



in the LOOP

The monthly e-newsletter from Dragons Abreast Australia - August 2009 issue

Welcome to the long overdue e-newsletter,

Our thanks to Rosemary Shimmin in Tasmania for her wonderful efforts with the newsletter over the last two years.

Our focus the last few months has been on the new office. We are now settled in and to coincide with our new premises have also given the newsletter a makeover.

Contributions to the newsletter are most welcome and we are seeking expressions of interest from anyone keen to be on the National Newsletter team, so do not hesitate to email us if you fancy yourself as a regular contributor.

Enjoy the read and we look forward to receiving your feedback!

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Deidre & Madeleine Moate

Crewsaders Dragons Abreast Bunbury

What is my story in short to date? It probably starts very similar to many of your own stories.

For a long time I have felt that my cancer was what was defining me. Not the fact that I'm happily married or own and run a small sign business with my husband or travelled to Europe, but that I had breast cancer.

I was 28 and planning to start a family when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was three days before Christmas when I was putting on a t-shirt and I rubbed the side of my chest by accident. It felt sore, so I stopped and felt a lump. The next day I went to the doctors who sent me for an ultrasound, but I was told not to worry because at my age it was just likely to be only a cyst. Well it wasn't. I received the news on Christmas Eve. However all the specialists went on holiday over Christmas, and the soonest I could see someone was the first week of January. So I eventually had a biopsy, which was inconclusive but suspected a bad result. The next week I had a lumpectomy, and the result was "yes it was cancer and no they didn't get a clear margin". So the following week I chose to have a partial mastectomy and some lymph nodes removed. This was followed by six months of chemotherapy and seven weeks of radiotherapy.

I thought before chemo, "Please, I don't care about being sick but I just don't want to lose my hair." Well I soon changed my mind. I was so sick after treatment that I was back in hospital, plus I lost my hair. Although some friends thought my wig was nicer than my hair, and were actually giving me compliments without realising it was a wig.

Sometimes people said to me "You're young it won't be so bad". Well because I was young the cancer was aggressive (high hormones), because I was young I reacted badly to the chemo, but because I was young I also bounced back quicker.

I don't believe it has made me stronger, but definitely more paranoid. A headache is a "brain tumour", any ache is a "bump". But it has made me get on with life. I now have holidays when we want. I don't work weekends anymore. I live. I will do anything once, but maybe not another time. Like paragliding which was my 30th birthday present from my husband, who I must say I couldn't have gone through all this without. It may have even been



harder for him because he could only just sit next to me and couldn't do anything to protect me. But he did come to every treatment, every test, every doctors appointment, everything.

I changed my whole lifestyle after finding out I had cancer, to give my body the best opportunities to survive. I eat healthy (juice vegies), got my mind healthy too (positive thinking), plus started to get my fitness up (dragon boating paddling).

Well this is my five year mark and I'm in the small percentage of good and as well as bad. I have been blessed you see because after all the battery I've been through, I'm now in another small percentage, which the Oncologist said would be highly unlikely, even the surgeon said to think about survival first. I have a highly unlikely mini me, a six month old baby girl, Madeline. So now my focus is on her and I'm incredibly grateful to have the chance to have this family.

I had resolved myself to not having a family, but that didn't matter because my husband has two daughters from a previous marriage. So he is not with me for kids, and his girls are wonderful to me. But then in March 2008 I was going for an MRI breast check, which has to be timed with my cycle, but I didn't have one. So I just thought I better check before the procedure and to my shaking surprise, I was pregnant. We have had two previous miscarriages and chemo, so I was extremely paranoid throughout the whole pregnancy. Plus there was all the myths about the cancer reoccurring due to my body now allowing a foreign object to grown inside me, a baby. Until I held our baby in my arms, I would not believe this was finally happening. It has been about eight years now since we first thought that a baby would complete our family.

