



# "AMONG" *Friends*

Friends  
&co™  
Spring 2023

## Who is Helping Whom?

### ***War Vets Meet Face-to-Face After Sharing Phone Companionship During COVID Pandemic***

Friends & Co Phone Companions Jim and Bob, both spirited 90-year-olds, recently met face-to-face after almost two years of only knowing each other as voices over a phone line.

Jim was connected to Friends & Co through NE Seniors in St. Paul during the height of the COVID pandemic. He was grieving the death of his wife of 62 years and needed help finding his way out of the loneliness and isolation he felt living in the home they once shared.

Bob decided to pursue volunteer work with Friends & Co's Phone Companions Program after overcoming his own



**A rare bond: Jim (left) and Bob connect over shared life experiences**

struggle with loneliness. Urged on by his son Larry, a long-time F&C volunteer, Bob reached out to begin the process in 2021. "I just wanted to help people who may have been through what I have," Bob said.

Jim and Bob began their weekly phone conversations in August 2021, connecting over their shared experience serving in the Korean War. Jim was stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and eventually in Germany.

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### ***50 Years Acclaimed Playwright August Wilson Cooked Up Kindness in the Early 1980s***

establishment was often seen at a coffee shop not far from the Little Brothers offices, hunched over a notebook, writing.

Though the job at Little Brothers only paid eighty-eight dollars a week, it gave Wilson free time to get his writing done. "It was the best job I ever had," he would later say. In 1980, August received a fellowship for The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis, and the LBFE job allowed him to delve

deeper into his playwriting during breaks and non-working hours.

The late Dick Dee, a volunteer for Little Brothers at that time, recalled in 2005 that August was a quiet, very soft-spoken man. "As I was a volunteer, there were only about a dozen times I worked with him. He and I would clean up the kitchen before I delivered meals, and as we did, we'd talk, mostly about the doings of the day."

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There was always something special about August Wilson, the soft-spoken part-time cook who worked out of the Minneapolis office of Little Brothers of the Poor in the early 1980s. The poetry-writing cook, who could have easily been a chef at a fine dining



# The Many Ways of Connecting

**James Falvey,**  
**Executive Director**

For over 50 years, Friends & Co has been making connections. Connecting our organization to its community, our community to its lonely older adults, civic-minded businesses to volunteer opportunities, and of course, connecting one individual to another for friendships that bring a little extra meaning and purpose into the lives of each friend.

Friends & Co will embark on a new set of connections this summer. Borrowing from an adage attributed to the disability movement in South Africa, "nothing about us without us," Friends & Co will be touring the State of Minnesota, hosting Community Conversations. Older adults will be invited to share their perspectives on what makes growing old in Minnesota wonderful - and what things they see as getting in the way of aging with the utmost grace and dignity.

Staff and volunteers will listen intently, take notes, and examine how social connections (and social isolation and loneliness) are connected to people living their best lives. The information gathered will be reported to each group and used to help us reexamine how we present the services we currently offer and help us identify new and compelling ways to engage more people in Minnesota and beyond.

Connecting the hopes and dreams of older adults to the services and activities we provide is a connection we are all excited to make. Please watch for stories and social media posts about our Community Conversations. And please know that all of the old and new connections we make are because of you and the support you provide.

Thank you!

## War Vets Meet Face to Face

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Bob was stationed north of the 38th parallel, which is now North Korea. Though their wartime experiences were very different, it proved an important point of understanding between the two.

**"just ask for help  
and take life one  
day at a time."**

"I did shift work for Northern States Power for 35 years, a different shift every week. I didn't have much of a social life, and when my wife passed, I felt lost, but I hate asking for help." Jim said.

"This experience as a volunteer has taught me that I just need to listen. I can't fix anyone, but I can listen and tell them what worked for me," Bob said. "I always tell Jim: It's okay to ask for help. I had to do it, and so can you."



**Jim and Bob greet each in person for the first time at the Friends & Co offices**

You just ask for help and take life one day at a time."

Jim encourages other older adults who might be feeling socially isolated to reach out for help. "You just got to keep going the best you can day by day. It's okay to ask for help and Friends & Co will get you connected."

