

# He rowed across the Atlantic Ocean

## Now, he's going to do it again

By JEREMIAH O'HAGAN  
Staff Reporter

His shoulders ache and his chest muscles are tug-of-warrioring for his sternum. The tendons on the inside bends of his elbows are singing.

His head is Zen — at a place of subconscious rhythm and peace.

It's 2006 and Greg Spooner is rowing. He's been a rower for seven years, since he was a junior at University of Puget Sound, but he's never rowed water this big. His feet push against the bottom of the boat, quads flexing for leverage, and he pulls again. And again. And again.

Spooner, DPT, now 32 and a physical therapist at Stanwood Camano Physical Therapy, got into rowing through a friend who crewed for Western Washington University. It wasn't long before the sport took over Spooner's life.

After graduation, he moved to Seattle to pull oars for Lake Washington Rowing Club.

"Post-collegiate is a whole different animal," Spooner said.

Instead of one time a day, he trained three times. The boats were faster and lower and tipsier.

"I'd get my butt handed to me for almost a year," he recalled. "Spent a lot of time swimming."

But it was a piece of paper that put him on the ocean.

In 2005, Spooner's buddy Jordan Hanssen — whom Spooner had introduced to the sport — passed a poster

for trans-Atlantic rowing races.

Hanssen said, "Dude, let's row across the ocean,"

"No." Spooner said. "That's the stupidest thing I've heard."

Hanssen found two other rowers and came back to Spooner: We need four people to race from New York City to Falmouth, England in 2006, he said.

Spooner decided it wasn't the stupidest thing after all.

They had to learn everything, Spooner said. How to create a nonprofit — Ocean Adventure Rowing (OAR) Northwest — fundraise, figure out what kind of boat to get, how to modify and outfit the boat, and the logistics of getting to the starting line and home from the finish line.

There is no support crew on the open water, Spooner said. The boats must be self-sufficient for up to three months. There's a pump on board that desalinates seawater for drinking and isobutene stoves for cooking food. Of which, in 2006, there was not enough.

All those muscles crank through the calories as they lift, dip and pull the oars. Two people row while two rest, each person burning 5,000 to 6,000 calories per day, Spooner said. They were expecting fierce metabolisms, though. What they miscalculated horribly was how long it would take them to row their 29-foot boat across an ocean.

"We brought enough food for 40 days," Spooner said. "The trip lasted 71."

Spooner's body, tall and

lean already, ate 45 pounds of itself for fuel. The other three men lost between 35 and 40 pounds each.

But, they made it. So did two of the other four boats that set out from New York. One retreated a week into the trip, after an unholy storm flooded its hatches and left it waterlogged and limping.

And Spooner realized that it's in the midst of riot and disaster and sea spray that you find the Zen of rowing.

He learned that the big storms are scary but hyper-focusing. He learned that you cast the sea anchor, hunker into the cabin and wait it through. He learned to love the waves because they're mesmerizing, like watching flames, he said.

"The best are 10- to 15-foot waves, they're great for just cruising," he said, and it's not hard to imagine the boat riding the swells and shooting the troughs, surfing an infinite set of rollers.

The men pulling again, and again, and again.

Fast-forward from 2006 to earlier this year, when OAR circumnavigated Vancouver Island April 11 to May 2, in the Canadian Wildlife Federation's (CWF) Salish Sea Expedition, 2012.

"It was in stark contrast to the Atlantic trip," Spooner said.

In the years between their first trans-ocean row and their circumnavigation of Vancouver Island, Spooner and Hanssen not only figured out their food situation, they honed their craft and nonprofit.

CWF came on as OAR's lead sponsor earlier this year,



Jordan Hanssen (left) and Greg Spooner, a physical therapist in Stanwood, navigating Pacific Ocean swells off Vancouver Island's Brooks Peninsula last month.

affording the men some awe-some opportunities to take their passions to a broader audience.

They've built OAR on three pillars, Spooner said: adventure, research and conservation.

The adventure grabs people's attention, while the research and conservation have become the supremely cool part of what they're doing.

Working with University of Washington's School of Oceanography and United States Geological Survey, OAR came up with a system that collects data on the ambient air and water every 15 seconds, or roughly each boat length. They can combine this with other info about marine life to address the conservation issue — what are we doing to our environment and what can we do to protect it?

Along with this data collection came a rowboat renovation. The boat that circumnavigated Vancouver Island bristled with solar panels and was topped with a small wind turbine. Together, they create alternative power for the data collection system, as well as satellite communications and video.

"We want to interact real-time with students in classrooms," Spooner said. "We'd like to make great relationships with a few schools and interact with them from the boat."

OAR sees it as an opportunity to put students inside an experience where they can witness adventure and risk, and sharpen their critical-thinking, problem-solving and communication skills.

