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MEDIA RELEASE

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Patty's Last Ride

— by Pat Case, Hospice of The Gorge

Patty Dutson, a feisty, yet terminally-ill forty-three year old, is shown here on the back of a Harley-Davidson Softail, being driven by its owner “Buffalo” Mike Bishop —taking what will likely be her last ride.

At the request of Hospice of The Gorge (an organization that cares for people at life's end), “Buffalo” Mike and a group of five others surprised Patty when they recently pulled up in front of her house. They revved their engines in unison — made a whole lot of beautiful noise — and asked her to hop-on.

She chose to ride the Softail, because according to Patty, “It would give me a softer ride.”

She was thrilled. She could not believe what Hospice had done. She said: “They told me they had a surprise for me, but I never imagined it could be anything like this!”



She rode with Buffalo Mike and the others around and through The Dalles a couple of times — through “the gut” as some people like to call it. She said she was ready to go again, but figured she might not have the strength to hold on.

Patty had been riding on the rear seats of Harley’s since she was eight. She says that even as an adult, she was always too small to ride a bike of her own. “I’m only four feet ten-and-a-half inches, and was never much more than 100 pounds. But I always got the sense of freedom from riding—of getting away from it all; leaving your problems behind. If you have a bad day, you just get on that bike and ride!”

“I always preferred a Harley to any other kind of bike,” says Patty, “mostly because of its sound. Whenever you ride into town on one, it roars out: ‘Here I am!’”

Today, Patty thinks about another kind of ride — a ride she never asked to go on. It’s a ride from which she will never return.

As she gets ready to embark on this final journey of her life, we at Hospice of The Gorge asked her to share her thoughts, so that others might learn. For our sake, and for the sake of her children, she agreed.

She told us her innermost thoughts about life and death, and about what people should remember most in life. She told us about the most beautiful things in her life as well as the most painful. She also shared what she hoped was the legacy she is leaving for her children.

Regarding her journey into the afterworld, she says that while she’s sad, she’s not afraid. She says that her guardian angels will protect her. “I was never a religious person, but I always believed in my guardian angels. If it weren’t for them, who knows where I would be today.”

Patty mentions that she’s had a tough life, but she doesn’t dwell on it. Those who know her well say she’s a tough cookie.

Mostly, Patty talks about her children—about her son Aaron, 23, and her daughter Kyla, 25. She says she loves them both so very much, that they have fulfilled her life, and that she couldn’t be prouder of them. “They’re both so sweet,” she says. “They love people; they’re there to help anyone who needs it. They’ve never let me down.”

Still, she cries when she talks about Kyla.

“Kyla’s accident was the most painful thing that ever happened to me in my life.” When Kyla was 19, she was in a car accident that left her in a coma for two years. “She was so beautiful, and she still is. But I cry every time I think about her . . . when I think of her voice on the phone; about the way we used to talk together all the time.”

Two years into her coma, Kyla’s doctors felt they could do nothing more. They urged Patty to agree to let her be taken off life support. Patty resisted. She didn’t want her child to die. Finally, reluctantly, she agreed.

Patty, beside herself with grief, waited for the inevitable to happen. But miraculously, two weeks later, Kyla sat up in bed.

Kyla lives in Portland now, in a special place where she can get the help she needs. “She’s always telling me not to worry, that she’s all right. I try to believe her—and I do (I suppose) but I just can’t help to think about her before the accident, and about how much I love her.”

“My son, Aaron, is also so precious to me. He’s a wonderful person. Last week he and I talked about my dying, and I told him I thought I would be alright. He said he thought he would be OK, too, and he promised he would always take care of Kyla. He wanted me to feel at ease.”

“I’ve always shared things with my kids — all their lives. We never kept secrets, or tried to hide anything from one another. I think that’s one reason why they’re such great people today. I feel they’re prepared for life, and that they have the tools they need to make the right kinds of decisions. I feel good about that. It’s my legacy to them. I think I played an important part in helping them become who they are.”

We asked Patty, given all that she had been through, was there anything that stood out about the “meaning of life” that she would want others to know. She said: “Cherish every moment you have—with your kids and with your family. Don’t take anything for granted. You never know what’s going to happen.”

When we asked Patty about her immediate future, she said that she and her fiancé Ed wanted to get married. She said she’s only known him for about two years, but that he’s been a very important part of her life. “I’ve been so very grateful for all he’s done for me.” Fortunately, before this article went to press, Patty’s dream of a marriage to Ed came true. On a quiet Sunday afternoon, they joined together in a special union, commemorated by a spiritual ceremony that acknowledged their love and devotion to one another.

Patty was quick to add that Ed is a very loving and charitable person. He used to be Governor of the Moose Lodge in The Dalles, and was very involved with the charitable work that they did. She said she loved to help him there, and that she met many wonderful friends though the Moose. Ed is still actively involved with the Moose and their charitable causes, and plans to remain that way in the future.

Patty’s final words to us were: “No matter what, hold onto your dreams, and believe they will come true. Have faith.”

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