

STOP DRIFTING,
**START
ROWING**

*One Woman's Search for
Happiness and Meaning
Alone on the Pacific*



Roz Savage



HAY HOUSE, INC.

Carlsbad, California • New York City
London • Sydney • Johannesburg
Vancouver • Hong Kong • New Delhi

“It is easier to sail many thousands of miles through cold and storms and savage cannibals . . . than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific ocean of one’s being alone.”

— HENRY DAVID THOREAU

INTRODUCTION

Dream Big, Change Your Life

“Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life.”

— KATE CHOPIN, *THE AWAKENING*

If you rotate a globe until your view centres on Hawai’i, you will see a mostly blue view of our planet, a vast expanse of ocean barely besmirched by land. There is just a sliver of California visible in the top right corner, a glimpse of Australia in the bottom left, and a smattering of islands and atolls strewn like grain flung by a celestial farmer. The Pacific covers 65 million square miles, about a third of the world’s surface. In places the water is nearly six miles deep, although mostly it’s only about two miles deep. Not that it really matters to me. As soon as it’s more than 5’4” deep, I’m out of my depth.

From 2007 to 2010, this water world was my home, as I inched my way, oar stroke by oar stroke, from California to Papua New Guinea to become officially the first woman to row solo across the Pacific. My stated goal was to use my adventure to wage a campaign of awareness and action on the most important environmental issues facing our world today, communicating my message through blog posts and podcasts from the ocean, and through speaking and writing once I was back on dry land.

Yet just a few years earlier, nothing could have been further from my mind than fighting the good green fight from the deck of a 23-foot row-boat. Crank the clock back to the year 2000, and you would find me age 32 and living in London, supposedly happy. I had a well-paid job, a big house, a successful husband, foreign holidays, and a little red sports car. In other words, I had the classic materialistic Western lifestyle.

My childhood had been austere as the elder daughter of two low-paid Methodist preachers. My father’s quarterly stipend did not allow

luxuries, so my mother grew fruit and vegetables to stretch her house-keeping allowance and made clothes for my sister and me with her sewing machine and knitting needles. As a teenager I had grown restless with this spartan lifestyle, and I yearned for a time when I would have money to spend, designer clothes to wear, and a big house to live in. After 11 years of chasing that dream in the City of London, I'd acquired everything that I had thought would make me happy.

But there was something wrong. The truth was that, despite all these material blessings, I wasn't happy—not happy at all. There was a persistent and ever-increasing feeling that there was a mismatch between the person I was and the person I was pretending to be. The tension between the two selves was becoming unbearable.

What brought it home to me was a self-help exercise I did one day. I sat down at the dining-room table and wrote two versions of my own obituary—the one I wanted, and the one I was heading for if I carried on as I was. They were very different, and I saw that I was moving in completely the wrong direction if I was going to be able to look back and be proud of my time on Earth. I realized then that I needed to make a major course correction if I was ever to find happiness and meaning in my life.

That exercise was the first, irrevocable step on a path that would take me away from all I had held dear—my husband, my house, and my sense of security. I would also have to let go of all the things that were cluttering my mind—the possessions that had come to own me instead of the other way around, the preoccupation with what other people thought of me rather than what I thought of myself, and the voices in my head that questioned whether I dared to be different.

This may sound like a painful process, but at each point of the transformation I was moved to undertake, something would happen to indicate to me that I was on the right track. What might have looked like sacrifices actually felt like liberations.

LEAVING MY HUSBAND WAS THE FIRST, and most difficult, part of the journey. I had married for love and for life, and even though the 11-year relationship was faltering, it took a long, hard struggle with my conscience before I reluctantly acknowledged that only one course of action felt right. In my heart I knew that for as long as I was with him, I could not

truly flourish. I needed to escape my gilded cage to find out what lay outside—but that prospect terrified me.

Confused and indecisive, I took an old school friend into my confidence. I agonized over whether I should really leave him as my friend and I sat sipping wine at her house. She asked me repeatedly, “What do you want?” It was at once the simplest and the most difficult question I’d ever been asked. I had grown up to think in terms of what I *should* do, or what was expected, not what I wanted. I simply did not know the answer—or maybe did not want to admit that I knew, because that would require me to act on it.

While debating my options yet again with my ever-patient friend, I confided that I was afraid to be alone, particularly as I got older. What she said next changed my life.

She told me, “I can imagine you, me, and Steph [another old friend] sitting around the kitchen table when we’re 60 years old, eating ice cream out of the tub and putting the world to rights.”

With that one image she made me realize that there are many forms of companionship, that mutual support does not exist only in the context of a marriage, and that I no longer needed to fear being a single woman. I realized that what I actually wanted was to start over, to free myself from my existing boundaries to find out who I really was and what would make me happy—not what would make my parents or my friends or my husband happy, but *me*.

After long and tear-filled discussions, in 2002 my husband and I agreed that we had arrived at a parting of the ways, and I moved out. I didn’t take much with me, and even those few possessions I soon sold. I had put my things into storage, and one day when I was there to retrieve something, I looked around the unit and realized that this stuff was no longer important to me. Outside the context of a home, these superfluous clothes, ornamental knickknacks, and even my beloved books had become a hindrance.

I loaded up my camper van to the roof with these relics of my previous life, and drove to a car-boot sale (a kind of yard sale, where people show up and sell all manner of things out of the back of their cars). As I was parking, even before I opened the sliding door at the back of the

van, people were pushing and elbowing, waiting to see what riches might lie within.

In all honesty, there were nothing of real value at all, but I rapidly discovered that one person's junk is another person's treasure, and that if you are willing to sell it cheaply enough, you can get rid of just about anything. A few hours later I had nothing left but a few books and garments that I donated to charity. I hadn't sold my things for financial gain—I only made a meagre £200 (about \$300) for a vanload of stuff—but I felt so much lighter and freer without all the baggage.

I had let go of a lot—emotional attachments, material possessions, and most important, my fear of the unknown. I had launched myself into the abyss without looking before I leaped, and I found that rather than being a void, it was in fact a fascinating place, chock-full of potential.

I spent several months simply enjoying my newfound freedom. By not being too fussy about where I lived, I was able to keep my financial overhead to a minimum. I earned a trickle of money from photography and selling my home-baked cakes at a farmers' market, and this was enough to keep me afloat while I read books, met people, relished serendipitous conversations, and wrote in my journal. I was surfing on a wave of discovery, and every day I found new ways to be joyful.

But once again I became restless. Since my liberation, I had learned many new things about life and how to live it, but now I needed a purpose. I am a goal-driven person, and once my driving motivation was no longer to make money and acquire possessions, I needed some other objective to take its place. I had learned a lot about how to be happy, but I needed more. I needed meaning.

I tried to identify the root cause of this imperative to find some reason for my existence. I considered the possibility that it might be because both my parents had a vocation to preach the Christian gospel, so maybe I'd internalized at an early age the importance of having a purpose in life. But my hunch is that we all, deep down, desire meaning in our lives, irrespective of our parents or our circumstances. We don't want to accept that our time on this planet is ephemeral and pointless. We cringe away from Thomas Hobbes's dictum that life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. We want to find intimacy, beauty, harmony, and inner peace, and to impart an enduring legacy, leaving this world a better place than

we found it. This instinct may be buried deeper in some than in others, but I believe that it exists in all human beings if we search deeply enough. Whether or not life has objective meaning, subjectively we want to make it so.

I had figured out this much when I had my environmental epiphany.

