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‘Last quilt’ finds its way home

By Jenny Schoupe
News Report Staff

Tammy Flack-Wheeler, of Shumway, grew up receiving quilts from her grandmother and quilter, Betty Jean Flack.

She had accumulated so many throughout her childhood that the excitement of a new quilt had worn off.

But on September 24, Tammy received a quilt – this time from her Aunt Jeanne Sutter – and she cried tears of joy and excitement.

According to Tammy, Flack kids would never cry over a quilt, so no one quite understood her reaction to receiving this specific quilt.

“We had dozens of them. We’d show just as much excitement over a pack of tube socks as we would over a quilt,” Tammy explained.

Tammy and her siblings would receive a quilt for each Christmas and birthday. They would take random pieces of fabric and clothes to Betty Jean’s home and ask for a quilt to be made of that material, and within a week or so, Betty Jean would have a quilt constructed. According to Tammy, one of her brothers had a quilt constructed from a curtain sample book and she’s pretty sure her cousin invented the concept of a t-shirt quilt.

“If we would have cried, it was because we would have rather had a new Barbie instead of another quilt,” said Tammy.

But when it came to this quilt she received on her wedding day, there was something special about it.

It was Tammy’s “last quilt.”

Tammy was 24 years old when she received this quilt for the first time from her grandma Betty Jean. At this point in Tammy’s life, she realized the time and energy that went into the making of a quilt.

“By then I understood that it was art and that it was love. By then I was an accomplished seamstress myself and I understood the incredible talent and hard work that went into a quilt. I cherished that last quilt,” said Tammy.

According to Tammy, this quilt was so special that it was the only quilt she kept in good condition.

“It was my only quilt not drug through dirt, or singed from sitting close to a camp fire. It was never in the bottom of the dog’s bed. I never took it to the beach, never used it as a rug or even used it to mop up spilled milk. I’m serious when I say that this is what Flack kids did with their quilts,” explained Tammy.

Tammy knew her grandmother’s health was



Tammy Flack-Wheeler beams with excitement after receiving her “last quilt” from her aunt as a wedding gift. Tammy thought her quilt was gone forever after having to sell it to pay her bills.

Submitted Photo

slowly declining and that this “last quilt” would truly be the last one she would receive from her grandma. “It became my most prized possession.”

Betty Jean Flack passed away in 2011, around the same time Tammy became a single parent.

According to Tammy, “Things got hard. They got really hard.”

Things got so hard for the single mom that she was forced to make very difficult decisions.

“I had to make a choice between feeding my kids or keeping the last quilt,” explained Tammy. “A ‘Betty Jean’ quilt always fetched an incredible price, and that price skyrocketed when she was gone and there were no more ‘Betty Jean’s’ being made.”

Tammy made the difficult decision to sell her “last quilt.”

“I sold something that never should have left my possession. I sold a piece of my heart and a piece of my legacy, and I was heartbroken,” said Tammy.

Though the decision was a difficult one to make, Tammy couldn’t look back. With the money she received from the quilt, she was able to pay “two months’ worth of bills and buy shoes” for her three children.

Tammy thought her quilt was gone forever, until she opened a gift from her Aunt Jeanne Sutter on her wedding day.

The card attached to the gift read: “It’s something old, but it’s new to start your lives together. It’s been borrowed and it even has some blue. Please don’t sell me when times get tough because Grandma will haunt you and she can get rough.”

After reading the card, Tammy wasn’t sure what she would find beneath the bow and wrapping paper. She eventually unwrapped the gift, and to her surprise, she laid her eyes on the one possession she thought she would never see again.

It was her “last quilt.”

“Somehow, my aunt had kept an eye on it and knew where it was. She brought it back to where it never should have left. She couldn’t have given me anything as meaningful as my last quilt coming back home. She returned my last tangible evidence of my legacy,” explained Tammy.

Though many of the wedding guests and even her new husband did not understand the significance of the quilt until afterwards, it didn’t matter. Tammy knew, and that’s all that mattered.

According to Tammy, she jokes that to this day “this is the only way to make a Flack kid cry over a quilt.”



Turning 15 is an important time in the Latin American and Mexican cultures. They celebrate with a special ceremony called Quinceañera. It symbolizes the transition from a young girl into a young lady. Isabella Muñoz (seated in left photo), along with her parents Tony and Aleyda, celebrated this time together. The ceremony includes numerous special elements. Aleyda presented Isabella with a kneeling pillow, while “grandpa” Dan Conley gave her a ring and Tony did the ceremonial changing of the shoes.

