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## Building a future a log at a time

By Ana Macedo - Chilliwack Progress - May 29, 2008



Shelley Mohammed-Ollenberger's brush with cancer has given her a new appreciation for life, and a desire to help those less fortunate than herself. JENNA HAUCK/ PROGRESS

Imagine a beautiful, tranquil setting. There's a log home handcrafted from Western red cedar on this secluded property. It's screened by rhododendrons and large, mature trees. The air is warm and sweet and the birds are chattering away while butterflies flutter by. The wind blows gently and whistles kindly. This sounds so inviting, peaceful and relaxing. It's a simpler way of life and a good place for your soul. "Wake up, Ana! It's time to come back to reality," I whisper to myself. For many of us, this is just an unrealistic fantasy. For Shelley Mohammed-Ollenberger and her family, manufacturing log homes has become a way of life and a chance to turn a fantasy into reality for many around the globe.

In the late 1990s, Keith Ollenberger and his son Colin were ready for a career change. Shelley began encouraging them to do what they loved and were capable of doing. The idea of building high quality, hand-peeled, handcrafted long homes was born and in 1999, Chilliwack Mountain Log Homes was launched. Since then, it has become Canada's foremost domestic and international supplier of beautifully handcrafted log homes. The utmost care is taken in building each dream home and the reviews from world-wide buyers reflect this commitment. "We were the first Canadian company to ship a handcrafted log home to Israel. We shipped it piece-by-piece in a container," she said with a smile. Shelley traveled to Israel with the shipment and Keith has since been back to see the masterpiece which overlooks the Sea of Galilee. "The people who own it have a huge ranch and they now want little log cabins so that people can take their horses and vacation on the property," she explained.

Since starting the company, the Ollenberger family has seen a lot of success and steady growth. They also work hard and are committed to their customers. In 2002, Shelley was asked to join then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's European Trade Mission. "It was incredible. Here I was on this plane with half of Canada's Premiers and the Prime Minister himself. Me! It was a 10-day trip to Moscow, Munich and Berlin and while

we didn't specifically sell any log homes, the exposure was certainly worth it. It put us on the map," she reflected.

For Shelley, the year they started the company was not only busy and exciting; it was also the year that she fought for her life. She discovered a lump on her breast one month after her father had died of cancer. She admits having lived in denial until her actual diagnosis and vividly recalls the moment that she was told about her cancer. Shelley ended up having to undergo four rounds of heavy duty chemotherapy and subsequent radiation.

While she had been a rebellious and difficult child growing up, she was also painfully shy. After graduating, Shelley was undecided about her future but eventually got into accounting, worked for Corrections Canada and even worked in England at the London Stock Exchange. Still, she felt as if she was going through life with no purpose. "Oddly enough, cancer was the best thing that happened to me. It forced me to stop and look at myself. I now do things that I would have never done before my diagnosis. I don't hesitate, I just do them," she said. Shelley is also more accepting and forgiving and concedes that the best mode of transport is a leap of faith. Cancer free for nine years now, Shelley doesn't fear death. "I never thought about death before but now I can say that I'm not afraid," she said.

During her course of treatment, she met quite a few women who were also fighting the same battle to survive. Debbie Spencer was one of these women. Shelley and Debbie had been diagnosed within a month of each other and quickly became friends. They had many similarities in their diagnoses and as a result were put under the same treatment protocol.

After about two years, Debbie was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer which meant that hers had returned to stay. Over the next couple of years, Debbie bravely fought an uphill battle. She volunteered for many clinical trials, all of which helped to slow the growth of the cancer but it ultimately continued to spread. She fought it bravely for the next five years before succumbing to it in May 2006.

It was during this time that Shelley began taking courses in silversmithing. She decided to create something that had to do with breast cancer but ruled out the well-known pink ribbon or any ideas based on that. "One day when I was visiting Deb in the hospital, the idea of a tear drop came to me," she said. Thus, the tear pendant design was born. "I called my design Pink Tears for Breast Cancer because as many of us are affected by this disease, we have all cried many tears and they are a representation of how we feel inside. Whether they're tears of frustration, fear, confusion, pain, sadness or joy and happiness, they are tears brought of incredible emotion. I chose a symbol of that raw emotion that is caused by this disease," she explained. Each sterling silver piece is individually hand-polished and hand-set with a high quality pink cubic zirconia. Pendants are also being made with white gold and a pink tourmaline. "The mold and casting has been very generously donated by Anna Hubbs and Ross Christopherson of The Goldsmith Shoppe in Chilliwack," she quickly acknowledged.

While Debbie had a lot of support from family and friends, the battle was hard nonetheless. Her children's care was always her biggest worry. "She asked me where she should go when it got really bad. Should she stay at home with her teenage children to care for her or should she go to the hospital?" Their good friend Lynne had passed away only months earlier in Langley and had received excellent care from Langley Hospice. However, in Chilliwack, hospice care was only available in the hospital. "This is why the Chilliwack Hospice Society has become an important place for me to place my support. I have been involved with other pink ribbon charities since being diagnosed myself and I have realized that it's important to think globally but it's equally important to act locally," she said.

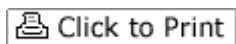
She has sold 130 pendants thus far and hopes that this will become an ongoing fundraiser for Hospice. "Debbie always wanted to go and see Oprah. I've sent the show an email and I'm hoping that Oprah will

feature it on her show. I'm sure that Debbie is watching me and laughing," she chuckled.

Shelley is a kind, brave and generous person who lives life to the fullest and desires to give back. This is her way and you can help. If you'd like information about the pendants or would like to purchase one, call the Goldsmith Shoppe at 792-4007 or the Chilliwack Hospice Society at 795-4660.

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