



2009 Picnic and Paddle Gaydon Willis

The first time I participated in a Flower Ceremony, I was completely overwhelmed. I remember thinking, "Once I used to be over there where you're standing, and now I'm over here". How quickly life can change. The dictionary definition of survivor is "one who will not accept defeat". Look around you. You are surrounded by survivors who will not accept defeat. And we are not merely surviving life, we are living life. You can tell that every time we get into the dragon boat. No matter what life has thrown at us, no matter how we are feeling, when we get into that boat, we forget everything else except what we came here to

do. We dig down deep, reach further, pull harder and sit up stronger. When we want to quit, we don't quit. We are all breast cancer survivors.

In Sistership, there are several types of survivors. The first type of survivor is the one who is now cancer free and has been given the "all clear" from their doctors. Most of our sisters are this type of survivor. But some of our sisters, after being clear for some time, are again fighting this dreaded disease with courage, dignity and hope. They are another type of survivor, the ones experiencing a recurrence. Then there are survivors like me. I have never heard the words "all clear, cancer free or remission". The cancer has remained in my body for the last three years and the best case scenario for me is that the cancer stays dormant for as long as possible with the help of drugs, a positive attitude and healthy living, which includes being part of Sistership.

We are Sistership. Two crews, one Team.

But it not just about us. We are also here today to remember with love those sisters who have gone before us. Our loss is great - 26 sisters in 12 years. This tribute is written for them.

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

Thank you to our families, friends, and sponsors who joined us on this very special day.