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Tale of Love and Illness Ends in Deaths

By MATT FLEGENHEIMER

His was a love story, Charles D. Snelling wrote — a tale of a shiftless dreamer and the woman who saved him, of the life they built over six decades and the disease that stood no chance of erasing it. By the end, he said, their time together had become a case study in reciprocity.

“She took care of me in every possible way she could for 55 years,” Mr. Snelling wrote of his wife, Adrienne, months before the two were to celebrate their 61st wedding anniversary. “The last six years have been my turn, and certainly I have had the best of the bargain.”

On Thursday, months after contributing a [poignant essay](#) to The New York Times about navigating a six-decade marriage upended by his spouse’s Alzheimer’s disease, Mr. Snelling killed his wife and himself, the Snelling family said in a statement released to The Morning Call of Allentown, Pa.. They were found Thursday in their home in Lehigh County in eastern Pennsylvania, the police said. Mr. Snelling shot himself, the coroner said. The ruling on Ms. Snelling’s death was pending. Both were 81.

In the statement, the Snelling family said Mr. Snelling had acted “out of deep devotion and profound love.”

Last December, in response to an [Op-Ed column by David Brooks](#), Mr. Snelling contributed a 5,000-word “Life Report” essay to nytimes.com, devoting the final section to his wife’s disease and his role in managing it.

“It’s not noble, it’s not sacrificial and it’s not painful,” he wrote of his caretaking duties. “It’s just right in the scheme of things. After all, this lady rescued me from a fate worse than death, and for a long, long time.”

Mr. Snelling met the woman who would become his wife at a sophomore dance at Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pa. She was spoken for then, “on the arm of the Yalie” who was her date, Mr. Snelling wrote. It would not last.

“That Adrienne was the girl that I wanted, the girl that I needed to bring into my life, and the girl that I had to marry became very clear to me quite soon,” Mr. Snelling wrote.

But it soon became apparent that Adrienne Angeletti was studious, he continued, and so he would have to be, too. When she took her books and a blanket outside to study, Mr. Snelling tagged along “to pester her,” he wrote.

“You’re not studying,” she would say, according to Mr. Snelling, to which he would reply, “I’m studying you.”

On March 21, 1951, the two were married. They honeymooned in Bermuda. Soon came children — five of them, over 10 years — and a series of career ventures ranging from artificial insemination of dairy cattle to real estate development to the presidency of the Allentown City Council.

In the 1970s, Mr. Snelling became finance chairman of the Republican Party in Pennsylvania. At 70, he was named to the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority.

After decades of her support in these endeavors, the illness was a sort of “redemption” for him, Mr. Snelling wrote.

“I have dug in with the will,” he said. “Adrienne likes to be with me so, everywhere I go Adrienne goes as well.”

He went on, “We continue to make a life together, living together in the full sense of the word; going about our life, hand in hand, with everyone lending a hand, as though nothing was wrong at all.”

Earlier in the essay, Mr. Snelling had assured readers he did not intend to sound “boastful” in retelling a life blessed with “more ups than downs.” Mr. Snelling’s readers required no disclaimer. Some were moved to thank him.

“What a privilege it is to experience the ‘charmed’ life of another and as a result to appreciate what is valuable in our own,” one reader from London commented on the article.

“We should all be so lucky to have unconditional love,” wrote another, from Honolulu.

At the end of his essay, Mr. Snelling described the seal at Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., his prep school: a hive abuzz with bees, with the Latin ‘Non Sibi’: “Not for self alone.”

Then he recalled another school creed. “The motto, also in Latin, is ‘Finis Origine Pendet,’ ” he wrote. “The Beginning Foretells the End.”



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