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October '10

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Survivor Support **8**

# SURVIVOR SUPPORT



By Nikki Klock

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and while not all women will develop breast cancer themselves, many will feel the rippling effects of the disease through family or friends. The good news is that, along with working toward a long term cure, many local and national organizations are committed to improving the lives of survivors.

In 1999, 47-year-old Vancouver mother of 6, Clara Jean Laible, was diagnosed with breast cancer. After a mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiation therapy, the cancer went into remission—only to return two years later and take her life.

Soon after, Laible's children took action by creating the Clara Jean Foundation, whose mission is to educate, support and empower those affected by breast cancer. Focusing on natural medicine and a holistic approach, the foundation hosts events throughout the year, including Moving You Forward, a walk and health expo held annually at Esther Short Park.

"At [Moving You Forward], people can come and talk with natural practitioners in person and learn about more options for breast cancer treatment," says Stina Hatch, one of Laible's daughters, and a Clara Jean Foundation board member.

Hatch, now a mother herself, previously worked at Just Like a Woman, a Portland specialty lingerie store fulfilling the special needs of women who have undergone mastectomies, giving her insight into the struggles that breast cancer survivors face long after the cancer has left their bodies. A wealth of other resources, including local practitioner referrals, research news, and support group information can be found at [www.clarajeon.org](http://www.clarajeon.org).



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On a national level, Dara Marias, of Las Vegas, a 40-year-old working mother of two and breast cancer survivor, has been dealing with the effects of cancer her whole life: her grandmother, mother and aunt have all passed away from breast cancer.



Dara Marias (pictured with her daughter, Molly) underwent an optional mastectomy and breast reconstruction after testing positive for a gene linked to breast cancer

Unfortunately, at age 36, Dara tested positive for the BRCA gene, putting her at high risk of developing cancer, and led her to the incredibly hard decision to have a hysterectomy and a prophylactic mastectomy and immediate breast reconstruction with AlloDerm Regenerative Tissue Matrix, which is derived from donated human tissue. Through breast reconstruction, patients like Marias are able to regain a sense of self.

Dr. Allen Gabriel of Southwest Medical Group has been working with cancer survivors for over a decade. "Reconstructive breast surgery is an important part of emotional and physical healing for women who have endured a battle with breast cancer or another disease," says Dr. Gabriel. While not all women are candidates for reconstruction, or choose not to have the procedure, "many patients feel better knowing that their illness hasn't robbed them of their femininity . . . Our patients would like to have minimum reminders of their disease and our goal is to achieve this with their collaboration."

In the wake of her survival, and in memory of those lost to cancer, Marias recently founded the Butterfly Project, which provides women access to the resources and information they need about support groups, treatment options and breast reconstruction information (see Resources). "My mother taught me so many things, but her central message was always that if a person can act to better the situation, he or she has an obligation to do so," says Marias. "Treat everyone with kindness, caring, dignity and respect, and do your best to

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make things better. This is what life is about."

"It seems like everyone knows someone who has dealt with Breast Cancer," says Hatch. "I find so much strength in talking to a survivor and hearing about their journey. Each of us has a chance to learn and grow from the people we meet and the experiences we have."

*Nikki Klock is the married mother of two daughters and editor of Vancouver Family Magazine.*



*Above: Photos courtesy Clara Jean Foundation*

CANCER AWARENESS  
& RESOURCES

**Clara Jean Foundation: [www.clarajean.org](http://www.clarajean.org)**

**Butterfly Project: [www.helpbutterflyproject.com](http://www.helpbutterflyproject.com)**

**Breast Reconstruction Information: [www.breastreconstructionmatters.com](http://www.breastreconstructionmatters.com)**

**National Breast Cancer Awareness Month: [www.nbcam.org](http://www.nbcam.org)**

**Just Like a Woman: [www.justlikeawoman.com](http://www.justlikeawoman.com)**