



## MAKING WAVES

The LWRC Quarterly

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*In this issue:*

[Intracoastal Waterway and beyond, page 5](#)

[Experiencing the Charles River, page 11](#)

[Meet Renton Rowing Center, page 15](#)

# We'll Miss You, Janet

Little did we dream, when Janet Walker joined LWRC in 2013, what an impact she would have on the future of our club. Under her steady hand, we have emerged from times of great financial uncertainty to face the future with confidence. Many of us are perhaps unaware that the LWRC boathouse rests on leased land, even though the structure itself is owned by the club. When the lease is renewed and restructured in 2023, costs will rise significantly. Prior to Janet's tenure as treasurer of our club, no significant measures had been taken to prepare for this eventuality.

Thanks to her experience and expertise in the corporate world, Janet immediately recognized our vulnerability. To improve our financial security, she prioritized paying off our mortgage balance immediately and then dedicating our resources not only toward boathouse maintenance but also toward establishing a reserve fund to draw on after the new lease would take effect. In other words, she instituted a common-sense approach toward fiscal responsibility. We can now look forward to the future with some degree of confidence.

Janet is a hard worker. In addition to bearing the burden of managing club finances, she also spent countless hours at the boathouse, taking care of a variety of mainly mundane tasks. Several times a week, she could be seen on the water,



either in a single or with her usual rowing buddies. She tirelessly answered office mail. You might say she was a one-person committee whose responsibilities were "everything."

Even though she had left Seattle several weeks before we hosted the Head of the Lake Regatta on November 7, Janet fulfilled her responsibilities as regatta director from afar. She stayed in touch with club organizers and officials, making the critical calls dictated by dismal weather conditions. It was Janet, in consultation with the officials, who made the difficult decision to shorten the course and cancel small-boat races.

Shock and dismay ran through the membership when Janet announced in October that she would be returning to Ohio, the place where she grew up. It's hard to imagine LWRC without her presence. She will continue to serve out her term as treasurer until elections are held in January. We are fortunate to further benefit from her wisdom until then.

—Editor

*Lynne Robins spoke recently with Janet, learning more about what lies behind her public persona:*

During our Zoom conversation, Janet looked relaxed and happy. She excused herself several times to head into the kitchen and stir the Italian sausage soup she was preparing—a family favorite. Though Janet misses her daily connection with LWRC friends, she’s glad to be settling into her second Fremont home—this one in her home state of Ohio. Even though she misses her LWRC community, she is comfortable being back among sisters, nieces, nephews, and high school friends. She wistfully recited the chorus from John Prine’s song “Summer’s End”—*Come on home, come on home ... No, you don’t have to be alone, Just come on home.*

Janet loves rowing, but her entry into the sport may have been delayed by its “messiness” (her word). She’d spent years watching her son Steven compete in regattas but was put off by how much equipment and logistical bother it seemed to involve. (As a competitive swimmer, Janet needed to be concerned only about things such as bathing caps and goggles.) In time, however, Steven encouraged her to row a double with him and eventually to venture out in a single.

Janet typically throws herself into things, so it may come as no surprise that soon after she started rowing, she met with extraordinary success. In 2012, Steven invited her to race with him in a mixed double at Boston’s Head of the Charles Regatta. So she traveled to Steven’s

home in Ithaca, New York, to train for three weeks. Following the training regimen Steven had devised for her, she rowed with him regularly. She felt privileged to witness her son’s dedication to training for his additional club singles race. It was a full-on bonding experience.

Janet recounted the exhilaration of passing boats during their race while Steven called out instructions from bow. They crossed the finish line in under 20 minutes—earning them second place in the Directors Challenge Mixed Doubles race. Janet proudly showed me the picture she’d received as part of the racing package. But it is the image of their row back, on the near-empty waterway, that she remembers most vividly. Satisfied that they had trained well, rowed well, and experienced this together, they could savor the colorful fall day together.

After Boston, Janet’s love of sculling led her to Lake Washington Rowing Club. She was already familiar with the boathouse because Steven rowed at LWRC whenever he visited Seattle. In fact, she laughed, **Karin Rogers** had rowed with him one New Year’s Day, long before Janet and Karin met. In 2013, she joined the club, taking classes with **John Robinson** in a single. The following summer, along with Karin Rogers, **KC Dietz**, and others, she took **Hugh Lade**’s class. An invitation to join the LWRC board followed, and the rest is history. Janet describes the excitement of working with board members to reconfigure the boathouse and



*At the 2015 C.R.A.S.H.-B Sprints (Scullingfool Photo)*

convert the upstairs into a gym. And she relishes being part of the team that achieved what she believes is a most critical accomplishment for LWRC’s future—joining forces with Holy Names Academy.

For the immediate future, Janet intends to row her newly purchased Bay 21 on a beautiful river that feeds into Sandusky Bay and ultimately Lake Erie. The waterways here are gorgeous, she enthused—and the surrounding deciduous trees shed their leaves to reveal eagles’ nests (and eagles!) everywhere. She also plans to continue Zooming in for LWRC’s erg sessions. (Did I know, she asked, that she had placed second in the





*Janet with her son Steve, 2012 Head of the Charles (Sport Graphics Photo)*

2015 C.R.A.S.H.-B. Sprints World Indoor Rowing Championships, Veteran Women Age 55 to 59?—No! There was so much I didn't know!

Meanwhile, Janet is settling in, reconnecting with her hometown Fremont community. She has offered to lend her decorated-for-Christmas Victorian dollhouse to the town's Rutherford B. Hayes estate for display over the holidays. On the home front, she and her husband have finished phase one of their great wall(paper) takedown. And her newly licensed car sports plates with Ohio's latest design option: a bull-frog—to support wetlands preservation.

—*Lynne Robins*

*We wish Janet good times with her family, and we thank her for many years of dedicated service to our Lake Washington Rowing Club community. Fortunately, Janet has promised to return for visits in the future—including time on the water, of course!*

## Check out our programs!

<http://lakewashingtonrowing.com/home/programs>

## Editor's Note

This issue offers insights into the characters of several of our members. We will miss [Janet Walker](#), who gave tirelessly of her time to make our club a better place. Learn more about her in the lead story. [Dave McWethy](#) describes his 3,000-mile solo river journey from Annapolis to Chicago. [Jasper Tran O'Leary](#) conveys the excitement of his first-time experience at Head of the Charles. [Rachel Wong](#) introduces us to Renton Rowing Center, and [Kendal Swinski](#) tells us why she is able to handle the demands of running our club office. Off the water, [Marcy Heffernan](#) offers pet owners comfort through art.