I SHOULD FIRST OF ALL EXPLAIN MY PREVIOUS ATTITUDE towards the environment. As a child, I had some awareness that humankind was treading heavily upon the Earth, although of course I would not have phrased it in such precocious terms. Given their religious inclination, my parents saw nature as an expression of God's goodness, and they had instilled in me an appreciation of the natural world. My father was fascinated by the stars and planets, and devoured books on astronomy and physics. My mother's focus was rather more down-to-earth, in every sense. She took my younger sister and me on long walks and bicycle rides in the countryside, and taught us the names of birds, trees, and wildflowers. We were also taught never ever to drop litter. My parents would tut disapprovingly if we saw someone dropping a wrapper in the street, or came across a mess of fast-food containers and empty soda bottles littering the pavement. It was important to look after our environment, in the very local and immediate sense of the word, and they impressed upon me and my sister that to do otherwise was a crime most heinous.

Yet my sense of connection to nature seemed to come from somewhere deeper than my parents' obsession with litter. I can clearly recall as a child looking out from the back window of our boxy white 1966 Triumph Herald, admiring the neat patchwork of fields checkering the English countryside, and despising the incursion of the hideous electricity pylons that marched relentlessly across the landscape like enormous invaders from a hostile alien army. To my young mind, it just didn't seem right. We humans seemed to be making the world an uglier place, not a better one.

When I left home to go to university in 1986 and then to work in London in 1989, I lost touch with that appreciation of nature, which came to seem childish. I began worshipping at the altar of the new god called money. The other one, the God of my parents, became largely irrelevant to my fast-paced city lifestyle. My world was all about the pursuit of

material possessions. Having lived in grimly functional church manses for my first 18 years, I now became an arch-materialist, the kind of woman who would rip out a perfectly adequate kitchen in order to install the latest fashionable units. I never even thought about where stuff went when I threw it “away.” Household waste went into a black plastic sack, and the binmen took it. Building debris went into a skip, and that, too, went away. Rubbish disappeared from sight, never to be seen or thought of again. It vanished, conveniently and completely.

But that blinkered view of the world was about to change. I had taken advantage of a friend’s offer to stay in her family’s cottage in a hamlet outside Sligo on the west coast of Ireland. It was February 2004 when I arrived at the small, pebble-dashed cottage, and the day was cold and blustery. A wrought-iron gate bisected a low, whitewashed front wall, its balustrades the only ornamental flourish in an otherwise starkly plain façade. Three or four shrubs, wintry and leafless, dotted the lawn of the front garden. A narrow concrete path ran straight from the gate to the grey front door. Two small, square windows at the front of the house peered out like eyes from beneath the overhanging eaves of the tiled roof. A couple of irregularly placed chimneys marred the symmetry.

I stepped through the front door and into a time warp, straight back to the 1950s. The furniture in the living room was simple—a dining table with a patterned plastic tablecloth, four dining chairs, a long low sofa, three uncomfortable-looking chairs with wooden arms, and a sideboard with sliding frosted-glass doors, behind which I could see the hazy outlines of stacks of plates and bowls. An electric eternal flame flickered under the sacred heart decoration on the high mantelpiece above the stove, which also bore a small collection of ornaments arranged symmetrically: two artificial roses in crystal vases, two brass candlesticks, and two ceramic pots shaped like hens sitting on wicker baskets. The decor was basic and unpretentious. It was perfect for my purposes.

I was there for a self-imposed retreat. I intended to pay penance for the excesses of the Christmas season by eating simply and abstaining from alcohol and caffeine. My rucksack, presently sitting in the small hallway beneath the coat pegs, was half full of books, mostly lent to me by friends, on philosophy, spirituality, and religion. I planned to meditate, enjoy long walks, and take time to be with myself and see what ideas

might emerge. Over the course of the coming month I did indeed lose weight, regain my fitness, improve my focus during meditation, and read prodigiously.

As it turned out, the fairly random selection of books in my rucksack would combine to change my life. Amongst them was *Ishmael*, by Daniel Quinn, which uses the literary device of a telepathic gorilla to describe humanity's behaviour from the perspective of an intelligent but nonhuman onlooker. It questions the wisdom of our shortsighted determination to eradicate our natural competitors for food, to the detriment of the planet and, ultimately, of ourselves.

I went on to read *Conversations with God*, by Neale Donald Walsch, which gave me permission to put behind me the modest, self-effacing spirituality of my parents and dare to be, as he put it, "the grandest version of the greatest vision you ever had of yourself," not as an act of selfishness, but as a duty and an obligation to contribute to the collective evolution of humankind.

It was into the fertile ground prepared by these books that the seed of *The Hopi Survival Kit* was sown. It described the prophecies of the Hopi tribe and their belief that these are now coming true. The predictions consist of a sequence of signs that the end of a civilization is approaching, and a new era is coming. The first sign is a "gourd of ashes" falling from the sky. The Hopi interpreted this occurring when the atom bomb fell on Hiroshima. Since then, they have regularly sent a delegation to the United Nations to issue an urgent call to action.

According to their philosophy, we have to look after the Earth if we want it to look after us. If we lose touch with our spirituality and forget that we are dependent on the planet for our survival, things are not going to go well. The people who will survive are those who know where to find their own food and water.

When I read this, it hit me between the eyes with all the force of a fundamental truth. On a finite Earth, it stood to reason that we can't continue to pull out all the good stuff—oil, coal, and minerals—and turn it into junk that we then throw into landfills. One day we would surely run out, of both the good stuff and the places to dump the debris when we've finished. This pattern of behaviour was clearly not sustainable.

Now that I was seeing the world holistically for the first time, I was horrified by how oblivious I had been. I'd never even considered these questions before, so preoccupied had I been with the pursuit of possessions. I'd never stopped to think about my home in the broader sense—the planet on which we live and the other inhabitants with whom we have to share it. What terrible damage had I already inflicted in my thoughtlessness, heedless of the consequences of my self-centred actions?

Not only had I been ignorant, but most of my peers also seemed to be completely unaware of our headlong rush towards self-destruction. I felt a powerful need to bring this to people's attention as a matter of the utmost urgency. With every passing year we were trashing the Earth still further.

I'd been looking for a life purpose, and I had found it. I was full of bumptious enthusiasm, overflowing with the zeal of the convert, and eager to do all I could to save the world. I had become a woman with a mission—but why would anybody listen to me? I was just a recovering management consultant. I needed a platform, a pulpit from which I could proclaim my message.

ABOUT FOUR MONTHS LATER, THE IDEA to row across oceans hit me in a blinding flash of inspiration, and I knew that I had found the perfect *métier* for my message. It would be unusual enough to catch people's eye and to provide fodder for public presentations, media interviews, films, and books, allowing me to spread the awareness. My voyages themselves would be environmentally low-impact, the boat powered only by my body, the electronics by solar panels.

It was an outrageously audacious plan, my relevant experience consisting of several years rowing on the River Thames, usually in a crew of eight. But when I started to wonder, *What if I'm actually going to do this?* and began to compile a grand to-do list of all the things I would need to read, learn, finance, buy, and otherwise do to prepare for an ocean row, it started to seem frighteningly achievable. I had broken the list down into such small steps that there was nothing on it that was too far outside my existing abilities. It felt as if everything that had happened so far in my life had been leading me to this point, preparing me for this task, and that I was uniquely equipped to pursue this quest. It was a perfect collision of personality, past experience, purpose, and timing.

