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Hope in the Form of a 19-foot Rowboat

2,950 Miles Across the Atlantic for Cancer Research

By Paul Ridley

You may have already seen *Liv* and me on Long Island Sound. It would probably have been early in the morning, or just before sunset, when the winds are light. Despite her size, at only 19 feet, 4 inches, *Liv* is hard to miss. She's a bright yellow rowboat, and I'm the guy who's training to row her solo across all 2,950 miles of the Atlantic Ocean. At 25, I'll be the youngest American in history to row an ocean alone, and I'll be the only one to have done it with the sole purpose of raising money for a charitable cause.

My sister, Joy, and I lost our mom, Katherine Ridley, to cancer in 2001. I was 17 and about to graduate from high school, and Joy was a junior in college. Our mom had fought off melanoma before we were born, and had been in remission for over 20 years. Growing up, we were barely aware that she'd even had it; she was vibrant and energetic, never tiring of travel, gardening, good books, and her kids. When her cancer came back she must have been terrified, but ultimately she was the one to assure all of us we'd be alright. Her fight was courageous but short, and after she was gone I remember wondering how anyone ever moves on from that kind of loss. Joy and I came to realize that the way to move on is to do more than just mourn. The way to move on is to put what we have left to work for something bigger than ourselves. What Joy and I have left is the sense our mom instilled in us—that nothing was impossible, and that nothing we did with passionate dedication could fail.

I had been a rower at Colgate University and had fallen in love with the sport. Shortly after college I was introduced to ocean rowing by a colleague, Erik Swenson. The thought of crossing an entire ocean by oars alone was immediately intriguing and the idea was born. This was a way to accomplish something seemingly impossible, and in doing so memorialize our mom by making a meaningful impact in the fight against cancer.

Two-and-a-half years hours later, Row for Hope, Inc was born. We were incorporated in 2007 and established as a 501(c)(3) public charity later that year. We have a team of more than a dozen regular volunteers, and an ambitious fundraising goal - to raise more than \$500,000 for cancer research. When we're done, we're going to help other athletes do the same thing.

Trans-ocean rowing is at most a "niche" sport, and one that is still delightfully underserved by rowing equipment manufacturers. Because of this, the mantra "if you can't find it, build it" has defined my two years of preparation thus far, especially when it comes to the boat itself.

There are only a few dozen ocean rowboats in existence, and thirteen of them are for sale through the UK-based Ocean Rowing Society. I'd just have to pick one, right? Wrong. Most of them were built not by professionals, but by ocean rowers themselves from a kit of flat-packed marine plywood and were designed to accommo-



Erik Olsen

date two rowers. These boats represent the first-generation of ocean rowboat design and construction, and the two-rower, "build it yourself" concept didn't make sense for my solo row. I kept coming back to the image of riding a tandem bicycle solo. It just didn't feel right.

Luckily the ocean rowing world is a small one and I quickly caught up with Phil Morrison, an accomplished British yacht and dinghy designer who happens to have designed not only the "kit boat," but nearly every other successful ocean rowboat of the last 15 years. Given the scope of my expedition, Phil and I agreed on a concept for the boat that would eventually become *Liv* - "Minimal accommodation for a single rower, utilizing composite materials." After considering my dimensions (I'm 6 feet 2 inches tall, 190 pounds), Phil produced a design that would be a snug but otherwise perfectly suitable place to live and row for up to 100 days.

With design in hand, I set out to find a builder capable of building a boat unlike any they or I had ever seen, and with the creative ingenuity to welcome the challenge. A conversation with a yacht designer and friend at Sparkman & Stephens led me to Bristol, RI-based Aquidneck Custom, owned by Bill Koffler. In addition to Bill's years of experience working with composite materials and building high-tech cruising and racing boats up to 75 feet, I was thrilled to learn that he was involved in Ned Gillette's 1998 "Sea Tomato" project, a 720-mile, four-man row across the Drake Passage from Chile to Antarctica in a 28-foot bright red aluminum boat.

