

Hi Everyone,

My name is Deidre and I am proud to be standing here today with my team, Sistership Calgary. We make up two crews; Phoenix and Twisted Sisters. We are very honoured to be joined this year by 'Bosom Buddies', all the way from Nova Scotia, and our dear friends (and competitors 😊), 'Breast Friends', from Edmonton.



Each and every one of us has heard those dreaded words, "it's Breast Cancer". Each and every one of us, and many before us, chose a road, post treatment, that led us to this wonderful sport and team. Climbing into that boat, we have gained strength, camaraderie, and discipline. As each year passes, more layers come off revealing our inner 'athlete'. With the help of our great coaches and the YMCA, we are strong and surviving very well.

We want to take a moment to thank the Calgary Dragon Boat Society for their continued efforts to put together today's Festival and for breathing life back into the Dragon Boat Community in Calgary.

We must also acknowledge and give a huge thank you to our families and friends for their unwavering love and support as we have made our way through the diagnosis, the treatment, and now as we move into the commitment that this team sport requires. We are doing you proud!

Please, all of you, look upon these women on the dock, not with sadness, but as a symbol of HOPE!

Sistership started 16 seasons ago in 1998 and has seen well over 200 survivors join and paddle on this reservoir, some of whom had never been on the water before. Many have stayed. Indeed, we still have some original members actively paddling; others have moved on to other adventures. We always welcome new members, if you are a survivor and want to know more, come over to our tent, today!

Unfortunately, some of us are fighting the battle again. We pray for them and wish them a hasty return to good health and to our boat.

Harder still, over our 16 seasons, we have lost 29 of our paddlers, more than an entire crew, to this disease. Remember them now as we listen to the words of one of our sisters, Gaydon Willis, who is in her own struggle right now. Here is an excerpt from a moving speech that she wrote;

*"Silently, their paddles enter the water as one, in time with the beat of the drum. Slowly, they pass the cheering crowds on shore and the dragon boats carrying Team Sistership with their flowers held high in the air, -singing, laughing, crying.*

*Once they were Sistership. They, too, won many races. Medals hang from their necks. On command they "Let her run".*

*They paid the price and joined the team. They learned what they were made of. They understood what it meant to be part of a team, to give of themselves selflessly to reach the goal. Their hearts beat in unison as they reached, pulled and strained together, eyes locked on the finish line.*

*They were Sistership. They had families and friends who came to cheer. They celebrated, laughed and drank a toast together. "Stay well", they told each other. "Stay well". They smile now and send their blessings.*

*"Paddles Up!", calls the steersman and in unison they begin the Sistership salute as Spirit Sistership moves through the water out of sight.*

*In Loving Memory"*

In honour of our team-mates who have passed, and indeed for all who have lost their fight with Breast Cancer, please join us as we listen now to 'The River'.