

by Alexandra Houser Vukoder



# One Step at a Time

## A story of survival



"Toby Bothel is all smiles as she celebrates 10 years of survivorship."

"Toby with her dragon boat teammates."

**W**hen Toby Bothel talks about breast cancer, she starts by sharing that she is a ten-year breast cancer survivor. "I remember vividly how my world changed and how crushed I felt when I learned I had cancer," she says. "But I've learned to be grateful for each day and embrace my life, the cancer included."

In 2006, Toby was playing catch-up on her doctor's appointments after having spent the previous 18 months sailing with her family to the Mediterranean Sea. What started as a routine mammogram turned into a consultation with a surgeon and then a biopsy of the breast and lymph nodes.

"I will never forget the words of my doctor that Tuesday evening at 7:00 p.m.," she recalls. The breast cancer had spread to Toby's lymph nodes, requiring eight rounds of chemotherapy for the next 18 weeks followed by a mastectomy. That fall, she endured 38 rounds of radiation, which she did every morning before going to work as a civilian ocean engineer with the U.S. Navy.

"I was devastated. But my doctor also said to me, 'we'll take this one step at a time.' I took those calming words to heart then, and they comfort me still now," says Toby.

Toby also found solace and comradery in the Dragon Dream Team—a competitive dragon boat team comprised entirely of breast cancer survivors. When she retired to Ohio several years ago, she was thrilled to find a local Dragon Dream Team. "I feel blessed to be a part of this team of dedicated women who are so generous with their time and talents to help other breast cancer survivors," Toby says. "As a team, we are honored to be a part of supporting breast cancer survivors at the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk."

Toby and her family have participated in breast cancer walks for many years. "My children were just 15 and 17 when I was diagnosed," she says. "I never realized how important being around other survivors was to my children until at one event, my son walked ahead of me and made friends with a long-time survivor. Her sharing with him how long she had survived brought such relief to him. I am forever grateful for her, and my goal is to do the same for others."

*Come see Toby and Dragon Dream Team at the Akron Making Strides Against Breast Cancer on Saturday, October 14 at Canal Park. For more information, visit [makingstrideswalk.org/akron](http://makingstrideswalk.org/akron).*