

# One Degree of Effort

*Margo Pellegrino Paddles  
from Miami to Maine to  
Raise Ocean Awareness*

*By Chris Szepessy*



Kirk Larsen

Margo Pellegrino eased her yellow, red and white outrigger canoe alongside a float at Skipper's Dock Restaurant in Stonington, CT on Monday, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, having paddled across Long Island Sound from Cutchogue, NY. Most paddlers would feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment after completing such a passage. For Margo, it was simply the end of day 56 of Miami2Maine, her 11-week solo voyage from Miami, FL to Camden, ME.

Margo, who lives in Medford Lakes, NJ, is an environmentally conscious mom who's pushing herself to her limits to show her kids how to make a difference in the world, and to inspire a grassroots movement of paddlers, fishermen, surfers and sailors to take an active role in the stewardship of our oceans. "My children have inspired me to make a statement to bring attention to one of the most critical problems the entire world faces," she explained. "The future of our oceans."

Waving goodbye to her husband Carl and kids Billy (5) and Julia (2), Margo left Miami on May 7<sup>th</sup> to paddle over 1,900 miles up the Intercoastal Waterway and along the Atlantic coast. "There was a tropical depression with 40-knot winds that first day," she recalled, but she didn't postpone her departure. She stopped at 74 points along the east coast to speak about her personal quest to help save our oceans from ultimate collapse.

As she paddled along the shores of 14 states, Margo passed endangered reefs and dredged beaches - problems that she wants to bring to light. She also wants to raise awareness about dwindling fish populations. "Overfishing is largely responsible for the rapid decrease in fish populations and has put our oceans in peril," she emphasized. "We've seen the small farmers pushed out by agribusiness, and I fear that with large scale aquaculture, the same thing is going to happen to small commercial fishermen...commercial fish farming is a disaster."

"We're at a point right now with our ocean that we can either ignore it and the problem will get so bad it won't be able to get fixed," Margo asserted, "or we can take action now." After arriving in Virginia, she went to Washington, DC for a meeting with members of the House Oceans Caucus. She urged them to stand tough on measures to reduce overfishing, the destruction of natural habitats and unsustainable aquaculture along America's shorelines. "They're sponsoring a bill called Oceans 21, which is a really

cool piece of legislation," she said. "I like it because it will create more research money for NOAA, and for conservation education."

"Sustainability is at risk from so many factors," Margo continued. "We must stop turning the oceans into dumping grounds. The effects of offshore oil drilling, pollution, overfishing, bottom trawling and climate change pose a constant threat to marine ecosystems, shorelines and the natural food chain. I'm pushing David Helvarg's *50 Ways to Save the Ocean* - it's a phenomenal book. When people say, 'I'm just one person - what can I do?' I tell them, 'Pick up that book.' It has 50 things that one person can do to make things better."

Emily Rothman of Sayville, NY is driving Margo's chase car, numerous local paddlers have joined her for a leg, and she has the support of the American Canoe Association, the National Environmental Trust, Oceana, WaterWatch International and the East Coast Chapters of the Surfrider Foundation. Margo hopes Miami2Maine will attract more ocean-minded people to these organizations and promote their missions and work. Her engaging personality is making that happen.

"The Connecticut Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation is excited for, and grateful to Margo for her amazing journey to raise awareness of the plight of our oceans," said Chapter Chairman Andrew Krupa. "The proposed Broadwater LNG facility in Long Island Sound is the exact kind of project that continues to threaten our waterways. Margo's been a great advocate for us, lending her name and mission to our mission to put a stop to the Broadwater project." Margo added, "I cannot imagine having Broadwater out there - it's certainly not a good idea. If we're so dependent on fossil fuels 30 years from now, we are really screwed."

Margo, who modestly claims to be a "slow paddler," is not a professional athlete, although she demonstrated her extreme fitness by proudly flexing her biceps. Her average speed is about five or six knots. "One time I hit nine knots," she enthused. "It was awesome!" She logged more than 100 miles in two days in North Carolina, although the New England legs are shorter at 25 to 35 miles per day. "I never push my pace because I never know when I'm gonna need that reserve. You can think, 'Wow, this was an easy trip'...then the last five miles can be like the five miles from hell."



