made the move to New Jersey. I went back to work at this time, and Rick started attending school.”

Once they arrived in the United States, the Verheij’s and Dirksen traveled to and lived in many places together, including Panama, where Verheij’s husband and son worked on a construction project for an entire summer one year in the early 1970s. Rick Verheij was 15 at the time, and he helped his father and crew while the ladies relaxed. At another point during their friendship, they decided to visit Holland together, but it wasn’t what they expected.

“Of 13 children, I am the youngest. I have six brothers and six sisters,” said Dirksen. “While two of my brothers were living in Canada, I visited home to see my other ten siblings. During my visit, my siblings became very bossy with me, insisting that I stay with them indefinitely to help clean the house and take care of my mother. I said I wasn’t staying and Coby and I continued with our vacation, traveling to Paris and Amsterdam. We even did some camping in Europe during that time. Coby and I agree that we don’t particularly care to visit Holland anymore, as so much has changed since the time we lived there, and the culture is not the same.”

Not only did they all travel together, they later also ran a bed and breakfast for 10 years together. In 1995, they all moved from Ohio to Asheville, N.C., where they ran a bed and breakfast called Applewood Manor. Dirksen took care of the cleaning, ironing and laundry, while Verheij cooked and set the dining tables. Verheij’s husband took reservations, prepared the rooms for the next customers, and



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did all the accounting and other recordkeeping. They worked together and enjoyed the nice arrangement. In 2006, they sold Applewood Manor and moved to Carriage Park in Hendersonville, N.C., where they retired. Verheij's husband passed unexpectedly in 2007. Rick Verheij and his wife Debra live in California. However, in 2016 Rick joined a project in Palm Beach, Fla., and suggested that Verheij and Dirksen join them there so they would be even closer, look after each other and spend more time together.

"I discussed the idea with Bev, and we decided to move to Florida because it would be a new adventure for us," said Verheij. "The move to La Posada, a retirement community in Palm Beach Gardens, has been a wonderful next step for us. We continue to do everything together in this new chapter of our lives. We love to read and speak Dutch together to keep up the language. I am thankful every day for Bev's friendship and companionship. I am so happy that we are still friends after 62 amazing years. After my husband's passing, I still have Bev to keep me company and cheer me up. It has been truly special having her along on this wild and crazy adventure. Most people think we are related, and they cannot understand the dynamic friendship we have. It is a rare and wonderful thing."

"My friendship with Coby has opened so many doors and opportunities," said Dirksen. "For example, I got to visit Santa Barbara, Calif., ride a helicopter over the Grand Canyon, see Neil Diamond perform in Las Vegas and even had my picture taken with Elvis at Coby's surprise 80th birthday party. We've gone on boat rides, we've traveled the world, and we've built and enjoyed a wonderful life together. You only live once, and we have lived well."

"Coby and Bev are a true delight and their story is a unique one," said Brad Cadiere, executive director of La Posada. "We enjoy hearing their stories and are happy they have companionship in this chapter of their lives. All our residents have interesting backgrounds and come to us from all over the world."

If you are interested in covering this story, please contact Lauren Witt via phone at 214-378-7970 ext. 306 or email at lwitt@thepointgroup.com or Amy Jones via phone at 214-378-7970 ext. 302 or email at ajones@thepointgroup.com.

ABOUT LA POSADA

La Posada is a resort-style life care community located in the heart of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. The continuing care retirement community features 193 luxurious independent living apartments, 11 independent living cottages, as well as assisted living apartments, memory care suites, private rooms for short-term rehabilitation and skilled nursing, all nestled within 22 prime acres of sparkling lakes and lavish courtyards. Providing a variety of amenities, residents enjoy chef-prepared meals, concierge



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services, state-of-the-art wellness programs, transportation services, and intellectually stimulating events and activities.

As a Kisco Senior Living community, The Art of Living Well philosophy is in every aspect of community life. Unique social and wellness opportunities strengthen the mind, body and spirit.

For more information, call 561-514-5114 or go to <http://www.mylaposada.com>.

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