Submitted Photos

Quinceañera . . . young girl to young lady

By Steve Raymond
News Report Staff

Quinceañera.

Translated it means “girl turning 15.”

In Latin American and Mexican cultures, it’s a special ceremony. It’s a day to have a “Fiesta” to cherish and honor a 15-year-old daughter as she symbolically transitions from a young girl into a young lady.

For many Hispanics, it’s a day of equal or greater importance than even the wedding day.

For Isabella Muñoz, her Quinceañera was celebrated August 20.

It was an opportunity to share time with family, friends and many that have served as role models and have made a positive impact in her life.

“It was a chance to reunite the people that have been important in her life and have helped make her the person she is today,” said Tony Muñoz, Isabella’s father. “It was important for Isabella to have this moment as a stepping stone in her life.”

Isabella is the daughter of Tony and Aleyda Muñoz. Tony is pastor of Igle-

sia Bautista Latina in Effingham and has served for the last nine years as a Missionary Strategist for the Illinois Baptist State Association (IBSA), planting and leading congregations in Effingham, Centralia and Champaign. Aleyda works for Sehý & Jones and also teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) at Lake Land College.

Tony and Aleyda were both born and raised in Honduras. They came to the United States in 2001 when Tony entered the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. In fact, Isabella was born on August 13, 2001 – his first day of seminary.

“She was born at 5:15 and my first class started at 8 a.m.,” Tony recalled.

Bella, as she is called, is a sophomore at Effingham High School. She has two siblings. Antonio is 17, a senior at EHS and was just crowned Homecoming King Friday night. Her sister, Emilia, is 12 and in seventh grade.

A Quinceañera is rooted in Mexican Catholic tradition and many include a Mass. But the ceremony is mostly known for its symbolic elements, food and fun.

But Bella’s ceremony was centered

around the family’s Christian faith.

“It was an opportunity to showcase our daughter, but we wanted to be careful,” Aleyda explained. “We wanted to show the foundation of what she’s been taught when it comes to Bible principles. We wanted to show God’s grace and mercy in her life and how she will live her life for God’s purpose.”

The family actually started planning the event more than a year ago. Approximately 250 people were invited and attended the ceremony, held at the First Baptist Church in Effingham. Included in that group were seven family members from Honduras and three more from Houston.

Tony’s sister, Brenda, brought seven 50-pound bags full of ornaments and handmade wooden souvenirs for the guests, with the help of Mrs. Nongil (Tony’s mom), Mrs. Lucy (Aleyda’s mom), and Mrs. Daysi (Tony’s high school teacher) from Honduras that helped decorate and adorn the church and fellowship hall.

The one group Bella was responsible for was her Court of Honor. The size of that group could be anywhere between

1 and 30. It could be all girls, all boys or a mix. Including Isabella, her Court had 20 high school friends with an equal amount of boys and girls.

“When I first asked my friends to be part of the Court of Honor, they didn’t know what a Quinceañera was,” Bella noted. “I told them it was like a wedding for a 15-year-old, which seemed to help. They learned a lot about it during the ceremony.”

The program opens with the processional of the Court of Honor. They entered to the song “We Are” by Kari Jobe.

Isabella was the next to enter. She was escorted by Collin York, the young man she asked to accompany her. That is called the “chambelan.”

The minister then started the ceremony. Tony served that role, as requested by Bella. It was the fifth Quinceañera he has officiated locally since coming to Effingham in 2006.

He read Matthew 5:16 – “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

“This world needs a lot of enlighten-

ment,” Tony said. “This passage talks about good works and how they will impact those around us. We need to be more of a light of the world and we need to share that light.”

Tony also explained the various elements of the ceremony and the symbolism they represent.

The first was the giving of the ring, which serves as a reminder to remain pure until marriage.

It was a special moment for Bella when Dan Conley was chosen by the family to present the ring. Dan, and his late wife Vicki, were the American “abuelos” (grandparents) to Bella, Antonio and Emilia.

“They have been the kids’ grandparents by love ties,” Tony explained. “May 21, 2006, was the first day I preached at Calvary Baptist. After the service, Dan and Vicki came up to us. They were drawn immediately to our family. It was a divine connection. They were God-provided. They became grandparents to our kids, since we left all our family in Honduras.”

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