We hope you will enjoy becoming better acquainted with your fellow members—there's lots of talent at LWRC!

—*Roberta Scholz*



## Designer's Note

*Making Waves* is meant to be read on-screen, laid out in monitor proportions. You can print it on letter-size paper at 94%, but text is large, and underlined links are live. Use [full-screen setting](#) (View > Read Mode) in Adobe Acrobat for the most legible view.

—*Suze Woolf*



**Pass the Word:** Has an LWRC member done something worth recognizing, on or off the water? [lwrnewsletter@comcast.net](mailto:lwrnewsletter@comcast.net)

## 2021 Doors Close, Doors Open

For many of us, 2021 was a time of reflection and redirection. Given our inability to return to our normal routines as rowers, as teams, as competitors, we were given an opportunity to row in small boats or pick up new athletic interests outside of rowing. Perhaps you were able to feel the grace of letting things arise more naturally in these uncertain times. Did you regain a sense of wanting to race again, enjoy the rowing motion for its own sake, become more sensitive to your effect on a boat, decide to return to the fold of a program or team with new sensitivity? Wherever you are in this moment, the club remains available to you to pursue your goal.

The board of directors continues to provide direction on how the boathouse will operate during the pandemic. We have opened up more and more of the club for everyone's use. The gym is fully functioning, winter indoor training classes will commence, and coaching will be available on the water. We will follow the guidelines of local and state governments. We hope that, with vaccinations and antiviral treatments available, the hold that COVID has on us will diminish.

The board continues to hire paid staff in membership services, equipment, facilities management, and coaching. Some work can't

be done exclusively with volunteers. Costs will increase as a result of expanded staffing, 2023 rent readjustment, and rising cost of living. We have increased rack fees and launch-use fees, starting when your current rack contract renews or at the beginning of 2022. We will also present a membership dues increase at the annual meeting for your vote. We can offset many costs by fundraising and using volunteers where possible.

Volunteerism is at the core of our club values. We need the collective good will to keep the club working for all. COVID pushed us further away from being able to volunteer for nearly two years, but we are slowly returning to organized volunteer activities. The recent Head of the Lake success provided encouragement that we can come together as a club to make things happen. You'll hear more in the coming months about how you can help.

Some might say the club is at a crossroads. As is typical of many nonprofit organizations, the many super volunteers that dreamed and built this club are moving on. We are in a stable place right now, but solid leadership must be sought out to continue this way. Elections for a new president, treasurer, and co-captain will happen at our annual meeting in January. *These positions are key.* I served on the board for a very long time. **Janet Walker**, our treasurer,



er, has moved to Ohio. We both remain dedicated to the club and hope that new blood steps forward with the time and energy to keep the club viable and strong. We are happy to assist in the transition, as we hold an immense amount of knowledge that should not be lost. Let's pass the baton, team. We hope our example will motivate you.

I love rowing and I love this club. Thank you for letting me steer the ship this long—it's been an honor.

*—KC Dietz, President  
LWRC Board of Directors*

**Harbor Patrol**  
**206-684-4072**

Also on the bulletin board in the boathouse

**Report Oil Spills 24/7**  
**1-800-OILS-911**

Washington Division of  
Emergency Management



# Imagination Triumphs over Common Sense

## Navigating the Intracoastal Waterway: Not for Sissies

### The Journey Begins

In October 2020, after months of home confinement for the coronavirus, I decided to buy a boat on the East Coast and drive it south to Florida on the Intracoastal Waterway, then into the Gulf of Mexico, and up the rivers to Chicago, *solo*. By myself. The Waterway stretches 3,000 miles from Boston to Brownsville, Texas, curving around the southern tip of Florida.

By the beginning of November, I had acquired a Back Cove 29, a power boat, in Annapolis. After an extensive name search, she became *Jeunesse*, meaning—with admitted irony—“youth” in French. After getting the boat equipped for a journey and doing necessary maintenance, I headed down the Chesapeake Bay the day after Thanksgiving. Most of the boats heading south had already departed well before. The day was wonderfully warm for that time of year, with low winds. Sun sparkled across the water. I saw very few other boats in two days and 200 miles.

In Portsmouth harbor, across from the largest Navy base in the world, I spent two days at a marina, waiting for high winds to pass. This would happen every ten days, I later learned. The next day, I entered the Waterway, where I single-handedly passed through the first canal of the trip, dropping two feet. The canal, between Portsmouth and Albemarle Sound, dates back to 1859.

The trip down to Stuart, Florida, would take a month. The northern leg of my journey was often cold at night, but my biggest concern until I got to Florida was water depth. Running in water shallower than three feet put me at risk of damaging my propeller. In between many days of gorgeous

sunrises and sunsets, cruising along, I was always watching my GPS and depth sounder to keep within the channel. A wise waterman in the Chesapeake once advised me, “Just because it’s wet don’t mean you can drive your boat over it.” So true.

Navigation was a constant challenge. The entire southern East Coast waters, including Florida, are very shallow. Misjudging depth or missing a channel could have caused serious damage to my propeller.

Each night, from North Carolina to Florida, I would spend an hour or two going over the next 50 to 75 miles. Each day, I navigated the often narrow channels, using buoys, Garmin GPS, the *Waterway Guide*, and the Bob423 *ICW Cruising Guide*.

Where the channel no longer matches the Army Corps’s intended channel, there may or may not be temporary buoys. But these also can be wrong, due to shifting sands from major storms, particularly at ocean inlets. The saving grace was Bob423, aka Bob Sherer, who with his wife transits the ICW fall and spring. They update channel data to show the shoals and the real channel, and their information is posted online. They had preceded me by a couple of months. Along with countless other boaters, I owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

Because of the virus, I had minimal contact with people ashore. In North Carolina, at a marina on the Alligator River, I was confronted with my language limitations and



Egret (All photos courtesy Dave McWethy)

learned why companies don't have call centers in North Carolina. I'd say, "What?" two or three times and still not understand.

In South Carolina and Georgia, I passed inlets from the Atlantic where a single storm can put a shoal where the channel had been.

South Carolina and Georgia, except for the occasional town, were extremely remote but



also beautiful. Some days it was narrow rivers, or open sounds, with many miles of marsh grass. There were dunes and occasional views of the ocean. I passed the starting point of the Civil War at Fort Sumter, spending the night anchored off Charleston Harbor. Occasionally, in unnamed states, I'd fish and sometimes enjoy freshly caught dinner.

