

Around-the-World Sailing Grandma

With typical British pluck, Jeanne Socrates, the 68-year-old grandmother whose third solo circumnavigation attempt was cut short in January when her boom snapped on the approach to Cape Horn, has not given up her quest to circle the globe.

"It is highly likely I will try again. I'm not someone to give up lightly," Socrates said.

It's no surprise that Socrates would simply pick herself up, brush off and go on. In the last 10 years she's encountered more bluewater adventures and mishaps than most will experience in a lifetime.

She began sailing at the age of 48, and within a decade she and her husband George were off on early retirement, voyaging throughout Europe and across the Atlantic to the Caribbean. But just a few years into their dream cruise her husband was diagnosed with cancer and died in 2003. But just how she transitioned to singlehanded circumnavigator is part mystery.

"We were perfectly happy doing what we were doing at the time," Socrates said. Sailing around the globe was, "not something we discussed."

"But cruisers, once they start off, always have it in the back of our minds. You almost do it by default: five, six, 10 years later, you're back where you started, and realize, 'Well, I've sailed around the world.'"

After three years of extensive cruising, Socrates decided to set off alone on what she called a cruising-style circumnavigation in 2007. She planned to commence in Zihuatanejo, Mexico, and stop everywhere along the way that tickled her fancy.

Like many of her travels, that endeavor was wrought with adversity. A pre-departure refit in Vancouver, Canada, left *Nereida*, her Najad 361, with more troubles than she'd arrived with. Approaching Point Reyes, California, Socrates' instruments conked out, and in the thick fog she ran over a crab pot that wrapped around her prop and rudder. In short succession, and often concurrently, she encountered foul weather, chronic issues with her autopilot, water in her diesel supply, corroded injectors, a faulty solenoid and radio glitches.

And then, after 15 months and 25,500 miles, just 60 miles short of her triumphant return to Zihuatanejo, *Nereida* ran aground. While Socrates catnapped her autopilot had



lost power and shut off, allowing the yacht to saunter off course toward a desolate beach north of Acapulco. The boat was destroyed. Half a day from accomplishing her solo circumnavigation, her campaign was over.

Fortunately *Nereida* was insured, and in short order Socrates had a new, slightly larger Najad 380 and was planning another round-the-world trip. This one would begin October 2009 in the Canary Islands, and be nonstop.

"Watching the Vendée Globe made me start thinking, 'If I go to the Canaries I can do the same thing.'"

Once again fate had other plans. Forced to halt for engine repairs in Cape Town, South Africa, Socrates was hung up for three months. In that time her weather window closed. Unflappable, she decided to start again from Victoria, Canada, and she would sail from South Africa to New Zealand, Hawaii and the Pacific Northwest, merely to get to the start line.

"Once you're on the boat, it's no big deal to keep going," she said matter-of-factly. "As long as the boat survives."

Socrates left Victoria on October 25 for her third stab at a solo circumnavigation, and while it was a voyage marked with challenges, it was nothing the perky English sailor couldn't handle, that is until Day 72 of her voyage, just a few hundred miles from Cape Horn. Battered by large seas and 40-knot winds, she was hove-to.

"Suddenly, all hell let loose and everything that could move was relocated to the port side of the boat," she said. "Water was pouring in from under the sliding hatch and there was chaos everywhere."

Socrates climbed out the aft cabin hatch to discover the boom had broken in half, and the dodger swept away. "In brief, I didn't know where to start," she said and tried to clean up what she could while concerned that another knockdown was imminent. "I tried everything I could to get us to head downwind," she said, and as she struggled to douse the sails, worried: "Things were going from bad to worse!"

"I returned below to the awful, dripping, wet mess there. I was feeling very vulnerable;

'Gosh, how am I going to get sorted out?' Normally something goes wrong and you can fix it, but this was one of the most unfixable things.

"I decided I'd better let the authorities know of my plight, not yet life-threatening but not good."



Jeanne Socrates gets ready to set sail from Victoria, British Columbia, on her third circumnavigation attempt, facing page top. It was cut short when her boom broke off Cape Horn, above. *Nereida*, Jeanne Socrates' Najad 380, anchors near Cape Horn with a broken boom, facing page left.

Eventually, the weather calmed enough to allow *Socrates* to run her engine for steerage, keeping *Nereida's* stern to the seas and motoring steadily toward Cape Horn. She continued to blog about the flora and fauna more than her trials and tribulations.

"I was in company with a bigger group of dolphins, with lots of albatross around, mainly black-browed, some white-chinned petrels and a flock of excited terns," she wrote. "As I approached the anchorage, I spotted a penguin in the water close by, a great delight! I suppose the upside of my mishap is that I get to see such scenery and wildlife up close."

Nereida arrived in Ushuaia, Argentina, January 8, to await a shipment of parts and equipment. She expected to finish critical repairs and depart early March, before heading to Cape Town to finish the refit.

At that point, *Socrates* will have completed a full circumnavigation. "If I get to Cape Town, at least I will have achieved that much, and will check off something on the list.

"After that, I'm seriously going to have to look at the weather, in which direction I'll go. I want to get back to British Columbia, as I left a lot of cruising gear there," she said.

"I love being on the boat, living the life I'm living. I love sailing, and being out in the middle of the ocean with just albatross keeping me company, but I've also met so many wonderful people doing what I'm doing," she said. "And people are very nice, usually very helpful and friendly."

Surely a petite, 68-year-old grandmother showing up alone "gets their interest" she said, "especially when they realize where I've just come from. It's just not something women of my age normally do."

Socrates continues to sail to raise awareness of the Marie Curie Cancer Care Foundation in memory of her husband and hosts a donation link on her website. Visit www.svnereida.com for more details, and a full account of *Socrates'* adventures. --Betsy Crowfoot

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