I had a wonderful pregnancy. I would do it again tomorrow. I wanted every experience that went with a pregnancy, good and bad. I wanted morning sickness, most people don't believe me but I wanted the proof that the baby was in there. But I felt fabulous the whole time. I also wanted the labour; it's true. I did change my mind after 15 hours of labour. Plus I wanted to have a huge belly, but I only put on 6.5kg (all baby). When you don't think you can have a child, you realise that you want to feel everything that other people have talked about. I believe the easy pregnancy was because of my healthier lifestyle.

Then on December the 4th at 1.25pm our baby daughter, Madeline, arrived, weighing 3.7kg. She was perfect in everyway, just a bit bigger than we all expected, thinking we were have a 6 pound baby and getting an 8.2 pound (possibly another effect of that healthy living?).

Continued from Page 2...

Now the next challenge for a breast cancer survivor, can I breast feed? I only had surgery and treatment on my left breast, so throughout the pregnancy I could see my right breast changing. It was very amusing to physically see the difference between my two breasts, one that is dormant and one that was preparing for a baby. So we thought that I might be able to feed a baby; after all mums with twins manage. We found out that our Madeline is not fussy. She feeds from me well, although I used a nipple shield for the first few weeks so she wouldn't damage the only breast.

In the first week my right breast grew to about three times the size of the left breast. Trying to find bras that fit has been a mission. My husband now calls me "One-hung-low". You just have to laugh.

Madeline feeds from me all day and we give her one bottle of formula at night before bed. She drinks from anything as long as it has milk in it. But now that she is six months we are starting her on solids and going to start weaning her onto complete formula. Even though I would love to keep feeding Maddie for a year or until I can, I now need some more tests. I have not had extensive tests like a mammogram since before I was pregnant. So unfortunately I have come to this six month compromise with my husband. But Maddie has been given a lot of my good living in the last six months. Even if I couldn't breast feed at all, that was the least of our worries. It is a bit unfortunate that my previous cancer has interrupted my breastfeeding but at least I'm here with a daughter.

So that is my story in short to date and I'm happy to share it with you all. I could go on forever about other aspects of my treatment and after. Yes I had cancer, but not now, and yes I had chemo, but that is my past, Madeline is my future.

Deidre Moate
May 2009

AstraZeneca Breast Care Award - Winners Announced



Pictured: Dr Jodi Lynch & Sue Murray CEO NBCF

Earlier this year Australian women with breast cancer were invited to nominate their doctor (surgeon, oncologist, GP or breast care nurse) for the AstraZeneca Breast Care Award which recognises exceptional compassion and commitment. The nominated medical practitioners had all exceeded their patient's expectations and provided invaluable emotional support and assistance.

More than 150 entries were received, and this is only the second year of the awards!!! The winner is **Sandra Gregg**, breast cancer nurse from Cairns, was announced as the 2009 Breast Cancer Care Award winner!

Sydney-based oncologists, **Dr Jodi Lynch** and **Associate Professor Fran Boyle**, also received highly commended awards to recognise their outstanding care for breast cancer patients.

Official Opening of Dragons Abreast Headquarters

Almost 11 years in the making DAA opened its national office on Saturday 11th July.

My memories of the day are - that I felt privileged to be present, to be taking my visiting relatives (escaping the Victoria cold weather) along too.

The office had a busy and friendly feel about it, the volunteer staff were welcoming and excited that finally they have office accommodation that has room to house them comfortably, is work friendly and with easy access for all members.

The opening was a happy and emotional time for some of us. There was pomp and ceremony in the guise of the lion dancers from the Chung Wah Society, speeches by DAA Board members and we were delighted to also be joined by the NT Minister for Health, Kon Vatskalis as well as Austin Chin, Patron of Dragon Boat NT who presented a beautiful wall hanging as a gift for our new home. *Trish Greenfield, Regional Representative NT*



Office blessing by the Dragons from the Chung Wah Society Northern Territory - click for more

A Bucket List Event

Day 1 - My journey began immediately after work on Wednesday 6th May when I boarded my flight from Coffs Harbour to Sydney for a transfer to Darwin.