Georgia tides would be as much as eight feet. Traveling on the "highs" made navigation easier. With each degree of latitude further south, the weather became warmer. And in northern Florida, it began to feel like a pleasure cruise.

Christmas Day found me behind Merritt Island, near Cape Canaveral, midway down

Florida's Atlantic Coast. Here, tides were only one and a half feet. Oddly, to me, I saw more pelicans than seagulls in Florida.

At Stuart, Florida, with roughly a third of the trip behind me, I entered the Okeechobee Canal, which crosses Florida and ends at Fort Myers. A system of five locks raised the boat on the east side and lowered it on the west. Halfway through, Lake Okeechobee is big enough that there came a time when I couldn't see shore in any direction. At the west end of the lake, the Caloosahatchee River flows into Fort Myers. "Caloosahatchie" just sounded like Old Florida.

From Fort Meyers, the next destination was Charlotte Harbor. The plan was to find dry storage where I could leave the boat while making a trip back Seattle. I needed to let time pass, to let spring flooding subside on the rivers above Mobile; I also needed to go home, hopefully to get vaccinated.

## The Gulf Coast

In late March, I headed east from Seattle again, this time to Chicago, where I left my van with relatives and found a broker I liked. (I had decided to sell the boat in Chicago.) Soon after, I headed to Florida in a rental car.

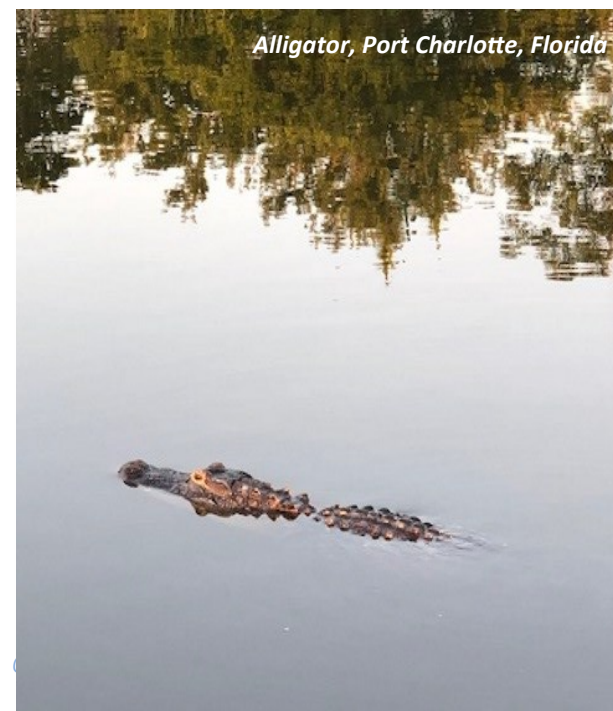
I spent several weeks at the Florida yacht storage, doing maintenance. When I finally put the boat into the water one night, I saw the one and only alligator of the trip. The next morning, I started up the coast toward Tampa.

Even though I'd had concerns about crossing

the open water of the Gulf, it turned out to be easy. North of Tampa, I went up to the Steinhatchie River area—which probably prides itself on being backwater Florida. Forecasts showed two-to-four-foot seas for many days. I wanted to be careful in my solo crossing, but local advice supported going. The boat took those larger seas better than expected. After four or five hours, I was across to Apalachicola, on the coast of the panhandle. From there, I stayed on the ICW, which gave me protected waters and pretty good depth.

## North to Chicago

After a couple of days, I started up the Mobile River on May 1. I was still almost 1,400 miles from Chicago and still on schedule. Between going upriver and downriver, down is better. All the way to the Tennessee River, I encountered







*Bobby's Fish Camp, Mobile River, Alabama*

strong current and an abundance of debris in the water. Going upriver, the floating wood comes at you more quickly. One morning, after at night at anchor, I discovered an alligator-sized log jammed in my anchor chain.

The 200 miles north from Mobile surprised me. The Mobile and Tombigbee Rivers felt very remote, with almost no houses, no fishermen, and not even trash in sight. One night as I lay at anchor, a storm blasted in with hail, rain, and wind like I've rarely seen. The sky was purple, which looked like tornadoes. Much of the way, I had wonderful anchorages in coves or streams off the river. At the north end of the Tombigbee Waterway, beautiful Kentucky Lake provided a relaxing break. Along the Tennessee River, high bluffs of limestone lined the shores.

Paducah, Kentucky, where the Tennessee joins the Ohio River, was a familiar stop. A few years ago, I had ended my Ohio River journey there. Going down the Ohio now (these were the only downstream river miles on my trip), I passed Cairo, Illinois, at the confluence of the Ohio and the Mississippi.

I should mention locks. With 15 locks between Mobile and Cairo, I got good at solo lock passage. When the lockmaster gives permission, the boat enters the big concrete box and loosely ties to one side. As the level either rises or lowers, water swirls vigorously around the boat. At the new level, the lockmaster opens the gates and toots permission to depart. One day on the Tombigbee, I went through five locks in close succession.

After a strong current behind me on the Ohio, I turned into the power of the Mississippi, fighting my way upstream to St. Louis. On the Mississippi, too, I found delightful protected anchorages. The current was three and a half to four miles an hour *against* me. Towboats and barges were more common here than anywhere else on the trip. Passing them at narrow spots, I'd find myself holding my breath. On one side, it was death by barge; on the other, running aground in the shoals.

What was the hardest part of the trip? Without a doubt, it was the two hours going past St. Louis on the Mississippi. The debris here, washed south by a four-mile current, was the worst anywhere. Branches, bolts of wood, 20-foot stems, and full trees came at me. It was



*Galley of Jeunesse*

hard to find clear water, to steer between those threats.

Much of this wood comes from the Missouri River, which joins the Mississippi just above St. Louis. North of their confluence, much of the debris subsides. But it's a different story to the south of the confluence, a portion of the river known as the Chain of Rocks, [as one boater recently learned after running aground](#).

