

Paul Ridley, Row for Hope: A Journey Completed June 7, 2009 Welcome to Yale Cancer Center Answers with Drs. Ed Chu and Francine Foss, I am Bruce Barber. Dr. Chu is Deputy Director and Chief of Medical Oncology at Yale Cancer Center and he is an internationally recognized expert on colorectal cancer. Dr. Foss is a Professor of Medical Oncology and Dermatology and she is an expert in the treatment of lymphomas. If you would like to join the discussion, you can contact the doctors directly. The address is canceranswers@yale.edu and the phone number is 1888-234-4YCC. This evening Ed and Francine welcome Paul Ridley. Paul is the founder of Row for Hope, a non-profit organization dedicated to funding melanoma research, and Paul recently completed an amazing solo trans-Atlantic journey to support melanoma research at Yale.

Chu Let's start off by having you tell us a little bit about your amazing journey that you just took, that took you across the Atlantic Ocean.

Ridley The short story is that it was an 87-day trip covering more than 3000 miles from the Canary Islands right off Morocco, to Antigua in the Caribbean, completely solo and unsupported. No chase boat, no resupply, no getting off for a hot shower half way across. It was just me and my 19-foot boat all alone in the Atlantic.

Foss So, Paul this is a real tour de force. I wonder if you could talk to us a little bit about the course and how you picked that course.

Ridley The course that I took was a trade-wind route, that was the idea at the time, it turned out to be a terrible year for trade winds on the Atlantic, but it's a typical crossing route taking advantage of winds coming off the Sahara blowing east to west all the way to the Caribbean. I took a sort of southerly course right off the bat going 700 or 800 miles south before making a right, basically, and heading straight westwards for the Caribbean.

Foss How did you stay on course?

Ridley It was more of an art than a science, certainly. Basically, I could take an angle off of the wind, but for the most part I was really at the mercy of the wind. So, if you look at my track it would be zigzagging all over the place and the idea of staying on course was not always up to me.

Foss For those of us who are not navigators, did you navigate by compass, by the stars, or both?

Ridley I mostly relied on my GPS and my compass for day to day making sure I was going in the right direction. I was trained to do celestial navigation by the stars, luckily, I never had to do that.

Foss How did you do that?

Ridley I converted the time into mp3 file http://www.yalecancercenter.org/podcast/Answers_Jun-07-09.mp3 it, but it was comforting to know that if everything went down, I could still make it to Antigua.

Chu Now, you mentioned it just a little while ago, and it doesn't sound like your boat was all that big. Can you tell us a little bit about the boat and how it was fitted?

Ridley The boat was custom built and custom designed for me. What that means is that it fit me really well, and one of the effects of that is that there was a lot of extra space. For example, the cabin where I lived was about 6 feet 5 inches long, long enough for me to lie down in, but at 6'2", which is how tall I am, there is not a lot of room to get comfortable. There is about a 4 foot open section on deck where I would do the rowing, but other than that it is pretty much the 19-foot boat, there is not enough room for a bowling alley.

Chu This boat was designed in such a way that it could withstand the rigors of the Atlantic Ocean. I can imagine you must have