So, with little going for me other than unstoppable eagerness, a sense of total commitment, and a stubborn refusal to give up on what felt like a divinely ordained scheme, I cast myself upon the waters of the world's oceans.

IN THE 8 YEARS AND 15,000 MILES that have now passed since I first dipped my oars in the turbulent waters of my first ocean, I have spent more than 500 days alone at sea, as I crossed the Atlantic (2005, described in my book *Rowing the Atlantic*), Pacific (2007–2010), and Indian (2011) Oceans. And yet I don't think I will ever feel truly at home on the ocean. It will always test me. I love it, fear it, hate it, respect it, resent it, cherish it, and frequently curse it. It brings out the best in me—and sometimes the worst.

Despite my uneasy relationship with the wet parts of our planet, I cannot think of any other activity that would have met my objectives so perfectly as ocean rowing. Besides my environmental mission, I wanted to find out who I am, what I'm capable of, and what life is all about. It was my quest for happiness that first got me out of the office and onto the water, and although happiness is an emotion in scarce supply while I'm at sea—my feelings usually ranging from resigned acceptance of my self-imposed travails, through low-grade stress, to moments of sheer terror—the resilience and life skills that the ocean has engendered in me have enhanced my existence on land beyond all measure. To embrace a cause, to feel passionate about what I do, to believe I am making a difference and leaving a legacy, to be part of a mission so much bigger than one small woman sitting in a rowboat—all these things have brought me enormous fulfillment. Truly, the sense of achievement is proportionate to the scale of the attempt, so to take on a challenge the size of the world and to patiently chip away at it, one oar stroke at a time, has been a tremendously rewarding experience.

The ocean has been a harsh but effective teacher. She has taught me the value of simplicity—without all the distracting noise of life on land, I've found myself clear and focused on the things that really matter. She has reminded me that we humans are not separate from the environment, but are completely interconnected with it, and any notions we may have that we're above or beyond nature are dangerous delusions.

And she has shown me how an ordinary human being can achieve the extraordinary, by presenting me with challenge after challenge, pushing me to what I thought were my limits, only for me to find out that when I have no choice, I can go beyond those boundaries and achieve more than I would ever have dreamed possible.

I hope that the story of my Pacific voyages will leave you feeling inspired and invigorated, eager to face the future with courage and positivity. I wish you enjoyment of this book, and of the rest of your glorious, unique, important journey. You have one life. Live it.

Roz Savage
London, England

June 2013





CHAPTER ONE

FACING AND EMBRACING FAILURE

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

— WINSTON CHURCHILL

The ordeal began on 21 August 2007. My boat capsized twice that night. The first time, the *Brocade* rolled right over until she was upside down in the water. I landed sprawled across the cabin roof, while all around me in the darkness I could hear belongings escaping from their straps and sliding around the curved walls like clothes being tumbled in a dryer. The tiny sleeping cabin was only about three feet high, so I hadn't fallen far from floor to ceiling, but the shock of the capsize and collisions with solid objects battered me emotionally and physically.

For several seconds the *Brocade* remained inverted. I held my breath, willing her to turn the right way up again. She was designed to self-right, the air trapped in the two cabins fore and aft making her unstable in the upside-down position. Having already crossed the Atlantic in this same boat, I had faith that she would turn, but she was taking her sweet time about it. At last she slowly started to roll back to an upright position, and my belongings and I returned to the floor in a jumbled mess.

I pushed aside the bags of food, clothes, electronics, and instruction manuals, and wriggled reluctantly out of my warm sleeping bag to check the status on the darkened deck. As I opened the hatch, I was hit by a cruel blast of wind and cold, salty, sea spray. I clipped a neoprene

waist strap around my middle and secured its carabiner onto a D-ring bolted firmly to the boat so that if another destructive wave came along, I wouldn't be swept away.

Things didn't look too bad out here, considering that the boat had just rolled a full 360 degrees. Spending 103 days at sea on the stormy Atlantic had trained me to keep everything securely attached to the vessel or else expect to lose it overboard. I quickly unfastened the cockpit bags from their fixings and threw them into a locker in case a second capsizing might prove too much for them, and hastily slammed the hatch cover back in place. A wave crashed over the side of the boat, drenching me in cold seawater. I swore.

Soaked, I returned to the cabin and, turning on the light, restored some order. Once everything was as shipshape as possible under the circumstances, I wriggled back into my sleeping bag and tried to get warm again. The bag was designed specifically for ocean usage, comprising two inner bags of thick, woolly fleece inside a waterproof outer shell. It retained the last vestiges of my body heat, but it took a long while before the fleece wicked away the dampness from my skin and my hands and feet lost their chill. I strapped myself to the bunk using two seat belts secured to the cabin floor, fastening them across my chest and thighs so that I would not end up on the ceiling if the boat should flip again.

I didn't feel particularly afraid as I lay there in the darkened cabin, despite the violent pitching and rolling. For the first two weeks of my maiden voyage, nearly two years previously, I had been petrified. The carbon-fibre hull had amplified the noise of the Atlantic waves so that they sounded terrifyingly huge. I had lain awake night after night, quaking in my cabin, convinced that the boat was going to be smashed in two, or at the very least have her rudder torn off. I'd listen to the pounding and thumping of the waves, berating myself for having taken on such a foolhardy challenge and wondering if I would even live to see the morning, let alone the other side of the ocean.

But after enduring two weeks of terror on that voyage, I eventually grew tired of being scared. My boat had withstood the tempestuous conditions thus far, and so I reasoned—fallaciously, but it cheered me to believe it—that she would continue to hold together. I, too, had withstood a fortnight at the mercy of the ocean, so maybe I would continue

to hold together as well. I quickly adapted to my new circumstances, and the fear ebbed away. Now, on the Pacific, I quickly tapped back into the strange serenity that comes from being able to greet fear as an old friend.

Two hours later, the second capsizing came. As my body weight met the resistance of the restraints, the belts held for only a moment before they ripped their bolts out of the cabin floor and once again I found myself on the ceiling. I waited for a long moment before gravity asserted itself and the *Brocade* laboriously rolled right side up.

This time when I crawled out on deck, the beam of my head torch picked out the bundled-up sea anchor escaping from its ties. *Ah, the sea anchor—that will help.* I got the nylon fabric back under control, and deployed the anchor—a 12-foot parachute on a 250-foot rope—over the side of the boat and beneath the waves. As the red-and-yellow dome filled with water, its rope pulled on a ring on the bow of the boat, pulling the bow around until it pointed into the wind and waves. Now, instead of sideswiping the *Brocade*, the waves pushed past her sides so that she pitched forward and back rather than rolling side to side. *This should reduce the risk of capsizing.*

Satisfied that I had done all I could to ensure my safety, I returned to my bunk. It was the least dangerous place to be. At least I couldn't be swept overboard while I was inside the enclosed capsule of my cabin. Although I felt relatively safe, the hectic pitching of the boat and the crashing of the waves made for a poor night's rest, and I slept little, alternating between disturbed dreams and unhappy wakefulness.

The next day was rough, but nothing worse than I had seen on the Atlantic. I spent most of the day in the cabin, trying to stay as warm and dry as I could while the waves raged around the *Brocade*. Both hatches, fore and aft, had leaked slightly while they were submerged, so everything was damp, making it difficult to stay warm. The only times I emerged from my cocoon were to answer the call of nature, cursing the necessity and wishing that I were a man and able to relieve myself into a convenient vessel without having to go outdoors. The traditional sailors' description for the most basic of sanitary facilities is "bucket and chuck it," but in fact I use a bedpan, finding it less precarious than trying to hover over a bucket. As I squatted, however, the waves drenched me, so despite my best efforts I invariably brought a trail of saltwater back inside.

