

Bill Charmatz, 80, Illustrator Known for His Comical Touch, Dies

By [STEVEN HELLER](#)

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Correction Appended

Bill Charmatz, a humorous editorial and advertising illustrator best known in the 1960's and 70's for pictorial essays in Sports Illustrated that captured the joy and folly of sporting events, died on Sunday at his home on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. He was 80.



An image from Bill Charmatz's pun-filled book "Endeermments."

No cause was announced, said his friend Gail Richardson, but she added that he had long been ill with heart, liver, kidney and blood sugar problems.

Mr. Charmatz's distinct impressionistic style was a curious synthesis of his favorite European cartoon artists, André François, Raymond Savignac and Georg Grosz.

"His work had a kind of velocity in the way things were made," said the designer Milton Glaser. Nonetheless, Mr. Glaser said, Mr. Charmatz often labored over even the most seemingly insignificant line to ensure its sense of immediacy.

His regular feature for Sports Illustrated, which included colorfully expressionist paintings and drawings of baseball and football teams in training and of skiing in Europe, captured the sweat, grit and action of those sports, always filtered through his light-hearted perspective. Yet not everything was comical; he also produced a tender series of paintings of the life of a French family on an oil barge for The Lamp, a magazine published by ExxonMobil.

Adolph Charmatz was born in 1925 in East New York, Brooklyn, to Russian immigrant parents. He went to the High School of Industrial Arts in New York. There, he told a teacher that he hated his name and was advised to expand it; he added William as a first name and was thereafter known as Bill.

He joined the Navy during World War II and was assigned to a graphics unit, where he made precise renderings for charts. In 1949 he studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and from 1951 to 52 at the Grande Chaumière there.

In the late 40's he also worked for Alexey Brodovitch, the influential art director of Harper's Bazaar, who urged Mr. Charmatz to chronicle his bicycle travels through France; from this project came more than a hundred drawings and watercolors of the everyday people of France, in bars, bicycle shops, restaurants, on the street and along the rivers. Rendered with a vigorous brush line, these images earned him frequent commissions from Esquire, TV Guide, Time, Life and The New York Times, where from late November 1996 through April 2004 he was the regular illustrator for the Crime column by Marilyn Stasio in the Book Review. He also worked on many advertising campaigns, including ones for the radio station WCBS-AM in New York and American Express.

Mr. Charmatz wrote and illustrated several children's books, including "My Little Duster." He also published a collection of cartoons, "Endeermments" (Ballantine Books, 1971), featuring dozens of line drawings that were puns on the words "dear" and "deer," like "deeranged," illustrated with a picture of buck in a straitjacket.

Mr. Charmatz's 1959 marriage to Marianne Flender ended in divorce in 1966. He is survived by his daughter, Katrina Charmatz, a television producer, of Corte Madera, Calif.

Correction: Sept. 13, 2005, Tuesday:

An obituary of the humorous illustrator Bill Charmatz on Saturday misstated the residence of his surviving daughter, Katrina Charmatz. It is New York City, not Corte Madera, Calif.