

2017- Frankie's Sistership Tribute



I first met Frankie in the spring of 1999. Sistership had started the year before and had been very successful in their first year of paddling. They had put out a call to begin a second crew because they realized just how important paddling together was, both physically and emotionally, for women recovering from breast cancer.

There we were; twenty-five women sitting around a table at the Canadian Cancer Society office listening to some of the original women of Sistership telling us all about dragon boating. None of us had ever been in a dragon boat and we were excited and more than little bit scared. I was sitting by Frankie and I took to her right away when she whispered to me that she wasn't much of an athlete and she was worried that she wouldn't be able to paddle well enough to be on this team. Well, she certainly proved herself wrong about that! Frankie always worked hard in the boat and she turned out to be one of our very best paddlers! She was a fierce competitor and she loved to win. She loved to win almost as much as I do!

Another thing that Frankie told me on that very first night was that she was kind of disappointed because she had tried to join Sistership the year before but she hadn't been able to commit to paddling in Calgary, that year, because she and Larry were going to England to visit with her family, at the time of that festival. She had wanted to be on the original team of Sistership that got the whole thing started. As I look back on this, I'm selfishly glad that Frankie hadn't been able to

join that first year. As a crew of all-new women, we quickly grew very close to each other. That first year, of ours, was very special and I'm so glad that I got to share it with Frankie. She never quite got over not being an original, though, I don't think. She called herself an Original-Wanna-Be and even snuck into one of the pictures, of the original members, at our fifteen-year celebration.

Everyone remembers her incredible sense of humour and this is just one little example of that.

Over the years, Frankie took on more and more responsibility with Sistership. She seemed to always be on The Board of Directors, firstly as Treasurer, then as Registrar, one year as Vice President, and then back to being Registrar. Frankie was also the captain of a crew. She worked tirelessly for Sistership and everyone was very grateful for all that she did for our team.

Things were working out wonderfully well for Frankie until one day we were out running. We were doing the Run-For-The Cure together and had joined The Running Room's Clinic. Frankie told me that she thought that her arthritis was getting worse and that her hip was really sore. It had been seventeen years since her primary diagnosis of breast cancer and neither of us even thought about the possibility of metastasis. It seemed to take ages, going for tests like bone scans, before she finally got the diagnosis of breast cancer metastasis to her bones.

One of the first things that she said to me, after that diagnosis, was that she absolutely did not want to bring the other women down because of this. She stayed true to that for the next eight years, always being brave for the women of Sistership.

When we still lived in Calgary, after I retired, I went with Frankie to her appointments at the Tom Baker. We went from bone metastasis, to lung metastasis, to liver metastasis together. I remember well being with Keri, when we went for Frankie's lung biopsy. We were hoping so much that the cancer had not spread to her lung but we pretty-well knew that it had. Frankie was so brave for Keri and Keri was so brave for Frankie. That was a hard day.

Every time that Frankie had a new C/T scan, we would either celebrate that the latest drug was working or come up with a plan, with Dr. Patterson's guidance, of what to do next. We'd go for a coffee, after each appointment, and talk over

every single detail. She fought her cancer with a vengeance, always wanting to know about the next drug that was available for her.

When a C/T scan showed that the cancer in her lungs was growing, I remember Sandra asking me what Frankie said when she was told. True to her pledge, she had just sighed and said, "Oh well".

Frankie lived for over eight years, after her diagnosis of metastasis, and she did not waste one minute of that time. Incredibly, she worked until just last year and she was still paddling at the end of last dragon boat season! She paddled for eighteen years straight! She actually said these words to me: "I'm not going to stay home and wait to die". She never said no to a chance to go out for a meal, a glass of wine, and a visit. Frankie wanted to live in her own home and she got to do just that, except for those last few days in the hospice.

Frankie sure loved everything about Sistership. She loved the women of Sistership as well as the competition. She loved the partying and she loved the support that we give to each other. I'm so glad that she got to go to the Sistership twenty-year celebration, just over a month before she died. I know that our women were very happy to be able to give her a hug and to tell her that they loved her. I know that there isn't one of us who will ever forget her and all of the fun that we had together.

We'll all miss Frankie terribly. Frankie's second-last e-mail to me was sent just as she was leaving to go to the hospice. She had written a group note to a few Sistership women and she had signed it by saying "I love you all". What a lovely way to remember her.

Our first Sistership president, Jennifer Sass, once said to me that to be allowed into someone's life, when they are facing death, is an honour and a privilege. Being Frankie's friend, while she was well and while she was facing death, has been an honour and a privilege.