



YWCA
EDMONTON

A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN

Cynthia's Story

Cynthia Bale

Even in the American South, where I grew up, it still gets chilly in winter. In the eighties, my grandmother, skilled in every sort of needlecraft, crocheted each of her four grandchildren an afghan to curl up in on nights when frost crystallized on the windows. Then, in 1994, a fifth grandchild, my sister Cosette, was born. The intervening years, however, had not been kind to my grandmother's talented hands – arthritis set in, and then a tremor. Granny still doted on Cosette, of course, but we understood that there could be no afghan for her.

Granny passed away in 2008. I flew down to my native Kentucky for the funeral, and helped my parents begin the unenviable process of sifting through eighty years' worth of "Don't throw that out; I might need it someday!" Among the decade of completed newspaper crossword puzzles and oddities like my grandfather's hospital bracelet from a 1976 operation, we found her stash of knitting needles, crochet hooks, spare yarn and pattern books, and, as the remaining knitter/crocheter of the family, I inherited the lot.

When I returned to Edmonton, I began to organize the collection, and at the bottom of the bag of yarn, I discovered an unfinished project. Sixteen crocheted motifs – fourteen of them already sewn together in groups of seven, a central hexagon surrounded by six more hexagons in a contrasting colour, two more loose and waiting for motifs to surround them. It had to be Cosette's afghan. We may have assumed Granny couldn't possibly have crocheted another stitch, but clearly she did not. I shudder to think of the force of will required to achieve such tight, even, perfect stitches with pain-wracked hands. The strength of her love for her grandchildren was never so clear as in that moment.

I knew then that I had to complete it. Among all the pattern books Granny left, however, there was no pattern that matched the afghan. Fortunately, I also inherited her stubbornness. I studied the pieces carefully under a magnifying glass, then picked up one of her hooks and some magenta yarn. A few hours of trial and error later, I had a hexagon of my own. More followed, all in the vivid colours Granny favoured, many of them made from her own yarn.

My grandmother is in the afterworld. My little sister is in Louisville. In Edmonton, I stitch crocheted hexagons together, determined to finish the afghan for Cosette's sixteenth birthday, determined to pull us all closer despite the winter's chill.

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