experienced some pretty tough weather?Ridley Yeah, this boat is very much an open water boat. Yes it's a rowing boat, it doesn't have a motor or oars, but at the same time it could handle anything that that part of the Atlantic could have thrown at me at that time of the year. The builder and the designer said that they thought it was capable of handling 40 foot waves without a problem. Thankfully, I never saw 40 foot waves. I did see about 25 to 30 footers, but it was good to know that I still had a little bit of a buffer before I got into the peak of what the boat would be capable of withstanding.Foss For those of us who may have rowed say a canoe or a sea kayak, can you give us a little bit of a comparison as to what it was like to row this boat?Ridley Yeah, it was a lot heavier than a lot of the other boats that you would see out on the flat water and out in the sound, but other than that the motion was more or less the same. The boats that I trained in, for example, were about 31 pounds; my boat when I left the Canaries was more like 1500. So it was heavy, but when I am carrying all my food and all of my supplies for what turned out to be almost a 90-day trip, that's going to happen, but thankfully the motion was pretty familiar.Chu Before you embarked on this adventure, before you even thought about this as an idea, were you an active rower?Ridley Yeah, I come from a rowing background, I rowed in college, and I sort of had the bug. I also5:25 into mp3 file http://www.yalecancercenter.org/podcast/Answers_Jun-07-09.mp3 was two and a half years into an ocean rowing specific training program. So, think lots of rowing obviously, but also long duration, low intensity exercise that would prepare me to at least stay healthy for the first 10 days or so of my trip when my body would be conditioned to row what turned out to be 10, 12, 14 hours a day.Chu On a typical day, if you are rowing 10, 12, 14 hours, how many miles can you row during that timeframe?Ridley It would depend a lot on the weather and the wind. I think my fastest day was 55 miles.Chu Wow.Ridley I mean there are also days when I got blown backwards. There is nothing like rowing all day and finding that you are farther from the finish line then when you started, but that's sort of part of the game.Chu Was there any way to prevent you from being blown backwards?Ridley Yeah, I brought a sea anchor, which is basically a big underwater parachute that when inflated fills with water and it will slow down your backward progress. So that helped, but there was a period of six days, for example, when the winds had turned against me and I could not row because rowing would have been even less productive than just sitting there, and I lost 35 miles over six days, and you can imagine what that felt like after I had been on the water already for 65 days and by that point I was really looking forward to getting back to dry land.Foss Can you talk about the planning for this trip, for instance, did you plan it for a certain time of year based on weather?Ridley I thought this route through and talked to a lot of people that knew the Atlantic a lot better than I did and that's how we came up with the early winter timeframe for when I left. I left January 1st and arrived in Antigua on March 29. The planning for this was massive and it took about three years, everything from logistics of how to get the boat over to the other side to the starting line, to the food, and what kind of special oars do I need, and a lot of safety measures, of course.Chu Did you

have to pack all the food for the entire trip at one time or were there various stops along the way where you would get refueled with food and water?8:04 into mp3 file http://www.yalecancercenter.org/podcast/Answers_Jun-07-09.mp3Ridley

I packed everything in the Canaries and sealed the front compartment and never took on any additional food the entire trip. I left on day one with all of the food that I needed for the trip. My water, thankfully, came from an electric water desalinator that was powered from solar panels that I had on the boat. So I didn't have to carry my own water and instead I could make it every day as I went.Foss What kind of diet did you have while at sea for that long?Ridley I had the great joy of getting to eat lots of calories, with that said, it's not like I could eat three pizzas every day. All of my food was freeze dried, sort of astronaut food. You boil two cups of water, put it into the bag full of dried food and wait eight minutes, and then there is your lasagna. It was okay at first, but as you can imagine there was the repetitive nature of the same thing over and over and over.Foss When you got off the boat, what was the first thing you wanted to eat?Ridley I had a hamburger and French fries.Chu There you go, typical US style.Ridley Yeah.Chu I read somewhere, I think maybe on your website, that you were consuming 8000 to 9000 calories a day, is that right?Ridley Yes, well that was the goal and I don't know that I ever got that high. I was probably closer to 5000 or 6000 and that was eating as much as I possibly could, eating all the time and even whole chocolate bars at a time, king-sized Snickers bars, energy bars, and Gatorade mix, everything, and I still could only get to about 6000 calories.Chu Wow.Ridley And even with all of that, while I out there I lost 30 pounds.Chu I was going to say you look a little less hefty then when we first met before you took this trip.Ridley Part of my preparation was to put on some extra fat that I could then burn during my row, and most people expect to lose 20 to 25 pounds. I was certainly glad that I put on an extra 15:10:15 into mp3 file http://www.yalecancercenter.org/podcast/Answers_Jun-07-09.mp3 pounds above where I normally would have been because I needed it losing 30 pounds. I have put it back on in the last three weeks, which has also been a lot of fun.Foss How did you deal with the solitude being out there, did you have any cell phone communication with anybody?Ridley I did have a satellite phone, and even though it was really expensive, I did make a very short phone call home most nights. There is nothing like hearing a friendly voice from your family or your friends to keep you motivated out there and that was huge for me.Chu And you also had a daily blog, is that right?Ridley I updated my blog every day and the blog is still available through rowforhope.com. I would write on the blog and it was a great way to chronicle my experience. This was a once in a lifetime thing for me so its great to have that record, but even more importantly at the time, people would send notes of encouragement and comments on each of my days postings and I would get those back on the Atlantic, so that was a huge motivating factor for me.Chu Was there ever a time where you lost communication?Ridley That satellite phone was picky, I guess it should be expected, but my communication actually held up pretty well. That's one thing I cannot complain about. I did have some other equipment issues, but