Between trips to the deck I hunkered indoors, gazing out of the round hatch and watching the waves foaming and frothing against the clear Perspex. It was mesmerising, like watching the laundry inside a front-loading washing machine, except that I was inside the machine and the foaming water was on the outside.

I had little choice but to bide my time. I knew that the storm would pass—eventually—and that in the meantime, I just had to stay safe and sane. I imagined how my boat must look from the outside, a seemingly fragile little silver craft being buffeted this way and that, pounded by the foaming waves, a tiny speck on an angry sea. When I'd seen her being hoisted out of the water at the end of the Atlantic crossing, I had cried with emotion. She had looked so small. She was a big boat to row, but a tiny boat in which to cross an ocean.

At intervals throughout the day, I spoke via satellite phone to my weatherman, Rick, in Hawai'i, an experienced yachtsman and former U.S. Navy meteorologist and oceanographer. He had been recommended to me by one of the world's foremost forecasters, Stan Honey. I had not yet met Rick in person, our correspondence having been conducted by telephone and e-mail only. Now Rick told me that at least another 60 hours of rough conditions were forecast, with gale-force winds and seas of 8 to 11 feet. That may not sound like much, but to a 23-foot boat an 11-foot wave is plenty big enough. Another 60 hours of this sounded like a long time, but I was determined that I could tough it out.

The second night of the gale arrived. Around 10 P.M., a powerful wave rear-ended the *Brocade*. I shot down my bunk, my sleeping bag tobogganing over the slippery vinyl of the mattress. I came to an abrupt halt when my skull collided with the wall at the end of the cabin.

Ouch.

I sat up, and felt blood trickling across my scalp. I explored the damage with my fingers. It didn't seem too bad. I dabbed the blood away with a flannel and lay back down on the bunk to try and sleep, but every time I heard another big wave coming, my arms automatically shot out to brace myself against the cabin walls so that I wouldn't be flung across the cabin. Sleep was impossible.

A little later the boat capsized again, the third time in 24 hours. My head cracked against the cabin ceiling, and again I felt the trickle of blood.

Something was amiss. Since I'd put the sea anchor out, the *Brocade* should be pointing into the waves and therefore be much more stable, the waves running along the sides of the boat rather than catching her beam-on. Unappealing though the prospect was, I knew I'd better go outside to investigate. I pulled on a waterproof jacket and a head torch, mustered my courage, and exited the cabin to the watery cauldron of the deck. The boat rocked violently from side to side, and I crouched low and hung on firmly to the guardrails as I staggered to the front of the boat, the beam of the head torch casting a circle of cold, white light onto the seething surf.

Sitting backwards on the rowing seat, I pulled on the main line to the sea anchor. There was a suspicious lack of resistance as I drew it in. After a couple of seconds, the rope reached a frayed end. It had broken just six feet from the point where it attached to the boat. I turned my attention to the trip line, a second line to the sea anchor that assists in retrieval by collapsing the chute, dumping the water out of it and making it easier to draw it back in. But that, too, came to a premature end, at the first of its two flotation buoys. My sea anchor had escaped its lines and gone to a watery grave.

This was bad news. Now I had no defence against further capsize. I deployed a pair of drogues, mini versions of the sea anchor, but they were too small to make any difference. There wasn't anything else I could do other than retreat to the safety of the cabin, where I lay in my bunk, feeling vulnerable and alone. I was in an increasingly unseaworthy boat, about 80 miles from shore on a dark, dangerous ocean, with another two and a half days of storms and high seas ahead of me. This was not the ideal start to my voyage.

I HAD SET OUT NINE DAYS EARLIER, on a foggy but bright Sunday morning, from the small town of Crescent City in Northern California. Aiming to become the first woman to row solo across the Pacific Ocean, I had hoped to launch my 8,000-mile quest from the iconic Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. But on that part of the California coast, the prevailing

winds blow onshore, and although I waited for many weeks for a letup in the strong sea breezes, Rick could find no window of opportunity long enough for me to make a clean getaway from the coast. If I left it too late in the year to depart, I faced the risk of running into winter gales in the latter stages of my journey as I neared Hawai'i. Eventually, Rick suggested that I could leave from the Golden Gate Bridge, or I could leave in 2007, but I couldn't do both. He advised me to head north to the calmer conditions near the border between California and Oregon.

So I had hitched the boat trailer to the tow bar of my little yellow pickup truck and driven eight hours north to Crescent City. With me was my title sponsor's public-relations agent, Nicole Bilodeau. A lively brunette in her late 20s, Nicole had been working closely with me during the media blitz in the run-up to my row as she supervised photo shoots, arranged interviews, and wrote press releases, and we had become good friends. When I stated my intention to head north to Crescent City, Nicole offered to come along to see me off, on her own time and at her own expense, and then drive my truck and empty boat trailer back to San Francisco afterwards. I had gratefully accepted.

My boat was named after my title sponsors, Brocade, a Silicon Valley company specializing in data and storage networking products. I had met their CEO at the time, Mike Klayko, when I was exhibiting my boat (formerly known as *Sedna*, named after the Inuit goddess of the ocean) at a special one-day event for schools at the Tech Museum of Innovation in San Jose. Mike had listened with interest to my story and invited me to submit a sponsorship proposal, which I did with alacrity. This kind of request does not come along every day in the world of adventure sponsorship. Within days we had a deal, and I can honestly say that Brocade were an absolute pleasure to work with.

Nicole and I arrived in Crescent City a couple of days before my projected launch date and checked into the Light House Inn. A life-size fibreglass Blues Brother greeted us in the entrance, and other kitschy items adorned the reception area. As we explored the town that evening, we saw a plaque on the wall of the harbour master's office showing the 20-foot maximum height of the tsunami that had devastated the town in 1964—a reminder, as if I needed one, of the phenomenal power of the ocean.

The following day, Nicole backed the trailer down a ramp to launch the boat. Neither of us enjoyed trying to manoeuvre the thing in reverse, but on this occasion I had to be in the boat, ready to man the oars as the boat floated up off its trailer, so I had a cast-iron excuse for delegating to Nicole. Once afloat, I rowed around the corner and moored the *Brocade* to the fuel dock in readiness for the launch, which was scheduled first thing the next morning.

The following day I was awake early, roused by a mixture of anticipation and anxiety, both eager and reluctant to get started. Conditions were perfect: the air still, the water like a mirror. Nicole and I carried a few bags of fresh provisions down to the boat, the more durable rations such as snack bars and dehydrated meals having been stowed on board long before.

A small group of people had gathered on the dock to see me off, including a news crew from Eugene, Oregon. They had been none too keen to come, as it was a considerable drive from Eugene and they would have to set out at around 3 A.M. to get there in time. But Nicole had coaxed and cajoled in her most winsome way until they had finally relented and agreed to come and report on my departure. We'd hoped for much more media coverage, and if I'd been leaving from San Francisco we would have had it, but Crescent City was an obscure outpost of humanity, far from big urban centres and media outlets.

There were a few other well-wishers. A father had brought his little girl, no more than a toddler, to present me with several bars of imported Lindt chocolate for my voyage. Several men from the local boatyard had come to see me off, too, but generally it was a low-key affair. Although more media attention would have been welcome, I decided that a quiet departure suited me just fine. Celebrations were for arrivals, not departures.

