

## The Solo-Circumnavigating Singing Grandmother!

Donna Lange challenges all your preconceptions about the definition of “Grandmother.” Her diminutive 5ft 2” build and friendly, smiling face, framed by unruly waves of black hair, hide a determination and resilience that have brought her 17,000 miles through the sort of oceans and weather conditions that most of us will only ever read about. The challenges of her voyage, non-stop from the East Coast of America, are nothing short of heroic and New Zealand is privileged to host the only stopover of her circumnavigation.



Donna arrived here in April and is currently living aboard her yacht in the boatyard at Milford Cruising Club. Step aboard her yacht and you'll gasp with amazement at its small size, the lack of sophisticated equipment and the age of everything! Her 28ft Southern Cross double ended sloop, 'Inspired Insanity', was bought for 18,000\$US six years ago in the American Virgin Islands. Although the boat had been surveyed – there was nothing seaworthy about it and Donna spent eighteen months of hard work to get her into a condition fit for going off shore. The “shakedown cruise” was a marathon sail down to South America and back, during which time numerous structural problems arose, forcing Donna to conclude that a major refit in her home port of St Thomas, USVI was the only solution. As a singer / songwriter, she was able to supplement her meagre funds by singing at gigs, in-between working on the boat herself.

In July 2002 Donna set out to sail round the world as a modern day wandering minstrel on a voyage of self discovery. She nearly didn't make it. Only 250 miles out from Newfoundland she sailed into a Force 9 gale that took out her self steering gear and her primary mainsail. “I decided that I could somehow make myself steer the boat for the next 2100 miles without it. If prisoners of the Holocaust could survive weeks in trains heading for torture and death, I could endure three weeks of sitting in one place steering towards my dreams. But it was to be an endurance challenge beyond my imagination.” It was during this traumatic time that her deep connection to playing Irish music empowered her east across the Atlantic to Ireland. The conditions she encountered were horrendous, experiencing only six calm days during the thirty-three day voyage. Donna ended up staying in Ireland for a year and it was here that her dream of spending an extended period at sea materialised. She left Ireland in 2003 en route for New Zealand, but after a major storm in the Bay of Biscay, she realised that *Inspired Insanity* wasn't properly equipped for the Southern Ocean, so she sailed back to the Virgin Islands via two and a half months in the Cape Verde Islands. It took Donna a year and half to recover her momentum.

These voyages, although momentous in their own right, were really the entrée to her dream quest of a solo circumnavigation which started in Newport Rhode Island in November 2005. Rounding the Cape of Good Hope she encountered the first of many Southern Ocean gales, “By late afternoon the swells were at 45ft, growing still with increasing winds. The breaking crests are steeper now. I'm beginning to feel fear; the potential to capsize is increasing. The dynamics intensifying, yet the beauty and glory are beyond magnificent. The sounds are intense; the crush and the rush and then a sudden lull. The boat stalls as the peaks, with the foam and milky-white sea, explode around me.” Blasted by squall after squall, she spent days standing in the companionway mesmerized by the swells which relentlessly lifted her stern into the air and then dropped it down again. “It is the world in reverse. I rarely look forward. My world approaches from behind.”



*Inspired Insanity at anchor*

Now safely in New Zealand, Donna has three more months of repair work on “Inspired Insanity” before she sets out on the second leg of her journey – which will take her east across the Southern Ocean, round Cape Horn and up the east coast of the Americas and home. A momentous voyage, that would freak-out the hardest of sailors amongst us. Her budget is extremely limited and although she's doing much of the work herself, she says that a lot of other hands are working alongside her. “New Zealand is truly the country of hospitality! A place where service is given from the heart because as they say, 'I just couldn't sleep at night if.....' they didn't give you a fair deal and a kind, genuine smile. What an amazing country”. Milford Cruising Club has adopted her, hauling 'Inspired Insanity' out and putting her in their yard for nothing; Westhaven Marina gave her a couple of free nights when she first arrived in Auckland and she's enjoyed the warmth of many new found friends' homes.



Bob McDavitt giving Donna weather advice

Before Donna can leave for the second leg of her journey, she has an immediate need for some essential equipment to ensure the safety of her and her yacht. If you feel moved to be part of her incredible story, she is more than happy to email a list to anyone willing to help. In return Donna is available to provide a fabulous evening's entertainment. As an accomplished speaker, musician and singer, she will inspire and motivate all those fortunate enough to spend time in her company. She is happy to speak anywhere about her travels, solo sailing, women's issues and the potential in all of us to live life to the full. You'll find her enthusiasm contagious. I suspect it will spark you into some self-examination, maybe prompt you to take stock of your life and even start you off on a new course!

Although the underlying purpose of Donna's incredible voyage is very personal, she never imagined the powerful inspiration she would become to

hundreds of others along the way. "All along I have had a sense that it wasn't just for my personal growth. I have sensed it would teach me things relevant to others to share." In July this year she received an award from the US based Stay-n-Out / Serendipity Programme for encouragement she'd given to the men and women involved in it. (The philosophy behind it is to equip its inmates with the life-skills to support their commitment to not re-offend.)

Donna has already undertaken several speaking engagements in NZ and is available for more up until the time she leaves in late November. She can be contacted by email on [donnalange@hotmail.com](mailto:donnalange@hotmail.com) or on mobile 021 160 9013. More details of Donna's trip can be viewed at [www.donnalange.com](http://www.donnalange.com)

Her latest CD, ALONE AT SEA, is available for \$20.00 and can be got by contacting her.



Donna does most of her own boat work



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