

'It was like the years melted away'

Two cousins find each other after 70 years

When Caroline Davies was a teenager, she traveled with her father on a business trip from their home in northern Vermont to New York City.



Lori Van Ingen

Senior citizens

Along the way, they stopped in Connecticut to visit her third cousin, Tom Benham.

Benham had been blind from an eye infection since he was 2 years old, but Davies said they had "the best time" when they walked along the beach talking about their common interests. Later, Benham visited her twice in Vermont.

"I was always impressed by Tom's wit and determination," she said.

As the two grew older, they lost touch with each other. Davies graduated from Douglass College at Rutgers, met and married Chester Davies and raised two sons and a daughter in Kittanning, near Pittsburgh.

When Chester became ill, the couple moved to Brethren Village. After her husband died, Davies moved into the assisted-living facility, where she still lives today at age 90.

There, Davies met volunteer Becky Cargas, who has become her regular visitor. Many times Davies told Cargas about Benham, whom she hadn't seen in 70 years, and wondered if he was still alive.

Cargas decided to check. She went to the Internet and "Googled his name," she said.

To Cargas' delight, she found a lot of hits on Benham. She found out Benham had attended

Haverford College and later became a physics professor there.

After World War II, Benham developed an electronic travel device for the blind. This turned into the laser cane.

Benham also was a radio tracker of early U.S. satellites, including Explorer 1 and 2, Vanguard 1, Explorer 3 and Sputnik 1.

In the 1940s, he modified manual calculators so they could be used by blind people.

He organized the nonprofit organization, Science for the Blind.

Further research showed that Benham taught at Haverford until 1976 and, in

2004, he donated to the college.

On her second attempt, Cargas succeeded in getting in touch with him through the college's alumni association.

It turned out Benham lived in Wayne, only a 90-minute drive from Lancaster.

"It was a lot of fun trying to find him," Cargas said.

"I'm very happy we live so close. I have very fond memories of him. He's just remarkable," Davies said.



Cousins Caroline David and Thomas Benham, center, meet for the first time after 70 years Tuesday at Bloomfield Square near Brethren Village. They are flanked by Becky Cargas, left, who found Benham for Davies, and Lee, Benham's wife.

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Benham was equally delighted to hear from Davies after all these years and was surprised his cousin lived close by. Why, he and his wife, Lee, even occasionally ate at Lancaster's Red Lobster when they

went on vacation. On Tuesday, the long-lost cousins were reunited at Bloomfield Square, near Brethren Village.

Cargas said Benham walked into the restaurant using a cane and the arm of his wife. Lee read the menu to him, but otherwise "you'd never know he was blind. He was so capable," Cargas said. "He even still works today at his own company at age 91."

"It was so exciting to see him after all these years. It was like the years melted away," Davies said. "It was one of the highlights of my life."

Lori Van Ingen's e-mail address is lvanningen@lnpnews.com.