Jim says his visiting and phone companions have added so much to his life over the past three years. "My last birthday, I had fourteen people there, organized by my Friends & Co companions. I really enjoyed it," Jim said. "There was just one person missing."



# Coffee Talk Q&A

We asked one of our weekly Wednesday Coffee Talkers, Sean, to share some of his thoughts regarding volunteering on the Coffee Talk drop-in chat phone line.

## What motivated you to get involved with Coffee Talk?

*"I got involved with Friends & Co through Coffee Talk because I found myself looking for a way to spend some of my time that had meaning attached to it. I did a search and found several local organizations looking for volunteers, but after getting an introduction to it, I was sold on Coffee Talk."*

## What was it about Friends & Co that had you sold on Coffee Talk?

*The Friends & Co goal of addressing loneliness and the many issues that stem from it was what grabbed my attention. I am a firm believer that every person deserves dignity and to have all of their needs met, in this case, social needs. Friends & Co shows the power of people coming together to affect change where social and government safety nets have failed or are nonexistent.*



## What do you get out of being a Coffee Talker?

*Coffee Talk allows me to engage with people I wouldn't normally have a reason to talk to. I enjoy conversing with all sorts of folks, and with Coffee Talk, I have conversations with some of the loveliest. I enjoy catching up weekly with a fellow cat lover, the music historian who always has a good album recommendation, and the person who reminds me to look after my own body and mind. I've heard a lot of different stories and gained so much wisdom talking to the weekly and irregular callers on Coffee Talk."*

## Playwright August Wilson

From page one

A big break for Wilson came when he submitted a play to the Yale Repertory Theatre, which was accepted. He would go on to earn international acclaim for his plays, winning two Pulitzer Prizes and two Antoinette Perry Awards.

Wilson's generosity and influence touched the LBFE volunteers and staff who worked alongside him while he was a cook at LBFE. "He could have opened plays in New York or San Francisco, anywhere, but he brought them here," Dee said. "The proceeds would go to Little Brothers and programs around the city. August always remembered LBFE."



August Wilson with Little Brothers of the Poor colleagues

Chat with Sean on Wednesdays from 8am -Noon on Coffee Talk!

## 3,500 Valentines Delivered to Older Adults

*"It really meant a lot to open up my door and find those homemade Valentine's cards waiting for me. Thank you very much."*



Friends & Co, in partnership with radio hosts Jason and Alexis from myTalk 107.1 and our F&C celebrity spokesperson Liz, raised awareness this Valentine's Day about loneliness and isolation for older adults in Minnesota. Together we generated and delivered 3,500 hand-crafted, heartwarming Valentine's Day cards to 716 older adults throughout the Twin Cities!



## Volunteers Needed for Phone Services

### Be a Coffee Talker

If you love chatting on the phone and the idea of connecting with a variety of older adults inspires you, join our Coffee Talk team! Sign up for a weekly four-hour shift to offer words of encouragement, a listening ear, and great conversation. Calls will be routed directly to your phone and can be answered from wherever you and your phone happen to be. Great training and support are provided. Contact Emma Lucchesi @ 612-746-0746 or [elucchesi@friendsco.org](mailto:elucchesi@friendsco.org)

### Be a Phone Companion

If you are a talker and connecting one-to-one with an older adult for ongoing meaningful phone friendship appeals to you, let us pair you with someone through Phone Companions. You can be the warm, caring voice at the end of the line that ensures one older adult knows someone cares. Build a rich and rewarding connection, one call at a time. Contact Ann Fosco @ 612-746-0725 or [afosco@friendsco.org](mailto:afosco@friendsco.org)



Friends & Co, formerly Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly, is a nonprofit volunteer-based organization committed to alleviating social isolation among older adults through community-led service that fosters meaningful connections for everyone. We envision a world where every older adult thrives in meaningful relationships.

To learn more about Friends & Co's programs, staff, board of directors, and volunteer opportunities, or to make a donation, visit: [www.friendsco.org](http://www.friendsco.org)

If you have questions about this publication, or to be removed from our mailing list, contact Michael, 612-721-1400 or [mhaas@friendsco.org](mailto:mhaas@friendsco.org)

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