Bill was confident that he would find material suppliers who, hearing our story, would offer to donate or deeply discount many of the materials he'd need. He was right, and with the help of Rich O'Meara at Core Composites in Newport, RI, who not only donated some foam core but also lined up other donations, Row for Hope had its first sponsors. Alcan Composites donated the AIREX C70 foam core and SciArt provided a discount on the S2 fiberglass that gives the boat stiffness and strength. When Kane Ace epoxy resin was supplied and Composite Polymer Design donated the resin hardener, we were in business.

Liv was built over five months from two custom molds; one for the hull and another for the deck and cabins. To prevent structural damage if I were to run into floating debris (a submerged shipping

container, for example), she was built with a false bow of six inches of solid foam core that could be punctured or even break off without compromising the hull structure. She has strong points throughout the cockpit where I'll be clipped in with a harness at all times. If she were to capsize, *Liv* is designed to self-right within a few seconds, even at full expedition weight and with me inside. Though this would be very much like being run through a washing machine, it's far better than swimming during a storm at sea.

Liv is many times stronger than necessary for ocean crossings. I'm lucky to be organizing an expedition like this in 2008, when technology is available to make my time with *Liv* more comfortable and safe than it would have been only 15 years ago. *Liv* will have the luxury of a full solar-powered electrical system like those found on larger yachts. Two 30-watt photovoltaic panels will charge a bank of deep-cycle marine gel batteries that will provide power for eight electrical components. Among these are a desalinator to convert salt water to drinking water, an Automatic Identification System (AIS) to identify nearby ships, redundant GPS systems, and a VHF radio for short-range communication.

For long-range communication, I'll have a satellite phone and hand-held PDA that will allow me to stay in touch with my land-based support team and media outlets, and make daily updates to my website and online journal. A satellite-based passive position indicator will automatically send my position every several hours to my support team, and an iPod and small fan will afford me the utmost in mid-Atlantic luxury.

"Liv" is Norwegian for "life," which fits well with the charitable

goals of our project. I couldn't be more confident in my boat or in my preparation for this expedition. My departure date from the Canary Islands is December 1, 2008. The voyage should take 60 to 80 days, but a successful ocean row is the secondary goal; the true motivation is the cause. Behind my family's story are the stories of millions of others who have fought cancer and millions more who someday will. They will muster more courage than they thought they possessed, and will face more pain than they thought they could endure. We can't spare them all from that, but we can and will stand up against the disease. In doing so, we will help to ensure that fewer people will have to battle cancer. And of those who do, more than ever before will win the fight.

Row for Hope is committed to raising in excess of \$500,000, and while we're well on our way, we need your help. Individual donors are the key to success. Whether you've been affected by cancer, are passionate about finding a cure, or just want to be a part of an expedition that will make history, we need your help. Our website is rowforhope.com. There, you can make a tax-deductible donation, learn more about my expedition and get in touch with the Row for Hope team. You can also help us by spreading the word about our story and my expedition.

And as for *Liv* and I, when you see us training on Long Island Sound this summer, somewhere between Martha's Vineyard and New York City, stop and say "Hi." At 4 1/2 miles per hour, I'm not hard to catch. Also, know that although my hands will be blistered, and my seat will be sore, I'm loving the journey and I'm doing this for all of us. This is just the beginning. ♦

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Around Long Island Regatta

Eligibility
- Vessels and Multihulls of least 24' in length holding a valid IROC, IRC, Multihull (NEMA), or Manufacturer's certificate

Start
Thursday, July 31, 2008, Rye Cove, Port, NY

Finish
Cape Cod, Buzzards Head, Hedgesport Harbor, Sea Cliff, NY

Course
Starts at Rye Cove then to Ocean Point to the Finish

Divisions
IROC - Sparrows and New Sparrows, IRC and Multihull (over racing for fleets of 8 or more)
J1 - Tasting Division

YRA of LIS Quarters!
Western Ocean Racing Hosts for WOC Quarters

32nd Annual ALIR
hosted by the Sea Cliff Yacht Club
July 31st-August 2nd

The ALIR will take place on Thursday, **JUN 31, 2008**
All entries must be received no later than:
Monday JUN 28, 2008

Awards, Celebration and Beach Party will be held on **Sunday, August 3, 2008** at:
Sea Cliff Yacht Club
42 The Boulevard
Sea Cliff, NY 11579

For further information (2008) CONTACT:
Around Long Island Regatta:
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Sea Cliff, NY 11579
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