



# *History of The Mission Hospice Society*

*By Lillian Dudfield*





The seed for my eventual involvement in the Mission Hospice Society was planted some time ago while I was living in Prince George during the 60's and 70's. I was working as an administrator of a care home at the time and found that the matron moved patients, who were dying and who had become comatose, to a spare room, disturbing and difficult to handle that I would go into that room and sit with them when I could. I'd visit and talk to them, even though I wasn't sure that they could hear me or even knew that I was there.

I would also arrange for funeral services for some of the patients who were without family members. This was done with the co-operation of my church minister and the congregation of our church. This particular service had not been done before as most of these patients had been on welfare and few had family or anyone at all to take responsibility for the funeral. As a result, the funeral parlor would just take the bodies away and dispose of them without any ceremony, even though they were being paid by Social Services to do so. I suppose I was a bit of a renegade, as I felt that these people had the right to some kind of ceremony when they died, just to acknowledge and to recognize the value of their lives. I came away from that experience with the deep feeling that ***no one should ever have to die alone***. Needless to say, I did not stay in that position very long, gaining it the distinction of being the only job from which I have ever been fired.

My husband and I eventually moved from Prince George to Mission in 1974. Having been a member of the Medical Office Assistants' Association in Prince George, I soon joined the chapter in Abbotsford hoping to find work in another doctor's office. In the process, I attended a Medical Office Assistants seminar where one of the talks was about "Losses in Life", given by Dr. Denis Boyd, a psychologist who was very interested in the Hospice/Palliative care movement. Dr. Kubler Ross's book "On Death and Dying" was being talked about a lot during this time; and, it was also about this time that Dr Cecily Saunders started the Hospice movement in Britain. I found all this information extremely interesting and wanted to learn more.



My husband died in 1979. It was then that I learned first hand about the grieving process and the real need for grief programs. Unfortunately, there were none here at that time.

In November and December of 1984, our local Knowledge Network carried a program on TV for six weeks on the Hospice/Palliative Care movement entitled “If I should Die Before I Wake” This program was produced by “Anglicans in Mission”, a program funded by the Anglican Church Diocese and was produced by Susan Skerry, a Mission resident. I invited several interested people to come to my house and to listen, learn and discuss some of the pertinent points raised in these discussions. We were encouraged to call back to the program and participate in having some of our questions answered, which we did.

At the end of the six weeks, early in the Spring of 1985, one of the speakers on the program, Mary Ellen DeGrace, who was the person primarily responsible for the program, came to Abbotsford with a Dr. Werner Boldt from Lions Gate Hospital who was starting a Hospice ward there. Those who had been listening to the TV program in our area were invited to attend. He spoke to us about the need for a Hospice movement with volunteers to work with the dying.

After this meeting, Jeanette Poulin from Abbotsford, and I felt strongly the importance of getting a program started in our areas. We arranged for a meeting in an Abbotsford school library on May 15 1985, with Dr. Werner Boldt as speaker. We placed an ad in the local paper and hoped that somebody would read it and attend.

To our delight, over 100 people from both Mission and Abbotsford came. We quickly ran out of chairs and had many more standing. There were four nurses from our Mission Hospital who were there at the beginning; Harriet Faulkner, the head nurse on third floor, and RN’s Shirley White, Rose Boulieu and Jeanine Pepin. They had been very interested themselves in getting some form of Hospice/Palliative Care started in Mission. As there was so much interest, Jeanette Poulin took the names of those living in Abbotsford, and I took the names of those from Mission who were interested and we each arranged a follow-up meeting.



I was the 2nd Vice President of the Mission Hospital Auxiliary at that time and felt I should let Neville Cox, the hospital CEO, know what we were doing. I wrote him a short note for his information, which, to my surprise, he took to the next hospital board meeting. At that meeting, he suggested that a hospital board member as well as one of the doctors be appointed to our board. The hospital board readily agreed.

Dr. Peter Robson and Margaret Johnston, were eventually appointed to be on our hospice board. Together, we decided that we needed to have a local church minister as well. Subsequently, the Rev. Brian Brglez from the Mission Alliance Church joined our group. At our first meeting in June 1985, we decided that we needed to become a Society and so began working on our constitution and bylaws. Although this took several months to do, the Mission Hospice Society became official on September 30, 1985 with founding members: George Lewis, Dr. Peter Robson, Donald Clogg, Shirley White, Anne Gosselin, Rev. Brian Brglez, Margaret Johnston, Harriet Faulkner and myself.

In January 1986 we received information from Neville Cox, the Mission Hospital Executive Director, that they had booked the Conference Room for us for our monthly board meetings. The hospital also provided a mail slot so that we could have a permanent address for our organization, and, as well, an extension on their 'phone system so that Chris, the Executive Secretary could receive calls for us. The hospital staff was wonderfully co-operative with us and made everything work so well. We were eventually even allowed to do all our photocopying on their equipment.

