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My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer as a young woman in her early 30's. I vividly recall her having the surgery which involved a lumpectomy and removal of the affected lymph nodes. This was a highly progressive procedure in the day and age where standard operating procedure was complete mastectomy, no questions asked.

I remember my father taking my sister and I to visit her in the hospital afterward. I remember the subsequent chemotherapy sessions. I remember hearing that a classmate of my sister's shared in "show and tell", that our mom was dying of cancer. When my father went to work to support us, I remember my mother driving herself back and forth to chemo sessions with kids in tow until the day came that she simply could not physically do it on her own anymore. I remember witnessing her suffering through terrible nausea and vomiting nearing the end of that course of treatment. Despite all of that, I remember our mother fighting to get well. I also remember being completely confused by it all. I was in Grade 5. Fast forward 20-odd years from my mother's initial breast cancer diagnosis and a lengthy period of clear clinical follow-ups. After a time of feeling vaguely unwell and chronically exhausted, she was sent for a colonoscopy which resulted in a blood transfusion and diagnosis of colon cancer.

The news came as a complete shock. I had just moved to Toronto a couple of months before. I asked her if I should consider moving back to Manitoba. She said, "Absolutely not. It wouldn't help anything and would only make me worry more."

The months of treatment and recovery that followed were very difficult for her. She endured it all quietly and stoically. It is a testament to her strength and will to overcome that she lives to share her story.

At one point in her healing journey, my mother discovered her tribe: a group of cancer survivors participating in a dragon boat team to support each other and raise awareness. Since joining the team called "Waves of Hope", my mother has attended many festivals and events that help to educate others about prevention and early detection.

This is an aerial overview of the recent Dragon Boat Festival in Sarasota, Florida. At the end, you will see a cluster of boats joined together. Every person seated in the boats are cancer survivors. And every single rose you see dropped into the water represents someone. Someone who didn't make it. My mother was there, in Boat #5.

Blessed be the survivors in their unity above and beyond adversity. May hope and healing continue to expand in their wake.