the satellite phone was okay. Foss You talked about motivation and getting encouraged by the blogs, but can you talk to us about motivation in general. It must have taken a tremendous amount of motivation to get this trip organized in the first place. Could you share with us some of the reasons why you went after this and how you kept yourself motivated? Ridley My expedition, of course, is part of a larger effort, and that's cancer research, fundraising projects to benefit Yale Cancer Center, which has been fantastic and hopefully we can talk more about that in a little bit. It was a fundraiser inspired by the loss of my mother in 2001 to skin cancer. At the same time, a few months later, my father was diagnosed with prostate cancer and was successfully treated and is healthy. We had two very different outcomes and it really showed how important cancer research is to people when they are diagnosed. 12:46 into mp3 file http://www.yalecancercenter.org/podcast/Answers_Jun-07-09.mp3 Foss We will talk more about that Paul when we return after the break. You are listening to Yale Cancer Center Answers and we are here with Paul Ridley, founder of Row for Hope. Foss Welcome back to Yale Cancer Center Answers. This is Dr. Francine Foss and I am joined by my co-host Dr. Ed Chu, and Paul Ridley, an amazing supporter of Yale Cancer Center. Paul rowed across the Atlantic Ocean to raise money, and for cancer awareness. Paul, you were talking a little bit before the break about what motivated you and your personal experience with cancer. Can you talk a little bit more about that? Ridley As I was saying earlier, my family has an unfortunate, but also all too common, history with cancer. When I lost my mom in 2001, where that left my sister and I was with the knowledge that we needed to do something, do our part to make progress in the world of cancer research. I made the connection with ocean rowing only five years later. And that really started with the founding of Row for Hope, which is a cancer research fundraising organization, it's a 501(c)(3) non-profit, and that provided a lot of the framework and also inspiration for my row. Chu As you say, your mom unfortunately passed away from skin cancer, and the kind of skin cancer she had was melanoma? Ridley That's right. Chu Which we have talked about on the show before, but just to remind our listeners, melanoma is viewed as the most aggressive type of skin cancer, and unfortunately, it is the type of skin cancer when in an advanced stage, unfortunately can lead to death. 15:33 into mp3 file http://www.yalecancercenter.org/podcast/Answers_Jun-07-09.mp3 Ridley My mom was actually diagnosed with skin cancer for the first time when she was in her 30s, fought it successfully and was healthy for almost 20 years, so I grew up with a very valuable fear of the sun, I think. It may sound a little ironic, given my family history with skin cancer, that I just went out and rowed across the ocean in the sun for three months. Chu Along those lines, because you did just row for three months across the Atlantic Ocean, did you take any special precautions in terms of protecting yourself from the sun? Ridley Yeah, absolutely. That was a big focus for me and of my team in our preparation. My strategy was to do a few things, one of them, most importantly, was to stay out of the sun during the heat of the day; that's kind of a no brainer, right. I would take about a two hour break

in the middle of the day, every day, and it also happens to be lunch time, and after already rowing for six hours that day I was ready for the break. I would also wear UV proof clothing. I was generously sponsored by a company named Coolibar, which is a start-up that makes UV proof clothing of all sorts, and of course sunscreen with really high SPF ratings.

Foss Can you talk a little bit more about Row for Hope? Is this an organization that other people could get involved with?

