

Good afternoon Survivors!

I am so excited to be here today sharing this precious moment with you. We are here to celebrate the simple fact that we ARE here today to celebrate!

I look out at all of you beautiful, strong, proud and courageous women - so full of fun and hope and I rejoice because I am one of you. It's truly an honour to be your survivor spokesperson today.



Our stories are all different, but we all share a deep bond, we all have felt the cold grip of cancer trying to squeeze the hope from our souls. And we have all successfully pried away those deadly fingers and allowed our hope to radiate and heal.

My Story...

- At 22 I moved away from my friends and family in Calgary to Niagara Falls with the man that would be my first husband - you already know where this is going!☺
- In 1994 I felt a lump in my upper breast tissue heading towards my lymph nodes on my right side.
- I was 29 when I experienced my first mammogram ... and that is just about my favourite thing in the world to do! ... Anyways, no problem, you're young, it's just fibroids, cut down on the caffeine - but come back on 6 months.
- (6 mo. Later) my Second mammogram - no problem, you're young, it's just fibroids, cut down on the caffeine - but come back in 6 months.
- Another (6 mo. Later) my Third mammogram - no problem, you're young; it's just fibroids, cut down on the caffeine - but come back in 6 months.

Have you ever seen the movie 'Ground Hog Day' with Bill Murray? It was kinda like that.

- Anyways, my next scheduled mammogram was cancelled by the doctor ... his office manager, Pam, called me at work and didn't say we need to reschedule, just, we are cancelling your appointment. Well, okay I thought, I mean I knew her, she came into my shop to order her printing if she wanted me to reschedule wouldn't she have said so? Yes, I was stupid and trusting and naive.
- So a year or so goes by and all of our friends and siblings are having one kid after another, growing their families ... but not us. We had our printing

business and we worked (well I worked, he played hockey and golfed) and we tried to conceive, we both had all of the tests, there appeared to be no good reason ... but it just didn't happen.

- So, we decided to try to conceive in-vitro...now if you think a mammogram is invasive... We tried twice. The second time they noted that my estrogen levels were extremely high. Yes, it was a tough couple of years ... everyone around us were growing their families, having baby after baby. Not me, I grow tumors.

By now it's February 1998 and I have been noticing that my lump was definitely getting bigger ... so

- Another mammogram - believe it or not when I walked into my doctor's office to get the results I was still in denial ... until I saw the nurse ... she quickly looked away when she saw me walk through the door and could not look me in the eye.
- That exact moment was when the numbness started. Then I met with my family doctor. Kudos to her, she ripped the band-aid off quickly ... it was "sit down, you have breast cancer". Then she said more ... but to this day I don't know how much longer she talked or what she said. I do remember her asking, "Do you have any questions? Do you need a ride home?" I remember being mad that I had no one with me for comfort and I'm pretty sure I was in shock. So, what did I do? What I always did ... I went back to work and closed the print shop at 5 o'clock.

That night was the only night I cried for myself.

As you all know, this was probably the hardest part of this whole cancer experience... the not knowing what was going to happen next ... not knowing, am I going to lose my breasts, my hair or my life?

Get this, surgery was scheduled 5 days later, on Friday, February 13th. I had a lumpectomy and 10 lymph nodes removed. I went home at noon on Valentine's Day with 1 breast and two brand new scars.

Blood tests and Chemotherapy were scheduled every three weeks for 9 months and then 8 weeks of radiation.

So I usually took my chemo day off work, picked up my little Sister, who had moved out to Niagara Falls a year earlier, so that I had some company and drove to St.

Catharine's for treatment.

I marched through like a good soldier, never accepting help or sympathy. (I sure regret not milking it more now!) It was a very hard year and the next year was even harder.

The next year I left my husband 3 days before our 10th Anniversary.

I moved back home to Calgary and left behind a breast ... and a boob. :) I know that's not nice, but I think it's funny. 😊

Some of the best advice I ever got was ... you feel how you think. I have found that it is so true...

Isn't it crazy that most of us don't start living until we think we are dying? Well, this is when I started living! I reacquainted with my friends and family and I grew just a bit selfish! I made decisions that were good for ME and I embraced the cancer community ... with all of its ups and downs. I changed from being a follower and letting things happen to me, to taking charge of my life and my health. I feel very lucky and blessed to be alive and I do not take this life lightly.

I met and married the love of my life, a man who loves me and supports all that I do and want to do. Now don't get me wrong, life is not all roses ... I didn't get to nurture little babies, but rather 3 teenaged step children. If I ever needed therapy it was then! Remember Joanie, you feel how you think! 😊

I celebrate EVERYTHING and I don't take anything for granted!! My life is focused on family, friends, health, fitness and sharing the knowledge about the risk factors that we can change.

I am proud of my accomplishments since my diagnosis. (And I brought props!) 😊

Paddle, 3 x medals

I have run many half marathons and 5 full marathons including the Goofy weekend in Disney World which was by far my favourite because you get three medals, a Donald Duck one for running a half marathon on the Saturday, a Mickey Mouse one for running a full marathon on the Sunday and a Goofy medal if you are goofy enough the run a half and a full marathon the same weekend!

I learned to swim 2 years ago and have since competed in 5 sprint triathlons including 3 years in Strathmore Women's Only Triathlon ... which, by the way, is

totally doable for anyone, including beginner triathletes. And I am seriously considering training for an ironman ... because I would love to hear 'Joanie Snodgrass, you ARE an iron man' over the loud speakers!

I am a member of the YMCA and have volunteered at the Shawnessy branch every Saturday morning since 2003 and I get my butt kicked in bootcamp at least twice a week.

The very first thing I did when I moved back to Calgary, before I even had a job or a place to live was to join Sistership Dragon Boat Racing Team. I paddle a dragon boat with an amazing group of women who are all Breast Cancer Survivors and whom, I consider to be my dragon sisters. We train almost year round and we travel and compete in at least 4 festivals each season spreading the simple but important message - it's YOUR body, it's YOUR life - take control, be active, be strong and fight - life is worth the effort!

I make goals and I strive to reach them.

I have raised money and participated in the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure for over 10 years because I believe that the money raised is funding the grants and research that will lead to a cure.

I am doing all I can so that my cancer does not return. If it does, I am mentally and physically strong and fit and will have the resources to fight not only the disease but the cure. I am doing everything I can do to keep my designation of a SURVIVOR!

And I am proud to be your Survivor's Spokesperson for the 10th Annual Survivors' Parade this year because I look out to all of you and I see the strength and the unity that is needed to bring us to the day when there will be no more deaths from breast cancer. Because I have been to the funerals of way too many beautiful, strong women who I have loved and admired and who have inspired me and still inspire me and who were not ready to die.

Dear Pink Ladies, friends and Dragon Sisters, may your souls continue to radiate hope, long after your last breath.

Remember, Live the life you love, love the life you live (I have that written on my paddle) - what are you waiting for?

Let's go parade!

~ Joanie