

The Hamilton Spectator

Day: Monday Date: 7/12/2010

Section: Local Page: A4 Edition: MET

Dateline:

### **They slay dragons to beat illness**

Jenni Dunning The Hamilton Spectator

Doris Camilleri was given one year to live.

The mother becomes quiet and thoughtful when she thinks back to the day her doctor said she needed a liver transplant.

It was sudden and seemingly out of the blue.

After weeks of a fast-moving illness, with no sign of getting better, Camilleri's eyes started to turn yellow.

The disease was starting to show.

"I was very, very sick. You don't know if you're going to die or not," said the Milton woman. "I was devastated. I couldn't sleep."

That's when her son, Adam, 22, stepped up.

After being diagnosed with liver disease in the fall of 2008, Camilleri received 70 per cent of Adam's liver during a March 2009 surgery.

"We're a tag team," she said, smiling. "He's a good boy. He saved my life."

Adam just shrugs it off.

"You do it for your mom," was his simple reply.

"(Plus) chicks dig scars and I was told I'd get a gnarly one. It's like fishing with dynamite," he said, laughing, to tease his mom.

On Saturday, the pair teamed up yet again -- this time as part of Team Transplant, a group of transplant recipients and donors who took part in an annual dragon boat race at Bayfront Park.

The Lively Dragon Waterfest, in its seventh year, raises money for the Bay Area Restoration Council.

This year, about 1,200 people on 47 teams participated in the event, according to organizers.

Long boats with green dragon heads and snarling white teeth on the ends glided through the water as teams raced back to the shore down buoy lines.

"It was a blast," said Camilleri. "We've had the same experience of being sick, but look at us all -- we're doing great."

Team Transplant, based in Toronto, has been participating in similar races around Ontario for the past 13 years. Almost all of its members have received or donated organs or tissue, including kidney, liver, pancreas or bone marrow.

It has also had heart and lung transplant recipients in the past.

One of its active members is blind and on dialysis waiting for a transplant, but was too sick to attend Saturday's event.

Henry Lowi, of Toronto, has active lung disease and joined the team to make his upper body stronger in case he needs a future transplant.

"We had a great time paddling today," he said. "Boy, did this make us feel alive."

Lowi said "it's a no-brainer" that people should donate more organs.

In Ontario, 1,600 people are waiting for organ and tissue donations, said J. R. Dash, of the Trillium Gift of Life, which sponsored the team.

Awareness is one of the team's goals, said Joanne Gibson, of Hamilton, who is a team member.

The renal dietitian who works with people awaiting transplants calls the waterfest a "hugely beneficial" event.

"These people are amazing," she said.

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**Caption:** Photo:

Photo: Photos by Ron Albertson, the Hamilton Spectator  
Participants dig in with their oars in Lively Dragon boat races, part of a fundraising effort for Hamilton Harbour restoration.