**CHARITY EVENT SPEECH**

**FOR**

**PATRICIA OCONNELL**

Hello everyone! Once again, it is a privilege and an honor to be a part of this incredible organization and to have the opportunity to speak with all of you today (**If there are any people in particular you would like to acknowledge, do that here**). I’d like to acknowledge and thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for organizing this event and for providing the platform, context, and resources to take a stand and implement much needed action to challenge this insidious disease.

Every day since that fateful moment back in 2017 when I received the dreaded diagnosis that **NO ONE EVER** wants to hear, the universe has provided me with more opportunity than I could have ever imagined. In my short life.... after all, I was just \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years old when I got the news and heard **THAT** word.... I have dedicated my life, my spirit, my resources, and my common sense and determination to dealing, healing, functioning, and surviving in “the new normal.” I’ve immersed myself in the quest to support and fund research to find treatment and cure for ovarian cancer. I’ve faced fear. I’ve conquered pain. I’ve dealt with uncertainty, scrutiny, grief, anger, and frustration. My emotions have run the gamut from uncertainty to despair to bewilderment. Every day provides a challenge and today is no different..... as I stand here, before you, I can’t help but wonder.... “**REALLY**???? With all I’ve been through.... with all of the ups and downs... and lower downs of the events of the past several years, **REALLY**??? I **REALLY** have to follow **JANE FREAKING BRODY**??? (**Wait for the laugh**). I can’t help but invoke the expression, “We make plans and God laughs.” If he only knew how many drafts I’ve written for **THIS** moment... oh. Wait. He **does**!!!

(**Do you want to call her Jane or Ms. Brody?**). \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ has presented to us a mindful, educated, informed, thought provoking keynote speech. From my perspective, it’s not possible to say or inspire too much on the topic of well being, cancer, treatment, and just plain survival. Her wisdom and insights about health, from both personal and professional vantage points serve to spur us to action.... to really encourage us to think about our relationship to our bodies and our minds.... to guide us to find... if not resolution, then at least a path to action. Believe me, every day I realize that it will take an endless font of support, encouragement, information, and partnership.... just to get through. It is thanks to **HOW** and events like this that provide the opportunity to learn from people like Jane Brody.... and all of you.... that optimism has a chance to crack through the barriers of anguish and frustration.

Eleanor Roosevelt said, “A woman is like a tea bag. You never know how strong she is until she finds herself in hot water.” Believe me... over the past several years, I’ve **STEEPED**! (**Wait for the laugh**)..... but I can’t help wondering.... isn’t it time we examine the benefits of “cold brew?” (**Wait for the laugh**). Over the years, thanks to science, medical advancements and discoveries, and the overwhelming participation and generosity of people like all of you, progress has been made. Now is the time to be more vigilant and more relentless than ever before. I know I have partners in all of you when I say that my... **OUR** mission needs to be **ZERO** tolerance for ovarian cancer. We need to reach and sustain the only goal... cure... remission... survival and retention of **ONE HUNDRED PERCENT** quality of life. We need to align on the reality of completely conquering this disease so that future generations will be able to ask, “Cancer? What’s **THAT**?”

We’re not there yet. Fran Drescher, a strong, witty, talented woman and a “sister survivor,”.... same club... different branch, had this to say about her experience with uterine cancer, as she reminds us that she “has been in more stirrups than Roy Rogers.” (**Wait for the laugh**). That we can laugh about these conditions now is a true blessing. Laughter... conversation... enlightenment... are all healing agents and are necessary components of treatment and discovery.

Every story of diagnosis, treatment, recovery, and survival is unique and different. Every woman that has experienced ovarian cancer has a story to tell and it is our job to listen and act in the most effective means possible. Support and encouragement, in whatever form it takes, is priceless, and while we, as patients and fighters ultimately go through each battle alone, to face the effects of surgery, treatment, and their considerable aftershocks, it is through the tireless human connection and networks of friendship, love, generous contributions, and scientific advancement that we will conquer this.

Boy... I think I must sound wise beyond my years.... You know **WHAT**? I had **no** **choice**. In my short life, so far I’ve dealt with considerable curve balls, and while others my age, for the most part, have managed to live a fairly unscathed existence, I stand before you as a somewhat dubious member of a club I really did not plan to join. ... but the **GOOD NEWS** is... I’m **HERE**. I **AM** standing before you. And I have **LEARNED** some **INCREDIBLE** life lessons.

In 2017, I was diagnosed with stage 2C clear cell ovarian cancer. It took nearly three years to find an accurate diagnosis. I endured two major operations and six rounds of platinum-based chemotherapy, and I am very blessed to be able to say that I remain in remission today. Within the last year I transitioned from being a cancer patient to a cancer survivor to a heavily monitored patient in remission. This past year forced my body into medically induced menopause at the age of 34. I wasn’t “allowed” to take any replacement hormones and I was told there is a 70% chance of a reoccurrence. I think you can understand that this past year has been the most difficult of my life as my process evolves to include depression and the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. There are long-term effects cancer can have on a person. Fighting for one’s life is sobering indeed. When you consider the other factors... I’m in my mid thirties... I have three small children, a husband, a life, and a burning desire to be “normal” again, I want you all to understand that remission isn’t synonymous with recovery and that it has been and will continue to be a difficult, challenging process to regain my **SELF**.

I want you all to understand that survivors need help and support, sometimes even more than those in the thick of the battle. I want you to know that when the dust settles, and people have gone “back to their lives,” please remember it is worth checking on that friend. I invite you to consider that mental illness is just as powerful as any 10-pound tumor and we as a society need to begin to acknowledge the importance of really being there for those depressed after major events and that suicidal thoughts can occur in any situation for any person and they are serious and should not be ignored or diminished.

Is there an upside to my story? I have to say there is. As I said, I’m **HERE**.... far too many women that have preceded me cannot boast that accomplishment. I’m here and I take one day at a time. I’ve learned to fight. I’ve learned that each one of us has a story... and just because we’re able to stand upright... with our hair grown back and the pallor in our cheeks vanquished, it doesn’t mean that we go through life without scars. It means we have **survived**... one day at a time. It means that I’ve learned new meanings and iterations of the word “compassion.” It means that, for now, I dodged a bullet. And although I hear others whizzing past my ears, for now, I’m here. I’m here to tell my story. I’m here to fight for the well being of others. I’m here in the name and spirit and memory of Jacquelin T. Liggett, who, although not **physically** here, lives on in **ALL** of us.

I am grateful to be able to live my life, love my husband Patrick, and my kids, Jane, Peter, and Mary. I’m humbled to be in your presence and yes, I’m even thankful that me, little Patricia McConnell of Lighthouse Point, Florida, got to share a podium and speak a few words **FOLLOWING** the great Jane Brody. Most of all, I’m thankful for your friendship, generosity, and commitment to this cause and organization. Thank you all!!