We had no funding back then of course, but I decided to open an account for our fledgling organization at the TD Bank with five dollars of my own. Membership in our new society became \$5.00 and we eventually had a raffle of a painting donated to us by Frank Proctor, a local artist, which increased our bank balance a bit. We charged \$50 each for the hospice training sessions and were able to pay our facilitator from those proceeds.



Before we could start our service, we needed to have training for our volunteers. This we arranged in conjunction with Abbotsford Hospice Society, with Dr. Denis Boyd, a psychologist specializing in Hospice and Palliative Care, as our facilitator. From this training session we had four trained volunteers ready to start the service in April 1986. By January 1987, the number of Volunteer Visitors had increased to seven with several more trained but waiting to be interviewed.

Later in the year as noted in an August 1987 Newsletter, this number had increased by one, and from the time we actually started doing Hospice work, 40 patient/clients had been visited. Eleven patients were being visited in August 1988, with eight visitors to do the work. I know that I had two and sometimes three patients with whom I was working at one time. The need was great, and still is.

In January 1986, we had our first Assets & Liabilities balance sheet with Income of \$115.00 and disbursements of \$61.91 leaving a bank balance of \$53.09

Now we were looking for office space. Up to this point, everything was being done out of my home. Our book collection was growing larger than my shelves and we needed to have a central place where we could store it all. It was also necessary for us to have visibility in our community. Fortunately, Mission Community Services offered us space in the basement of their building, which was on 5th Avenue, in the old hospital building.

Rent was \$50. per month which included a phone (for local calls only).

We eventually rented the space on Friday only, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. We had to provide our own desk, filing cabinet and bookshelf, which we were able to do with a desk and chair from the hospital storage room. I don't remember where the bookshelf and filing cabinet came from but we obtained those as well. By this time, we felt we were really in business. We only had the space for about a year and a half and finally had to close it down simply because it was too out of the way for people to call in and it was much too hard to find volunteers to man phones that seldom



rang. We went back to keeping our records and books in a filing cabinet on the third floor of the hospital and hoped we could eventually have an office in a more convenient space, preferably in the hospital.

Out of the members we had gathered, we appointed a Volunteer Co-ordinator who assigned the trained volunteer/visitors to a patient. Shirley White, one of the nurses from Mission hospital was our first Volunteer Co-ordinator; Rose Hampson became our Volunteer Co-ordinator in 1989 and was with us in that capacity for a number of years. Cathy Doran was next and Eleanor Lobb was Co-ordinator in 1996, Gina Kreml followed until 1999. All these Volunteer Co-ordinators of course were unpaid.

Robynn was our first paid staff member and helped us to become more organized. She was with us from 1999-2000 as Executive Director/Volunteer Coordinator, and her salary was paid for a year through Community Futures.

In 1988 and 89, we were kept busy raising funds and were fortunate to have a donation of \$500 from Mission Memorial Hospital towards redecorating two rooms on the third floor and one on the second floor for Hospice/Palliative care. There were some funds from the disbanded Mission Memorial Society, which were given to us when regionalization came into being. Two very good donations came in at \$1,000 each from the local Oddfellows and Rebekah lodges.

We also ran a very successful raffle. The Palliative Care room on second floor was completed in March 1990 at a cost of \$5,160.92. The other rooms were completed soon after but unfortunately there are no records of the cost. Needless to say, just a handful of volunteers did a tremendous amount of work. Not only were they board members, they also did the fund raising, and organized the Visitor Training. All this was accomplished on top of the excellent Hospice/Visitor work that was done.

When Julia and Terry Marshall came on board later in 1994, they brought great drive and enthusiasm to our cause with them. Eventually, through their efforts and through the generosity of the Mission Hospital, The Mission Hospice Society obtained an office on the lower floor of



the hospital. We had the Grand Opening of our second office on Tuesday November 25, 1996. We installed our own telephone, had a donation of a computer and other office items, and had our own office again.

Being in the hospital was very important, especially for the volunteer co-ordinator. As well, our growing library was kept there under the competent direction of Julia Marshall who was a tremendous asset.

We participated in the British Telecom Voices for Hospice, on Saturday October 18th 1997. This was a worldwide simultaneous singing event that started in New Zealand and finished in Mission, Canada... involving 42 countries around the world. Its purpose was to raise funds and awareness for Hospice/Palliative Care and was a tremendous undertaking for our little group. Through that effort we raised \$2,000.00. It was thanks to Terry Marshall's vision that it all came together.

We held the concert in the newly built Clarke Theatre and Terry hooked up by telephone with New Zealand at the finale of the concert when Handel's Hallelujah Chorus was sung. In Mission we had 28 artists and choirs involved. It was a great evening!

