

## 2007 – Penny's Sistership Tribute



*Penelope Ann Haddad*

I am Charlene Waldal and I am a friend of Penny's. I am also the president of the Sistership Breast Cancer Dragon Boat Association and was the coach of the Dragonflies' crew, a crew of new members, when I met Penny in 2005.

The drummer, who we had enjoyed with Sistership for many years, had died in the winter of 2005 and I had wondered how she would be replaced. In talking with Penny about her bone mets, in the

early part of the season, I suggested she might want to try being the drummer. I thought to myself, this is going to work. She had so much bubbly energy, I knew she would be great.

That season was the ten-year celebration for Vancouver's team 'Abreast In A Boat' and there was a huge festival planned in Vancouver for breast cancer warriors only. More than 55 teams were coming from all over the world, with 25 members each, and all of the women on the teams had had a breast cancer diagnosis. There would be a very powerful and emotionally-charged atmosphere at the festival as we would all be celebrating the growth and success of what the Vancouver team had started all those years before. The festival was coming up in June and I was eager to see this team of newbies go to Vancouver to experience the magic I just knew this gathering would have. Penny, of course, was in. She was in for any and all festivals, whenever and wherever they were.

We began to practice in May. Penny was paddling at first and then she learned to drum. She was a natural. She yelled and cheered, demanded attention in the boat, and then cheered some more. She was vibrant and alive. It was stunning to watch her.

When we raced, it was magic as promised. After one of our races, a final for our

division, the boat went quiet and all of the paddlers gazed up at her. Penny was crying and the team thought that they had let her down. Quite wrong! We had won. We had smoked 'em in fact! This team of new recruits had won!

She was thrilled. Any of us, who were there to see her, remember her arms raised in celebration and her being so proud. Penny's enthusiasm and joy in the new-found love of her life was, for me, a confirmation of why this group is so special.

She shared with several of us that Sistership had brought her something special when she really needed it, after she was diagnosed with bone mets. She could not find her way out of the darkness that comes with this kind of cancer diagnosis until Sistership provided her with a way out. We were lucky to have found her, too. We count our blessings for that special Dragonfly season.

Our season as Dragonflies continued in a joyous, magical way and Penny's contribution was no small part of that season. We also attended the Lethbridge, Calgary, Sylvan Lake, and Kelowna festivals that year.

In Vancouver, then more in Lethbridge, and at each of the other festivals, the cancer was showing its ugly self. Penny would have no part of that, pushing on, as she continued to do, right to the very end. Penny would pound the drum, cheering with 'Scorch', our dragon mascot. She kept him with her at all times except when he jumped ship in Calgary, during a race. Thankfully, another was found later to replace him!

In Kelowna, we out-did ourselves in the dress-up department. This falls under what happens on the road, stays on the road. There aren't any pictures.

It was on the bus ride home from Kelowna that Penny asked me to do this for her and I am honoured to do so.

The bonds we had built that year were strong. We didn't want the season to end. Penny had hoped to go to Singapore to race, but that was not to be. So ... the book club was formed. Penny, as you know, loved to read but we mostly used the book club as a reason to get together.

We started off meeting in different homes until Penny needed us to meet at her home. When we became too much to handle as a group, we changed again. The book club was an extension of Sistership and the Dragonflies. We loved every moment we had with Penny and I am thankful that I was able to enjoy that season with her and the passion that developed for her and dragonboating.

Once she became too ill to be in the boat, the Sistership team went to her and I think that meant a lot to Penny. There is a beautiful picture of her and the medal the team brought to her. She had such a proud look on her face. With that medal, came an orchid that bloomed and bloomed and bloomed. I think it was kind of a symbol for Penny's connection with Sistership. I hope we were good for each other.

Through Penny's journey and the short time I knew her, I saw the hope change. I saw what a strong person there was inside that frail body. I saw where she got that strength, after spending time with her mom, our friend, Susan. You are very special, Susan. Thank you for letting me do this today. I wanted you to know what we had meant to each other.