

‘I can even hear you smile’:

Donated hearing aid invigorates 96-year old Kelowna woman

BY GLEN SCHAEFER, THE PROVINCE DECEMBER 2, 2015



GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier Elsie Chandler, 96 gets her hearing tested by ColinVanBergen, audiologist and owner of NexGen Hearing on Thursday. Elsie was getting fitted with brand new hearing aids donated by Oticon Canada. GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier Elsie Chandler, 96 gets her hearing tested by ColinVanBergen, audiologist and owner of NexGen Hearing on Thursday. Elsie was getting fitted with brand new hearing aids donated by Oticon Canada.

Photograph by: GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier

Elsie Chandler was still getting used to her new hearing aids as she talked on the phone Wednesday.

The 96-year-old Kelowna woman said she could talk on the phone before, “but I think I shouted. Am I shouting at you now?”

Not at all. In a dulcet voice, still with a light accent from the England she left in 1948, she explained that she thought she could hear just fine until a group of well-meaning folks set her up with the new hearing aids on Nov. 26.

“I can go back to being normal again,” said Chandler, who lives in an apartment in Kelowna’s Okanagan Mission neighbourhood.

Her hearing problem became clear when her soft-spoken 59-year-old son came for an extended visit from Alberta.

“I thought I could hear, I really did,” she said. “When you live alone, it’s very quiet ... My son came for a visit, and I kept saying to him ‘what did you say?’”

Chandler’s modest pension wouldn’t cover the cost of hearing aids. The service agency Seniors Outreach got in touch with hearing aid firm NexGen Hearing, which refurbishes donated hearing aids for those who can’t afford them. In Chandler’s case they were able to get a new set — worth more than \$5,000 — from a manufacturer.

“We managed to have an appointment that day, we had a cancellation and got her in that same day,” said NexGen audiometric technician Lisa Gunn, who helped fit Chandler. “She was absolutely floored. She made a comment that was so sweet, she said “I can even hear you smile.”

For her part, Chandler said she felt less isolated with the new equipment. “Now I’m in the world, now I belong. I feel that now I’m included. I didn’t realize ... Nobody realized that I couldn’t hear them. I could hear a softer version of what I’m hearing now.”

A widow for 20 years, Chandler remains active physically and mentally, going out for walks at least three times a week, and exercising an undiminished wit in conversation.

Asked about her living space, she said: “I have a regular apartment, two bedrooms with two bathrooms — and that’s not an invitation by the way.”

She’ll be 97 in February.

“I wake up every day and I know I’m going to have a good day,” she said. “We’ve all got lots of things that would be nice to have, but I’m not only happy with what I’ve got, I’m really contented.”

The new hearing aids, she said, were “another addition to my life. I’m very grateful to everyone who’s taken part in this.”