In 1999 we had a very generous donation of \$10,000 from Vic & Hilda Hollister. This money was used to start the Mission Hospice Society Endowment Fund at the Mission Foundation. This fund attracts public donations and the Mission Hospice Society benefits from the interest. Such a lot of ground work was done by so many in these formative years that it is impossible to name them all, as everyone involved in the simplest activity had some part in the society's eventual success.

Over the years we have had many very competent and dedicated Board Presidents and members. Some of these were Eleanor Lobb, Polly Betterton, Diane Kruger, Doreen McKimmon, Julia Marshall, and Gina Kreml.



Christine Morrison, a Mission School Teacher graciously left a bequest in her will donating a large sum of money to Mission Memorial hospital in 1994. This was to be entirely under the direction of her family physician Dr. A. Edelson and her heart specialist, Dr. Hector Baillie. Joel Fair (Ross) was the Assistant Executive Director of Patient Programs in the hospital at this time and she was the driving force for getting the hospice/palliative care rooms built. She formed the Palliative Care Committee in 1996, and her role provided leadership and a place for the palliative patients at the hospital This was under the medical supervision of Dr. Lynne Potter, a specialist in Palliative Care and a great addition to the team.

There was also need for a special room and the team decided to request that some of Christine Morrison's bequest be used for this purpose. Ann Bish was the head nurse in charge of the surgical/medical unit at the time and a member of the team. She approached Dr.'s Edelson and Bailey to request some of the funding towards this effort and between them they decided that some of this money could be used for this special purpose. Eventually a special palliative care room was built near to the ICU unit and a lounge was created for the patients of both units and their families. A great deal of thought went into preparation and decoration of these rooms and they were officially opened on Thursday September 12, 1996. The rooms were named in memory of Christine Morrison and her generosity to Mission Hospital.

These rooms were used constantly and there were many families of both the palliative and the ICU patients who were so very grateful to have such a place exclusively for their use at such a traumatic time.

The lounge was furnished with a fridge, a microwave and coffee equipment, as well as a TV and many appropriate books and magazines. The couch could be made into a bed, and many of the family members were able to spend the anxious nights close to their loved one. Sadly, these rooms were closed when the Health Care system was being regionalized in 2002, and the third floor was closed down.





There were several times when some of the Christine Morrison Fund was also generously donated to the Mission Hospice Society for the purchase of books for their library. These books were given free of charge to the family members of the palliative patients. In fact there were no charges at all for any of our services. The hospice/palliative care received by patients and families was all part of the Medical Health Plan.

We all had a dream of a Freestanding Hospice Residence. This finally came to pass in May 2005, when the Christine Morrison Hospice/Palliative Care facility was opened on the third floor of Mission Memorial Hospital. As mentioned above, this floor had been closed for 3 years due to cutbacks when the regionalization of the health care system came into being, now it was finally opened again and being put to great use. This too was a joint effort between the Mission and Abbotsford Hospice Societies. The Fraser Health Authority Board financed the staffing and medical care and the Mission and Abbotsford Hospice Societies raised the funds to furnish and beautifully redecorate ten single rooms for patients and their families. This included special bedchesterfields, so that families can stay the night. A large portion of the Christine Morrison Fund was also donated towards the Hospice, and the Hospice was named in her honor. It is a truly beautiful facility, with thoughtfully decorated lounges and a fully equipped kitchen. A beautiful patio had a mural painted on a large blank wall and many pots with flowers and plants. This patio was designed and funded in memory of Evelyn Thomas & her daughter, Blanche LaFortune. Originally it had been completed in August of 2000 but had lain unused since the 3rd floor was closed in 2002. It was good to see it opened up again and being used for its original purpose.

Mission Hospice Society has come such a long way in the twenty years that have passed. The Society has subsequently honored Harriet Faulkner, Eleanor Lobb, Lyn Edmonds, Vic and Hilda Hollister, and myself as Life Time Members. However, it has been the dedication of each and every member that has brought Mission Hospice Society to this point of success.

In retrospect, it seems that the time was right for the Hospice Movement to begin in Mission, and Harriet, her nurses and I just happened to be there then to give it a bit of a kick start.



There are so many people to thank for the way that the Mission Hospice Society has evolved and for how it is still evolving. At this time in January 2006, there are now four paid employees: Stephanie Ediger, Executive Director; Terri-Lou Woods, Co-ordinator of Volunteers, Kate McCandless; Co-ordinator of Bereavement Programs, and Mary Hoag, Office Manager. The organization has 37 Active Volunteers, working in the Christine Morrison Hospice and the community, as well as many other volunteers who work on fund raising programs and office duties. These members are carrying the torch into the 21st Century with the same zeal and passion for Hospice/Palliative Care in the community that we had in the beginning. It is wonderful to know that the work will go on long after we are gone.

Mission and Abbotsford residents can be assured now, that they can pass on with dignity in a beautiful, peaceful environment, with their loving family able to be with them at all times, and with a loving, caring Hospice Volunteer to hold their hand.

**They will not have to die alone.**