

Busting with Life is a dragon boat team for breast cancer survivors which is about to start its 12<sup>th</sup> season of competing in Auckland, around New Zealand and overseas. The team consists of 25 women. Some of the current team have been members for many years and six members have been with the team since its inception in 1997. They are Linley Rivers, Irene Muller, Pauline Gill, Jenny Terry, Robyn Brown and Clare Brown.

Being a member of the team is very rewarding but requires a great deal of commitment. During the summer months the team trains at least twice a week and the team races in regattas in Hamilton, Tauranga, at least two in Auckland and one away regatta which in the past has been in Christchurch or Wellington and last year was near Rotorua on the Blue Lake. Over the years other breast cancer survivor teams have been formed around the country and the competition has been quite fierce, leading many team members to discover a competitive streak that they did not know they had. Linley says "I have learnt that I have a previously unknown competitive aspect to me, that I enjoy being part of a group of women who are all aiming for the same goals; winning races and staying healthy".

The Busting with Life team are the current National Champions in the breast cancer division and will defend the title next March on Lake Hood, near Ashburton. Jenny says "winning was a real boost to good health I am sure".

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my 11 years with Busting with Life" says Robyn. "It has been an opportunity to challenge myself physically and make some wonderful friends. We have had many experiences together as a team, an opportunity which is not available to many women in a team environment who are not committed athletes. I believe many of us have extended ourselves physically and mentally way beyond the limits we believed possible. This has been a very positive opportunity presented to us by the common factor of having had breast cancer. I often wonder what my life would have been like if I had not had the privilege of being part of this group – perhaps the breast cancer was positive and meant to be. The thing I most hope for is that our experiences continue to be an encouragement to those being diagnosed; that life can still be full and enjoyable after breast cancer, and not the end of opportunity as it so often seems to be."

These thoughts are echoed by Jenny. "I love the friendship and camaraderie that has developed over the years with my team mates." Jenny enjoys the excitement of racing through the water and winning and has lost count of the number of trophies the team has won over the years. She says "We are a very special group of friends proving that there is life after breast cancer".

Irene feels that it is an honour to be a member. At the outset she sensed this was going to be something special in her life and for her it has proved to be. She refers to the team as "an amazing group of women, all determined to rise above breast cancer, take on huge challenges and above all to have fun." She has been impressed with the friendship, support and encouragement she has received and seen given to all members.

Linley admits that she had no concept at the beginning of what would be involved. Like many of us she was aware of dragon boating, firstly in Hong Kong and then later in Auckland when racing used to take place in the harbour. She says that "going to those first meetings was the best decision I could ever have made and I am now entering the 12<sup>th</sup> year of challenging my body to perform on demand". For Linley being part of the team has helped turn an individual thinker into a team player and "has guided me to become an international athlete, paddling in foreign waters. Along the way the team has become part of a sometimes overwhelming worldwide breast cancer movement, with times of sharing victories, struggles and sorrows".

Being part of Busting with Life means that Linley has "met many great women from all walks of life, all ready to overcome physical adversity, learn new skills and have lots of fun".

There is very little talk of breast cancer among team members, on or off the water. There are no bigger grins than when these women get out of the boat at the end of a race. No one is alone, in or out of the boat.