Although my flight arrived just before midnight, an ever smiling Michelle was there to greet me. The luggage carousel then decided it was time to malfunction which left 2 very tired dragon ladies waiting patiently for my luggage. The irony was my boys had bought me a cabin bag especially for the trip but as the plane out of Coffs was only small, I couldn't take it on board.

Day 2 - After too few hours sleep I set off in the morning with Michelle to check out the "new office". You may or may not remember but I did an article a few months ago about the poor conditions Michelle, Steve, Kathy, Denise & the other volunteers had to put up with at "head office" and the fact you literally couldn't swing a cat in the space. Well let me tell you, you could swing a whole pride in the new abode. It is a great space and I'm sure a welcome change, not before time, for Steve and Michelle as well as Kathy, Denise and all the other elves!

I had a lovely paddle in the afternoon with the Darwin gals as well as Karen and Joy from Clarence Valley. After the paddle we went to the Mindal Beach Markets, a first for me. Karen and I salivated our way down the foodies sections before selecting our cuisine of choice. We listened to some great music, did a bit more shopping and then went home.

Day 3 - on Friday morning, after a longer night's sleep we all arrived at Darwin airport, 13 breast cancer survivors, 2 supportive husbands, a sister and cousin hailing from Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Clarence Valley, Coffs Coast, Darwin and New Zealand. The airport was abuzz with pink, paddles and huge smiles. After an hour's scenic flight to Kununurra we were greeted at the airport by our driver and tour guide "Keith".

I had noticed a man at the airport in Darwin, on the plane and now at Kununurra airport, and realised it was James Blundell, a prominent Australian Country Music Singer. I approached him (shy as I am!) and asked if I could have a photo taken with him, which of course he obliged. I had intentionally decided not to ask too many questions about the Ord journey so as not to spoil the surprise (also a bit of not wanting to scare myself too much). However I did ask one question "Who is my roommate". Michelle's quick response was "Hugh Jackman of course!" As I was having my photo taken with James I told him the story and said he would be a close second! James then obliged the masses as cameras clicked everywhere. Anyway my roommate was neither Hugh nor James but was Karen Kiely from Clarence Valley – a close third.



Angie Walter with James Blundell

Keith, a Councillor and previous Mayor of Kununurra took us on a tour of Kununurra and its surrounds, the Ivanhoe Crossing, past the Kimberley Moon Festival site (saw a few freshies sunning themselves on the bank nearby) and Diversion Dam. We learned a lot about "Sandalwood" and "Host Trees" on that informative tour. Our tour finished with a scrumptious lunch at Celebrity Park. That evening

we were treated to a "Mystery Dinner" at The Kimberley Resort. The Chef bought out each of the 4 courses and then asked after each what we thought it might be. We dined on lots of local fare and had a great night getting to know each other more as we were encouraged to sit next to people we didn't know.

Day 4 – Saturday, free day. I choose, as did a few others, to head into town and check out the markets, art gallery and walk to take in the scenery, finishing my afternoon with a swim and a nana nap. Some took flights over the Bungle Bungles.

We then headed to "The Kimberley Moon Festival". The afternoon/evening was a picture with the full moon rising over the Ord River, truly magical! We were given silver circle seating - our own beach chair, picnic hamper and the front row! We were even in front of the "Black Tie" mob who paid \$500 per ticket. What a great night, so much fun and entertainment with some taking the opportunity to do their warm ups via dance! When James Blundell came on stage as MC and to sing I was seen in the front holding up a DA banner, which he acknowledged, never miss an opportunity I say! Not one of us saw the end when realisation set in as to what we were about to start the next morning at 4.30am.

These lead up activities to the actual marathon were so important. All were great opportunities to get to know each other. We would together for a considerable length of time under unique and extreme circumstances.

