

***Carpe Diem*; make the most of every opportunity.**

Robin Drysdale 1992 – 1999

The splash took us by surprise. Not just the sheer size – we estimated similar to dropping an estate car into the sea, but because of the rarity of witnessing a whale breach in the middle of the Atlantic. Was this yet another hallucination our sleep starved brains were making up? We were on day 28 of what was to be a 47 day crossing of the Atlantic in our ocean rowing boat, and the shift pattern didn't allow for a lot of sleep. As we saw the whale swimming closer to the boat, we realised we really had seen something truly awesome.

It wasn't the first time I had been awed by nature; I have been fortunate to have had some amazing experiences since I left Longridge in 1999. Whether it be the first time I heard the sounds of a jungle at night whilst sleeping under a tarpaulin on my gap year in Costa Rica with Raleigh International; or the low warning growl of a lion when we patrolled a little too far onto its patch in Kenya; or the view of the animals making their way to the watering hole from the dawn helicopter evacuation; or even the rumble of the avalanche that engulfed my village in a cloud of snow dust in the Alps. Even the Scottish Borders has its own richness of nature though, and in the UK alone I have paddled with seals in sea lochs whilst golden eagles circle above (my Norwegian friend was VERY impressed), and crested hills only to find deer grazing 20 metres away. So if all that is on the doorstep, why did I feel the need to row an ocean?

Whilst these experiences provide an amazing backdrop to my exploits, they are not the only thing to be gained from an adventure. My motivation lies in a combination of experiencing a different environment, the satisfaction of fending for oneself and dealing with the discomfort, and the joy of meeting new people and forging friendships in the furnace of adversity. As a crew in the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge we were taking on the ocean as an entirely self-supporting boat. We made our water, we carried our food, we rowed and we rested on our 30 foot vessel "Auriga". If anything broke we had to fix it, if anyone was hurt we had to deal with it. We faced 3,000 miles of ocean, waves the size of houses and 45 days of freeze dried food. The scale was well beyond anything any of us had ever tried.

I was diagnosed with Bowel Cancer in August 2016. The circumstances that led me to the one in a million diagnosis, meant that I was operated on and recovering at home before I would have been diagnosed in the normal timelines. Bowel Cancer is a disease that is easily operable on as long as it is diagnosed in time, which just shows how awful it really is that it is the second most deadly cancer in the UK. I emerged from the diagnosis determined that cancer was not going to be a negative experience for me, I took courage from the stories of friends of friends and the tales of what they had managed after their treatment, I felt very lucky to have caught the disease early on, so I felt a desire to have a positive influence – giving hope to future cancer patients and raising money for charity – and also to have an adventure I had always dreamt of, which is how I came to be on a tiny boat, rowing alongside a whale in the middle of the Atlantic and raising £70,000 for charity whilst we were at it.

Adventures don't have to be on such a scale to be worthwhile. I have had many awesome adventures over a weekend in the UK which has ticked all of the boxes of difficult conditions, great people striving together, and amazing environments. The main thing is to make the most of opportunities that come our way, *Carpe Diem*.

If you would like to more about their journey, please go to: menofoar.com