Ridley Certainly, Row for Hope is a small start-up non-profit founded by my sister Joy, and I, back in 2007. We are very much a grassroots organization where we don't have corporate support, of course we'd love to, but right now we are supported by people who are a lot like us, that have been affected by cancer in one way or another. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people like that, but we survive on small donations from individuals, you know, hundred bucks or less, and Americans have been very generous so far, especially as our press coverage around this row has increased, and it's all on rowforhope.com.

Chu Yeah, since you have come back from this amazing journey you have been on various talk shows and there has been a lot of publicity, how have you found all of that to be?

Ridley It has been a little overwhelming. It was very surreal doing interviews with CNN from the Atlantic, which I did a couple of times, and I was also on the phone with them within an hour of stepping foot on land. I didn't expect to spend my first three weeks basically doing three to four press interviews every day, but it has been a great opportunity to spread the word about Row for Hope, promote Yale Cancer Center and all the great work that has been going on here, and also get in touch with people that have similar stories to my own.

Foss Were you able to anticipate that this would be as successful as it turned out?

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Ridley We dreamed of being able to tell a story like this after the row was complete. This row has been as successful as we could have possibly imagined. Of course fundraising has been difficult in these tough economic times, but of course the support that we have got from people, not just monetary, has been great, and the press coverage has been incredible. I am happy to say that my row was safe and reasonably uneventful, and I didn't get a single painful sunburn.

Chu That's fantastic. I am just curious, obviously you were successful at rowing across the Atlantic, can you tell us how Row for Hope has done in terms of raising funds?

Ridley I know that we have cleared \$100,000 for Yale Cancer Center, which we are very proud of and that's going to continue as I shift into the stage of speaking tours, talking to groups, rotary clubs, boy scouts, schools, and things like that, which is going to be a lot more fun than being alone in a row boat was. It will be great to actually get out and talk to the people that followed me and continue to spread the word and raise money.

Foss Paul, if people out there wanted to contribute is there a way that they can get in touch with you?

Ridley Yes, definitely. The best way is through rowforhope.com and we make it easy to get in touch with us and very easy to donate. It can all be done online though rowforhope.com and they can also learn more about my expedition, about Row for Hope as an organization, and also hear us gush about how great it has been to be partnered with Yale Cancer Center.

Chu

What are your next steps in terms of planning? Are there any other rowing events, maybe not necessarily for you alone, but maybe including some of your supporters? Ridley Yeah. We are trying to figure out the next steps now. Of course my row is complete, but there is still a lot of progress to be made when it comes to cancer research and fundraising. This is going to be a life long cause for us, and my sister and me. The next steps probably won't be as exciting necessarily, as rowing across the ocean, but hopefully the impact will be the same. Foss When people like you think about, and go ahead and raise money for cancer research, can you tell us a little about what your expectations are, what are you hoping that money does in terms of advancing where we are now with cancer? Ridley Well one thing that's been a privilege for me has been to actually get to know the people that are doing the research and everyone that's contributing to the progress that's being made 21:27 into mp3 file http://www.yalecancercenter.org/podcast/Answers_Jun-07-09.mp3 everyday in little tiny steps. They are changing people's lives and improving people's lives, and there are a lot of really smart people trying to solve these problems, but all we can hope for is to keep moving in the right direction. My experience working with the people at Yale Cancer Center has been that they are definitely on the right track and it will be great to contribute to that. Foss Ed and I can reiterate as researchers that this is critically important at this point in time when federal funding for research is being cut, we really depend on donations and people like you who are willing to get out there and help us raise money. Chu Absolutely. Francine and I, and the rest of the Cancer Center, just want to thank you and your family for everything that you have done and that you will continue to do on behalf of Yale Cancer Center. I am just curious Paul, how did you hook up with the researches at Yale? Ridley Well, I knew the cause I wanted to support, but I didn't know anything about the cancer research world. So what I did was talk to a handful of different well-known cancer research institutions, most of them in the northeast, and what I found with Yale Cancer Center was that is was the right balance for us in terms of a really well-known place with a great reputation connected to Yale, which is a name that everybody knows, and of course with that background we knew there was great work going on here. But what really drew us to Yale was the family atmosphere that we felt when we started talking to people here. It has been great working with Yale, everyone has been incredibly friendly, accommodating, and welcoming and it's really an incredible place. Foss I am curious as to whether any patients have contacted you? Ridley Yes. In fact there have been a handful, certainly, that were following my expedition and when they were sending notes back to me I would read things from people saying, "I am being treated at Yale Cancer Center and this is a great place. Keep it up." Just hugely motivating for me. When I first met Dr. Sznol, I knew I was in a good place when he brought me into his office and started showing me, I guess they were CAT scans, of shrinking tumors, and that was the first time that I could say, "Wow, this is making a difference for real people today," and I agree I am no expert in cancer research, I leave that to you guys, I will do the rowing, but everything I have heard and everything I have

