

# 2001 – ‘Run For The Cure’ – Kim Blaikie



Hello Everyone

I found this picture on the internet and its beauty instantly caught my attention. It is called a ‘Fire Rainbow’. What an unexpected name; it is such a contrast in terms. For me ‘fire’ implies danger and emergency or drama while, in contrast, ‘rainbow’ is magical and lucky.

I thought this would be a fitting background for my address to you today because I am here to speak about being a ‘cancer survivor’. Those are two words that now, quite unexpectedly, apply to me.

The cancer part started about 15 years ago, when I was 37. My younger sister, Kelly, had just had a lumpectomy and radiation therapy for stage one breast cancer so, being a nurse and all, I went to the breast health clinic to learn more. They suggested a mammogram which, to my surprise, showed signs of early cancer. The subsequent biopsy showed ductal carcinoma in situ or DCIS. This is not considered to be cancer, but a cancer pre-cursor. Never-the-less, it had to be removed and radiation therapy followed.

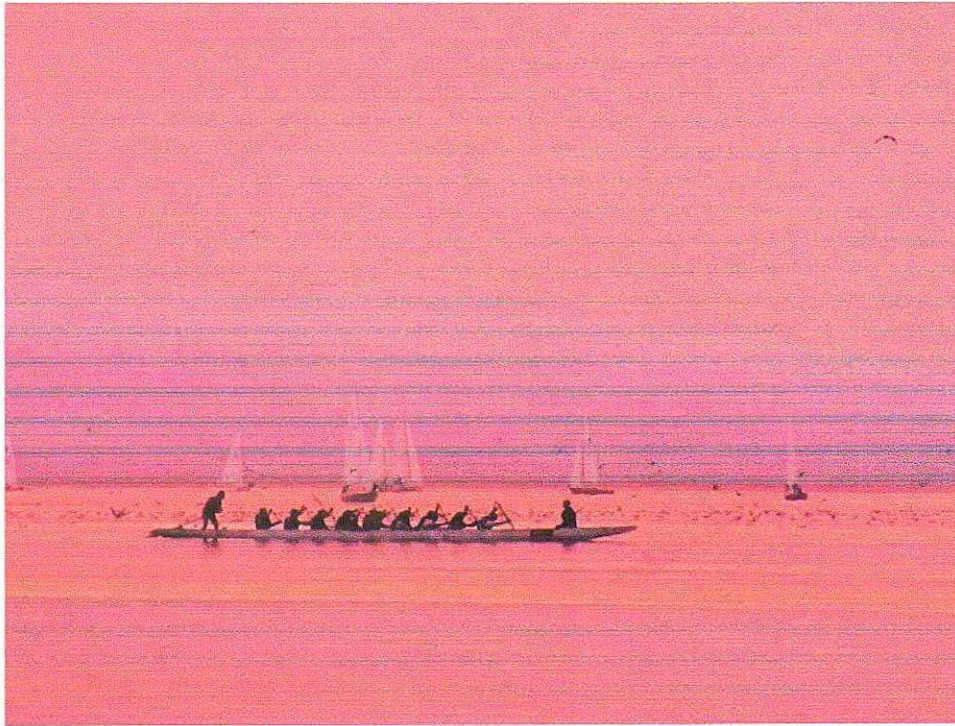
I had a very hard time making sense of this. If this was not really breast cancer, why did I have one-quarter of a very small breast missing? Kelly barely had a dimple missing. Why was I going to the cancer centre every day for 5 weeks to be radiated? I was supposed to be better off than the women with 'real' breast cancer yet I felt old, alone, and ugly.

With the help of a therapist, my family, and a support group, I made it back from my depression. It took about 3 years.

In the meantime, my sister's cancer was spreading. Just four years after our diagnoses, Kelly had painful bone metastases and needed chemotherapy and more radiation. Our family rallied around her and we all had different support roles. I was the nurse and I needed to be the one to go to her appointments and treatments with her just as much as she needed me.

The next year, I was diagnosed with 'real' cancer in what remained of that poor breast. I decided to have both breasts removed with immediate reconstruction. I

looked better! I was so much stronger this time; there was no depression - just an urgency to get on with my life.

