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# Husband's devotion to his first, and only, love carries on

By Susan Carroll, Houston Chronicle | February 13, 2017 | Updated: February 14, 2017 8:39am

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Photo: Susan Carroll

**IMAGE 1 OF 2**

Jake Reissig, 88, visits the grave of his wife every day and talks to her about their 64 years of marriage.

CONROE - Nearly every day, sometimes twice a day, for the last 2 ½ years, Jake Reissig has visited his wife's grave.



But after the 88-year-old came down with pneumonia three weeks ago, his doctors were adamant that he had to stay home, where it was warm. He convinced his daughter Cheryl to drive him to the cemetery about a week ago, but she didn't dare let him out of the car.

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On Monday, the eve of Valentine's Day, Jake combed his wispy, white hair and put on a pair of crisp, khaki pants. He was ready when Cheryl came for him.

"I'm feeling good," he said. "I'm looking forward to going to see Momma."

Jake had known Elizabeth "Betty" Reissig nearly all his life. They grew up down the street from each other in the small town of Slaton, about 15 miles from Lubbock. He caught her staring at him one time after church, he said, and then she caught him staring back. She was 15. He was 18.

"We clicked," he said. "We never looked back. I never dated another girl."



They had a big Catholic wedding when she turned 18. That was followed by the births of Gary, Joe, Cindy, Tracy, Cheryl, Jeff, Diane, Roger and, finally, David.

With nine kids, she'd sometimes laugh when people asked what she did for a living.

She still managed to help him with his home-building business, picking out wallpaper for a new house with a baby on her hip, he said.

They moved to Houston in the late 1960s, but it was too big. So in 1971, they drove through Conroe and fell in love with its small-town feel, he said. They built a house and eventually bought a plot of land near a lake, hoping to someday build a little getaway cabin.

Sometimes, they'd drive out there and sit on the empty lot and watch the sunset on the water. But they never got around to building the cabin, he said, without a hint of regret.

"My family is my legacy," Betty said before she passed.

She was so easygoing, he said, and sweetly sentimental. After she died, he found little notes from her all over the house. One was stuck to a framed photo, where Betty had full lips and perfectly coiffed hair. "I'd choose you again," the note said.

"It meant more to me than anything else," he said.

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Jake's youngest son, David, carried his dad's black stool to the gravesite on Monday morning.

Sometimes, Jake sits there for hours.

"We talk about our good times. I try to keep it a happy thing. Sometimes, I break down."

Jake hadn't been able to tend to the roses in his garden because of his pneumonia, but David found a few deep red rose buds, his mother's favorite, and snipped some baby's breath and ferns. Jake settled onto his stool and trimmed the lower leaves from the rose stems, putting them in a white bud vase.

"Two years," he said to Betty, "and six months."

For a long time, Cheryl said, her father was so sad. But he went to a grief support group at church, and has tried to let go, slowly.

He realizes, he said, just how lucky he is. Eight of his nine children live nearby. Every night, one of them has dinner with him. He has 17 grandchildren and so many great-grandchildren that he stopped counting.

"We had such a good life," he said. "I'm going to accept she's gone and do good things for the rest of my life. They say the little things make a difference."

When he waters his wife's grave, he always turns a hose on a veteran's a few spots away.

On Monday, he sat with Betty for a bit, as his two children stood nearby. When he got up to leave, Cheryl asked him, gently, "Do you want to do your kiss?"

If she let him forget, she said, he'd want to come back right away.

He walked back to the grave and kissed two of his fingers. Then he touched her photo on the tombstone.



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