

When a friend first posted about entering a Dragon Boat race, I had no idea what it would entail or what a dragon boat even was! But, I figured a few nights away from my kiddos, with 20 other moms in my town, was definitely needed for my sanity. Little did I know what an absolutely amazing experience I was about to undertake.

Dragon boat racing is like nothing I have ever experienced before. It is not like rowing a canoe, and it is not like rowing crew. It has its own special row because the goal is to essentially make your boat float on the water. There are 20 people in a boat, sitting side by side, and you are only paddling on one side. You have a person who is your drummer in the front calling out your strokes and a crew member steering with an oar in the back guiding your boat in the water.

We practiced a few times on land, sitting in chairs, using golf clubs, umbrellas, basically anything long enough to mimic a paddle. But of course without water, all your paddle hits is land! Land practices ended up being more socializing and laughing than practicing, but we eventually hit our stride and learned how to watch each other to paddle together.

Our first water practice, I believe everyone was in awe. It started out just fun. We tried to paddle in sync with each other because if you are not in sync, you are hitting the back of the person in front of you or hitting your paddles together. Then we paddled under the Bulkeley Bridge coming into Hartford. Our counts starting echoing under the bridge, and 20 women, 20 mothers, just started cheering. We stopped for a few minutes to take in our surroundings. We were paddling down the Connecticut River, under bridges we had driven over countless times, with the skyline of Hartford in front of us and the sun setting. Amazing, magical, awe-inspiring. None of those words quite captured what we felt.

Soon race day was upon us. We raced on August 19, 2017, in the Asian Festival held at Mortenson Plaza in Hartford. We called ourselves Mothers of Dragons. The teams we were up against were outstanding, teams from Cigna, Aetna, United Technologies. There were teams from Vermont and New York. The Mothers of Dragons were made up of moms (and one grandma) from our local Moms Club chapter in South Windsor, Connecticut. We were the only all-female team that was not a club with years of experience practicing together. We had two water practices under our belt, were brand new to dragon boat racing, and we were excited.

We walked down to the docks for our first race, the adrenaline pumping, our captain yelling, "Mothers!" and us responding, "Dragons!" We had dragon tattoos on our faces, our arms, our necks. We had each braided our hair like Daenerys Targaryen from Game of Thrones. We were ready, and we were not going to come in last! And for two out of our three races we did not come in last.

But it was so much more than a race, so much more than whether we were second to last or last. All of our families watched us. Our children watched us. Our children saw their moms take time for themselves to nurture their souls. Our children watched us work together, undaunted by the powerful teams surrounding us. Our children saw their mothers row with everything they had, showing them that we can be powerful as moms and as women. Our children watched us have an amazing time. And even in our last race, when we came in dead last, our children saw us cheer for each other, cheer for the teams who won, and laugh with each other for the amazing time that was had by all.

I so look forward to next year when I get to race again. This Mother of Dragons still has a lot of races left in her future. Look out teams. Next year, we aim for fourth place!