After a few words to the TV camera, I got into my boat and Nicole pushed against the oar to propel me away from the floating dock. I looked at my watch and noted the time to be recorded later in my log-book: 6:49 A.M., 12 August 2007. A smattering of applause accompanied the first few strokes of the several million that lay ahead.

The day was beautiful, and I was in a relaxed mood as I paddled out of the harbour. That didn't last for long. No sooner had I cleared

the harbour wall than there was a gentle crunching sound, and my boat stopped dead. I swore. I had run aground. It was low tide, I knew that, but I'd had no idea that the water would be this shallow. Embarrassed, I scanned the harbour wall. I didn't see anybody. I gave a sigh of relief that apparently my humiliation had not been observed.

I tried to push the boat off the sandbank with the oars, but to no avail. Sighing with irritation this time, I took my feet out of the rowing shoes, rolled up my black leggings to my knees, and gingerly swung my legs over the side of the boat into the chilly water. It barely covered my ankles. I pushed the boat off the sandbank, clambered back on board, and quickly resumed rowing as if nothing had happened.

Unfortunately, you can always count on a photographer to be around when you least want them to be. The following day *The Daily Telegraph* in Britain published an article under the headline: "Roz Savage runs aground minutes into journey," with a photograph of me standing in the water, bending over slightly with my hands on my knees as I survey the situation. If it had been a caption competition, my facial expression suggested that anything I had to say at that moment would most likely be unprintable.

Afloat once more, in golden morning sunlight I rowed past the historic lighthouse at Battery Point, a pretty whitewashed cottage with a large maritime light sticking out of the middle of its red-tiled roof like a preposterously overgrown chimney. As I paddled out to the open Pacific, the mist thickened while the sun continued to shine, creating a glowing, ethereal haze. Small groups of sea lions swam alongside my boat, their heads popping up like periscopes from the waves to check me out. They were playful, rolling their black, water-sleek bodies around and over each other like roughhousing teenagers, bringing a smile to my face.

Rick had predicted a clear run for the first four or five days out from the coast, which we hoped would be long enough for me to put a safe distance between myself and the rocky shoreline before the prevailing westerly winds kicked back in. I quickly fell back into the familiar routine of ocean rowing, which will be familiar to readers of my first book, *Rowing the Atlantic*. . . .

AFTER A NIGHT THAT MAY OR MAY NOT INVOLVE much sleeping, depending on how rough the sea is, I wake up as the first rays of daylight seep into my sleeping cabin. The space is about the size of a queen bed at its widest, tapering down to just over a foot wide at the stern of the boat. I have just enough headroom to sit up at its highest point, which is also the widest, again tapering down towards the stern. The walls and ceiling form a continuous arch, so it's rather uncomfortable sitting against the wall of the cabin as the curve forces me to hunch over. Lying down is by far the most comfortable position on the boat, and it's one I adopt with great gratitude, my favourite moment being when the day's rowing is done, my blog has been updated, and my head hits the pillow for some well-earned rest and recuperation.

The bunk runs down the middle of the cabin, so my body weight doesn't tip the boat off balance, and on either side of the bed there is a lee cloth, a strip of canvas the same length as my bunk and about a foot wide, fixed to the cabin floor and suspended by cords from the ceiling. The purpose of the lee cloths is to stop me being tipped off the bunk if a big wave knocks the boat onto her side.

Depending on the temperature inside the cabin, I lie either in or on a sleeping bag, which in turn rests on a foam mattress, thin enough that I can fold it back to get to the storage lockers beneath. My luxury is a proper pillow, which usually goes mouldy while at sea, but is essential to any hope of sleep.

I lie in the bunk with my feet towards the stern and my head towards the entrance hatch that leads out to the rowing deck. This makes it easier for me to check my marine instruments during the night. They are mounted in a panel to one side of the entrance hatch.

My first thought on waking is always, *Where am I?* I want to know where the boat has drifted overnight. Unlike rowers, winds and currents don't sleep, so I never wake up in the same place where I stopped rowing the night before. I plan my route to work with the prevailing winds and currents, rather than fighting them, which means that about 90 percent of the time I will wake up a bit closer to where I want to be. Sometimes I wake up a lot closer—my best ever night has been 22 nautical miles to the good—but more often it's just a handful of miles, and sometimes I wake up farther away, which is not a good start to the day.

So my first act upon waking is to turn on the GPS to allow it to get a fix on the satellites while I'm extricating myself from my sleeping bag and grabbing a Lärabar (a whole-food bar made of nuts and dried fruit) for my breakfast. By the time I have my logbook and pencil at the ready, the GPS has identified my position. At this point it is my tradition to utter, "Hurrah," or "Boo," as appropriate.

Then I pop my head out of the hatch to take a look at my red ensign, the British maritime flag, which also makes a good weathervane, its direction and demeanour revealing the angle and strength of the wind. Making a mental note of my estimates, I close the hatch and note down in my logbook the wind speed and direction. Consulting various instruments, I add the amount of charge in my two solar-powered ship's batteries, the distance and bearing to my final destination, the number of hours I have spent sleeping and rowing since my last entry, and a one-line comment on how I feel about life at this particular moment. This varies from the poetic to the profane, depending on circumstances.

As I finish the last bite of my Lärabar, I pick up my iPod from where it has been charging overnight and roll it up with my sun hat, rowing gloves, and a few spare Lärabars. I pick up my seat pad and a clean(ish) cover made out of lightweight and superabsorbent fabric (actually a pack towel, intended for use on camping trips), wrapping the cover around the pad, fixing it with Velcro. Placing the sun hat and its contents on the seat pad, I push the bundle out onto the deck, with me following close behind, closing and securing the cabin hatch firmly behind me. As well as providing dry space for sleeping and storage, the two cabins also act as buoyancy chambers, the air trapped inside making the boat unstable when upside down so that eventually it returns to the upright position. Keeping the hatches closed at all times apart from the barest moments required to enter and exit a cabin is the first rule of ocean-rowboat safety.

I attach the seat pad to the rowing seat with two press studs. I release the oars from their overnight stowage position, still in the oarlocks but swiveled around so that the oars are flush with the sides of the boat, with the spoon ends each secured in a clip on either side of the sleeping cabin. I sit on the seat and pull on my sun hat and rowing gloves. I secure the iPod to a hook on the deck using a carabiner, put in the earbuds, and hit the play button on whatever audiobook I'm currently enjoying. Time to row.

I usually row four shifts a day, of two to three hours each, depending on motivation, energy levels, and conditions both present and forecast. Between shifts I update my logbook, eat, have a siesta if required, and do various chores around the boat. I try to keep these to a minimum, as I don't enjoy tinkering for its own sake. I'd rather be pushing on towards my destination. Daily tasks include tending to the pot of bean sprouts that supplements my onboard diet, retrieving more raw-food crackers or freeze-dried meals from their respective storage hatches and moving them to my designated galley locker, writing the daily blog post, phoning my mother, and occasionally scrubbing gooseneck barnacles off the bottom of the boat—by far my least favourite task. I don't enjoy having to work underneath the boat, as it makes me feel rather vulnerable, and it also makes me feel guilty to prise the barnacles off their happy home on the hull, sending them to certain death in the depths.

