



Dragons Abreast Mackay Inc. Newsletter

Editor: Cheryl Machen

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**Welcome to this edition of our newsletter
and thanks to everyone who has helped
make it possible.**



Heading to the start line on Lake Kawana at Caloundra during the Abreast in Australia Celebrations. September 2007.

*Encouraging early detection and
raising breast cancer awareness whilst
getting fit and having fun!
We're living life to the full!*

SURVIVING and THRIVING!

Maureen Meikle

I was 45 and living in Mackay when I was diagnosed with breast cancer in November 1999. In the 6 months from diagnosis to the end of treatment my life changed dramatically. My treatment was surgery (a lumpectomy and axillary lymph node clearance), three months of chemotherapy and then off to Townsville for radiotherapy. In addition to all this, there was a cyclone and the death of my father-in-law to cope with.

We were also faced with making a decision about moving interstate for my husband, Phil's work. The company gave us 6 months for me to recover and in September 2000 we made the big move to Coffs Harbour in NSW. This was our first move and it was so far away. Thank heavens for Telstra! I was forever calling my friends and family back in Mackay. I did not know a soul in Coffs Harbour but contacted a support group and made a few contacts there. In 2002, I accepted the role of local Liaison for the Breast Cancer Network Australia and participated in the first National Summit in Melbourne. That was where I first heard about Dragons Abreast Australia. I remember my room mate saying "This is for me" but I said "You have to be kidding! It looks a bit too strenuous for me".

2004 was a big year for me. I turned 50 and posed for a nude calendar – Living Proof - with 11 other breast cancer survivors. (\$40,000 was raised for Breast Cancer research) There I was in a bathtub of milk, in the middle of August, out in a paddock with calves and traffic whizzing by and enjoying every minute. Who would have imagined I'd be doing this? It was an experience not to be missed.

After completing some training with the Cancer Council I became a Breast Cancer Peer Support Volunteer for Cancer Connect. I loved doing this and I met some amazing women along the way.

Eventually, someone started to talk about starting up a Dragons Abreast Group. I decided "What the heck! I am alive and well and need a bit of exercise" so I joined and I have not stopped paddling since. I always feel energized and exhilarated after a paddle. I was having the time of my life going to Regattas and other club meets in many parts of New South Wales. What a great way to meet other people!

The opportunity arose for us to relocate back to my beloved Queensland. The first thing I checked was whether there was a DAA group and to my horror there wasn't, but just over three hours away there was one in Mackay, my home town. We moved to Rockhampton in 2006 and I have been happily travelling up the coast to paddle with the DAM Oarsome girls in Mackay ever since.

In the meantime, I have been helping to start up a dragon boat club for all cancer survivors here in Rockhampton. I paddle a canoe in the Fitzroy River with some of the girls here to get fit for when our boat is delivered.

My motto is 'LIFE AFTER BREAST CANCER IS NOT ONLY ABOUT SURVIVING, BUT THRIVING'

I have certainly thrived in the past nine years, four of which I have been paddling.



MEMORIES of CNY SYDNEY

Carol Steel

I completed my treatment in August 2007 and by September of the same year I had joined Dragons Abreast Mackay. In November, the call went out for paddlers who were interested in competing in the annual Chinese New Year Regatta at Darling Harbor. The general excitement that this announcement generated, combined with the tales from the previous years exploits, convinced me that it was something I should be a part of despite the fact that I still couldn't paddle continuously for the required 250 metres.

We were booked to fly to Sydney on Friday February 15th for a few days of sightseeing and a spot of shopping before the regatta on Sunday. On Thursday evening I went to bed early and woke on Friday morning to the sound of rain the like of which, I have never seen or heard before. In six hours Mackay received over 600mls and the city was afloat. The airport runway was underwater and I thought that my CNY experience had come to a soggy end before it had even begun. By the following day however, the airport had reopened and we were able to fly out.

We arrived in Sydney on Saturday afternoon to blue skies and brilliant sunshine and made our way to our accommodation before climbing aboard the monorail for some, albeit rushed, sightseeing. That evening we donned our finery and headed off to the Gala Dinner. It was here that I caught my first glimpse of what was in store for the remainder of the weekend. The spirit of friendship and camaraderie was overwhelming and when songs like *'I am Woman'* and *'I Will Survive'* rang out it was the most I could do not to burst into tears. For me it was a wonderful opportunity to meet new friends and for the members who had competed previously it was an opportunity to reestablish and strengthen old friendships. We laughed, drank, ate, drank, sang, drank, danced and drank some more until finally with the prospect of the following days events looming, we headed off for a restless nights sleep.