From there I soon entered the Illinois River, heading toward Chicago. Many people worry about dodging barges ("tows") on this river, which is highly commercial. The reality proved easier than the imagining: often the river was [\(continued on page 10\)](#)

### *Kendal keeps the LWRC office running smoothly*

#### **W**hy I'm working for LWRC rather than for the US government as a spy:

How I got here would take up the whole newsletter, but there are a few things I'd like you to know about me:

- ▶ Originally from Baltimore, I came to Seattle in 1995 to complete a degree in Nutrition at Bastyr. My career and life path have been about as straightforward as rowing through the canal in the dark. But in both instances, I'm still happy to have gone that way.
- ▶ I learned to row at Green Lake in 2018. I came to LWRC because of the COVID shutdown and am here to stay! I also maintain my connection to Green Lake: I row there sometimes, and I am a member of their Rowing Advisory Council.
- ▶ I was born a night owl and remained as such all the way through motherhood. Only rowing could get me to convert!
- ▶ I enjoy rock climbing and want to repeat the *super-fun* ropes course I did during my MBA team-building retreat two years ago. This summer, I also discovered that I can still stand on, and walk on, the floating log that I grew up playing on at our swimming hole.
- ▶ I love creative projects and experiments, mostly in the garden, kitchen, and liquor cabinet. On occasion, I also tinker with graphic design.
- ▶ I have an entrepreneurial background in food services, and I ran a healthy, heat-and-serve-meals delivery service (Kendal's Kitchen) for six years.
- ▶ I also have a background with community building and

management. A highly functioning community warms my heart!

- ▶ I am ever so slowly building a coxing/leadership program to give women a safe place to practice leadership skills while learning to cox. Wouldn't it be great to have an abundance of trained coxswains? *I need input from adult women who might want to participate in a program like this. Please send my email address to anyone willing to chat with me!*

And lastly, as much as I enjoy getting into a well-made bed, I always hated making one. And this—my hatred for making my bed—is why I am not a spy.

For further interrogation, or to have a fun and chatty time as a fellow rower, email me to set something up ([office@lakewashingtonrowing.com](mailto:office@lakewashingtonrowing.com)). For LWRC matters, please find me during open office hours (generally Mondays through Thursdays, 8 to 10 a.m. If you need my assistance as LWRC staff at other times, please send me an email.

*—Kendal Swinski, LWRC Office Manager*





# Dock Fights

*Sharing our dock can be socially challenging*

Imagine, for a moment, lugging your boat down the Burke-Gilman to our wherry/launch dock amidst twenty other shells each morning. Or, better yet, visualize carrying it back that far after a hard row. In the mid-1990s, our members agreed that a great boathouse deserves an appropriate (i.e., closer) launching pad, so we gave ourselves a \$150,000 present: a new dock. The dock itself cost only about \$75K; the other half of the cost is explained in [this newsletter story](#), well worth a read.

Nowadays, if you row mid-day or in the afternoon during the summer, chances are you've had to launch and land your boat in the middle of an apparent frat party on our dock. You may also have encountered some nasty remarks as you tried to find room to operate. So how do you respond without escalating the nastiness?

It's important to understand that, even though our \$150K bought the dock and surrounding street improvements, occupying of public land and water space incurs obligations. The newsletter article above explains the situation:

Our "new" dock sits on public land and water. In return for occupying our fellow citizens' space,

we agree to conditional public access—namely, launching and recovery of human-powered vessels. True, our \$150K grants us priority use, but we seldom have dock-space conflicts with kayakers, SUP paddlers, and the odd photographer or parent/kid combo. However, summer afternoons bring out the swimmers, the sunbathers, the picnics, and beer—leaving little dock real estate unoccupied. Holy Names rowers, in particular, deal with the party crowd, as do occasional mid-day scullers. How should we exert our rights to use our own dock, especially if we meet with nastiness from the occupiers?

First, check out the sign on our gate; it details the legal conditions. Yet the issue is more social than legal. Absent any damaging activity, I tend to tolerate the swimming and sunbathing. With water access so limited, thanks to private-ownership laws, it's easy to understand the appeal of a public sun-drenched dock. So if you need someone to make room for your boat, it's best to rely on friendliness and humor, good tools for mind-controlling potential jerks. Shoving your way in and knee-capping people with your oars is oh-so-tempting, but instead pretend that it is their

space and ask permission to disturb them for a few minutes. If a to-the-core jerk refuses to move, contain your inner thoughts and find another area of the dock. Let there be no encouraging of midnight vandalism by a revenge-driven jerk. If it's any consolation, he (it's always a *he*) will come off as jerky to his friends.

Finally, I suggest reporting episodes to the LWRC office. Let the Board escalate a response as needed.

*—Hugh Lade*

*Long-time LWRC member and coach Hugh Lade has probably spent more time on the dock than most others at LWRC.*



*Fist (Creative Commons image)*

*Dock sign (Photo courtesy Hugh Lade)*



## BOARD UPDATES

**T**hanks to each and every one of you who helped run the Head of the Lake Regatta this year! While the weather didn't allow for the full event we had hoped for, the fact that we were able to run the event at all is a testament to all the hard work our members put in during the months leading up to it. It was great to see some racing once again, and we are looking forward to 2022!

### Winter 2021 Focus Areas

- ▶ Coordinating winter programs, both on and off the water
- ▶ Planning for 2022 projects, board elections, and other boathouse operations

*As always, the Board welcomes all members to join our monthly meetings.*

*Please contact Allison Thomas, Secretary, with any questions ([amthomas2448@gmail.com](mailto:amthomas2448@gmail.com)).*

*—Allison Thomas, Board Secretary*



*Craig Smith photo,  
courtesy Marilyn Goo*

### KUDOS: Our 25th Anniversary!

**T**wenty-five years ago, Frank Cunningham wielded the shovel to break ground for a permanent boathouse in Fremont. It is believed to be the largest non-collegiate boathouse west of the Mississippi,

and it is one of the few anywhere that can store two eights end to end.

Designed by Nelson Miller, the boathouse's finishing work was done largely by our members.

Next time you take out a shell, also take a moment to think about those who made it possible for all of us today!

### KUDOS: Success in Boston!

**T**he 56<sup>th</sup> Head of the Charles Regatta took place during the weekend of October 22–24 with over 11,000 competitors from around the world. LWRC with seven entries and Martha's Moms with three entries made their presence felt.

**Wispy Runde** and **Evan Jacobs** finished first—ahead of 47 challengers!—in the Directors Challenge Mixed Doubles race. Prior to this race, Wispy finished 14<sup>th</sup> of 69 entries in the Women's Grand Master/Veterans Single event. Wispy represented the Moms, and Evan rowed for LWRC. They made us all proud.

*Thanks to everyone who represented us  
in Boston!*

### (Imagination, continued from page 7)

narrow, but it was easy to pass barges on the straight sections.

