

Legislator's Widow Found She Enjoyed His Work

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It's been a spring of grieving, waiting and watching for Mrs. Donna Christianson, one of two women in the Minnesota Legislature.

Mrs. Christianson's husband, Marvin, died March 3 of cancer while serving his third term in the House. A month later she was elected to his seat. The couple's third child is due at the end of August.

"Marvin was thrilled about the baby," Mrs. Christianson said. "He told all the girls at the Capitol he was going to be a daddy as soon as we knew."

CHRISTIANSON had had cancer two years ago. He underwent surgery and tests a few months after the operation showed no presence of cancerous tissue.

"The doctor told Marvin he was completely recovered . . . that he could work on his farm as before . . . that there was no reason why he shouldn't seek reelection," Mrs. Christianson said.

"But you know how it is with cancer," she added. "The doctor told me we should enjoy ourselves . . . lots of picnics. We did. I'm grateful to that doctor for giving us two extra years."



MRS. CHRISTIANSON
Representative from Halstad

At the end of February this year, Christianson, who was 41, fell ill. A bout of the flu, he thought. Tests showed first cancer in the artery leading from the heart and later throughout his chest.

CHRISTIANSON was not told. He believed he had virus pneumonia.

"I could not add to his burden," Mrs. Christianson said. "He had been so worried about me. The first months of pregnancy had been rough. And he had just added another 160 acres to our farm. He had planned that for years. I just couldn't worry him any more."

Her husband's death left Mrs. Christianson numb.

"It didn't seem real," she said.

THEN SHE DECIDED to run in the special election.

"You know," she said in her soft voice, "it was a project that had to be finished."

The Christianson's farm is near Halstad, a town of 500 in northwestern Minnesota.

Mrs. Christianson was a city girl when she married 19 years ago at the age of 18. But her husband taught her to do "everything" on the farm and she enjoyed doing it.

THE AREA had a hard winter this year and Mrs. Christianson trudged through snow and mud in her door-to-door campaign.

"Marvin and I had always worked as a team. He'd take one side of the street and I the other," she said.

This time she had to take both sides of the street. She was elected by a vote of 3,213 to 2,594.

"I was scared when I got down to the Capitol," Mrs. Christianson said. "It was hard sitting in Marvin's seat."

IT WAS DIFFERENT, too, the young widow found from watching House action from the gallery.

"Marvin and I were so

close we often didn't tell each other what we were planning to do," she said.

She knew her husband's stand on most major issues. Still, she felt, now she had to make up her own mind.

As a newcomer Mrs. Christianson thought it wisest to listen most of the time.

THE 1969 session of the Legislature is over and Mrs. Christianson is back on her farm with her son, Marvin Jr., 18, and her daughter Lori Ann, a chubby 9-year-old.

Mrs. Christianson, who thinks she may run again, has rented out the family's 380 acres, including the 160 her husband bought shortly before his death.

In a couple of months, there'll be the new baby.

"If it's a boy we'll call him David," Mrs. Christianson said, and her eyes were smiling. "Marvin picked the name."

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