Emma Estepanian

Emma Estepanian was born on December 26, 1934 in Tabriz, Iran. She was one of ten children. Her parents, Gayaneh and Gourgen Estepanian fled Armenia in the period of World War I, the Russian Revolution and the Armenian Genocide. Six of her siblings died before the age of 5. Emma was quite close to her father who served as a high-ranking military official. He died of mysterious causes upon returning from a military mission outside of the country. She was not yet ten. Her mother raised the surviving 4 children, Astghik, Gaspar, Emma and Malcolm while running the large dairy farm business that served the city of Tabriz. Gayaneh taught her two daughters to be self-sufficient and alert to a changing world. Emma and her sister, Astghik both became registered nurses and subsequently midwives.

Emma met Gaigham Ghazarian, MD while at work. They married and moved to the southern Iranian province of Khuzestan to work for the NIOC (National Iranian Oil Company). They had two children, Anita and Sabina Ghazarian.

In the upheaval of the Iranian Revolution, Emma worried about the family's status as an Armenian ethnic and religious minority in Iran. In 1979, she fled the country with her two young daughters. They lived in New York, London and then moved to Eastbourne in Sussex, before settling in Vancouver, Canada where her husband who had been unable to leave Iran as a physician was finally able to reunite with the family in 1986.

Emma had an eternal passion for imbuing everything she came across with love and life. This included showing her deep love to her own children and family, community and friends. The same zeal applied to her professional life, delivering hundreds of babies as well as to her hobbies such as gardening, winning several competitions for growing the best roses and strawberries.

Emma was a selfless and fearless advocate for her children and their education and a true fighter – she honed a new language and was able to start working as a nurse in several long-term care facilities in West and North Vancouver. Sabina, her youngest daughter, was her lifelong companion and protector who remained by her side throughout all of Emma's remaining years. Anita moved to Los Angeles to attend university where she later married and settled.

On Feb 20, 1993 she was hit by a car while crossing the road. She sustained severe brain and internal injuries. After months in a coma, she was left with severe disabilities. Many would have thought her story would end at this point, but she was resilient. Thanks to the efforts and advocacy of her daughter, Sabina and the love she received from family, caregivers and community, she lived nearly 31 years, mostly at Luther Court and more recently at The Summit.

Her struggles and her suffering finally came to an end on February 14, 2024. At her passing, her whole family were with her in person and virtually.

She was a beloved mother and an exemplar of true love, resilience and strength for all who knew her. She is much loved and will be missed. She is survived by her 2 daughters, her grandchildren Michael Armen and Oshin Ghazarian-Leeson, Alineh Anais and Aram Garbellini-Ghazarian as well as by her nieces and nephews in New York, Tehran, Toronto and California.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

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