And it was a treat to pass old river towns such as Ottawa and Joliet. (A bakery in Ottawa provided fresh hot cross buns for breakfast!) Joliet provided a mystery, as the town of Rome is close by. What's that all about? An Illinois joke?

Two channels lead from the Illinois River to Lake Michigan: the Chicago River, which goes through downtown Chicago; and the Calumet River. I chose the latter because my destination was at its mouth, south of downtown. After 3,200 miles of navigating America's most historic waterways, I tied up at Crowley's Yacht Yard and prepared the boat for sale, doing routine maintenance and a lot of detail cleaning. Anything I needed was there at the yard, and everyone was friendly and helpful. My broker had a buyer for me within a month. The whole experience at Crowley's was delightful! I may buy another boat just so I can do it again.

*Jeunesse* was trucked to its new home in Newport, Rhode Island. I am honored that her owner, a self-declared Francophile, will retain the name.

*—Dave McWethy*

*Dave wrote about his solo journey from  
Pittsburgh to Chicago in our March 2020 issue*

*([https://cc0f58f3-2631-43b2-aacc-6e774c54b002.filesusr.com/ugd/e389c3\\_4bfb3060164c42ddb92402c866596be5.pdf](https://cc0f58f3-2631-43b2-aacc-6e774c54b002.filesusr.com/ugd/e389c3_4bfb3060164c42ddb92402c866596be5.pdf))*



# Head of the Charles: A Year's Long Race

*How My First Head of the Charles, and Everything Leading Up to It, Challenged Me to Dive Headfirst into Competitive Rowing*

I'll soon tell you about the electric onslaught that was my first Head of the Charles Regatta. But as our men's club four flew down the Charles River on that crisp October Saturday, every stroke I took really stretched back years, starting September 2017 at Lake Washington Rowing Club.

The first boat I ever stepped into, a slightly rickety four, was the *Pysht* at **Teddi McGuire's** Learn to Row Sweep class. I was at the beginning of the six-year intellectual marathon of a PhD program and knew I needed a physical activity to keep me sane—preferably one that didn't consist of swimming endless laps while staring at painted tiles at the bottom of a pool. I fell in love with rowing on that shimmering

September evening, and the sport quickly became my new hobby.

After that class, however, it was difficult to find consistent partners for boats, especially sweep boats. I slowly became aware that I was missing something no one had asked about in my Learn to Row class: a collegiate rowing career. Various folks, from coaches to rowers from other clubs, hinted (perhaps too generous a word) that without that background, I would never be competitive—that my inexperience meant I would never get a seat in boats sent off to races.

Challenge accepted: I was determined to prove them wrong. I spent most of the next couple of years learning how to scull. Working

with **Theresa Batty, Hugh Lade,** and other coaches, I grew up in a single shell. I'll never forget my first race: completely alone in an open-water single at Northwest Masters Regionals, no idea how to get to the start line or line up with the stake boat—because nobody ever told me. Yet, as I hauled my way to second place in the men's novice single race, 500 meters from the finish line, I heard eruptions of cheering from the beach

from those who had encouraged me to step into the single. Their voices metabolized into pure sprint energy, and I've been hooked on the feeling ever since.

Fast-forward to May 2021: the Head of the Charles Regatta had been canceled the previous year, due to the pandemic. Now, LWRC was preparing to send a cohort to compete in Boston. I decided to use it as an opportunity to get as fast I could. In so doing, I found myself in an entirely new game, complete with competitive sweep rowing, boat lineups, seat racing, and erg scores—all things that I might have been exposed to in a collegiate rowing program but that I'd had only passing experience with.

My first step was to feel more comfortable sweeping—and what better way to do that than to row the pair, arguably the toughest boat to row? Thanks to **Alex Weatbrook** for stepping into a pair with me back in 2019, even when I knew nothing and had to steer us by stopping every 100 meters to hold water. Looking back on those early days, I see all the things that make rowing fun to me: stepping fearlessly into a new situation, striving to relax as I relearn how to move my body, eventually becoming faster and faster. I knew that seat races for the HOCR fours were coming up, so I used the pair to practice subtleties unique to sweep rowing—for example, following the angle of the oar with my body, counterbalancing at the catch, keeping the inside shoulder loose, matching blade prep, and learning how to blind-steer a sweep boat in the



*Practice day on the Charles (All photos courtesy Jasper Tran O'Leary)*

unfriendly 5 a.m. darkness. Special thanks to Theresa for a five-and-glide drill session complete with the exorcism of our Viking-style rowing tendencies—by keeping the finishes strong, level, and quiet, resulting in a much better set.

One round of seat racing later, I stepped into the Head of the Charles four with **Alex Weatbrook**, **Alex Lund**, and **Bennett Shultz**, who enthusiastically welcomed me to the new-found challenge of making a four soar through the water. I honed skills I'd begun to work on in the pair, such as matching finish and catch timing, even all the way at the bow of the boat. I trained myself to find the requisite whole-boat set by working together, using handle heights, clean finishes, and rhythm, rather than by leaning. Most importantly, I worked to adjust my knee-jerk reaction from "How can I go faster?" to "How can we all go faster as one boat, and how do I help make this happen?" I am grateful to all my boatmates for accompanying me on this mental and physical shift. I am also grateful for their patience as I steered us in that coxless four for many practices, including the first couple of times—when our course through the Ship Canal resembled a picture-perfect sine wave right out of my old trigonometry textbook. (I have since improved and now greatly enjoy deciding with my big toe the direction that a boat full of burly sweep rowers will take.) Thanks also to coach **Leo Pedrosa** for keeping a watchful eye on our boat and helping me work out the kinks in my technique.



Later in our practices, a new presence began to accompany us: coxswain **Cecilia Krause**. The relationship between the coxswain and the bow seat *in a bowloader* was an entirely new sort of relationship for me, one that few people outside of rowing will understand and appreciate. (In fact, perched atop the Anderson Bridge on the last day of racing in Boston, I was eager to inform some folks new to rowing that "The screaming person who should just be thrown overboard" is also the person who steers the boat through all the bridges.) Sitting in the bow seat, with Cecilia's back often no more than an inch away from my back, I was constantly swinging around to announce to her any boats about to overtake us, to receive multitudes of technical feedback, and to discuss jokes pertaining to good soup and being doused with backslash—all before the sun rose.

