



Surviving Clara

They happened upon each other by accident. A happy accident as it were. Fate brought Janet and Clara together in March of 2004 for cancer treatment. What they didn't know was the impact they would leave on each other. Read **Janet Boccone's** touching story of loss and legacy.

Clara Akey and I met in a chemotherapy clinic on a gloomy March morning six years ago. I was in my second month of treatment, and on that particular day, several nurses were trying unsuccessfully to administer the poison I was depending upon for my survival. I was crying; I was in pain; and I was pleading with my husband, who sat helpless at my side, to take me home.

Out of nowhere, I heard the most incredible laugh. It was the kind of laugh that turns your head and makes you smile, the kind of laugh that makes you wish you were in on the joke. And that's when I saw her. Across the room was a woman so full of life, she took my breath away. She was loud. She was smiling. She was having a good time. What on earth was she doing here?

It was our nurse Anne Marie who figured out how much we had in common and brought us together. I often wonder if she would be surprised to learn what fast friends and confidantes we became. Looking back, I can't imagine how different my life would have been

if Clara and I hadn't been introduced or if my husband and two girls hadn't embraced her so lovingly and welcomed her into our lives.

Thinking of Clara now, mere months after her death at the age of 47, I try and keep this first memory of her etched in my mind and my heart forever. Not the memory of her last days. Not the years she spent suffering. Because, unlike Clara's many friends and family who shared a lifetime with her before she became ill, the majority of our days together involved doctors' visits, shared complaints and strategies for overcoming our battle against breast cancer.

For almost a year we endured a roller coaster of health issues, but when the ride veered off course, I was caught horribly unprepared. My first taste of survivor's guilt came in the summer of 2006. Clara and I hadn't spoken for months, yet for some reason, as August came to a close, I felt an overwhelming need to speak with her. When she called me before I called her, I knew immediately something was very wrong. ➤

The breast cancer Clara thought had been obliterated by months of chemotherapy and radiation had spread to her brain and she was scheduled for surgery within days. She expressed shock at the harsh reality of her diagnosis and was distraught by how the surgery would impact her two sons. On the outside, I was a pillar of strength and offered her my unwavering support. On the inside, however, I came undone.

Overwhelmed

Aside from the overwhelming devastation I felt at learning her cancer had spread, I was a woman in torment and couldn't wrap my head around the multiple layers of emotion that were swirling within. It took a few weeks for me to realize that what was destroying me the most was the simple fact I was no longer fighting alongside her. For so many months, her battle had been my battle, and when another war presented itself, my absence at her side felt like a betrayal.

I helped her whenever I could, whenever she would let me. Clara was a tank,

“On the outside,
I was a pillar of strength
and offered her my
unwavering support.
On the inside, however,
I came undone.”

strengthened—but not hardened—by a bad marriage and years of single motherhood. I listened when she needed me to, drove her where was required and put my foot down when I thought she wasn't getting the care or the honesty she deserved from her doctors. Always trying to put myself in her shoes. Always feeling guilty and thankful

in the same breath. Always going home to collapse into my husband's waiting arms. And often, when the emotional commitment of watching Clara deteriorate would take its toll on my family, I'd pull myself out of her life for a few months so I could concentrate on my own.

Despite her many surgeries, her years of suffering and her ups and downs, the speed at which Clara left us haunts me still. I relive her last week in the hospital almost daily—sometimes hourly—and wonder when I'll finally be able to accept that she is truly gone.

I carry my friendship with Clara like a treasured four-leaf clover. She is my lucky charm, my ray of sunshine on the gloomiest and most miserable of days. As I trek from doctor to doctor, from specialist to surgeon, figuring out ways to keep any future cancer battles at bay, I feel her by my side, in my head and in my heart. She is always there, reminding me of how lucky I am to be here to make these choices, to be a mom to my two girls, to plan, to love, to live. ▀

Never settle for anything less than what you deserve
- especially when it comes to your health or healing.

The Pearl offers an unparalleled massage therapy experience in an elegant and exclusive environment.

Appointments are available 7 days a week to accommodate the busiest of schedules... even yours.



To book your next healing session, please call or email us:

905.492.4499
admin@thepearlspa.ca

1250 St. Martins Drive in Pickering

THE PEARL
MASSAGE THERAPY SPA
www.thepearlspa.ca



LIVEWITHSPIRIT

Yoga * Meditation * Pilates
WWW.LIVEWITHSPIRIT.CA

Join us this Summer for Yoga and Pilates in Downtown Brooklin, on an acre of gorgeous green property.

Brooklin Run and Cycling Club sessions begin SOON!

Also ask about the SPRIT WITHIN Retreat..

Mention this Ad to receive a free class.



75 Baldwin Street, Brooklin (905) 620-1151