

Zuri Scrivens ~ Novice Diary Part One



Having played and coached rugby for 17 years, both my body and mind were craving being involved in a team sport. Nearing the end of my treatment, I longed to find a sport that would provide me with the same team fulfillment as rugby, but without the same level of physical wear and tear as comes with being on the pitch. My body had been through enough what with chemo, radiation and multiple surgeries, but I desperately missed the feeling of physically exerting myself with a great group of people in order to accomplish powerful and uplifting things.

So, after much thought, I turned to the elusive dragon boat. My godmother has been dragon boating for years now, and though I have watched a few races in the past, the sport was

still somewhat of a mystery to me.

It took me close to a year to finally commit to my decision and sign up to join the wonderful ladies at *FORT-itude*. Admittedly, I was a bit skeptical about joining a team of breast cancer survivors. I worried that being a younger woman with breast cancer – first diagnosed at the age of 33 – would single me out. That despite being on a team, I might still feel very much alone. However, I could not have been more wrong. After my first few practices on the water, it became very clear to me that there really is no age on the boat. We were 22 or so women on the boat, all having travelled similar paths, and were now working toward the same goals. Age was, and is, irrelevant, and joining this team of warriors quickly became the best decision I had made in a long time.

Every time we set off from our dock in Fort Langley, I am filled with tremendous pride and a welcome amount of peace. The beauty of the Fraser, even on the coldest of wet days, never seems to grow old, and I am continually gobsmacked by what I now refer to as my “A-ha” moment. That moment when I quickly glance down the boat (something a novice on a short break is lucky enough to do), and see all of these fierce women in synch, paddling strong and driving that boat along the river like a well-oiled machine. That moment when I think to myself, “WOW! All of these women have had breast cancer in some way, shape or form. All of them have fought their own intense, roller-coaster of a battle; and yet, here they are, healthy, whole and **thriving!** For some of them it has been years since they were diagnosed, and yet, they are all **here!**”

I’m guessing this is not the thought that your average dragon boater has while paddling away, but being an *Abreast In A Boat* dragon boater is something special indeed. It is that “A-ha” moment that continues to give me hope for my own ongoing health, and the strength to keep moving forward on the water, and in life. Roll on race season!!

Zuri Scrivens ~ Novice Diary Part Two



It's hard to believe there was ever a time I wasn't paddling. With two regattas now under my belt, it's safe to say that I am in love (or is that addicted?) to the sport of dragon boating.

My first regatta was the Spring Knockouts, just over two weeks ago. The morning I woke up for those races, I was both nervous and excited, a combined feeling I recognized well and had missed very much. Being a highly competitive woman (with perhaps a touch of sadism), the Knockouts sounded like something right up my alley. 200 metre sprints back-to-back until the last two boats are

standing? Yes, please! And luckily for me, being a novice meant that I got to be in the FORT-itude boat for every one of our races!

I wasn't entirely sure what to expect of a regatta – I had only ever been on the spectating end of things. However, after our first two races, I was feeling well in tune with the rhythm of the day. Warm-up, race, rest, repeat!

This same rhythm carried on for my second regatta – Women's; 500m races with a Breast Cancer Challenge race in the middle of the day. Although I enjoyed both regattas thoroughly, it was the Women's regatta that really got me in the end.

After our first two races, we warmed up as usual prior to the Breast Cancer Challenge, with our coach Juanita as our ever-energetic lead, and it wasn't long before all of the breast cancer teams had gathered to join us. One hundred or so women, all smiles and decked out in pink, danced and stretched away to one of Juanita's carefully selected warm-up tunes. While we continued to bop away, Juanita called a few of us up (myself included) one-by-one to come and see this incredible sight from her vantage point. As I stood there, watching this sea of pink, my "A-ha" moment hit me once again. All of those women.... so many women... full of life, smiles and energy! ALL breast cancer survivors. It was incredible. There was so much strength and pride in that crowd.

As we carried on to our Challenge race, that feeling of awe remained, and continued to stick with me through to the Flower Ceremony that followed. All eight breast cancer boats were rafted together and everyone on each boat was given a deep pink carnation. A short speech was given by Rena Pratt and then Garth Brooks' song, The River was played. The women in our rafted boats swayed together, waving their flowers and singing through their tears; and when the song finished, we all tossed our carnations into the water in a display of remembrance for loved ones lost to breast cancer.

Admittedly, I may have been one of the few not to cry during the ceremony. I wondered if maybe I was missing something, but my tears were not that far behind.

After the ceremony, we had about two hours prior to our final race. Most of our team dispersed – some stayed under our tent and rested, while others wandered around, visiting friends and family, and all grabbed something to eat. Eventually I decided to wander off to find some food at one of the local shops. On my way back to our tent, I stopped at a small food truck selling specialty coffees one of the nearby streets. As I considered whether or not to liquify myself with a bit of caffeine, a woman who was also waiting commented on how much she loved my matching pink outfit. I smiled and told her I was dragon boating. Her eyes widened, and she said how great that was, and she went on to tell me of how her own family member had been journeying through breast cancer as well. Then, before I knew what was happening, she was thanking me for paddling, and we were hugging and tearing up like old friends. Little did I know that those tears were just the beginning.

Our last race finally arrived and team FORT-itude was ready for it. We were fed and rested and needed to redeem ourselves following a close second place finish in the Challenge race; and boy, did we ever redeem ourselves! We launched our boat from the start and didn't look back. You could feel the drive and determination in the boat, and it wasn't until we had heard those blessed words "Let it run!", that we all looked back and saw that beautiful expanse of open water! We had cleared the finish in first place with time to spare, and with that recognition, I burst into tears! The emotions from the day and the adrenalin from the race had culminated into such a phenomenal moment of pride and release – one that I won't soon forget.