At last, we were in Boston, the day before racing began: the official practice day where all crews were finally allowed onto the Charles

River. What a strange and exhilarating experience it was to wander into this "city" of rowers from all over the country and the world. Behemoth crews, trailers, and boats crowded the frenzied landscape of muscle and spandex; teams of all ages, backgrounds, and sizes—many of them hailing from well-funded programs abundant with bodies to fill boats—shuffled boats around like clockwork. In the men's club four race alone, half the entries were colleges. It seemed like a miracle that our club had made it there after over a year of austerity, loss of community, and scramble for structure. Others surely felt it, too; emblazoned on the Boston University Bridge near the start of the course, in red and white paint, were the triumphant letters *REUNITED*.

As we stepped up to the dock to launch onto the Charles for practice on a warm, bluebird October afternoon, I knew that this was a side of rowing that I had never before witnessed, one that challenged me to be the best athlete I could be. The boat-laden river—which I had



studied in many YouTube videos and coxswain recordings—seemed much smaller in person, with calm water and a crisply defined shoreline. It stood in stark contrast to the often choppy water and the jagged shorelines of the Lake Washington Ship Canal. We pushed off the dock, and—armed with a hastily purchased hot dog in one hand and the rudder control in the other—Cecilia steered us deftly past a blockade of boats and down through the Eliot Bridge. Other rowers were warming up along the river, in blades of all colors and designs, and I delighted in the sounds of those feathering blades echoing from the stone arches under the bridges. Evening light reflected off the windows of ivy-covered buildings, and with the softening light came a feeling of mental lightness, as if I had nothing to prove: we had done all we needed to row fast and take part in the celebration.

One pre-race pasta dinner later, a chilly gray morning marked the start of race day. I navigated to the Weeks Bridge to cheer on **Cody Jenkins** and **Megan Northey**, representing

LWRC in the men's and women's club singles, respectively. Seeing them locked into their stroke, along with all the other singles, energized me, and I nearly tore past three of my teammates further down the bridge who would be racing in the women's masters four: **Annie Grieff**,

**Lara Normand**, and **Maura Deering**. "Here's the calming chicken, it'll calm you down," Maura said, holding out a small plush chicken with an eye missing and a slightly squashed beak made of two orange felt triangles smaller than a fingernail—surely how my body would feel after this race, I thought.

Dreary light poured over the winding river that slowly became packed with spectators on all sides. Joined by **Allison Thomas** and **Amy Hildebrandt**, I wended my way upriver, past the tree-lined shore crowded with referees at checkpoints, past photographers pointing massive zoom lenses at the course like snipers aiming for a perfect shot, and past spectators

on picnic blankets spread right up against the water's edge. Closer to the launch site, merchandise tents lining the walkway overflowed with people rushing to purchase

caps, sweaters, and Ted Lasso unisuits. Lines for enclosures and beer gardens wrapped around

pathways being lapped by the continuing waves of foot traffic. The clouds began to part, and sheer-blue skies and sunshine poured over the scene. I had never been a part of any race of this scale.

Alex Lund safety-pinned a giant "9" on my back as our team trod through the maze of trailers toward the launch docks. Barefoot, we waited for the men's masters four to pull in with our boat (the *Skagit*), then hot-seated into the boat and pushed off the dock. The bathtub of a river I had rowed on the day before was completely transformed: an endless stream of sprinting crews surged toward the finish, throngs of shouting spectators packed every possible space on the shores and on every bridge, coxswains belted out technical and motivational calls. The sun shone with full force, and suddenly it seemed as if every other boat in our race, with their glistening muscles, could run us over on the paddle. I realized belatedly that "club four" was perhaps a misnomer when I saw blade after blade of university crews. Harvard alone had three boats in our race, behind us was a Yale alumni boat, and in front of us

**I had never been a part of any race of this scale.**



Crowded "merch" area

was the shamrock-green shell of Notre Dame. Nerves aside, I knew that in a few seconds, for just 17 minutes or so, my millions of meters on the water would soon pay off.

"Have a good race!" the announcer shouted. At a stroke rate of 36, the first double bridge span flew past us. We were right on our rhythm as we planted our blades into the tea-colored water. Around every corner, crowds small and large cheered, distracting me from the slowly building burn of lactic acid. Yale started to move on us, and Cecilia suggested that, if we added more leg on the drive, we could catch Notre Dame.

We hauled our way down the powerhouse stretch. In the milliseconds before each catch, a stream of early mornings spent working on catch timing coursed through my fingers—square and go, square and go, I insisted to my wrists. As we worked hard to keep the rate high and steady, one bridge, then another, then another tore past. Every stretch of river boomed with the sound of seat slides moving in sync. Cheers from the riverbanks alternated with lightning bursts of quiet solitude and oarlock echoes as we slipped through the stone arches of each bridge. We reeled around the Weeks Bridge. "Yale's disappeared!" Alex Lund called from the stern; the Yale coxswain had taken the turn too wide, steering them toward the shore and into oblivion. Just past the halfway point, with every

stroke together, we were swinging as one.

I lost count of the bridges and lost count of my breath. Suddenly, we were hugging the buoys on port as we chased down the long curve before the Eliot Bridge. Needing to pull out that extra gear, I felt my legs burn and my arms become disobedient; bad habits started to creep back in. Leaning with my body to adjust the set started to feel like an easier option than staying relaxed and adjusting handle heights. Pulling all the way into the finish and tapping the blade out became a monumental task. Our splits were climbing, Notre Dame was tired, and so were we—but we had to fight it. As we swung the boat around out of the Eliot Bridge, a curtain of sound flooded into my ears—a jubilant arena of spectators and a perfect line toward the finish line. There was no option but to sit up against the weight of the meters we'd rowed, dip the blade in, and push off the stretchers, cranking up the rate—it was time to cross the finish line.

After our final sprint, my freshly purchased visor miraculously still clung to my forehead and the word "Paddle!" rang out. We joined the crowd of other boats just past the finish line, keeping the *Skagit* at a crawl. We exchanged a breathless "Good job, good job" with the boats we hadn't quite been able to chase down as well as with the boats who hadn't been able to catch us. I beamed just a little when I took stock

of everything we had done as a boat, even though we didn't quite get the place we had been aiming for. Up until the moment we crossed the finish line, I had been coming to terms with *time*: the years I hadn't rowed as an undergraduate, the years learning on my own, the months learning in a boat with my teammates, the minutes tearing by on the course. But now, the time was mine: I had just rowed, and requalified for, the Head of the Charles. This finish line marked itself in my head like a start line—a start line for a much longer race, which will last years: becoming the fastest rower I can be, for as long as I can.

