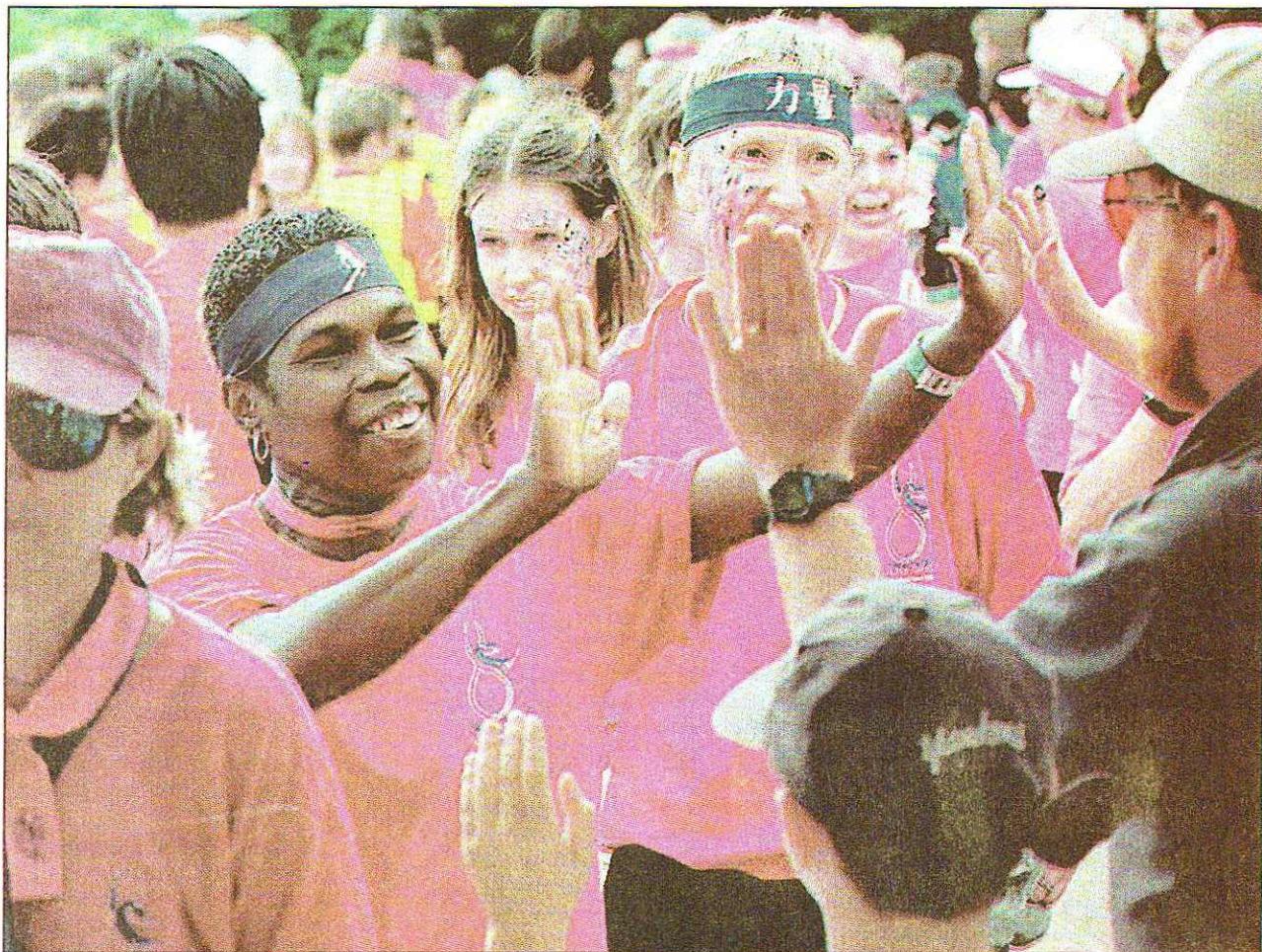


"Whether or not you have cancer, whether you're well or not well, no one has a guarantee they will be here tomorrow."

— Breast Friends dragon boat team member Deborah Borchert



Edward Parsons, *The Journal*

Loretta Young, centre, of the Sistership team from Calgary, gives high fives to spectators after racing Sunday in the finals of the Edmonton Dragon Boat Festival on the North Saskatchewan River. Three teams of breast cancer survivors, including the Sistership crew, took part in the weekend of races

Cancer survivors pull together

ROSS HENDERSON
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER
Edmonton

There was one boat at the Edmonton Dragon Boat Festival, full of women paddlers in pink T-shirts, that was the toughest one to get a seat on.

You first had to survive breast cancer.

"It's the only way you can get on the boat," said Jane Guest, a paddler and chairperson of the Breast Friends dragon boat team in Edmonton.

There was another team from Calgary called Sistership and a combination of women from each city in another boat called Friendship.

"Even though we have a rivalry

with Calgary, we all feel we've won the race," Guest said. Winning isn't the thing for these women.

Near the end of the races Sunday, the three raced each other. For the record, Calgary's Sistership team came in first, followed by Friendship and Breast Friends.

"The most important thing is we are sending a message out to women, even after diagnosis of cancer, that you can continue to lead active lives," Guest said.

Every major city in Canada has a boat for breast cancer survivors, she said.

After their race, the women performed a beautiful ritual that ends all their races.

"We toss carnations into the river

to remember those who we've lost to breast cancer and those ladies who are still fighting breast cancer," Guest said.

Team member Deborah Borchert said their common experience is a strong bond. "The women are wonderful. There's a closeness with people who experience cancer," she said. "They become an extended family.

"It's a sense of community. In a lot of aspects of society, we don't have that. This gives us an opportunity to be strong with a large number of people."

It teaches survivors to live life now. "Whether or not you have cancer, whether you're well or not well, no one has a guarantee they will be here tomorrow," Borchert said.