



**GLORIA GAYNOR** LIVES HER ICONIC ANTHEM "I WILL SURVIVE" AS A TIRELESS DEVOTEE TO CHARITABLE CAUSES – MOST RECENTLY N.J.'S BREAST HEALTH & HEALING FOUNDATION.

by Patti Verbanas

**SINCE THE 1980S, GRAMMY AWARD-**winning singer Gloria Gaynor has been offering her time, talent, and celebrity to causes from her home state of New Jersey to around the world. Her resume of charitable endeavors is as long as her song playlist and growing: United Cerebral Palsy (Hudson County), Save the Children, American Diabetes Association, and Trinitas Regional Medical Center to name just a few.

Last year, she became the International Goodwill Ambassador for Breast Cancer Prevention for the Breast Health and Healing Foundation in Belleville. The foundation, created by breast surgeon Kathleen Ruddy, seeks to raise awareness about the causes for breast cancer and to fund research for developing a breast cancer vaccine for the human mammary tumor virus. In addition to using her

platform to further the foundation's mission, Gaynor is promoting the launch of "Lobby Me Pink," a free app created by Ruddy that allows users to send emails directly to their Congressional reps.

"Gloria has long been an advocate for women, especially women with breast cancer," Ruddy says. "She has worked tirelessly to provide her support for women battling this disease, and her hit, 'I Will Survive,' is an anthem that most resonates with breast cancer survivors all around the world."

The Newark-born disco diva is certainly not one to sit still. Despite being constantly on the road, Gaynor has put her efforts into studying psychology and is about to pursue her Master's degree so she can begin her next life phase — as a counselor to teenage parents.

The rain is pouring outside Gaynor's home nestled in Somerset County's Watchung Mountains. Outside the door, cases of bottled water are stacked, ready to be disbursed throughout her home. "I drink lots of water — a challenge for me since I don't get thirsty," she says by way of explanation. "I sit bottles of water around the house so that I'm reminded to drink it." That's just one of the lifestyle tactics this music icon and former Wilhelmina model takes to look young and keep her boundless energy.

A television crew has just left, leaving behind them a wake of calm after chaos. We have a precious slice of time hours before Gaynor, now padding into her dining room comfortably slipper-clad, jets off to Atlanta to lend her talent to yet another cause. We sit and talk about the rewards of dedicating your life to service, the importance of taking care of yourself, and what it means to survive.

**Q | How did you get involved with the Breast Health & Healing Foundation?**

One of Dr. Ruddy's patients is a friend of mine, and she put us together. I am available to do whatever I can to further that cause.

**Q** | You have many philanthropic pursuits. What causes are most dear to you?

Cancer. My mother died of lung cancer, but I am interested in any cancer that affects women. I am also interested in osteoarthritis and have worked quite a bit with the Arthritis Foundation. Think of it: Do you know anyone who doesn't have arthritis? [laughs] As my brother would say, "We have pains in places where we didn't know we *have* places."

**Q** | Why have you decided to pursue a Master's degree in psychology to become a counselor?

I plan to open a healing, learning, and recreational center for teenage parents called Living Waters Family Teen Center in Newark at the end of 2012. I have long wanted to teach others how to create peaceful, harmonious, equitable relationships and I realized: Who knows less about that than teenage parents?

If you are a teenager with children you're ignorant to the things you need to know about having a child. So, you need that kind of learning, but you also haven't finished your education. Plus, you're still a child. You haven't finished playing. You need recreation. You need to be able to play without being hindered by a child. The teen center will offer a daycare so the kids can finish their education, play a while, get more acquainted with the baby's other parent, and perhaps come together in marriage.

This center needs to mentor men. Boys don't take the office of fatherhood seriously. They need to be given the equipment to be a man. They need to know if they made a baby with a girl, *that's* their family. They need to man up.

**Q** | You have worked tirelessly for decades to give back. What calls you so strongly to serve?

You know, I'm a walking billboard. [laughs] I have an overriding mission of being as socially responsible and civically engaged as I can. I think everybody should be. This world would be so much better if we all would get involved in what we are called to do.

### Gloria's Keys to Staying Youthful & Energetic

**ON GREAT SKIN:** I take care of my skin religiously. I put on sunblock with moisturizer every day. And I use very little makeup on stage. I completely clean my skin every night before I go to bed and use a moisturizer for my eyes and face as well as a lifting product. I especially love the products from RoC.

**ON EXERCISE AND REST:** I hope to exercise regularly [laughs] – and one day I will. I have done everything from putting a gym in the house to a pool in the yard. I don't always like it, but I exercise when I have time. I don't stay up late and make sure to get seven to eight hours of sleep.

**ON VICES:** I don't drink alcohol, smoke, or do drugs.

**ON HEALTHY EATING:** I eat lots of leafy green vegetables, salads, and fruit, and only small portions of meat, fish, and poultry. I go to the local farmers' markets and eat at Mr. Pi's [Japanese Restaurant in Warren]. The food is awesome.

**Q** | What do you believe is your ultimate calling?

I was born to be a teacher. When I went to my sister's funeral, I met an old family friend in his mid-50s who said to me, "You changed my life." And I thought, *Oh, here's another man who likes "I Will Survive,"* but when I asked him how I changed his life, he said, "When I was in kindergarten, everyone was learning how to read and write their name, but I could not learn. You took me aside and taught me how to read and write my name. It changed my life." And *that* was my confirmation. Even in my songs, I'm always trying to teach something.

**Q** | How do you define "a survivor?"

A survivor is someone who looks at adversity as a challenge that she can and will overcome as opposed to a roadblock. You need to look inside yourself and find that strength because it is *there*. \*