**On The Clothesline**

The socks were knitted by the Cowichan nation and like their namesake, *land warmed by the sun*, ensured heat.

They were a gift for my mother-in-law, Inez, mailed at Christmas. In the Spring, when the sap began to run, my husband and I and two kids went for a visit. When we arrived at Craig Road the socks were on her feet. And they stayed on her feet, day and night.

She had made up her mind: the socks kept her feet warm. They were cozy. She would wear them. Wear them until they had holes and then darn them and wear them again.

One evening when I was giving her a foot massage, I removed the socks from her swelling ankles and tender skin.

She was between pain and sleep when she revealed, with the same determination that she had decided to wear the socks, that it was time.

On that Saturday afternoon, she turned, opened one eye and looked directly at me. With a surge of strength, she said very clearly, *I have to go*.

The first time she said it with practical determination: the woman who sized up the situation, recognized that her body had had enough, made a list and *this dying thing* would be checked off.

Then she said it again, *I have to go.* This time those simple words filled with goodbye and *oh how much I will miss everyone*: the woman who moved towards life no matter how challenging, no matter how wonderfully full of wonder.

She never wore the socks again. They went into the laundry, and the stubborn wool things just wouldn’t dry.

John, her son, my husband, placed the socks above the old kitchen wood stove, then Peter, her husband, lovingly hung them outdoors in the wind.

A star twinkled on them in the night, and when the sky lightened in the morning the socks were there.

As they hung on the clothesline, looking so normal and cheerful in the bright morning air, Inez took her last, big, bold breath. She knew she had to go.