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Margo propels her 20-foot Fuze carbon /Kevlar OC1 (outrigger canoe) with a single-blade paddle, but this boat's nothing like a traditional canoe. It's essentially a surf ski with an ama (outrigger) attached to the port side. The ama has generous scoop and rocker for surfing big waves, and foot pedals operate the spade rudder. "The boat weighs about 23 pounds or so," she explained. "It's an awesome craft. The ease of steering, the speed, and the toughness of the boat give me the confidence I need to know I can make it up the coast safely. It's a performance boat and not meant for touring, but I don't think I'd be able to make all my destinations in the time frame I have in any other boat."

"It's amazing how this boat rides waves and how well it handles in rough water," she continued. "In fact, the rougher the water, the happier it seems to be, skimming along the crests...inlets are a blast! It's amazing how this boat takes care of me. It's the perfect boat for the mission because it's Polynesian and they're very seafaring people. The outrigger canoe clubs are very big on outreach and community...it's the spirit of *Aloha*."

"Today was the most I was paddling against obnoxious currents," Margo noted, referring to the eastern Sound's notorious tides. "I started coming out of the Gut at 6:00 when the tide was slowing down, but it was really a battle...you can always tell where the strong currents are because the water starts dancing."

A strong headwind was blowing when Margo crossed the Sound from Long Island to Connecticut. She handled the conditions with aplomb, but a day earlier she experienced what outrigger paddlers call a hulli. "I flipped yesterday," she laughed. "I was

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thinking about a phone call I'd gotten and not paying attention. I was a little too heavy on my right stroke...I have a surf leash on my leg so the boat won't fly away." The northern portion of Margo's route took her into open ocean, and U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary vessels escorted her. "The auxiliary guys have been awesome," she said. "They've volunteered to escort me all along the way."

Protein bars supply Margo's on-the-water nutrition, and she carries a GPS, an EPIRB, a compass and a cell phone/personal data assistant in drybags lashed on deck. She likes to be underway early, preferring to finish each leg well before dark to address the media, meet her many admirers, rest and eat. "That means ice cream," she laughed. "A little bit of protein, and lots of ice cream. It's been powering this trip - a different flavor each night. I should've bought stock in Ben & Jerry's!"

Margo's also been sampling margaritas at restaurants along her route. Ordering one at Skipper's Dock with extra salt on the rim of the glass, she joked, "It's important for the electrolytes!" She enjoyed the Stonington scallops in her salad (which, unsurprisingly, contained plenty of spinach!) proclaiming, "They're awesome! I think they're the best scallops I've ever had."

Indeed, the future of such things as the Sound's shellfish beds is at the core of Margo's mission. "Miami2Maine started as one woman's desire to bring attention to the current state of the environment as it impacts this planet's oceans," she stated. "My original goal in undertaking this venture was to simply draw attention to myself through this coastal paddle and channel that attention to professional organizations to bolster their advocacy regarding the plight of our oceans."

"At 211°F, water is very hot. At 212°F water becomes steam," Margo explained. "Steam can move locomotives. It's that one extra degree of effort that can make all the difference between failure and success. Miami2Maine is my attempt to make a difference - no matter how small. If it patches together a quilt of volunteers, organizations, media, and those who can affect public policy to bring about long-term sustainable change and motivate others, then we can make a difference. As soon as people start thinking about what's happening, I think they will demand change. It's a tall order, but if I can paddle up the coast and exceed my expectations, I really think that our government can get on board to do this."

Margo arrived in Camden, ME on July 20<sup>th</sup>. To read Margo's blog, and make a donation to her supporters (you can choose the Mordecai Island Land Trust, Oceana or a regional Surfrider Foundation Chapter), visit [miami2maine.com](http://miami2maine.com). ♦

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