Day 5 – Sunday – Mother's Day. Our day commenced just after 5am. We boarded our bus at Kununurra for the 70 kilometre journey to Argyle Dam, nervously excited. Many chatted, some took photos and some just sat, looking and contemplating what they were to embark on. We had a great breakfast at Argyle Dam Caravan Park. As we drove over the massive dam wall and saw the tiny spec of our 12m dragon boat on the other side, reality and apprehension started to set in.

The marathon paddle was 55 kilometres in length starting just after 8am and finishing at 4.30pm. It took us through spectacular scenery, rapids and incredibly wide sections of

the Ord River. In all we paddled for almost 6 hours, excluding our 3 breaks for morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea, only stopping to change sides & have a drink. Considering our races at Regattas are only usually 250 metres in length and take just over a minute to complete, this was certainly an awesome achievement for everyone. The oldest competitor was 71 & the youngest 47 years old.



The participants of The Ord 2009

The chatter in the boat deteriorated after each leg as many people had to get their minds in order to make their bodies work. Personally I found myself often closing my eyes and willing my arms to keep going up and down.

The crew from Kununurra Dragon Boat Club, who followed us in the rescue boat and who have completed this marathon on numerous occasions, were totally amazed at our stamina saying that our team of only 14 paddlers (they normally have 18) completed the paddle in the fastest ever time. They were in awe of our pace and consistency, and said they often just stop paddling throughout the event.

The last leg, although the shortest, was by far the hardest. Once I saw the finish the pace seemed to pick up, almost like the horse bolting home. When we finally arrived, the emotion in the boat was overwhelming as we realised what

we had just achieved.

We disembarked, through a paddle guard of honour. Many tears were shed, tears of disbelief and personal achievement and in remembering our own personal journeys with breast cancer and those we have lost. We had a celebratory drink, and then went to the pool and fell in fully clothed! I was fast asleep by 8pm.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in this

amazing event with a special mention to Michelle Hanton who arranged the incredible 4 days and to Kununurra Dragon Boat Club for everything they did to make this a reality from the awesome catering to their sincere encouragement.

In summary, this was a once in a life time experience and for me one of my greatest personal achievements. Were my expectations met? – you bet!
Angie Walter



OCTOBER PLEDGE

I would like to support Dragons Abreast Australia (DAA) in the following ways:

- Sell special October pink merchandise (see images below)
- Host an October fund raising event
- Please contact me to discuss in more detail how to assist DAA
- Make a Donation

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email address: _____



Please return this form by fax (08) 8947 0087 or email fundraising@dragonsabreast.com.au

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Tel: 1 300 889 566 Fax: (08) 8947 0087
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www.dragonsabreast.com.au

ID Badge Draw Winners

July - Phillipa Pike August - Janice Ferrall

What's New on The Website

www.dragonsabreast.com.au

Vale

The sad reality of Dragons Abreast is that we are a group that are living with breast cancer and inevitably we do lose members to this insidious disease. We are always deeply saddened to hear such news but equally we are lucky to have shared happy memories. Our website now includes a lasting memorial to all our very special **Angels Abreast** please **click here**. This is a recent addition & there are some details missing so we would love your help! If you would like an **Angel** included please forward details to: webmaster@dragonsabreast.com.au



Thank You!

Special thanks to our wonderful contributors

Dragons Abreast Ballarat	\$ 575.00
Madeleine Luck & Kay Taaffe	\$4,000.00
Dragons Abreast Coffs Harbour	\$ 771.00
Dragons Abreast Sydney	\$1,282.00
Dragons Abreast Byron Bay	\$ 400.00
Dragons Abreast Tasmania	\$ 830.00
St George & District Rugby Union	\$ 245.00
Dragons Abreast Bribie Island	\$ 900.00

Phil Auckland of Impedimed for nominating DAA as his charity of choice which resulted in a donation of \$200 from a business function

Please submit all editorials and photographs to be considered in this e-newsletter to newsletter@dragonsabreast.com.au