Around sunset I take my dinner break, boiling water on a Jetboil camping stove in order to rehydrate my freeze-dried dinner. I don't mix it in the bag, which would leave a residue that would quickly start to smell bad (I keep all trash on board until I reach port). Instead, I decant the freeze-dried rubble into my trusty thermos mug, wide mouthed with a screw-top lid, and add any extras that might make it more palatable, such as powdered coconut milk, herbs, spices, or other seasoning. This task is a lot easier said than done. Trying to transfer powdered foods from packet to mug in a brisk sea breeze is a messy business, and as often as not I end up with my skin liberally coated in various ingredients, which get stuck in the sweat and sun cream, but it's worth it to sit back and enjoy a well-earned meal while watching the sun set.

I row for a few more hours after dinner, and then bathe using a bucket, a sponge, and my favourite tea tree and mint shower gel, which makes my skin tingle with cool freshness. Finally, I retire to the cabin for the night.

DURING THOSE FIRST FEW DAYS OUT from Crescent City, I spent long hours at the oars, but there were some light headwinds that slowed my progress, sometimes to a paltry one knot or even less. I would usually expect to make at least two knots—still not exactly a phenomenal speed, but twice as fast as one knot nonetheless. (One knot is one nautical mile per

hour. A nautical mile is about 1.15 statute, or land, miles. This is equivalent to 1/60th of 1 degree of longitude at the equator, there being 360 degrees of longitude making up the circumference of the Earth.)

I kept plugging away, doing what I could to get as far from land as soon as possible, but it was like trying to run the wrong way up an escalator. After six days I had made some progress south, but was still only 20 nautical miles from land.

On the eighth day, the headwinds abated. The instruction from my weatherman was to "row like hell." I did. But on the ninth day I rowed not like hell, but into hell. My logbook entries for 21 August record the rising wind speed. At seven o'clock in the morning, it was a rower-friendly 15 knots. Two and a half hours later it was 23. Then 34, 39, 43, 47 . . .

Initially it was exhilarating. After the frustration of the headwinds, I was delighted to at last be heading in the right direction. I recorded a video of myself plying the oars, singing the theme tune from *Hawaii Five-O* as I surfed down the waves. It all seemed great fun, and I was in high spirits.

But as the wind speed rose beyond 40 knots, the exhilaration gave way to anxiety. The waves were now growing quite large, higher than forecast, and I clipped myself to the boat to avoid being swept overboard. Later, when the waves grew higher still, to around 20 feet, I retired to the sleeping cabin, which was by far the safest place to be. It was uncomfortable, noisy, and scary, but nothing too bad could happen to me while I was in there.

Conditions that night became worse. My last logbook entry of the voyage, on the morning of 22 August, records, "2 capsizes in night. GPS and wind monitor no longer working."

Despite these problems, it never crossed my mind to abandon the attempt. When American Tori Murden was attempting to become the first woman to row solo across the Atlantic, her boat capsized 11 times in one night. That was my benchmark, and the situation was far from being as serious as that. I was determined to keep going. I spent the morning of the 22nd inside the cabin, riding out the storm as best I could. I would just have to hold out until the storm abated, which Rick now told me would be within 24 hours. It would no doubt be a very long 24 hours, but on the Atlantic I had spent longer than that cooped up inside during periods

of strong headwinds. I knew I could do it without succumbing to cabin fever. It wasn't hard to reconcile myself to prolonged spells indoors when I considered the alternative of spending time on a wave-drenched deck.

But that afternoon, control of the situation started to slip away from me. Unbeknownst to me, somebody had contacted the Coast Guard, thereby setting in motion a chain of events that rapidly acquired its own momentum.

A small plane appeared overhead. For a while I tried to ignore it, hoping it would go away. I told myself that it must be there for somebody else. The trouble was that there wasn't anybody else. Eventually I had to admit to myself that: (a) they were there, (b) they were there for me, and (c) they weren't going away.

Reluctantly, I picked up the VHF radio handset and established contact. A disembodied voice from the plane announced itself to be the U.S. Coast Guard. They told me that they'd received a report that I was in difficulty. I berated myself. In my last blog post, I had mentioned the capsizes, the knock to my head, and the loss of my sea anchor. It had never occurred to me that this might provoke a call to the authorities.

The voice on the radio went on to tell me that a 660-foot tanker, the *MV Overseas Long Beach*, was going to bring me a replacement for the missing sea anchor, and that a U.S. Coast Guard ship, the *Dorado*, was on its way. They also said that the USCG Control in Humboldt Bay wanted to talk with me immediately "to discuss the viability of your voyage." I felt like I was being called into the headmaster's office. Sulkily, I took my satellite phone from its waterproof case and turned it on. The marine radio worked only as far as line of sight, to ships or planes in my vicinity. To call the shore, I would need the more powerful technology of the satellite phone.

The station commander in Humboldt Bay interrogated me at length about my onboard safety equipment. I found it difficult to conceal my irritation. Before my departure I had repeatedly invited the Coast Guard in San Francisco to come and inspect the *Brocade*. After being referred from department to department and ultimately to the Coast Guard Auxiliary, I was informed that they did not inspect leisure craft (as they categorized the *Brocade*, with no apparent irony), and so my boat did not fall within their remit. I had tried as hard as I could to be proactive in getting their

approval, but they had not seemed interested. I knew that my safety provisions were of the highest standard, and that this satellite phone call was a waste of expensive airtime.

In my mind, the voyage was still viable. I had my oars and my rowing seat, as far as I knew my watermaker was still working, and apart from a couple of minor knocks to the head I was fine—no symptoms of concussion or any other serious problems. After crossing the Atlantic with her, I trusted the seaworthiness of the *Brocade*, and I knew that the risk of death was extremely small provided that I stayed with her.

To be unambiguous about this, I have the utmost respect for the U.S. Coast Guard. Its members are brave people, putting their lives on the line to ensure the safety of all seafarers within their jurisdiction. They have to go out in the worst conditions, no doubt often to help people who with a little more foresight and preparation would not have got into trouble in the first place.

But I did not feel that I was that kind of person, nor was I in the kind of dire straits that warranted their intervention. My situation was not ideal, to be sure, but it was not life threatening. Furthermore, I'm not American, so I felt I had no right to call on the U.S. Coast Guard for help. For that very reason, I had taken out private insurance with a medical-evacuation company called Global Rescue that claimed to be able to rescue their clients from anywhere in the world. Given just how extremely remote I was likely to be, I hadn't wanted to take them at their word, so my team had spent a lot of time with them discussing my plans and devising a set of emergency procedures. We had a flowchart detailing who would do what in every potential scenario we could think of, from a minor communications failure to a full-on Mayday situation. Everyone in my team had a copy of it, and knew what their roles and responsibilities were. If I had wanted assistance, and if I had asked for it, our procedures would have swung into action.

But in my view, a couple of very minor cuts to the head did not constitute a medical emergency, and I hadn't even considered calling on Global Rescue.

However, somebody had deemed otherwise and had taken it upon him- or herself to call the Coast Guard. I was livid. I didn't know who it was, but I was outraged that somebody would have the arrogance, the

presumption, to deem themselves a better judge than I of what was good for me. *How dare they?*

But whoever had done it, and however little I liked it, the Coast Guard was here, and they were determined that there would be no casualties on their watch. The best way they could be sure of that was to bring me in.

“Are you in distress?” they asked me. On the ocean, as I recalled from my VHF radio course, *distress* is a technical term, meaning that the crew of the boat perceive that they are “threatened by grave and imminent danger, and require immediate assistance.” I’d had better days, I told them, but I was not “in distress” in the technical sense. I did not require assistance or rescue.

According to the Coast Guard, however, the weather was going to get even worse over the next 48 hours. I phoned Rick to double-check, and he reiterated his earlier prediction: that if I could just hang in there for another 24 hours, the conditions would ease and the waves subside. It was difficult to know whom to believe.

