

# Life stories

A celebration of lives well lived and people well loved  
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## Jean Murray: 'Inspiration Lady' remembered

*Helped form Helping Hands group in Vaughan to aid needy local families at Christmas time*

BY ADAM MARTIN-ROBBINS  
[amartinrobbins@yrmg.com](mailto:amartinrobbins@yrmg.com)

When Bob Murray hears Gordon Lightfoot's tune Inspiration Lady, it always makes him think of his late wife, Jean.

"I listen to that and it's just Jeanie to a T," he said. "In the song, it goes: 'She's always got something on her mind,' and Jeanie always had something on her mind."

Jean was born Feb. 1, 1959, in Calgary; the youngest of James and Charlotte Cameron's three children.

In 1966, her family moved east, settling in Thornhill.

After high school, Jean studied social work at Centennial College and landed a job at the Canadian Mental Health Association, teaching life skills to people who had anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder.

While vacationing in Cuba in 1979, she met Bob, a Towers department store manager.

The pair began dating, off and on at first, and eventually married on Oct. 3, 1981.

They moved around a bit, but eventually settled in Woodbridge in the mid-'80s.

Along the way, the couple had two sons, Patrick was born in 1983 and Alex followed in 1985.

Jean, who had bipolar disorder, continued working for a few years after Alex was born, but eventually had to give up her job.

She also had to surrender her driver's licence.

"She was good-natured about it," Bob said. "She'd say, 'I worked with people who suffered from anxiety and depression and bipolar disorder and I guess I caught it.'"

Some days she was full of energy and eager to take on the world, other days she had trouble getting out of bed, Bob said. But Jean refused to let her illness stop her from leading an active, fulfilling life.

"She had a lot of grit in her and she wasn't going to let it defeat her," he said.

*'She had a lot of grit in her and she wasn't going to let it defeat her.'*

—Bob Murray

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COURTESY PHOTO

Jean Murray (right) with childhood friend Dr. Sue MacColl.

When the boys were young, Jean joined the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) at Pine Grove Public School, where she happily took on any job that had to be done.

"If you ever asked her for help or you ever needed anything, she'd be the first one there to volunteer," said longtime friend Judie Pezzetta, who also sat on the PTA. "No matter what was going on, she would always say, 'What do you need or what can I do?' That's what I really liked the most about her, was her kindness, her thoughtfulness and

always being there when you needed somebody."

In 2005, Jean, Pezzetta and other mothers from the school founded Helping Hands and

began raising money to help local families in need at Christmas time.

Jean also volunteered in the tuck shop at Etobicoke General Hospital and would take the bus there several times a week.

Bob credits that job with helping her reduce the amount of medication she was taking.

"That was the best thing. She

*'She was one of those people that there aren't enough of in the world...'*

—Judie Pezzetta

had a purpose and a reason to get up," he said. "She would go four or five days a week. ... She loved to talk to people and she got along great with all the staff."

She was doing so well, in fact, they were planning to visit Ireland in June 2010.

In anticipation of that trip, Jean joined a gym and signed up with a personal trainer.

"She said, 'You know, my greatest desire is to be as healthy as possible, to feel as good as I can possibly feel,'" Bob recalled.

Sadly, they never made it overseas.

Jean suffered a cardiac arrest and died March 6, 2010. She was 51.

"It devastated us," Pezzetta said. "She was one of those people that there aren't enough of in the world. ... She was a wonderful woman and a wonderful friend and I'll never forget her."

A flag at Etobicoke General Hospital was lowered in her memory.

Bob is certain, if Jean had lived a few years longer, she'd have joined the efforts to stamp out the stigma around mental illness that began in earnest with the Bell Let's Talk Campaign about five years ago.

"I think that Jeanie would have been the type of person who would have gone out and talked to people," he said. "She'd seen it from both sides."

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