

**Rotary Hospice House
5th Anniversary Celebration
March 20, 2011**

Nearly 20 years ago, my friends Andrea, Ed and Heather, and my family members Phyllis, Peter, and Bob died, in the prime of life. In each case, there was the sadness and grief of losing someone I loved but in addition frustration--and yes even anger--about certain things that were done--or not done--by those caring for them, and the environment in which they died. Their stories were compelling. Sharing their experiences of dying inspired me to help people, facing the mystery of death, to find as much comfort and meaning as possible. It made me keenly aware of the necessity of enhancing the continuum of palliative care in the community which would include establishing a community-based hospice as an alternative to hospital and home.

And so, the journey to make this vision a reality began.

It included:

- creating a video with Shaw Cable of my friend Heather and her experience of dying--the patient's voice
- chairing a community panel on palliative care in Richmond which included input from a variety of health professionals, volunteers, patients and families
- surveying people with questions about their experience with loved ones at end of life. What helped? What was missing? What would have made things easier for them and their loved one?
- being part of a Community Task Force on palliative care
- visiting other hospices

The community began to respond. The Rotary Club of Richmond indicated a wish to plan the development of a free-standing community-based hospice. We invited the Salvation Army to partner with us. This resulted in joint capital fundraising activities, completion of a development plan for the hospice, the purchase of property and the procurement of operational funding from the Provincial Government through Vancouver Coastal Health. After many years of collaboration by leaders of our regional health authority, the Richmond Hospice Association and various community groups, we welcomed the first resident to Rotary Hospice House. And it is this which we celebrate today.

On the day of the opening of the Hospice, September 30, 2005, I spoke these words:

"At Rotary Hospice House, residents and health professionals, in community with one another, will renew and sustain hope within the reality of impending death. They will experience a depth of human relationship in which they are reminded of their shared humanity and the mystery of life and death. It is here that the possibility exists for an understanding of the human condition, the human spirit, the human journey that cannot be replicated in any other way."

It is this vision that we have incorporated into our Mission Statement.

Rotary Hospice House is a community that honours life values humility and shares hope

The word community is important; it is...

- the recognition of resident and family as community--that they are the focus of care
- the recognition of health professionals, residents and families and volunteers within these walls, as community, working together in caring
- recognition of all of us here as part of this hospice community--each of us in our specific capacity, helps create a safe, loving and compassionate environment within the continuum of palliative/hospice care
- and the recognition of Rotary Hospice House as part of the community of Richmond, and the way in which we make a difference in the lives of the citizens of our community

Being in community presumes a relationship, a fundamental dimension of human experience. It is the

means by which we humans achieve not only meaning but also purpose in life. And nowhere is relationship more important than in illness, especially terminal illness when one feels vulnerable, afraid and alone. One may feel no longer a part of life's game--or far out on the sidelines of it. But in relationship, a dimension of hospice care that goes well beyond the limits of science, hope is found, hope that transcends the physical domain, and the miracle of science. It means not just **doing** things for people but **being** with them. It means walking beside the suffering of another through their darkness and in doing so, acknowledging our own weaknesses.

Each of us has chosen to be part of this hospice. Some of our friends may ask Why? Isn't it sad? Doesn't it bring emotional distress? How can you do it? But as resident, family, health professional or volunteer, you may reflect, as I do, that being here is an opportunity to reaffirm the meaning, purpose and value of our lives and the possibility of sharing hope through human relationship.

Thank you all for being a part of this community.

Nancy Yurkovich