

Survivor stared down cancer



LINDA OLSEN

WOMAN OF VISION

Squinting against the warm sunshine, Carolyn Parks soaks up the view over the Glenmore Reservoir.

With her part-time job at the Alberta Children's Hospital, Parks' days are often spent in a laboratory in the basement, so an outdoor jaunt is welcome.

She sits back and describes what her life was like "B.C." as she calls it; before cancer, breast cancer, became part of her world 13 years ago.

"I was fit, I didn't drink, I didn't smoke. How could this be happening to me?"

The diagnosis of breast cancer to a busy mother of two young children was devastating, but Parks, who is now 60, was determined that it wasn't going to signal the beginning of the end.

"The first words I said were, 'I'm not going to die,' and the only thing I could think of were my children, who were seven and 10, and that I wanted to be there for them. I needed to be there for them."

She carried that unflinching focus through her treatment and recovery and even instructed her doctors to stay positive.

"I told my doctors, if I recur, don't give me a date. I don't want dates. I'll leave this Earth when I'm ready, on my timeline."

Parks was soon inspired to help others with breast cancer.

She became involved with the Canadian Cancer Society in 1992 and has since been instrumental in establishing a support group, producing an award-winning video and helping bring an art exhibit by breast cancer patients to Calgary.

"They've all been labours of

love. They've been something I saw as needed. They honour the people that were involved with them."

Parks recently honoured several of the women who rowed right alongside her on the Sistership, the colourful and well-known Dragon Boat racing team of women living with breast cancer.

She features their stories in her new book, *The Eye of the Dragon-Women, Cancer and Courage*. It's a compilation of the difficult and inspiring journeys these breast cancer survivors have taken.

"It's a book of courage and a book of encouragement, and that's what you need when you're facing this formidable dragon."

The idea for the book came to Parks as she was working on a fund-raising project for the Sistership, the group's first portrait calendar of members posing semi-nude. Parks thought the calendar, and subsequently her book, were powerful ways to help women reaffirm their self-image.

"Women are more than their breasts. You can be feminine and

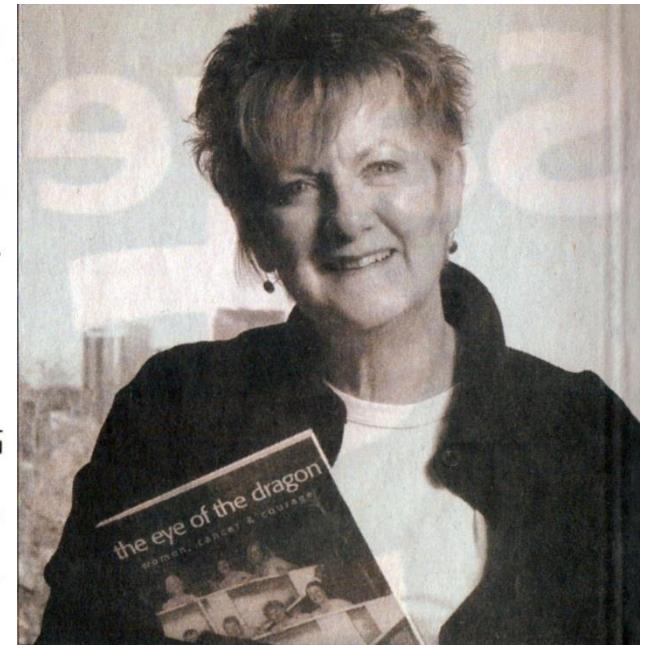
sensual with a chunk taken out of your breast, with one breast, with no breasts. Femininity is as much in the mind as in the body, especially for women."

The launch of Parks' book later this month coincides with Cancer Awareness Month, when Canadians stop to consider the devastating effects of breast cancer, an illness that claims the lives of over 5,000 women in this country every year.

Although she's healthy today, for Parks the battle against the disease continues.

"I don't want there to be a cure for breast cancer because I don't want there to be breast cancer — that means looking at what causes it — and is that over the moon, is that Pollyanna? I don't know."

LINDA OLSEN ANCHORS THE GLOBAL NOON HOUR WEEKDAYS. SHE ALSO HOSTS AND PRODUCES THE WOMAN OF VISION SERIES. THE STORIES AIR THE FIRST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH ON GLOBAL NEWS AT 5 P.M. TO NOMINATE A WOMAN OF VISION, GO TO WWW.WOMANOFVISION.INFO OR CALL 235-7714.



Colleen Kidd, Calgary Herald
Carolyn Parks, author of *The Eye of the Dragon*.