



REMEMBERING SUZANNE

September 1, 1970 – November 11, 2007

If you met her, you are not likely to forget Suzanne Aucoin. Lively does not describe her, she was bursting with ideas, plans, questions, strategies and news. Bright, insightful and wired for problem solving, she stayed alive against daunting odds when her colorectal cancer returned. Quite a few Ontario politicians, reporters and the Ombudsman could tell you about Suzanne's determination. Like a teacher who refuses to let a lazy student fail, or make excuses, or hide, Suzanne kept after the provincial government to provide the treatments she needed. Wrap those qualities inside an engaging, and compassionate personality and you start to understand why Suzanne had such a powerful impact.

Cancer is intensely personal, ripping at the sense of self, bruising human faith in a higher power, perforating all the envelopes we create to manage our lives. Suzanne turned it all into pixie dust. She created a website (helpsusanne.com) and organized dozens of fundraising events to pay for her cancer treatments in the US. She became a friend and advocate for hundreds of other cancer patients, trying to make their journey less painful than hers. She talked to reporters and looked into television cameras describing the government decisions that put her life in jeopardy.

Suzanne challenged OHIP and filed a complaint with the Ombudsman to initiate an investigation, spoke at public functions and press conferences, questioned Cancer Care Ontario's proposal for private pay and said, "It puts the responsibility on cancer patients to pay for unfunded drugs. This is essentially the situation I just went through with OHIP. It is grossly unfair and unjust." She demanded that her government treat cancer patients as if they matter.

As a relatively young patient, maybe Suzanne had more energy for the bureaucratic battles but maybe all the rest of us just hoped that was true. The toll was visible at times. Her huge army of friends and supporters, not to mention a loving family who dropped everything to help her, often dragged her away for holidays, lunches, little trips and fun events. Afterward, Suzanne propelled herself back into advocacy, knowing time was short and many others were too sick to fight for themselves. There was so much she wanted to do about accessibility and accountability, transparency, efficient decision-making and appeals processes.

Suzanne's personal motto was to LIVE LIFE LARGE. You did that, Suzanne. We loved you for it.