



## **Fateme Mirsayafi**



**June 26th, 1954—October 23rd, 2010**

Fateme was born and grew up in the city of Tehran, in a family of five children. As the eldest daughter, she was actively involved in the nurturing of her siblings.

Soon after finishing school, she began working as a data entry clerk at a university in Tehran. In 1975, she married Morteze Alimirzaie, an elementary school teacher.

During the first few years of their marriage, there was much uncertainty about the immediate future in Iran, due to extreme political upheaval. Optimistic that changes in the Iranian government would bring about a better life, Fateme and Morteze had a daughter, Azadeh, in 1979. The Islamic revolution did not deliver the free and promising life they had hoped for. Like many young, educated Iranian citizens, Morteze was outspoken in his opposition of the

Islamic Republic's rule, attracting the attention of authorities. Mortezeah was one of many arrested and eventually executed, leaving Fateme and Azadeh on their own.

Fateme took Azadeh to live with her family. She was frequently interrogated by police and feared she may suffer the same fate as her husband. She left Iran with Azadeh, by this time nine years old. Fraught with danger, risk and trauma, their path led them to refugee camps in Turkey and Yugoslavia.

In January 1989, Fateme and Azadeh arrived in Toronto as refugee claimants. Fateme attended English as a Second Language classes, beginning the week after their arrival. Fateme and Azadeh's refugee claims were denied by the Government of Canada, which decided that despite all that they had endured, lost and risked, their fears of persecution in Iran were unfounded. They remained in Canada on Immigration Minister's Permits and eventually became Canadian Citizens.

Fateme and Azadeh lived in the Flemington Park area for many years. Fateme's sister Fereshteh was already in Toronto with her family when Fateme and Azadeh arrived, and the two sisters were great company for each other while raising their children. Fateme was a wise, proud and protective mother who remained focused at all times on securing the bright future for Azadeh that she and Mortezeah had dreamed of. Friends and acquaintances remember Fateme's glowing pride in her daughter as she won annual scholarships, followed in her father's footsteps and became a teacher; her excitement about Azadeh's wedding and her elation over becoming a grandma to Micah in 2007. Fateme's second grandson was born three months after her passing.

Fateme worked casually at Red Apple Day Care in the early 1990's and years later attended "Grandparents' Day" there when Micah was enrolled at Red Apple. She joined the team at East End Children's Centre (EECC) in 1993. She touched the lives of countless parents, caregivers and children over the years. Her dedication to children and families could not have been stronger. She knew intuitively how to encourage parents who were depressed or exhausted. She gave extra attention to children whose parents were struggling. She showed parents how to guide children and set limits with compassion and

how to promote their competence.

Children took easily to Fateme. She sat on the floor and played with them. She built relationships with them and earned their trust. She observed them and made mental notes about what they enjoyed, what they were good at, what they struggled with. She worried about children whose needs were not being met and she worried about parents unable to meet their child's needs.

It was not unusual for Fateme to offer assistance to families in their homes during times of crisis. Co-workers as well as families attending programs at East End Children's Centre have entrusted their children to her. Fateme also frequently worked one to one with children with special needs, in their homes and at her apartment, providing respite for parents.

Fateme's gifts were not limited to her outstanding work with families. She was a wonderful cook: even the children's snack trays at EECC were artfully arranged. She was also very talented with fabrics, and created or repaired items at EECC's dress-up centres. Fateme's sense of humour provided ongoing work-place entertainment for her colleagues at EECC and Kimbourne Church.

She was very involved with family and friends, who remember her as a strong woman with a beautiful spirit. In spite of the many relentless challenges Fateme faced as a young woman, she lived joyfully and celebrated good fortune, love, friendship, family and success. She was a great fan of Bob Marley's music and lyrics.

In December 2009, Fateme was diagnosed with leukemia. She chose to keep her diagnosis private, worked until the end of March 2010 and began treatments in April 2010.

Hopeful that a bone marrow transplant would bring about a long-term remission, her family actively promoted the OneMatch program in the Persian community, to increase awareness and improve the chance that Fateme and others of Persian heritage might benefit.

On the evening of Saturday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, Fateme slipped away in the loving presence of her niece, Natasha. She is lovingly remembered and deeply missed by her family, friends, co-workers, as well as all the parents, caregivers and children at East End Children's Centre.