Sunday dawned bright and I nervously dressed in my pink regalia. Ron, my husband, gave me a reassuring hug and told me all would be fine and I should just enjoy myself. I was too nervous to eat any breakfast so we made our way to Darling Harbor not really knowing what to expect. The venue was breathtaking; a sea of 'pink' and perfect viewing for the thousands of spectators lining the water.

My heart was pounding as we paddled to the start line and when the starter's gun went off I took a deep breath, fixed my eyes on the strokes and started paddling.

We set a cracking pace and by 150 metres my heart felt as through it was about to burst out of my chest, my head was spinning and I was convinced that I was going to pass out. I was desperate to continue paddling but I knew I was in trouble. With a pervading sense of letting my teammates down, I lifted my paddle above my head. I couldn't contain my emotions and for the first of many times throughout the day, the tears flowed.

The reassurance and support showered upon me by my teammates instead of quelling my tears had the reverse effect and it took everything I had to regain some semblance of control. It was at this point that one of the girls suggested that perhaps because of my nervousness I had held my breath during the race and this could be a cause of my exhaustion. With this advice forefront in my mind I made a conscious effort, throughout the second race, to control my breathing – WOW what a difference! We powered across the finish line into the semi finals and I had paddled every stroke of the way. Once again I dissolved into tears but this time it was because I had finished *without* raising my paddle.

Cuddles and congratulations ensued and I again felt the awesome warmth and compassion of the spirit of the dragon. Our success in our second race ensured that we would be able to take part in the 'Flowers on the Water' ceremony, which I had been told would take me to yet another emotional plane. As the boats linked together as one in the centre of the harbor, the previously blue sky gave way to grey clouds. Then the entire harbor fell silent as the soloist began to sing a haunting and poignant rendition of *'Remember Me'*.

A fine mist began to fall and my thoughts focused on two of my teammates who were actively fighting metastatic cancer. I could feel my emotions building as we observed one minute's silence and scattered rose petals on the water. I was totally unprepared for the intensity of the emotion I was feeling and found myself overwhelmed and sobbing inconsolably. My teammates once again rallied round enveloping me in an invisible blanket of warmth and affection. Finally after a group photo and reliving the event with teammates, I made my way back to the motel exhausted physically and emotionally but in a state of total exhilaration.



Since returning home many of my friends have asked about my impressions of the event and I tell them all the same thing. If I had to crawl on my hands and knees to the next Chinese New Year Regatta I would. Never in my life have I experienced such a pervasive feeling of love, connectedness and compassion as I did at Darling Harbor. It is a memory that I will hold close to my heart for as long as I live.

Dragon Power!

Ethna Collins

From the very first public meeting of Dragons Abreast Mackay I was drawn in.

Since I was diagnosed in 1994 life for me has been a series of ups and downs. At the age of 46 I had a mastectomy and found it very hard as I did not know of anyone with breast cancer. I am the mother of three, grandmother of 13 and I have two great grandchildren.

I had lots to keep me busy. I became involved in Breast Screen and became a breast cancer volunteer with the Cancer Council of Qld. I just loved meeting women with the same needs and questions as myself, and being able to help them through the journey was very satisfying.

I still felt there was something missing until many years later when I found Dragons Abreast. I found support and awareness of breast cancer and began to have lots of laughter and fun. I have met with the most wonderful and beautiful women whom have all been through the pain and the fear of dying. Twice every week we paddle on the Marina at the Mackay Harbour and have a wonderful time.

For the first time ever I went to Caloundra in September 2007 with all the team and supporters and we all had an amazing time. The races were fantastic and meeting women from around the world was something out of this world. What a blast!

In February this year we all went to Sydney for Chinese New Year and again had a fabulous time!

I now know what it means to be a Dragon, it has strengthened me physically and mentally and I am among the greatest group of women. Where would we all be today without our paddling sessions? **Dragons Abreast women can do anything!**



Ethna and Anne on Karaoke

Caloundra 2007

Anne Tunnah

I joined DAM in March 2007, so it was with great excitement that I nominated for my first trip away with the "Dragons" as a member of the DAM Oarsome team for the Caloundra Regatta in September of that year. As the date drew near, the anticipation among the team members grew to fever pitch level. We were not to be disappointed.

The City of Caloundra was exceptional. The people who lined the streets for the parade, the bus drivers who ferried us to the venue, the volunteers who worked tirelessly to make things run ever so smoothly and many more all made me feel extremely emotional because they cared enough to show their encouragement in any way they could.

What an amazing feat it was to bring so many survivors and supporters together in one place to create such an event. To be side by side with so many wonderful people from Australia and overseas and to exchange gifts, hugs and stories was unbelievable.

Of course, the racing was invigorating as well. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to keep going but was always assured that just participating was the focus and of course "we're all winners in our lane and in life" because we're survivors. To be a part of the Flowers on the Water ceremony was nothing like I had ever experienced before, and again I was completely overwhelmed. The tears flowed but at the same time it was so uplifting.

