Newlyweds’ Happiness Shattered in a Second

It’s a story that first warms the heart and then freeze-dries it. Betty Jean Deyo and Joel Ridley were childhood friends, but they lost touch for decades.

At their 60th high school reunion in California, they rediscovered one another and two years later in early December 2006, they were married in Las Vegas. Their happiness came to an abrupt end on the drive home from visiting a friend who was helping the newlyweds plan their honeymoon.

A vehicle being driven by Ridley, 81, slammed into a power pole that was dangling from a crane in Upland, CA. He died at the scene while Deyo-Ridley, 80, suffered a life-threatening head injury. A 29-year-old crew worker, David Jenkins, who was holding the other end of the pole, was also killed.

Police allege that the workers failed to take proper safety precautions that could have prevented the incident. Reportedly the power pole had been hanging just a few feet off the ground in a traffic lane when it was struck in darkness, shearing the roof off the newlyweds’ car.

The San Bernardino County district attorney’s office was investigating possible charges. According to police, barriers should have surrounded the work zone but none were in place. Deyo-Ridley’s son, Stephen Deyo, told a Los Angeles Times reporter that his mother and Ridley were always laughing and were "new soul mates."