

Flower Ceremony 2005



2005 marks the tenth anniversary of breast cancer dragon boat racing in Canada. It all began in Vancouver by a concerned medical group, headed by Dr. Don McKenzie, to test the current medical advice. Ten years ago, this medical advice suggested that women who have had breast surgery must limit physical activities, particularly repetitive upper body movements, in order to not develop lymphedema. How wrong we have proven that medical advice to be!

Don't you wonder how a little experiment for lymphedema, which was supposed to last just a few months, could have turned into this ten-year phenomenon – a phenomenon which has spread all over the world? I can tell you how this happened.

Through dragon boating, we found a way to treat our bodies and our minds outside of the cancer centre. The surgeons and oncologists try to rid our bodies of breast cancer but we found a way to heal our hearts while learning to trust our bodies again. Our breast cancer diagnosis was no longer whispered but shouted over loud speakers as we lined up to race! We could not keep this type of healing to ourselves. Breast cancer dragon boat racing is not going away.

After a diagnosis of breast cancer, many of us found that, through dragon boating, we were able to find the courage and strength to once again live full and active lives.

We also participate in dragon boat racing to raise awareness about breast cancer and to give hope to and to encourage other women living with breast cancer to also live full and active lives. Determination, strength, and teamwork – these are the qualities needed to race a dragon boat. These are also the qualities needed to fight breast cancer.

The tossing of a pink flower in the water at the end of a breast cancer race has become a dragon boat tradition. It's a tradition that honours those who have died from breast cancer as well as those who are at this time fighting breast cancer. The tradition began ten years ago when one of the women from that very first dragon boat team in Vancouver noticed that her rose bush was in full bloom as she was leaving for her team's first race. On the spur of the moment, she picked twenty-four roses and brought them to that festival. Her crew members were delighted and tucked the roses into their headbands during their race. The following year, in an impromptu move at the end of the breast cancer race, these women tossed their

flowers into the water in a loving gesture for one of their teammates who was suffering from a recurrence. Since that time, there has been a flower ceremony after every single breast cancer final throughout the world.

Please join me in remembering those women in your lives who have died from breast cancer as well as those women who are fighting breast cancer at this time. Please join me in remembering the thirteen women of Sistership who have died from breast cancer in the past eight years – Kelly, Bev, Michelle, Brenda, Nancy, Kathy, Gail, Leona, Donna, Hulya, Ginny, Colleen, and Jennifer.

Please join me in remembering a member of our Lethbridge team, Christine Van Raay. Christine died from breast cancer just one week ago on August 1st. Brave Christine was an active paddler this season and paddled in both Vancouver in June and Lethbridge in July. Our hearts go out to our friends from Lethbridge.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in saluting all of our women of the dragon.