Over the next six hours the Coast Guard’s calls became more persistent, increasing the pressure on me to accept rescue. We debated the issue backwards and forwards on the radio. They would push, and I would resist, in a verbal tug-of-war.

As the pressure grew, I became less and less certain of myself, and doubt over the viability of my voyage took root. I was concerned about the state of my boat. I had lost the use of a number of instruments, as well as my sea anchor. I was experimenting with an autopilot for the first time, having used a simple foot-steering mechanism on the Atlantic, but the device had taken a knock during one of the capsize. The O-ring that formed a waterproof seal around the seam in its middle had slipped out of place, giving the black plastic case the appearance of having been disembowelled, the translucent white O-ring hanging out like a loop of intestine. Water would now be getting inside, and like most electronic devices, it would not take kindly to a soaking. But this was no big deal. It would be easy enough to switch to the backup plan: rudder strings that could be adjusted by hand and then secured through cleats on either side of the rowing position.

Marginally more serious was the problem that the GPS chartplotter had stopped working. Again, there was a backup plan—a second GPS in

my emergency “grab bag”—but the unit was a small and basic model that didn’t show nautical charts of the coastline. And again, it wasn’t a big deal. Once I got away from the California coast there was nothing for me to bump into. All I needed was my latitude and longitude and that would be enough to get me to Hawai’i.

By far the most serious problem was the loss of the sea anchor. This was an important safety device in rough conditions, and could also help in mitigating backwards drift in a headwind. I wasn’t wildly keen on the idea of continuing my voyage without a sea anchor. If I ran into big seas again later on, I would have no defence.

None of these issues in themselves would have been enough to make me abandon my attempt, but in combination they added up to a situation that was decidedly less than optimal. I sat in my cabin, swaying as the waves pummeled the boat, weighing up the pros and cons of the situation. As I did so, I became less certain about resisting rescue. One minute I would be marginally in favour of continuing despite the equipment losses and breakages, the next minute my mental seesaw would tip and I would be marginally in favour of returning to shore while I still had the opportunity to repair the boat. Sleep deprivation had interfered with my decision-making abilities, and I couldn’t make up my mind.

In mid-afternoon, the arrival of the *MV Overseas Long Beach* temporarily interrupted my deliberations. The merchant vessel was answering the Coast Guard’s summons to bring me a replacement sea anchor. The huge ship throttled back as she approached, wallowing in the heavy seas. I was amazed, and a little awed, to notice how even a ship of her size was affected by the conditions. Waves crashed around the enormous bows that loomed like cliffs from the water.

The captain brought his ship as close as he dared without swamping me, and hailed me on the radio.

“Thank you so much for coming to help,” I said, somewhat insincerely. I didn’t want help. I wanted everybody to go away and leave me alone. “But please make sure that you do not put your crew at risk. I repeat, do not put your crew at risk. I am not in distress. It would be helpful to have a sea anchor, but it is not important enough to risk anybody’s safety for.”

“I understand,” he reassured me. “I will not put my crew at risk. We are going to try to shoot a line across to you, which we will then

use to send over a sea anchor from one of our lifeboats. Do you have a boathook?"

"Yes, I have a boathook," I replied. Ever since I had needed to use a boathook to repair my oars when all four of them broke during the Atlantic crossing, I had vowed never to set to sea without one again. They're designed primarily to hook a mooring buoy in order to tie up a boat for the night, and are therefore theoretically useless in mid-ocean, but you never know when a long, telescopic pole might come in useful.

"Good, so we'll get the line as close to you as possible, and if it lands in the water, you might be able to use the boathook to reach it," the captain said.

"I'll certainly give it a try," I promised.

And try I did, but despite repeated attempts, they were unable to shoot the line within range of my boat. After each attempt they had to steer around in another huge circle in order to approach me again from upwind, as there was no point trying to shoot the line into the teeth of the gale. Each circuit took about half an hour. I stayed out on deck, getting progressively colder and wetter as the waves soaked me, waiting for them to come around to try yet again.

At last, on the seventh attempt, I managed to reach the line as it trailed in the water and hauled about 500 feet of thin orange line on board. This thin orange line was tied to a thicker line, which in turn was tied to a still thicker line. At last, when the entire deck of my boat was covered in a tangle of ropes, I reached the end, to which was attached a lifebelt, a buoy, and a small conical sea anchor made out of thick yellow canvas. It wasn't as large as the 12-foot parachute-shaped anchor I had lost, but maybe it would work. I wasn't sure why they had sent me the buoy and the lifebelt. Maybe they were just there for flotation. I pushed them into a corner of the deck.

It took about an hour for me to disentangle the lines, but eventually I was able to deploy the anchor off the bows of my boat. I watched anxiously to see if it would succeed in making the *Brocade* pivot around to lie with her bows into the waves. At first I thought it had worked—the boat turned through 90 degrees—but then she carried on turning until she had done a full 180, so I was still sideways to the waves, but facing the

opposite way. Sideways was not where I wanted to be. This was where the boat was most liable to capsize.

My spirits plummeted, and I suddenly felt exhausted. I had barely slept for two nights, and I hadn't eaten much, my appetite affected by the nauseating movement of the boat. I'd spent hours on deck trying to get hold of this sea anchor, another hour sorting out the tangle of ropes, and ultimately it had made no difference whatsoever. The prospect of another dark night of capsizes loomed.

Just then the Coast Guard called back. "We need a decision, right now," they said. "We can't get a boat out to you—the *Dorado* had to turn back because the waves were too big."

This made me pause for thought. Too rough for a Coast Guard cutter? This really was quite a storm.

"You're drifting away from the coast," they went on, "so by tomorrow you'll be out of range of a helicopter rescue. It's about to get dark. If we're going to send out the helicopter for you, it needs to be now. The weather is going to deteriorate. We're very concerned about you." *Accept our help before it's too late*, was the subtext. *Just say yes*.

Just say no! screamed my heart. *Don't give up on your dream!*

I asked for five minutes to consider my options and hung up. I tried calling my weatherman, but got his voicemail. It looked like I was on my own. The choice would be mine, and mine alone.

It was one of the toughest decisions of my life. I had spent well over a year preparing for this voyage—raising money, renovating and improving the boat, training, reprovisioning. It wasn't easy to let all that hard work go to waste. I was ten days out from shore, and in the last 48 hours had actually been making impressive progress in the right direction. I believed I'd done the most difficult work—getting clear of the coast—and I didn't want to have to go back and do that part again. Like so many enterprises, the hardest part of an ocean row is the beginning—those early, nervous, vulnerable days when there is still the option to turn back. But as the saying goes, a job begun is a job half done, and since I had left harbour, got the first few miles over and done with, and settled into my routine, I was keen to maintain the forward momentum.

Additionally, it would be embarrassing to turn back. Thanks to Nicole's hard work there had been quite an avalanche of media coverage. For it all to end prematurely in failure would be humiliating.

And what of my self-respect as an adventurer? I prided myself on being fiercely independent, on not quitting when the going gets tough, and on not getting myself into situations that I wasn't willing to get myself out of. To accept rescue went against my stubborn grain.

But on the other hand, my safety was now compromised by the loss of my sea anchor, the load of broken electronics, and my cabin being a mess of uselessly dangling lee cloths and untethered seat belts. I still had at least two more months out on the ocean and wanted to be ready for whatever the weather might have in store for me. I was being offered an opportunity to restore my boat to a shipshape state before continuing. *Safety has to be paramount*, I reminded myself.

