

Slaying the Dragon

New book chronicles adventures of boat team made up of breast cancer survivors

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Two weeks after her final radiation treatment, Marlene Jofriet picked up a paddle and began her journey toward strength and healing.

Jofriet, a Guelph resident and 66 at the time of her breast cancer diagnosis in October 2000, said paddling with the local Breaststrokes Dragon Boat Team has turned her life around.

Sitting in a boat, gliding over smooth water, the thrill of the race pounding through her body, Jofriet found strength she didn't think was there.

Her story is one of 28 in a book chronicling the dragon boat team, and how it has helped members regain control of their lives.

Lynn Wills, of Guelph, a member of the team and author of the book, said there were tears and laughter through the interviews, but that emotion was exactly what the project needed.

Wills, a breast cancer survivor, said the book looks at how paddling has affected members of the team, both physically and emotionally.

"I wanted to, as many of the women on the team do, educate the public that women with breast cancer can do this," she said.

Many of the women are members of the Guelph and Wellington Breast Cancer Support Group, and told Wills during interviews last summer paddling offers them exercise and a way to lift their spirits.

The team was formed in October 1998, and began racing the next summer.

The book, *Paddling with the Dragon, Profiles of a Breast Cancer Sur-*

vivor Team, contains short stories about each of the 27 women, plus Wills, detailing how their team involvement has strengthened them.

"We want to show women with breast cancer that they can regain their lives," said Wills.

Wills, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1992, underwent a mastectomy and six months of chemotherapy.

One paragraph in each woman's story looks at their diagnosis and treatment, but Wills wanted the book to be more about paddling.

She was inspired to write it last summer, as the team was coming ashore after a competition at Guelph Lake.

"The thought just came to me when we finished our first race of the season last year. When I saw some of our new members get out of the boat with looks of joy on their faces, I was inspired."

The women profiled in the book range from ages 30 through 70, some having lived with cancer for a long time, others diagnosed more recently.

Debra Singh had a mastectomy in 1998, Wills recounted.

"She felt paddling would help her visualize the strong body she wanted. She feels she has won the race against the dragon of breast cancer."

Wills said writing the book allowed her new insight into her familiar paddling crew.

A book launch is taking place May 28 at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, at Norfolk and Suffolk streets, between 7-9:30 p.m.

The 130-page book is available for \$9.95 by e-mailing the Breaststrokes club, at breaststrokes@rogers.com, or by phoning Wills at 824-5262. All proceeds will go to the Breaststrokes team.



Lynn Wills is author of the book *Paddling with the Dragon, Profiles of a Breast Cancer Survivor Team*.

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