



By Matthew Thomas

A Grande Old Dame

Many of us dream of selling up, cruising into the sunset and, mostly, that dream is about warm waters, tropical beaches and Pina Coladas. One of the great things about being based in Cape Town is the endless stream of sailors who pass through our 'Tavern of the Seas'. These sailors come in all shapes and sizes, from all walks of life, from the four corners of the planet; some are alone, others part of crew.

Jeanne Socrates is one of these, but what makes her different is that she got into sailing late in life. Having never sailed in her youth, Jeanne started sailing nearly 20 years ago in her local dinghy fleet in the UK, and the bug bit. Taking the step into keel boats in 1994, she and her husband George decided to retire early, and they started their adventure by buying the *Nereida*, a Najad 361 built in Sweden. They collected her and sailed her back to the Hamble where they started their transition from land to sea.

In 1998, they set off across the Atlantic and explored the Caribbean and East coast of the

US. Then, sadly, George was diagnosed with cancer and after a valiant fight, died in early 1993. Suddenly alone, Jeanne was faced with a huge decision - give up or carry on.

The sailing would be more difficult, and she'd have to be able to repair and solve any problems that would inevitably come when cruising alone. Jeanne decided to continue. It was a 'trial by fire' and reading Jeanne's online log (www.vnereida.com) gives one a good idea of the challenges she faced, and her dogged determination as she cruised Alaska and the North American west coast.

Then Jeanne decided that the time was right to try a solo circumnavigation and she prepared *Nereida* in San Diego before sailing south to Zihuatanejo, in Mexico, to start her west bound circumnavigation. This would take her through the Pacific Ocean to Australia and then across the Indian Ocean to Durban, before crossing the Atlantic to Panama. After transiting the Canal, it would be a short hop back to her starting point.

Just before dawn, after 15 months at sea and just 60 miles from her end point, *Nereida* would be lost in the surf on a Mexican beach, and that put paid to Jeanne's attempt.

Jeanne immediately looked for another boat. She planned another solo circumnavigation, non-stop from Lanzarote in the Canary Islands. The new *Nereida* is a cutter rigged Najad 380 which was delivered to Southampton in early 2009.

I got to meet Jeanne after she had put into Cape Town for rigging and engine repairs. As I write, she's back on her trip around the world. At a time in life when most people are retired and sitting on their porches remembering how they had had plans to sail around the world, Jeanne is off sailing, having the time of her life, exploring our planet, meeting new friends - and she is being followed by many armchair sailors as she faces each challenge.

Jeanne, well done! Thank you for showing us all that dreams should never be given up on, and that our 60s can be our best years! ↴

