

BIKE
FLORENCE
& TUSCANY

7 luglio 2018

<https://www.bikeinflorence.com/dragon-boat-florence-2018-festival/>

DRAGON BOAT FLORENCE 2018 FESTIVAL

7 JULY 2018



We had just spent the day gliding through the hills outside of Florence, Italy – me, Elena the guide for the [Bike Florence & Tuscany](#) cycling tours and a feisty group of 9 women – each and every one of them are **breast cancer survivors** and members of the [Survivors Abreast Dragon Boat Team](#).

We had shared a mystical morning at the monastery, pedaling through the Mugello mountains, a typical Tuscan lunch, a couple sips of wine, a peek at the Roman amphitheater in Fiesole and the breathtaking view of Florence from above, our time was coming to an end, and there was just one question left:

After your diagnosis and the treatment, what was one of the most significant moments in your life?
The unanimous response:

Dragon Boat



The Dragon Boat organizations create a positive and encouraging environment for survivors to engage in a recently proven theory (1996) that **physical activity improves their overall health**. They offer both a necessary and important support group for the survivors in addition to physical rehabilitation.

During the course of the morning, we had downed a couple of cappuccinos each, experienced a few false starts, laughed over a near fall, and enjoyed a lot of Tuscan sunshine.

And. We had just enough time together for me to appreciate **the sisterhood they shared**; one that didn't sugar coat anyone's personality quirks, physical limitations or age (heck, three of the group who had traveled to Florence were celebrating 75 years young just that week!)

It was a sisterhood that didn't emphasize the battle they had all individually fought, but rather **showcased their verb and enthusiasm for the life**.

If you didn't know, then you wouldn't have guessed

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Their survival status wasn't obvious to the casual onlooker, even as one guest sported a gaily colored headscarf and another struggled with her backpack and bra mumbling,

I look like I have a third eye. This sure gives one a good reason to look at reconstructive surgery

She wasn't complaining, she wasn't looking for sympathy, she was just with a group of women who had all "been there, done that" and in this case bought the t-shirt, that is the **Florence 2018 Festival Dragon Boat t-shirt**.

For all of my sympathy, empathy, and desire to be supportive, I understood that I could never really understand. And, that was OK, because they had a group that did just that.

They had all found Dragon Boat, in this case – these ladies found it in Peterborough Ontario – Survivors Abreast.



It's not all a bed of Pink Roses

The official take on Dragon Boat is an activity designed for post-operative rehabilitation. Yet the ladies biking with Elena shared the same story of having found a group which **emanated a strong collective energy** which helped them find themselves again when they were feeling down, discouraged and outsiders.

More than one survivor explicitly said, *without this group – without these ladies...*

They came to an event I was visiting. I was mesmerized as they entered the room – and I thought I want some of that!



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There were rare moments when they shared what must have been an underlying fear from the first moment someone pronounced the words “you have breast cancer.” At one point we stopped for a small pause next to a blooming olive grove and a charming ball of fire spoke her thoughts:

As we were cruising downhill at this last stretch, and the scenery started to open up before me, I could feel the tears welling up. I was so glad to be here, and now.

It was as if a collective sigh escaped everyone’s lips. I felt truly touched to be a part of that moment.

Paddle. Boat = Peddle. Bike

The here and now for these ladies was the 2018 Dragon Boat Festival held every four years – and for the first time since its conception in 2005, it was being held in Europe, on the **Arno River in Florence, Italy**. This international non-competitive event powered by breast cancer survivors teams aims at raising awareness – not just for preventative reasons but also for an army of ladies, and men, who are struggling to pick-up the pieces of their lives after the fact.

When Dr.Don McKenzie initiated the use of physical exercise as a way to rehabilitate after surgery – he was bucking the current train of thought that survivors were in some way limited or disabled. Studies show that to be far from the reality. To the contrary, **physical exercise had long-lasting positive effects!**



No would have one ever called me an athlete.

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You may be thinking that in order to paddle these boats you need to be pumping iron and working out every other day, but the ladies assured me that really wasn't the case – all you really need is curiosity and desire to learn. The activity adapts to all fitness levels and background. The power to “paddle up” will fall into place as you begin to frequent the meetings and the members.

Survivors Abreast have a very simple goal: “make sure that women and men from across our region have access to the tests and treatments that could save their lives.” They were quite emphatic (*and with a merited dose of pride*) that **100% of the funds raised go directly to procuring this goal.**

Awareness is Key

2018 IBCPC PARTICIPATORY
**DRAGON BOAT
FESTIVAL**
FLORENCE ITALY



I was only dealing with a small slice of the women in this particular Dragon Boat organization – but if the other almost 4000 participants expected to visit the festival in 2018 have even just a portion of their liveliness, determination, and compassion – then I know *they are going to do great things for breast cancer survivors* all over the world.

For more information for donating or joining to their organization please go their website: <http://www.survivorsabreast.com>

If you are looking for a Dragon Boat community near you, reach out to their facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/IBCPC/>



Mystical landscape: the clouds roll across the mountain tops