"It seems selfish not to take this attention and do some good with it," Spooner said.

Right now the crew is preparing for CWF's Africa to the Americas expedition, which will launch from Liberia in December. Sometime in early 2013, the boat will make landfall in Venezuela, nearly 4,000 nautical miles west. OAR will collect data on this trip, too.

"It's not going to be a race this time," Spooner said. "We just want to be able to do it well."

As far as future trips, "we have a couple up our sleeves," he said.

Spooner said the Vancouver Island circumnavigation, which took about three weeks, was the perfect length

for him. He and Hanssen also circumnavigated the Olympic Peninsula in 2008, and he said, "Those trips were more fun and good, old-fashioned Tom Sawyer-ing than the big expeditions."

Spooner said he and Hanssen have some shorter adventures they'd like to do in the future.

"Any inland waterway is row-able," he said. "With an awareness of self, family and community, you can go worldwide."

For more information, including photos, videos, expedition reports and crew blogs, visit [oarnorthwest.com](http://oarnorthwest.com).

Staff Reporter Jeremiah O'Hagan: 629-8066 ext. 125 or [ohagan@scnews.com](mailto:ohagan@scnews.com).



PHOTO BY HAROLD AUNE

(Above, L to R ) Markus Pukonen, Jordan Hanssen, Greg Spooner arrive at Jericho Sailing Center in Vancouver, B.C. having just completed the circumnavigation of Vancouver Island.

Advertise your business in:  
**Wheel & Motor**  
For more information call  
360-629-2155



Stanwood/Camano NEWS

**\$1.49<sup>9</sup> Gallon\***  
**PROPANE**

**\*500+ Gallons**  
Price subject to change

**Call for Quote**

Owned Tanks	Leased Tanks
500 Gal.+..... <b>\$1.49<sup>9</sup></b>	500 Gal.+..... <b>\$1.59<sup>9</sup></b>
300 Gal.+..... <b>\$1.59<sup>9</sup></b>	300 Gal.+..... <b>\$1.69<sup>9</sup></b>
150 Gal.+..... <b>\$1.79<sup>9</sup></b>	150 Gal.+..... <b>\$1.89<sup>9</sup></b>

**Special Pricing For Commercial Customers**

**Neighborhood - Group Deliveries Guaranteed Price Plans**

**Locally Owned & Operated Best Propane Value in the NW**

**1-800-929-5243**

Visit us @ [www.apppropane.com](http://www.apppropane.com)

18 Years Serving North Snohomish County & Camano Island

**Darrow's CarpetsPlus**

**COLORTILE**  
America's Floor Store

*is moving!*

to 27028 99th Ave NW  
Stanwood  
(Up 1 block from Josephine)

Come see us in our new location and check out our **MOVING SALE!**

**REMNANT BLOWOUT**  
going on now at our old location

[flooringstanwood.com](http://flooringstanwood.com)  
**360.629.9604**  
Financing Available OAC  
Lic. #DARROC1969WS

**Donation Drop Off Now Open!**  
**Clothing & Household Items**

100% of your tax-deductible donation empowers children & adults with disabilities.  
Learn more at [nwcenter.org](http://nwcenter.org)

**Stanwood Towne Center QFC**  
27008 92nd Ave NW  
Look for The Big Blue Truck™

Open Sat & Sun 10am - 5:30pm

Residential Pickup (800) 992-2060 [www.BigBlueTruck.org](http://www.BigBlueTruck.org)

**Law Office of Dale Wagner**

**WORKERS' COMPENSATION**  
**SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY**

- Treatment
- Lost Wages
- Disability
- Vocational Training

Se Habla Español  
VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
[www.dalewagnerlaw.com](http://www.dalewagnerlaw.com)  
**360-629-5276**  
9727 271st St. NW, Stanwood

**ORCHARD'S NURSERY**  
**Blow-Out Specials!**

**OPEN JULY 4th!**

**50% OFF**

ALL Boxwoods  
Rhodys  
Azaleas  
Vegetables  
Summer Annuals  
Hanging Baskets  
Seeds  
Pots

SELECTED Perennials  
Barberries  
Maples  
Blueberries

**30% OFF**

ALL OTHER NURSERY PLANTS  
1 Gal & up

**ROUND UP Weed & Grass Killer**  
**Concentrate Plus**  
Results in 12 Hrs.  
**\$18<sup>99</sup> ea.**  
36.8 oz  
Reg. \$26.99

**Gardner & Bloome Soil Building Compost**

- Ideal for Planting
- 3 cu. ft. bale
- Reg. \$9.99

**2 FOR \$16**

Open Monday-Saturday 9-6, Sunday 10-5 • Ad prices good through 7/4/12

10521 SR 532 Stanwood • Just East of Mark Clark Bridge • 360-629-3586