I felt so lucky to be involved and it was an excellent way to get to know all of the DAM Oarsome members who attended. In true Aussie spirit I now have a nickname from the weekend as a result of my luck holding out and winning the beautiful Calleija necklace at the end of the event. I can't wait for the next trip with my new mates. **Queen Anne**

May Day Weekend

Liz Spring

It was Saturday afternoon and our visitors from Brisbane, Townsville and Rockhampton gathered with us on the beach of our beautiful Marina. The weather was perfect and two full boats were launched.

Teaching, learning and fun were on the agenda and they all happened smoothly and happily. With virgin paddlers seated beside the more experienced, novice sweeps alongside the accredited, and Marty as a guide, our visiting sweeps were shown around the Marina ensuring awareness of hazards created by the extremely low tide. Two hours later, with some new paddling and sweeping techniques to remember we were ready for a drink.

Saturday Night was party time at the Yacht Club. The juke box cranked up, feet started tapping and the night rocked on. The brave Townsville Twin Titties members who wore their tutus, bras and feather boas turned heads amidst much singing and laughter.

On Sunday, we were back for more paddling. Many hearts skipped a beat when a huge catamaran popped up from nowhere and headed straight towards our dragon boat! Marty hadn't warned us about that one! "REVERSE PADDLE" didn't have to be called more than once and we were all very grateful when we "missed the boat!"

Steak & sausages were barbequed to perfection by a few DAM Oarsome husbands and with plenty of scrummy sweets to follow, the hungry dragons were satisfied. The atmosphere was relaxed and Louise from Missabitattiti sang "The Spirit of the Dragon" solo and unaccompanied. The goose bumps we felt weren't just created by the fresh ocean breeze.

May Day Weekend (continued)

The idea of a moonlight paddle was outvoted in favor of an early night, the boats were put away and all good little tired dragons left to find their beds.

Monday dawned and breakfast at Ants Cafe provided another opportunity for friends, new and old to catch up and for us to farewell and thank our most welcome guests. The Rockhampton paddlers headed home "hooked on paddling" and with new enthusiasm for a dragon boat in their town.

It was a fantastic weekend! The many paddling and sweeping tips were appreciated by newcomers and others alike and there were many stories of inspirational women exchanged. Dragons Abreast in the north of Queensland had taken a giant leap and we hope to do it all again soon.

RELAY for LIFE

Barb Mc Bride

The weekend of 10th and 11th May saw a team of "DAM Oarsome" walkers take to the track at Harrup Park, doing laps to raise much needed funds for The Cancer Council Queensland. This was the first year our Dragons have had their own team, having previously walked in conjunction with the girls from Breastscreen. From all reports, a great time was had by all who participated. We exceeded all our expectations and raised just over \$4,000, thanks in part to a very successful Mother's Day raffle. Our pink tent was once again utilized and stood out amongst the sea of tents surrounding the track. We were awarded the prize for Best Banner, which was made for us by the students of the Redcliffe Special School for our Caloundra visit. It was great to be able to show off this masterpiece once again. A pink paddle adorned with a collage of photos of our members was a very appropriate baton and attracted much interest. As is always the case, the early morning hours were filled with much laughter. It's amazing the stories that surface at times like these and the ears of our neighbors in the next tent were kept flapping. Hopefully, we can do it all again next year, as it is a wonderful way to promote our cause and at the same time, raise vital funds for cancer research.



Our prize winning banner!

May weekend.



A Big THANK YOU!

We've come a long way since our formation in July 2005 and we thank the Mackay community for such fantastic support. To those businesses and individuals who have donated not only their money but their time and resources in order to keep Dragons Abreast Mackay Inc. up and running, we want to let you know how much your support is appreciated.

Executive Committee

President:	Cheryl Machen
Vice President:	Lynda Lockyer
Secretary:	Karen Baker
Treasurer:	Tanja Hanly

If you'd like to
get fit, have fun and make new friends,
Dragons Abreast could be for you!

For more details please contact

Cheryl Machen: 4942 8085 or 0429 614 791

Email mackay@dragonsabreast.com.au
www.dragonsabreast.com.au

Upcoming Events

Auction of Bras with Attitude at 2pm on Sunday 13th
July at the Mackay Yacht Club

The Bras with Attitude will be on display at
Studio Space, Mackay Town Hall for a week prior to
the Auction.

Dragons Abreast 2nd Annual Corporate Regatta on
Saturday 9th August at the Mackay Yacht Club

Regular training sessions

Sundays 7.30am to 9.30am
Tuesdays 4pm to 6pm



Gardening at Dewachen Buddhist Centre