



Nan Reilly - Resurrection

It was Labor Day weekend, 2005. The Reilly family – Nan, her husband Steve and their daughter – and their friends were squeezing every last drop of summer fun from the warm holiday weekend. They staked their claim to a sunny spot along Lake Erie’s shoreline in Avon Lake and set up their day camp of beach chairs and coolers, towels and sunscreen, life jackets and power skis.

Nan Reilly and her then five-year-old daughter, Laura, took out one of the skis while a friend took out the other. The Reillys had ridden power skis for more than a decade, but the other woman was a novice.

Nan and Laura enjoyed the waves for a while and were simply floating offshore when Nan locked eyes with her friend, who was headed squarely for them. Nan threw Laura clear just seconds before the other woman's out-of-control power ski ran over her, causing massive internal injuries.

Nan has good reason to believe in miracles. She is alive because of a series of them:

A Hiram College student was also at that beach that day. She had been a lifeguard in California. She prevented Nan from being lifted from the water into the boat of a passerby who had moved in closer to help. Because of the nature of her injuries,

lifting Nan like that would have killed her. Instead, the college student positioned Nan on a boogie board to stabilize her as she was brought to shore.

The beach where they set up camp was not accessible by vehicles. But for some reason that summer, a temporary access road was put in. This is the only reason the ambulance was able to pull directly onto the beach to reach Nan.

The Metro Life Flight helicopter, which takes 15 minutes to warm up, happened to be participating in an event in Elyria that afternoon and was airborne as soon as the call came in. The trauma surgeon at MetroHealth who performs coil surgeries (exactly what Nan would need) received the page just as he was walking out of the hospital after a long shift. He turned around and came back.

Nan “died” three times before she even made it to surgery. She coded on the beach and was revived by EMS staff. She coded again during her flight to MetroHealth and once again in the trauma bay where she arrived with a broken sternum, lacerated liver and a lacerated spleen.

Her first surgery did not stop her internal bleeding. Blood was soaking through bandages and seeping into her IV line. The next morning, despite the risks, surgeons went back in to try to find the source of the blood that was pooling in her abdomen. The following morning, with blood now pooling in her chest cavity, surgeons went in for a third time. Within this 72-hour period, they removed three liters of blood clots from Nan’s abdomen and three more from her chest cavity. The bleeding finally stopped. Surgeons wouldn’t close her abdomen yet though. She was too swollen.

Nan was placed in a medically induced coma with a ventilator and a feeding tube. Within the week, she developed a 104-degree fever. Surgeons had to

close up her abdomen and opted for a mesh-like prosthetic to cover the eight-inch hole. They'd later graft skin from her thigh to cover the area.

Many months later, during surgery to complete the reconstruction, she'd even get a belly button again.

Nan spent a total of two months in the hospital. She'd lost so much strength, she needed to relearn how to hold a fork, how to hold a pen. Determined to write a card for Laura's birthday, Nan spent three hours writing 13 letters:

H-A-P-P-Y B-I-R-T-H-D-A-Y

Her recovery has taken years. It was a recovery she wasn't sure would even happen until she met the wife of one of Steve's colleagues a few months after she was released. The woman had also been in a serious accident and had suffered similar injuries. She showed Nan her scars and told her that it would take time, but that she would be okay.

Nan recalls that moment. It was the first time she truly believed that she would, in fact, be okay. So many others had given her that same encouragement, but this was coming from someone who'd been there and was now on the other side.

Three years ago when she was approached to be part of MetroHealth's Trauma Survivors Network to provide that same perspective to others, Nan agreed immediately. She volunteers monthly during the school year, increasing her frequency during the summer months when she's not teaching math to sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders at St. Joseph Parish School in Avon Lake, just down the road from Miller Road Park.

While she'll never do a yoga "plank," Nan has learned to run and finished a 5K race with her sister. She's traveled to Japan, meeting with fellow ceramic artisans, and shared in her family's ski

vacation to Utah. She also helps run a local Friday Night Ski Club, which has more than 100 members.

Years after the accident – to close that chapter of her life – Nan took Laura back out on the water to finish their ride.

