

# Edmonton man loses 'soulmate' on highway in P.E.I.

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**Elizabeth Ann Sovis and her husband, Edmund Aunger while on a bicycling vacation in P.E.I. on July 13. Sovis was hit by a vehicle and killed the next day.** Photograph by: Edmund Aunger, edmontonjournal.com

EDMONTON - Edmund Aunger was steering his bicycle along the narrow gravel shoulder of the highway when he heard a bang behind him, like a load of lumber falling off a truck.

He wasn't going to stop, until he saw cars and trucks pulling over, people running down the road toward the sound. Turning back, Edmund was relieved to see a glimpse of what he thought was his wife's bright orange safety vest, certain she was standing with the group of people gathered in the middle of the road.

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For 10 years, Edmund and his wife, Elizabeth Sovis, spent their summer vacations on long cycling tours, packing up their bikes and exploring trails in France and Slovakia, or closer to home in B.C., the Prairies, Quebec or the Maritimes.

Every summer, they picked their destination, and Edmund would research the area and map a course. They flew with their bicycles disassembled, packs ready for the trip. They cycled every day and stayed in bed and breakfasts, always making time in their travels to chat with the people they met along the way.

Because Elizabeth didn't like to cycle in traffic, they mainly stuck to trails, only venturing onto roads when absolutely necessary. Elizabeth almost always rode ahead. Only occasionally, when she was tired, would she ask her husband to go in front.

They met when they were 12, both bright Grade Six students in the enrichment program at what is now Willowdale Middle School in Toronto.

Edmund loved her from the start, but whenever he told her that, she'd laugh and say, "All you did for the first three years was smile and say hello."

He was shy, and she was a star. Beautiful, talented, a trained vocalist who once dreamed of being an opera singer. She was athletic and bright. She spoke four languages, and was remembered by her Latin teacher as the best student he'd ever had.

Edmund and Elizabeth dated after high school, and were apart for a while when they went to universities in different cities. They got back together in 1974, and never separated again. They lived in Quebec and New Brunswick, before settling in Edmonton 37 years ago, and raising their three sons.

Elizabeth taught French and English, but when one of their sons was born with a cleft palate she decided to go back to school to get a master's degree in speech pathology.

She worked hard, devoting herself to the challenging work. At night, she and Edmund spent time together, often enjoying the outdoors. They walked in the river valley every night, and cross-country skied in the winter. In the summers, they cycled.

A passionate advocate of safe cycling, Elizabeth was already looking ahead to her retirement next year, when she planned to work on building safer cycling trails in Alberta. Her parents both lived to be more than 100, and, at 62, Elizabeth was in perfect health. She and Edmund used to joke that she had to find a way to keep him alive, so he'd be there in her old age.

Last week, Edmund and Elizabeth packed their bikes and flew to New Brunswick to start their holiday. They spent two days cycling around Moncton, then headed into Sackville by train, because Elizabeth didn't want to cycle on a highway with no shoulders.

By Saturday, they were on the Confederation Trail in P.E.I., near the community of Cavendish.

With nowhere along the trail to spend the night, they left the trail that afternoon, getting on to a narrow two-lane highway to make the four-kilometre ride into town.

Elizabeth asked Edmund to go ahead of her. They were riding that way when Edmund heard the bang.

At first, he was sure he saw her standing on the road, but as he got closer to the crash, he realized he was wrong.

Elizabeth was lying on the pavement, a deep gash on her temple near her helmet, blood coming from her mouth. People at the scene were trying to save her. "She still has a bit of a pulse," Edmund heard someone say.

But her eyes were glazed, and he knew she was gone.

Edmund returned to Edmonton on Monday with his wife's ashes. He had refused to come home until he could take her with him.

The 49-year-old man who hit Elizabeth with his van has been charged with impaired driving causing death.

Edmund said he feels sorry for the driver, and is praying for him. He knows that man is hurting, too.

Mostly, Edmund is thinking about Elizabeth, the woman he still feels lucky to have met and married, so many journeys ago.

"We all dream of meeting a soulmate, someone to share our lives with," he said. "How many people can realize that dream?"

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