\* \* \* \* \*

Prior to this moment, whenever people asked me whether I rowed, I would respond, "Yes, I row in the mornings." Now my reply is, "Yes, I am a rower." Thank you to LWRC for giving me this opportunity and for changing my outlook in this way. My goal is to go back to Boston next October and help send our boat back through the water even faster. This first race up the Charles still reverberates in my head like a lengthy speech of encouragement, shouted by a thousand voices from the banks and from within the boat: to keep myself strong for life, to row past anyone telling me I'm not ready, to commit to the long haul.

—Jasper Tran O'Leary

*Thanks to Sophie Haeuber for helping me revise this article.*

**Now my reply is,  
"Yes, I am a rower."**



## “New” Club in Town

Renton Rowing Center is a small club located on the southernmost tip of Lake Washington, right next door to Boeing’s Renton campus. Since 2014 or so, RRC has been partnered with the George Pocock Rowing Foundation to help expand their programs and bring the sport of rowing to an underserved population. RRC offers programs for middle school, high school, and adult athletes year-round. Historically, the programs have been sculling-focused, particularly for the youth athletes. As a small, newer club with a limited alumni base to provide support, RRC has struggled over the years to produce consistent and competitive crews. Now, however, thanks to several years of support from the GPRF and a reinvigorated youth program, exciting things are on the horizon for this small but scrappy club.

Since August, I have been Renton Rowing Center’s program director. I manage our staff, oversee our youth and adult programs, coordinate maintenance and upkeep of

our facilities, and do basically anything else you can think of that keeps the boathouse running smoothly and helps our athletes improve every day. When I first arrived at RRC, I was immediately impressed by how passionate all the athletes are about the success of the programs and the growth of our community as a whole.

Located just outside downtown Renton, the boathouse is posi-

tioned to serve an extremely diverse pool of potential athletes. Most boathouses in the greater Puget Sound area are stationed in Seattle proper or in affluent neighborhoods, but RRC is integrated into a public space that is much more accessible for the community at large. It has all the resources needed for long-term success for a program—ideal boathouse location, well-maintained equipment, outside resources from the GPRF, and much more.

We also run a limited but popular small craft—rentals business out of the boathouse during non-peak summer hours, which allows many Renton residents to get an inside look at the facilities and equipment. Whereas most rowing operations aren’t set up to accommodate frequent visits from non-members, we are able to welcome new people into our space on a daily basis.

One of RRC’s biggest obstacles—one I’ve been working to overcome since assuming the role of program director—is the club’s isolation from other programs in the area. Everyone I speak to expresses so much interest in our scrappy club—and yet so little knowledge of the services and programs we provide. I believe that if everyone got to see just a fraction of the heart and hard work that our athletes and community members put into RRC every day, we would garner far more name recognition and interclub engagement. To everyone who has ever wondered what goes on in a day in the life of the Renton Rowing Center: Come find out! Take a tour, meet our coaches and athletes, or just ask those questions you’ve always wondered about. RRC has been, and will continue to be, a welcoming space for all.

—Rachel Wong

Rachel Wong is a proud member of LWRC. For more information on RRC, contact her at [director@rentonrowingcenter.org](mailto:director@rentonrowingcenter.org) or visit the club’s website at [www.rentonrowingcenter.org](http://www.rentonrowingcenter.org).



(Photos courtesy Rachel Wong)

# Timing Is Everything

*Direction matters, too. Rainer Storb describes a challenging 14-mile race around Shaw Island*

Uncharacteristically, this year's Shaw Island race on August 7 had two start times, 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. This was in part an attempt at social distancing and in part an effort to accommodate ferryboat traffic. Start and finish of the race were off the sandy beach at Indian Cove in Shaw Island County Park. Every other crew in the race opted for a counterclockwise race around Shaw, but **Steve Chapin** (bow; Rat Island Rowing Club) and **Peter Hirtle** (stroke; Pocock Rowing Center) preferred the clockwise option. My son **Adrian** and I represented LWRC in the engine room. Our average age was 66.

Our main competitors, **Ken Deem** and **Rod Sternagel** from Olympia in a Maas double, had waited until 11 for a head-to-head comparison with us. Ken, an awe-inspiring endurance athlete, finished sixth, third, and second overall as a solo rower in a Maas 24 in three consecutive 70/48 races from Tacoma to Port Townsend. And Rod is a seasoned endurance rower, too.

The horn blast sent boats scrambling to leave Indian Cove. Most headed east toward Canoe Passage while we went south, merging with the

tail end of Upright Channel. We met, and cheered on, competitors from the 9 a.m. flight on their end runs to the finish. At mile 1.5, we navigated around a rocky promon-

tory and entered the perennially squirrely San Juan Channel, riding an incipient flood tide. Peter's stroke rate was low, between 23 and 24. Tide rips off Shaw Island's various points jolted us but were manageable. At 5.6 miles, we rounded Neck Point and then headed east through Wasp Passage, then squeezed between Cliff, Crane, and Shaw Islands. We encountered a moderate and persistent headwind. Shouts rang out

when meeting Ken and Rod around the half-way point.

On our approach to Broken Point, the northernmost promontory of Shaw Island (mile 8.4), an inter-island car ferry out of Friday Harbor approached us from the west, raising concern she would mess up our course and force us out of the way, resulting in lost time. However, Fortuna smiled: we got around the point with minutes to spare. Perennial powerboat wakes jerked us around in Harney Channel between Orcas and Shaw Islands.

Another large car ferry sat at the Shaw Island terminal. San Juan Islands ferry pilots had been informed of the race, and we expected they would let us pass before taking off. But no: the ferry let loose with a long horn blast and promptly departed. In turn, Steve (or someone else) let loose with a four-letter word, made a sharp course correction, and steered across the ferry's stern. Her wake and prop wash whirled the quad around like driftwood—whoa! We recovered and rowed on.

We reached Hankin Point at mile 11.7 and exited Harney Channel into Upright Channel. For about two miles, we stayed close to Shaw Island's uninhabited, steep, and rocky east shore; it seemed to toss back at us each individual powerboat wake, making for challenging rowing. Two miles later, we arrived at Picnic Point, infamous for a multitude of underwater rocks, burial grounds for ripped-off fins and skegs—including two of ours, previously. Steve made a 90-degree turn west toward Canoe Passage, a short, narrow, reef-strewn tidal strait between Canoe and Shaw Islands. He noted a raging current coming out of the passage's main channel. Along the Shaw Island shore, between exposed rocks, he saw flat water and gambled there would be both less current and enough depth for fin and rudder to get us through unscathed. So he steered in that



**Her wake and prop wash whirled the quad around like driftwood**



# Resurrection of the Troll

After a two-year hiatus, the Head of the Troll returned to LWRC on October 3. Over a dozen boats ranging from singles to eights raced from the Locks to the Fremont Bridge. Most rowers wore the usual zany costumes. Thanks to Damon Ellington for organizing us!