It went against my instincts, but accepting rescue seemed to be the sensible thing to do. *Argh*—I hated this feeling of caving in to the pressure.

I rang them back. "Okay, let's do it," I said. "Come and get me."

I hung up the VHF handset and burst into angry tears. I had long dreamed of this row ending with a triumphant arrival in Hawai'i—not an airlift into a Coast Guard helicopter.

It would be a half-hour wait before the helicopter arrived. So many times during those 30 minutes I reached out involuntarily towards the VHF handset. Was it too late to change my mind? Could I still call off the rescue?

But each time my hand fell back to my side. The die was cast. I pictured the helicopter on its way, lifting off from the Coast Guard base, tilting and turning towards the ocean, and speeding across the waves into the gathering twilight. I had made my decision, and now I would have to stand by it. When the time came, I would meekly obey their order to abandon ship. The prospect appalled me. This felt wrong, so wrong.

The radio crackled. It was the helicopter pilot. "Vessel Roz, vessel Roz, vessel Roz," he called. That was funny. They thought Roz was the name of my boat, not the rower. I almost smiled, desperate to find some humour in this awful situation.

I picked up the handset. "This is Roz."

"We are going to lower the swimmer into the water. When you see the swimmer is ready, you are going to jump into the water and swim over to him. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I said sounding calm enough, but inside I was thinking, *You've got to be kidding me! You expect me to jump out of my boat—my nice, safe boat—into 20-foot waves?* Suddenly staying on board seemed much more attractive than the alternative. But I had made my decision, and I had to follow through.

It suddenly occurred to me that I should take my laptop and mobile phone. I would need them to communicate with my team and my mother once I reached shore. And if I was to never see my boat again, I wasn't willing to leave them behind.

"Can I bring a bag with me?"

"No. You can't."

"It's a very small bag," I eyed the grey Pelican case that housed my MacBook. It wasn't exactly small. But it wasn't too big, either. It depended on what you were comparing it with, really.

"Okay then," the voice on the radio conceded.

"Just give me a couple of minutes," I said, and hung up before the voice could change its mind.

I wriggled awkwardly into my survival suit, a red, rubber-lined, all-in-one garment like an overgrown baby's romper. It had got damp during the Atlantic crossing, and despite my best attempts to dry it out, the rubber lining had started to rot. I hadn't expected to need it, though, so I hadn't replaced it. As I pulled it on over my shorts and T-shirt, the material clung clammily to my bare arms and legs. *Yuck.*

I swiftly looped a strap through the handle of the grey Pelican case that held my electronics and slung it diagonally around my body. Pushing it out on deck ahead of me, I groped my way along on all fours, staying low to avoid toppling or being swept overboard. I retrieved the *MV Long Beach* lifebelt from the corner of the deck where I had flung it earlier and put it around my middle. I didn't want the weight of the Pelican case dragging me down to the bottom of the ocean, and the lifebelt would keep me afloat.

Leaning back into the sleeping cabin, I picked up the radio. "I'm ready."

I watched as the hovering helicopter opened its door, and a small orange figure was lowered on a line into the water, like a spider abseiling down a strand of gossamer.

"Okay, go!" I heard the command from the radio inside the cabin.

I latched the cabin door behind me and, taking a deep breath, steeled myself for the plunge. Was there even the slightest chance I could still change my mind? No.

Go, go, GO!

I jumped.

Saltwater spray stung my eyes and the Pacific sucked at the legs of my survival suit as I half-swam, half-wallowed through the towering waves to the orange-suited Coast Guard swimmer. The helicopter's blades thumped deafeningly into the 50-mph winds overhead. The swimmer helped me into a harness and hitched me to the winch line. At his signal, the helicopter started to gain altitude and we rose from the water in tandem, much too intimately entwined for two people who had met only a moment before.

As we were hoisted aloft, I looked down at my trusty rowboat, labouring in the foaming swells. She had looked after me throughout 103 days of storms, struggles, and solitude on the Atlantic crossing the previous year. On that voyage she had witnessed my gradual transformation from a nervous novice, a 30-something former management consultant hopelessly out of her depth on the high seas, into a self-sufficient, capable adventurer. She had been my prison cell, but also my life-support capsule. I owed my life to her. But now I was abandoning her. I felt a harsh pang of guilt and an overwhelming sense that I was making a bad mistake.

As we reached the threshold of the helicopter door, helping hands came out to haul me in. As the helicopter bore me swiftly towards land through a rapidly darkening sky, I huddled disconsolately on the floor in the back, my survival suit peeled down to my waist and a thick, standard-issue grey blanket wrapped around my shoulders over my T-shirt. A puddle accumulated around me as I sat in my soaking clothes, alone with my thoughts. All I could see of the helicopter crew was the back of their heads, and the headphones clamped over their ears made conversation impossible. I was in my own little world of misery.

I replayed the events of the last few hours again and again in my mind. I had set out to complete an ocean row to draw attention to environmental issues facing the ocean. Now, ironically and unwillingly, I had contributed to ocean pollution by losing my sea anchor, I was riding in a chopper that was burning fossil fuel at a phenomenal rate, and I had abandoned my precious boat—my only possession in this world apart from my old yellow pickup truck. What a mess.

Yet, I reminded myself, this is what I signed up for. When I had written those two versions of my obituary several years before, I had thought of the obituaries I enjoyed reading in the newspaper—the colourful characters who seemed to have packed several lifetimes into one, who followed their passions, who might succeed or fail equally spectacularly, and who, if they failed, would pick themselves up and dust themselves off and try again. They had been my inspiration, and now I had to draw on their example and find the strength to persevere.

I had wanted to push my limits, to get outside my comfort zone—and of course that would, by definition, be uncomfortable. On the Atlantic, I had thought many times that I was about to hit my limits—of pain, frustration, anger, boredom—only to find that my limits were far beyond where I thought they were. I had time and again gone past the imagined point of impossibility, only to look back on it from the other side and wonder why I'd held such a small view of my capabilities.

When setting out across the Pacific, I'd known that I was pushing myself even farther—5,000 miles farther. The more I pushed, the more likely it became that I would fail. There was only one way to find out how far I could go, and that was to go there. At the outer limits, there's a fine line between courage and stupidity. On this occasion, at least, I had stayed on the right side of the line.

Although to some extent the choice had been taken away from me, I nonetheless held myself responsible for my decision. I had committed to being the captain of my own ship. Setting out across the Atlantic soon after my divorce, I'd been determined to demonstrate my self-reliance, to myself as much as to others. I wanted to prove that I didn't need a husband—or anybody, in fact—to take care of me. This didn't just mean the physical self-reliance of being alone on a rowboat; it also meant the psychological self-reliance of making my own decisions and standing by

them. There was nothing to be gained by blaming the informant or the Coast Guard. Ultimately, the choice had been mine, and there was no benefit to regretting it or revisiting it and wondering if I'd done the right thing. I would never know what might have happened had I taken the other option and steadfastly refused the rescue. The decision had been made, and my job now was to figure out what to do to make the best of a bad situation.

In fact, my mind was already racing with what to do next. I was compiling a mental list of all the items that needed to be replaced, repaired, or added to my boat to make her seaworthy again; and I was determined to resume my quest as soon as possible. Abandoning my bid felt very wrong, and I wanted to right the wrong at the earliest opportunity.

I made a vow. "Stay safe, *Brocade*. I'll be back soon."

