

SAFE HAVEN

Clare Milford Haven turned her own tragedy into a force for good. **Charlotte Reather** meets the Marchioness behind the first non-clinic suicide crisis centre for men

Photography by **HELEN MCARDLE**



Clare wears her custom-made Reverso Classic Duetto Medium in pink gold with a Casa Fagliano leather strap

Sitting in the resplendent library at Cowdray House, Clare Mountbatten, Marchioness of Milford Haven, shows me her Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso watch. 'It's unique and was presented to me after working with the company for ten years. The Reverso Classic Duetto Medium goes from day to night. The day face is silvered grey art deco, the evening face, midnight blue with diamonds which, coupled with the ruby crown, complements my engagement ring [given by her husband, George Mountbatten, 4th Marquess of Milford Haven].' She flicks up the timepiece to reveal an engraving inside the gold casing. 'There are two crossed polo sticks with George's coronet and the initials of my three children, James [who would have been 33], Louisa, 25, and Harry Wentworth-Stanley, 30.'

I admire the blue leather strap made by the famous polo bootmakers, Casa Fagliano. 'The Reverso was actually made with polo players in mind,' says Clare. 'LeCoultre first designed a prototype in 1931 for army officers in India who kept breaking their watches while playing. He came up with the swivelling case to protect the dial and glass by turning it over and exposing the classic metal back to shocks.'

'Jaeger-LeCoultre is the official timekeeper at Cowdray Park Polo Club, which hosts the prestigious Gold Cup,' she continues. 'Time is crucial in polo as each chukka is only seven minutes long, so seconds count.'

The polo player and former social editor of *Tatler*, who looks far younger than her 58 years, is refreshingly down to earth and, in spite of the opulent setting and talk of polo, I don't feel the need to hide my own second-rate watch, although I do yearn to replace it. A decent watch is a universally approved and appropriate refinement; a car will depreciate and a handbag fall out of fashion but a handcrafted watch is timeless. It's an investment for your own lifetime and an heirloom for future generations.

The preciousness of time cuts deeply with Clare because on 15th December 2006 all the clocks stopped in her world when her eldest son, James Wentworth-Stanley, took



Clare wears the
Reverso Classic
Medium Thin in pink
gold, £12,300

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his own life, aged 21. ‘From that moment forward, everything changed. If I could go back in time, knowing what I know now about men’s mental health – masculinity, the signs, the threat – I hope I would have been able to save James from what happened.’

She has since devoted herself tirelessly to finding out why it happened, raising awareness about suicide, supporting families in crisis and working with mental health professionals to help prevent men from taking their own lives.

‘Men are particularly at risk because they find it hard to articulate their feelings and we also know that they find it difficult to ask for help.’

Her hard work and fundraising culminated in the founding of James’ Place in Liverpool, the first non-clinic suicide crisis centre in the UK, whose doors were opened in August 2018 by HRH Prince William. ‘Since then, we’ve helped 130 men through 550 interventions. We provide a safe environment, effective intervention that’s available at the point of crisis and we equip them with effective tools to help improve their mental health. We work with Shout (the 24/7 crisis text line) and are hoping to open more centres soon.’

Clare is proud of her achievement with James’ Place but her maternal grief is still raw and has become part of the mechanism that makes her tick. ‘My daughter Louisa said to me, “You’ve taken something that could have destroyed you and turned it into something that has been the making of you.” ’

Her love of polo is given another layer when she explains that James was passionate about the game. ‘He was obsessed with polo, we both were, and crazy about horses. We played together and against each other. He was Captain of the Harrow team that defeated Eton for the first time in 13 years in 2004.’ It’s a connection she’s not ready to relinquish and, with the support of Jaeger-LeCoultre as her team sponsor, she doesn’t have to.

‘When James died, Jaeger-LeCoultre was so supportive; they continued to back me and the team at a time when I didn’t think I could get back on a horse, but they wouldn’t let me give up. I owe them a lot because just taking an hour out when I wasn’t thinking about James, about all the sadness, and I could focus on something else was very important in my healing process.’ It was a relationship Clare had forged herself, wanting to



Clare wears the Reverso One Duetto Moon in pink gold, £34,000



Tatiana; Clare, wearing the Reverso Classic Medium Thin in pink gold, £12,300; Louisa, wearing the Reverso One Duetto in pink gold, £18,100

Photographer:
Helen McArdle
@ Katie Ellis
Hair and
makeup:
Wendy Turner
at Stella
Creative
Artists using
Sacha Juan
and Tom Ford
Beauty

play independently from her husband. 'I wanted to do things on my own terms, so I said I'm going to start my own team. George asked how, and I really didn't know.'

Fortunately, her editor at the time, Nick Foulkes, thought it was 'blindingly obvious' and pointed her in the direction of Jaeger-LeCoultre. 'I had lunch with the director, pitched my wild idea and he said, okay, let's give it a go.' Several years on, the company's involvement increased and Clare has been sporting the Jaeger-LeCoultre colours for the past 15 years. And the Marquess? 'He was amazed but proud.'

She continues, 'I'm a great believer in sport as a positive mechanism for mental health; it's about being part of a team, not giving up, the desire to do your best – and it gives you a healthy high that improves how you feel about yourself and your wellbeing. At James' Place we are hoping to partner with a football club to extend our message about men's mental health, suicide prevention and the importance of team sport. It can be football with your mates, playing golf – anything – but it's vital to have something for yourself.'

Her children and stepchildren, Lady Tatiana Mountbatten,

29, and Harry Medina, 27, with whom she's very close after 22 years as their stepmother, all take part in various sports. 'Harry and Louisa ride, Tatiana is a very talented professional dressage rider and, in 2016, Harry Wentworth-Stanley rowed as part a four-man team, 3,000 miles across the Atlantic, raising over £650,000 for James' charity.'

I ask her how James' suicide affected his siblings. 'It shaped them but it hasn't defined them. They're all off doing their own things. Louisa is an adventurer, like James – she spent two years in India and came back for the opening of James' Place, which was so touching. She works full-time for OKA on the design side and has her own business, Tamra UK, selling copper water bottles, jugs and vases. I'm very proud of them all.'

And the future? 'The purest luxury for me is time, so I'd like to spend more of it talking to the people around me, friends and those I work with, listening and getting to know them better. Every year I say I'm going to take it easy but, with James' Place, I've got so much to do. There's just not enough time.'

Clare is an ambassador for Jaeger-LeCoultre, 13 Old Bond Street, London W1S 4SX. ■