(Photos courtesy Fritz Scholz)



## Timing Is Everything, continued

direction and got lucky. Taking another look ahead to monitor his steering, he saw Ken and Rod approaching from the south. With a tinge of urgency in his voice, he announced, "I see them. OK, guys—we gotta sprint!" In an instant, Peter raised the rate from 24 to 30. The quad shuddered, gained speed, and then hummed in harmony.

A video taken by Steve's friends on an anchored powerboat nearby showed double and quad racing toward each other from different directions as they approached the finish. A background voice commented, "This is a close race." The video also recorded two horn blasts in rapid succession, but it was unclear which boat had crossed first. Suspense gave way to relief when the race director declared us overall 2021 Shaw Island winners, albeit by a margin of a mere five seconds.

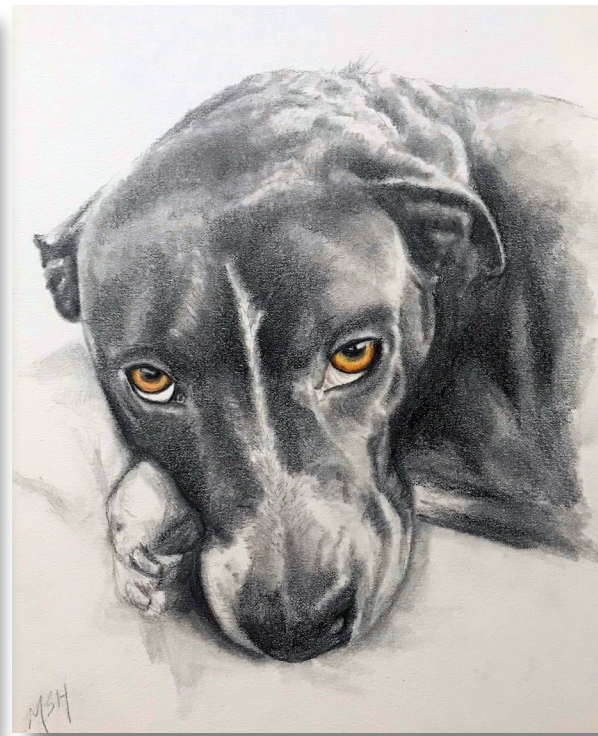
For no obvious reason, overall finish times were slow. Only four boats completed the race in under two hours, two in the 9 a.m. flight and two in the 11 a.m. flight. Waters surrounding the island didn't feel viscous, so I suspect the mysterious "sluggishness" came down to a matter of timing and direction.

—Rainer Storb, Sound Rowers

If you are interested in open-water racing, check out <http://www.soundrowers.org/>.







(Photos courtesy  
Marcy Heffernan)

## Pet Project

*LWRC's Marcy  
Heffernan  
connects with  
pet owners*

As a kid, I loved to draw—all my siblings like to work with their hands—but I hadn't really drawn much in years. And then one of my dog-walking clients lost her dog toward the end of 2019. He was a sweet and funny spaniel, a well-loved member of the family; they were bereft. On walks, I would take pictures of him; once I did a little sketch from one of the funnier ones and left it on their doorstep. They loved it. Then, since it was December, I did a couple more sketches for clients as Christmas gifts.

And then, I didn't do much sketching again until COVID hit and all my various gigs petered out, for obvious reasons. Everyone was on lockdown—the perfect time to start ordering art supplies and teach myself to use various products I'd always wanted to play with. An old friend commissioned me to do three sketches, and then another friend commissioned

me to do two. It sort of went on from there—a small trial run of business cards, and a display of my work in the sweet independent pet store I'd begun working in once again.

Some people want memorial sketches, others just want sketches for themselves or as gifts for friends and family. It's been such a fun little side gig, and of course I'm learning as I go. I started out by doing graphite sketches and am now doing colored pencil and watercolor as well—plus taking up pastel on the fly. I learn by trying stuff and then pestering my friends and family for feedback. There are so many incredible artists out there in the universe, and I follow a few on Instagram. I am definitely not in their league, but I do love connecting with people in this way.

—**Marcy Heffernan**

Marcy's pet portraits are done with a variety of media. Her contact info is [marcy.heffernan@gmail.com](mailto:marcy.heffernan@gmail.com).



## Extreme ... Erging?!?

Did you not. It doesn't mean erg till you die; it doesn't even mean rowing across an ocean. It means carrying your machine to an extreme location and using it there. Extreme erging follows in the footsteps of *extreme golf*: Ice Golf Championship in Greenland: <http://www.golf-information.info/world-ice-golf-championship.html>. Or check out Par 3 in New Zealand, accessible only by helicopter: <https://www.touringtreasures.com/new-zealand-home-golfs-toughest-par-3/>. At the nearby Rotorua Thermal Course, Hole 9 is actually steaming.

And then there's *extreme ironing* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extreme\\_ironing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extreme_ironing)). The possibilities—ironing atop high mountains, while water skiing, and in scuba gear under water—can only inspire dedicated extreme ergers in the future.

If you're looking for a new way to motivate yourself on the erg, consider local practitioner Ero Moldovan's Facebook post of September 2021: "Decided last minute to hike the 'easy' trail of Mailbox Peak this weekend, and decided to make it a bit more enjoyable with carrying my rower up there to do some rowing at the top! After 7 hours of carrying it up and down, and hitting 12.75 miles on my watch, I decided I'd do some laps with it in the parking lot to make it a half-marathon carried."

—Suze Woolf



Mailbox Peak is a very popular trail near North Bend. The "easy" trail is 9.4 miles round-trip and gains 4,000 feet in elevation. And yes, there is a much-decorated mailbox on the summit. (Photos Semida Moldovan)



## Finding Balance ... in a tiny, wobbly boat

In this article from the October 1, 2019, *New York Times*, author Tara Murtha waxes eloquent on the reasons why she rows. We especially liked the line "Rowing is about perpetually starting over." Enjoy!

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/01/well/move/rowing-balance-mind-body.html?smid=em-share>.