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News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

September 3, 1997, Wednesday, CITY EDITION

TRUE TOGETHERNESS/

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SECTION: PEOPLE & PLACES, Pg. 1

LENGTH: 762 words

Frank and Eloise Freeman are so close they even had heart surgery at the same time.

Like two peas in a pod, Eloise and Frank Freeman have been close companions during their 58 years of marriage.

A common bond and similar goals have marked their lives as they've raised a family, built a house and run two businesses.

The Freemans even were hospitalized at the same time recently for heart problems.

And ended up side by side at Moses Cone Memorial Hospital.

Last fall, Dr. Patricia Grodecki discovered several blockages in Frank's heart and recommended bypass surgery.

Meanwhile, Eloise Freeman had a heart attack and also needed bypass surgery. After her surgery, she had complications and remained in the hospital.

In came Frank - not for a visit, but for his heart surgery.

The Freemans requested adjacent rooms, and were able to eat their meals together and spend their days together.

"The people at Moses Cone were real nice to us," Eloise Freeman says.

"I really couldn't say enough about how good they were to us. They were real cute about us being side by side. They let us be together as much as they could."

"After their surgeries they were very supportive of each other," says Grodecki. "They were also very competitive in the recovery process."

After heart surgery, a patient must take a heart stress test by working on a treadmill while the heart's status is monitored by doctors. "They were very competitive as to who would do better on the treadmill, but also encouraging," says Grodecki.

The Freemans have raised three sons and operated two restaurants over the years. Eloise Freeman spent more time in

the restaurants than her husband, who spent 42 years working for Duke Power Co. Frank Freeman is now 79 and his wife is 76.

Eloise found the restaurant business a "natural" for her, where she learned early in her native Reidsville how to prepare food for large groups.

Her father worked in a sawmill there, and Eloise worked with her mother in the kitchen preparing food for the workers who would come to their house and eat. "I had to cook for the sawmill men. I was with mom in the kitchen cooking for the men, helping her do different things."

When Frank Freeman, born in High Point, landed an electrician's job with Duke Power, he was assigned to Reidsville. That's where he took Eloise out of her mother's kitchen and made her Mrs. Freeman.

Duke Power later transferred Freeman to Greensboro, only to see Frank volunteer for U.S. Navy service during World War II.

Eloise took their first son, Ron, back to Reidsville and lived with her mother until Frank's military duty was finished.

He returned from the war in 1946, and the family began to build a life together. "At that point in time you couldn't buy a place or rent - there weren't any for sale," says Frank. "Also, to get a loan on a house you had to make so much money."

So they built their own house, with help from professional builders, of course. Eloise's father gave them the lumber through his connections at the sawmill. They bought the land with the money they saved while Frank was in the service. Their first house had two rooms and was on South Elm Street in Greensboro. It still stands today, although the Freemans sold it a long time ago.

"It was a good little built house," says Eloise.

Eloise was a cafeteria manager for the city school system before they opened their first restaurant.

"Our oldest son talked about opening a business and I told him, a food business."

Food service was the business she knew about. Because Frank worked for Duke Power, Eloise ran the restaurant with the help of Ron and the younger Freeman sons, Michael and Richard. Now, since he retired from Duke Power, Frank oversees the banking.

The first restaurant they owned was Spring Valley Restaurant. After 16 years, they sold it and opened Palmer Plaza restaurant, where they've been for eight years.

Since their heart surgeries, they are back home together.

And they've found something else in common - monitoring their eating and physical activities.

"I watch my diet," says Eloise. "We walk and I walk on a treadmill. Frank rides the stationary bike mostly."

Frank also plays a lot of golf.

"Greensboro is home to us," says Eloise. "We've been at the restaurant business for so long now, it gets to be a part of you."

"We've been very happy the whole time," she says. "No problems that I know of. You, Frank?"

"Nope," he agreed.

TRUE TOGETHERNESS/ News & Record (Greensboro, NC) September 3, 1997, Wednesday,

LOAD-DATE: September 4, 1997

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: PHOTO: John Page/News & Record

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