

A Historic Regata Storica

September 5th 2021 will be a day I will never forget. It was the day my mother and I had a breakthrough heart-to-heart. It was the last day of my 30s. Above all, it was the day that enabled me to see how being part of the Vienna Pink Dragons has been instrumental in my mother's physical and mental recovery from breast cancer and how it has positively affected our whole family.

As I stood next to my father, watching my mother along with about 80 other Pinkies paddle down the Grand Canal in the "Regata Storica" Parade, I had goosebumps. Tears started flowing down my face. I looked at my father, who also had tears in his eyes. We embraced each other. The pride and joy we both felt at that moment was overwhelming. These women were all full of spirit. Full of strength. Full of pride. Full of hope. Paddles raised, saluting their supporters and all of the spectators, they received a monumental response from the crowds gathered at the water's edge. Not everyone around us knew who they were but they sensed that these paddlers in pink had done/were doing something pretty spectacular. They were raising awareness for a disease they had all battled – some more than once – and one that had claimed some of their teammates. We can't forget how breast cancer, or any disease for that matter, can ravage a person's body, mind and spirit but seeing the Pinkies in all of their glory I was reminded of what it means to be a survivor.

When we went to greet my mother as they all disembarked (a spectacle in itself) I was once again overcome with emotion as the energy of all of these women spilled out of the boats, onto the streets and through the hearts and souls of everyone around them. I teared up (I was surprised my tear ducts hadn't dried by then) as one of the members of the Venice Trifoglio gave my mother and me a memento of the day. With or without a keepsake, that day will forever remain etched in my memory. We had only intended to watch the parade and the races from afar but due to unforeseen circumstances, my mother was offered a seat in one of the Pinkie boats and was able to take part in the parade – as a result, we experienced something truly wonderful. This "Regata Storica" was truly historic because it was the first time that the Pinkies (of Venice and Mestre plus guests) had been invited to participate – a tradition that will hopefully continue for years to come.

Paddling as a team in a boat is something that other sports cannot offer – everyone has to work together, in synch, to move forward. Some have to paddle harder if others can't give as much that day. It doesn't matter how old or how experienced one is, there is a place for everyone in the boat. My mother started paddling at the age of 70 and the only experience she had in terms of rowing is one involving a canoe crashing into a bridge on the Loire River a few decades ago. I was in the boat with her so to put it mildly, I found it hard not to laugh when she told me she was joining a dragon boat club. Seeing her out on the water in Venice and being out on an actual boat with her in Vienna the following week had me eating an enormous slice of humble pie. I have never been more proud or in awe of my mother. I have been through my own struggles in recent years. Many of us have. Frankly, the whole world has been struggling. Being witness to my mother going through chemotherapy and radiation forced me to see her vulnerable side. She was not infallible. It actually brought us closer together, allowing us to gain a better understanding of the challenges we have faced as individuals and as families. We can be victims of a disease, of trauma and sometimes simply of our own circumstances but we can also emerge as survivors. Each of our personal journeys is our own, but we cannot do it alone. Thank you, Vienna Pink Paddlers, for supporting my mother through her journey. Thank you for enabling my family and I to be part of the joys of her recovery. Last but definitely not least, thank you to the Pinkies of Venice and Mestre for the honour you bestowed upon my mother and the memories you gifted my family as a whole.

Dominique Palac



1. Planning for the big day



5. Coming back from Ferrovia



2. On the Canal Grande - the historic boats



6. Disembarking



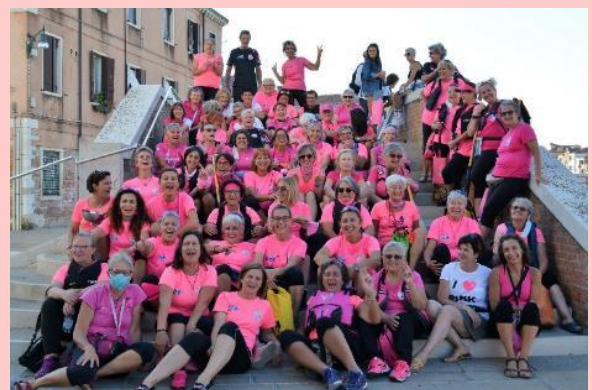
3. Here come the Pinkies!!



7. A couple of guests



4. That's my mother!



8. One big happy family!

Venezia, 5 September 2021