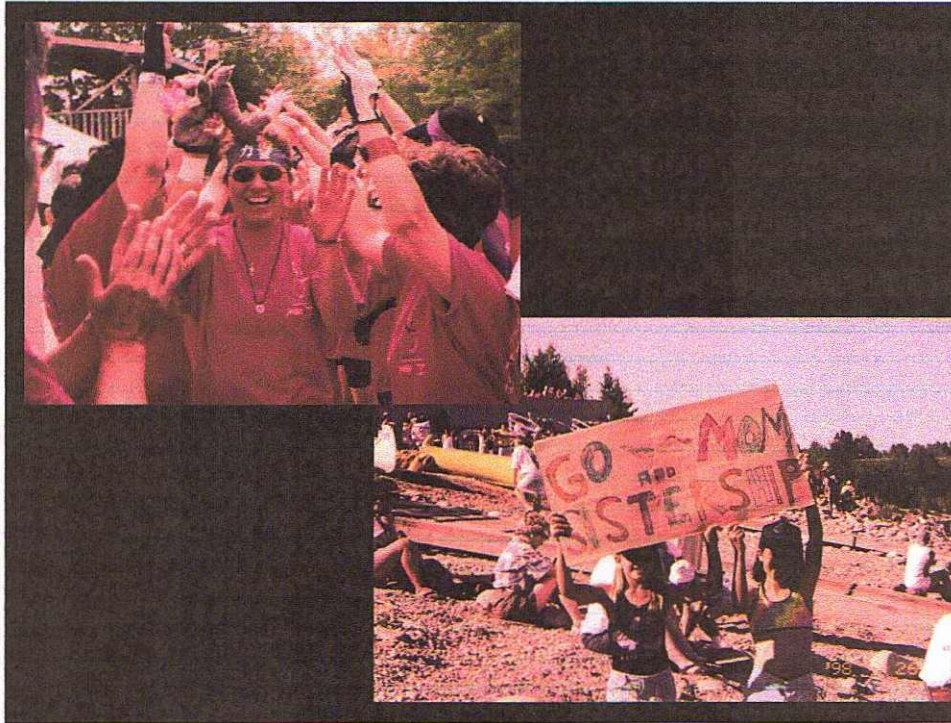


That winter, a group of breast cancer survivors wanted to form a dragon boat racing team. Kelly had competed as a drummer for her YYC Dragon Flies for a number of years and her

doctor put her in touch with the group. We put together a team of 18 breast cancer survivors and Sistership was born. We trained all that spring and summer for our first festival in August.

We won the Alberta Women's division and the Sportsmanship trophy that first year. I was astonished by the crowd support and overcome with emotion as the spectators and fellow competitors cheered and offered us their congratulations.

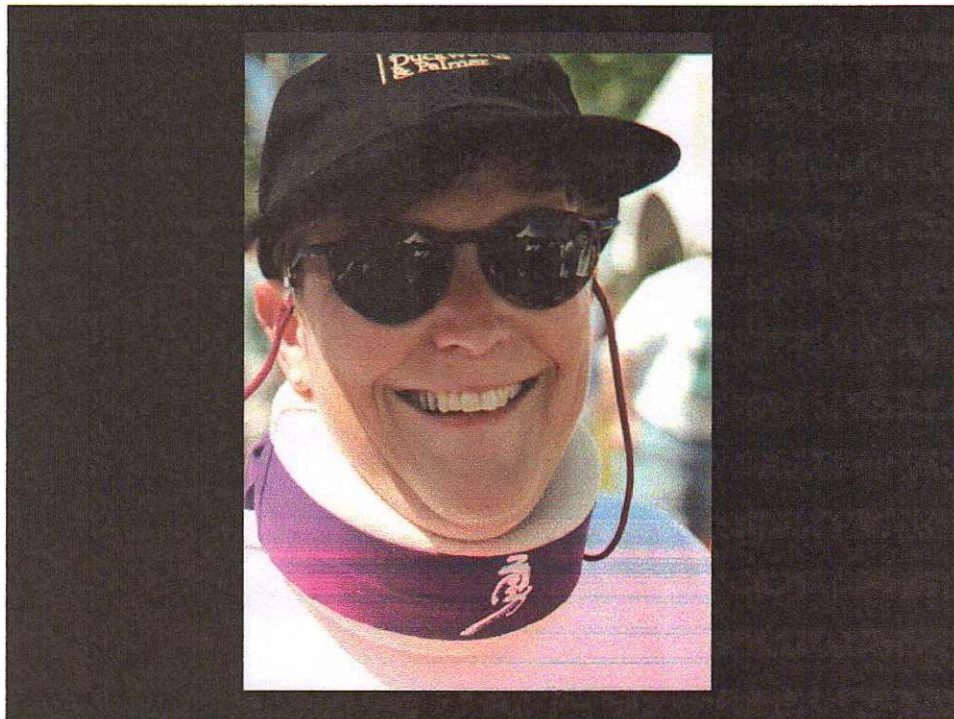




But in my  
mind, I was  
not hearing  
"Thanks for  
the race" or  
"Good show"  
- for an  
athletic  
performance.  
I was hearing  
"Thanks for

enduring the treatments", "Way to hang in there", and "Thanks for surviving cancer".

Sadly, Kelly died just 6 weeks later. She is a survivor.



I heard one of my Sistership mates ask, “When are you a survivor? Is it one year or 5 years? When can I call myself a survivor? If you die from cancer, has it beaten you; did you lose?”

To me, you are a survivor from the moment of your diagnosis.

Any adversity can beat you, if you don't keep learning and growing. We all die but true survivors live in the moment and are loved long after their bodies die.



The colors in this rainbow are extremely vivid. The arc starts suddenly and ends just as abruptly. There is no hidden, misty end that tempts us to believe in a pot of gold just beyond our reach. In the fire rainbow, the gold is found throughout the arc and one becomes rich beyond one's dreams.

The 'Run for the Cure' has been a special event for our family for many years. It is exciting to watch the donations tally up and hear the cheers of the crowd.

But I wonder if you can guess what I am hearing?

I hear, "Hang in there", "There is hope", "We want to be part of a cure", and "We are running for you".

I am here today to tell you that you do make a difference and to thank you for the commitment you have made to this event and to women like me.