

# A TOAST, TO LIFE!

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On January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012 my grandmother (Van Berezowski) was admitted to the Victoria Hospice at the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria, BC. She had made the brave and honorable decision to be taken off life support, after having been in the hospital for almost two weeks. We soon learned that we were in the same building, on the same floor, where my grandmother had worked as a nurse at The Royal Jubilee in the 50's. The nurses and volunteers at Victoria Hospice have created a space that provides families with a beautiful and comforting experience, while being with their loved ones during their last days.

My experience with my grandmother's passing has been one full of joy, growth, and coincidence. The most thrilling of these coincidences led my family and me to the beautiful people at the Cloth Castle in Langford, B.C.

I will always remember Victoria Hospice for its deep respect for the last wishes of their patients and families. Every wall is full of memories: paintings, stained glass windows, books, angels, and quilts, all of which were donated to hospice by families and friends in memory of their loved ones who spent their last days with the wonderful staff at Victoria Hospice. They have had so many quilts donated, that they are able to put a handmade quilt on every patient, including my grandmother.

It was a somber time for me when the 26<sup>th</sup> of January arrived, as it was my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. I sat with my grandmother for many hours that day, telling her how happy I was that I could be with her on my birthday. Sitting with her, I was staring down at the beautiful handmade quilt that had been placed on my grandmother the night she arrived. To my amazement, I realized that her quilt was decorated with birthday cakes. After pulling myself together and thanking the universe for such a wonderful,

magical gift, I shared this coincidence with my family. I asked one of the nurses if it was possible to take the quilt home after she passed and I was surprised to learn that this was a request that had never been made before. She looked on the underside of the quilt and found a dedication patch that had been sewn into it. The dedication read, "Donated in memory of the family and friends of The Cloth Castle." It was decided that we would leave the decision up to The Cloth Castle.

We made a quick trip to Langford and spoke with the kind folks at The Cloth Castle, which happened to be up the road from where my great grandparents are buried. We spoke with the owner (Sylvia Ratcliffe) for several minutes about the experience I had on my birthday, and how much it would mean to me to take the quilt back home to the U.S. after she had passed. She was so pleased to hear my story, and was more than happy to share a bit of her own story with us. She let us know that the three year anniversary of her daughters passing was approaching, and that it was a blessing to have us show up. It gave Sylvia great joy to see the way in which her quilt impacted my life. We purchased a replacement quilt that we brought back to the hospital and were filled with feelings of love and appreciation for each other; and the way the universe had brought us together.

It is because of the kind hearted people at The cloth Castle and everyone that has ever made a contribution to the Victoria Hospice, that I and many others are blessed with a life changing experience throughout the process of losing loved ones. We often times do not realize just how special the little things we do in life are, or how big of an impact we can have on the lives of others.

All of the people at Victoria Hospice, my family, The Cloth Castle and most of all, my grandmother, have given me the joy of having this realization of just how important and life changing the little things can be. I will be forever grateful to the people involved with the process of my grandmother's passing, and can only hope that everyone has the chance to experience something so profound in their lifetime.

To anyone who has ever lost a loved one and to my grandmother, may your hearts be filled with peace, and your world filled with love and light.

