

## CHARLES ALBERT HANSMAN

1926-2009

He and his wife of six decades, Shirley, were inseparable. Around her, he would really open up.

Charles Albert Hansman was born on June 30, 1926, in North Bay, Ont., to Albert "Ab" Hansman and his wife, Edith. The youngest of three children, and only boy, Charlie, or Chuck, as he was known, was soft-spoken and had a keen interest in "anything that moved, walked or flew," says friend Bob Kennedy. Charlie's father, who worked for the Ontario Northland Railway, was a founding member of the Laurentian Ski Club. Charlie "was absolutely fearless on a pair of skis," says Bob, and often won local competitions.

In high school, Charlie focused on vocational classes. He began hanging around the Cottrill girls, six sisters who lived a few blocks away. Before long, he set his sights on Shirley, a tall, gregarious brunette with whom he shared piercing blue eyes and a love of skiing. Too shy to tell Shirley, three years his junior, how he felt, she heard from the other boys that she had, according to him, been spoken for. They started dating in 1947. He'd need another nudge to ask for her hand: when Shirley, who was working at ONR, found out that Charlie, then training to become a journeyman at North Bay Hydro, wanted a car and a boat first, she bought him a car. They married in 1950. (Charlie began building his boat in the basement.)

Like his father, Charlie was a driving force behind the ski club and raised his kids—David, Philip, Elisabeth and Heather—on the slopes. "He'd forgo skiing to fix the toilets in the clubhouse, or if there was something broken on the hill, he'd be up there in his ski suit, getting grease all over him," says David. He spent months installing a T-bar using an old hydro truck, and, ahead of the scheduled Boxing Day opening, spent Christmas at the hill, working out the kinks. Nothing could keep him away: even while recovering from a broken leg he suffered during handball, he was on the slopes, commandeering the plow.

If Charlie was the ideas person, his eye always on the next skiing, golf or sailing trip, Shirley "was the one who would really organize it," says David. They made a lot of friends over the years, but Charlie needed "someone like her, who was an absolute extrovert, to really pull him out there," says David. Known for her practical jokes and sense of humour, Shirley was the demonstrative type, and around her, Charlie opened up. When they greeted one another or

parted ways, says Elisabeth, "they always hugged and kissed."

Charlie's boundless energy seemed to increase after he retired in 1983. He and Shirley moved to a large acreage just west of Powassan, Ont., which they called "the farm." They grew vegetables, and heated the home year-round with wood that Charlie gathered, even into his 80s. What began as collecting sap from their maple bush "on a whim" grew into "quite a production," says Elisabeth. Charlie installed gravity-feed pipes and hot-water tanks. And Shirley finished the process, by straining and then packaging the syrup in jars labelled "Alsace Gold," after the name of the road they lived on.



In retirement, they were always on the go, travelling to Central America, New Zealand and Europe (one adventure included renting a 52-foot barge to tour the canals of England). "We never knew where they were," jokes Elisabeth. They shared the slide shows of their trips with their family, which grew to include seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, and Charlie, an avid birder, recorded all the species they saw along the way.

About five years ago, Shirley, who had diabetes, began to lose her eyesight. Charlie began helping her bake and

make jam, and, when she could no longer read, spent hours reciting passages from the Bible (Shirley was deeply religious), or retelling classics like *Ivanhoe* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Last year, Shirley suffered a series of strokes. After a brief stint together in an assisted living facility, it became clear she needed the care of a nursing home, and Charlie, who was still full of energy (despite being diagnosed with prostate cancer a few years ago, he was responding to treatment, and was back on the slopes), debated returning to the farm. But, he told David, "I'd be too far away from your mom," and rented an apartment in town.

On the morning of Dec. 31, doctors called Charlie with bad news: Shirley was being placed in palliative care. After sitting by her side for many hours, he hugged and kissed her, and drove home for a snack and a rest. After loading his ski boots into the truck—David was going to fix his bindings before they hit the slopes together on New Year's Day—he went back inside. But Charlie never returned to Shirley's side. He suffered a heart attack and died, four days before his wife. Charlie was 83.

BY RACHEL MENDLESON