

RACHEL WEISZ

FIVE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ME...

1 If my house were on fire, the first thing I'd save is a 19th-century pendant my grandmother brought from Hungary when she fled the Holocaust. It's a peach stone that opens and has a tiny, tiny compass inside. Granny gave it to me herself - it's very special.

2 The best date I ever had was when a guy took me to an amusement park in Brooklyn's Brighton Beach. There's a really scary ride called the Cyclone, a 100-year-old wooden rollercoaster that shakes. It was one of the best times. And, no, I won't tell you who the guy was!

3 One of my idols is Harry Houdini. I've always wondered if we're related because his real name was Harry Weisz and he was Hungarian like my dad. We have very similar jobs - he escaped from ropes, I escape into characters.

4 My best friend is my sister Minnie. She's a few years younger and a talented art photographer. Growing up, neither of us was very girly - we wore odd socks and were real tomboys, and were real tomboys, climbing trees together all the time and scraping our knees.

5 At school I was hopeless at anything scientific - truly terrible. So if I'm playing a character with scientific expertise, I have to work extra hard to look like I know what I'm doing.



ANNE GILDEA

anne.gildea@mailonsunday.ie

I've been hearing about the Plurabelle Paddlers since I first got cancer: they're a group of women who meet to paddle dragon boats on Grand Canal Dock in Dublin. The exercise helps improve movement after breast cancer surgery and radiation. It's also scientifically proven to help prevent, and control, lymphoedema, the chronic swelling of the arm that may occur when the lymph nodes are removed as part of cancer surgery. Most of the team have, or have had, breast cancer.

I promised myself I'd go, then didn't, because I went through a phase of 'cancer over - I want no reminders of it'. Recently that's turned into 'I really need the company of others who've been through it'. So I went last weekend, and loved it.

The day that was in it helped: clear, blue sky and sunshine. About 30 of us gathered at Grand Canal Dock at 8:45am on Saturday. There was one other first-timer, a lady who told me she'd had her last chemotherapy treatment 10 days before.

Trainer Julie Doyle led a warm-up session before we got on the water. 'Wowee, there's nothing like running around, jumping and stretching in the cold fresh air of an October morning' is not what I was thinking. I'd been expecting a morning of light splashing about on water, interspersed with natter. It's actually serious keep-fit stuff, I realised, and that was even before we got in the water, and the startlingly tough action of full-on dragon-boating began... We novices were given a paddle-action lesson before the boats were launched. You lift the paddle and lash it into the water like it's a spade and you're digging potatoes - manically. That's the metaphor I had for it in my head anyway, being an ardent landlubber, something else that was brought home to me when we put on our floaty vests, and Dymna, who was doing the explaining, said, 'Don't worry - if the boat goes over, these will make you bob up.' The possibility of a dunking was another

thing not considered. It's only happened once by accident, she qualified, and that was during a regatta in Sri Lanka. Although, once a year they do it deliberately so everyone gets used to it. I made a mental note to miss that meeting.

Then the two boats were launched. I was expecting carved wooden ethnic yokes, like floating totem poles with massive dragon heads. I must have been looking at the wrong pictures on the internet. They're actually plain, long, flat-bottomed rowing boats, with benches spaced for rowers to sit in pairs, and areas for the instruction-shouter to stand

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at the front, and the rudder-guider at the back. And I know there's probably a more technical way to explain all that, but I'm also trying to convey my lack of affinity with things of a watery-sport ilk. When it was my turn to get in, there was a little voice inside squeaking, 'Erm, no thanks, I think I'll just actually run away now,' but in I got, at the back, and off we went, 16 paddlers.

Once you get into the rhythm with the team, you forget the effort as you become one with the energy of all the other women. This is what I imagine happens when you get used to it. I remained overwhelmed at the demanding nature of the repeating lift/stretch paddle action involved. It's ferociously

good exercise for upper-body strength, not to mention the lymphoedema element.

I'm lucky in that the hospital I attend, St James's, has a lymphoedema specialist, Jean-Marc Monseux, whom I see once every three months. I saw him two days before my paddle. He measures the arm very precisely each time and could thus inform me it was incrementally more swollen than before, and that it's imperative to wear a compression sleeve every day. Therapy for lymphoedema varies greatly across the country, with some women having no access to services at all. Which is a shame, as early-stage intervention to prevent it developing into a chronic, debilitating condition is essential. And if it does, there's also a dearth of available treatment, so Frances Clarke of Lymphoedema Ireland wrote to inform me recently. This organisation is focused on highlighting the condition and fighting for access and availability of treatment. Frances was asking me to get involved, and, yes, I most certainly will.

Also, on the subject of people getting in touch, Paula McMullan wrote to ask that I highlight the Donegal Calendar Girls calendar, which is being launched on 1 November (€10). Proceeds are in aid of Living Links Suicide Bereavement Group and Letterkenny Hospital Oncology Unit. The girls plan to pose in Magee's window in Donegal Town with the Sam Maguire. Watch out for that if you're in the northwest - sounds unmissable. They are setting up a PayPal account for postal sales. Get in touch if you'd like a copy, and I'll pass on the request.

Back on the subject of dragon boating, not only was the exercise fab, but the chats I had when we went for coffee after were just what the doctor ordered - advice, information, shared experience, laughter. A better bunch of women you couldn't meet. The Plurabelle girls meet every Wednesday evening and Saturday morning, from March to November; last meets of 2012 are this coming week. lymphireland.com; plurabellepaddlers.com

GORGEOUS GADGETS



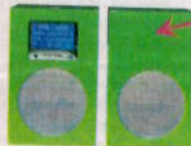
< NO BUTTONS! Choose four stations to preset on this little Q2 wi-fi portable radio, then switch between them by tipping it over. Kooky but clever; €115, q2radio.co.uk



TRY THIS! The Pure Sensia 200D looks like a cross between a rugby ball and a TV, but this is actually a wi-fi internet/DAB/FM radio and MP3 player, with an easy-to-use touchscreen; €339, debenhams.ie

RETRO HERITAGE > This retro-style Revo Heritage internet and DAB (digital) radio has outstanding audio, uses wi-fi or cable, and connects to iPods and iPhones; €370, revo.co.uk

IT'S LOGICAL Play digital music files from your computer as well as internet radio via wi-fi on the Logitech Squeezebox Radio. You can plug your iPod in, too; €173.40, dabs.ie



DESIGNER Choose from ice blue, green or chestnut in this stylish collaboration between Tivoli NetWorks and designers Cappellini. This model is internet-only and connects via wi-fi or cable; €985, ambientdirect.com



OCTOBER 21

On this day in 1982, Sinn Féin won its first ever seats in elections to the new Ulster Assembly, at the expense of the SDLP