

# COME TOGETHER

**T**HE RECENT DIAGNOSIS of my gorgeous elder sister Clara's motor neurone disease (MND) was earth-shattering. Although there are variants of this chronic condition, she is burdened with the most aggressive, affecting her entire being, from speech and swallowing to muscle strength, agility and emotional wellbeing. She (and we) know that with no cure in sight time is not on her side. Most distressing is seeing the merciless decline of someone so vibrant and physically able within a few short months. To quote Irish author Ruth Fitzmaurice in her compellingly raw memoir, *I Found My Tribe*: 'MND is like water torture, slowly drip-drip-dripping. A tiny nerve ending, a small piece of strength, gets stolen every single day.'

Clara, in her mid-sixties, has unwillingly surrendered her roles as loving carer (for her husband, five children and three young grandchildren) and chief organiser, to now be cared for and organised. My other sister Ruth and I wanted to regroup with her, to wrap her up and take her somewhere deeply nurturing, and I knew just the place.

This was not my first visit to Preidlhof. I came a few years ago to this hideout in the lush Vinschgau valley, where vines, orchards, olive trees, scores of medicinal plants and the purest mountain air combine to form one seamless wellness destination. I was travelling on my own, making a quick pit-stop on a wider Italy trip. And while I only stayed for a few days, it made a huge impression. A

recent report on the land over which the futuristic six-floor spa tower is built revealed a vortex of the highest vibrational energy possible rising from underground. I am not surprised.

I was also excited to revisit for the new wellbeing journeys developed by transformational coach and spa director Patrizia Bortolin and holistic healer Stefano Battaglia. Alongside an elite team of unfailingly tuned-in staff, including doctors, masseurs, life coaches, yoga teachers and a naturopath, Bortolin and Battaglia precisely curated an integrated programme to help us to reconnect on an emotional level, both with ourselves and with each other.

I began with *kokoro* (the word means heart – and extends to mind, or spirit – in Japanese and the session was designed to open ours) with shiatsu expert Elisabeth Raich. Gently holding my head in her hands, she began with my tightly clenched jaw and sensitively guided me to a still, relaxed state, telling me to honour my heart and bring myself home. It was as if she could see my soul. Lying cocooned in her warmth, I quietly hoped that if anyone could get through to Clara emotionally it would be this wise and gentle therapist. Being strong and in control is all Clara knows. But after

a few minutes in Raich's hold, her tears poured out, as did sorrow and intense fear of what lies ahead. This was the start of some much-needed release that would hopefully help her to come to terms with the devastating cards she's been dealt. Combined with Battaglia's osteopathy-based trauma therapy and Martin Kirchler's *daoyin yangshang* ancient Chinese breath-and-movement sessions, we were treated to a glimpse of the old Clara, as her eyes brightened, her face softened and she became more open and alive again.

It was not just Clara who benefited. Like so many of us, my life is lived in overdrive and both my heart-rate variability (HRV) and sleep analysis were testament to this. After deep abdominal delving and at times not-so-gentle neck manipulations (to free that super-stiff jaw), Battaglia reminded me that I need to smile more, laugh more, let the beat move me. Ruth was also shaken by her HRV results, as she did not realise just how seriously stress was impacting her physical and mental health. 'I believed I was capable

of managing everything,' she told me one evening over a pine- and rosemary-infused gin with the South Tyrol mountains in our view. Head of medical diagnostics Dr Alexander Angerner assured her that with a combination of acupuncture, bodywork, nurturing treatments and natural supplements, her system would undoubtedly recover. Two weeks later, she was sleeping more deeply than she had in 20 years.

Of course, there are also facials, massages, Ayurvedic

therapies, morning yoga classes and many other rituals of self-discovery available. We immersed ourselves in the maze of sauna and steam spaces, before finding a little quiet in the relaxation pods. Three days were never going to be enough to fit in the hiking, biking and forest bathing in addition to our daily treatments, but we made the most of it, and the warming local food and smooth biodynamic wine kept us nourished. I have stayed at some of the best spas and retreats on the planet and been treated like royalty along the way. Everything that we experienced here was from the heart. Along with the occasional sobbing, and dreading the hard times to come, there was plenty of joy and laughter – something the three of us haven't shared properly in years.

We all wanted to remain in this cossetting cradle, most of all Clara who, since releasing months of hardly unexpected anger and sadness, was once again present in our lives. After safely delivering her home to her husband, my jaw loosened further and my shoulders dropped a little more, knowing that we had found a rare and essential moment to heal, to help Clara process her pain. If this was the last dance for us siblings, it was a beautiful one. 🧡

## THE ISSUE

A MAJOR DIAGNOSIS SUDDENLY AFFECTS THREE SISTERS AND MAKES THEM FEAR THE FUTURE

## THE REMEDY

INTUITIVE PRACTICES AT PREIDLHOF IN ITALY TO RELEASE EMOTIONAL PAIN AND BOLSTER THEIR CONNECTION FOR THE NEXT STAGE

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