learned about Yale has just been fantastic.Foss It sounds like you have built up a tremendous amount of hope for a lot of patients, particularly patients with these terrible skin cancers. I was just wondering, going back to your24:31 into mp3 file http://www.yalecancercenter.org/podcast/Answers_Jun-07-09.mp3 experience with your mother, did you have hope at that point that there was any effective treatment for her disease?Ridley Unfortunately her experience was not one that left too much room to be hopeful. Unfortunately, when she had a recurrence it was already in such a late stage that the treatment that was available at that time for her was pretty limited. She met with doctors at great places, but you know, the progress just had not been made.Foss Hope is such an important word for cancer patients and I think all that you have done and all that you have said today will hopefully help a lot of people out there who are struggling with a lot of these same issues; not only with melanoma, but with other cancers that aren't really curable.Ridley Yeah, that's what this is all about. When I first set out to row across the Atlantic people said they didn't think it could be done, and it required defying the odds. I don't want to simplify things, but hopefully my row has proven that people can achieve what's unexpected, and if that could provide any encouragement or additional hope for cancer patients this is a success.Chu I am just curious to know, if we were here in the studio 10 years ago, could you have fathomed that you would have done such a journey?Ridley I doubt it; I think I am a pretty unlikely guy to have now rowed across the Atlantic. For example, I don't like the water, I don't like swimming, I am not good at swimming, and I couldn't run a 5K race 10 years ago. I played baseball, I wasn't an endurance athlete. This was something that I found that once I dedicated myself to the idea it very much came about, but you know, 10 years ago, who knew.Chu I may not have asked you this question in the first segment, but has anyone else ever done this type of solo row across the Atlantic Ocean?Ridley Yes, believe it or not, there is a small community of ocean rowers out there, most of them are in the United Kingdom, and that was the knowledge base that I tapped. It is much rarer for people to row the Atlantic solo. A handful or more have done it in doubles or four men boats, but I am the third American ever to have rowed an ocean solo, and also the youngest by I think 10 or 12 years.Foss Paul, you talked about the fact that your sister helped you to form this organization, and certainly we should give kudos to her for all of this as well. Can you tell us a little bit about what her role is in the organization now?27:32 into mp3 file http://www.yalecancercenter.org/podcast/Answers_Jun-07-09.mp3RidleyMy sister Joy was one of the co-founders for Row for Hope and she has really been my partner the entire time. We have the same motivation when it comes to supporting cancer research and as much as I was alone on the Atlantic, this was very much a team effort, and not just Joy, but a good friend of ours who lived across the street when we were growing up, a friend named Liz, really made up the core of the team. We started Row for Hope from just an idea and we would sit around in a coffee shop and talk about it and we built it from nothing. Now we are very happy to be looking around having achieved so much.Chu Paul, you really are an inspiration to all of us and Row for Hope

really, as Francine said, gives everyone involved in the cancer field, the cancer world, and the cancer patients, a great deal of hope. Thanks for joining with us this evening. Ridley My pleasure. Thank you. Chu You have been listening to Yale Cancer Center Answers and again I would like to thank our guest for this evening's show, Paul Ridley, for joining us and for all that he has done to support cancer research, and specifically, Yale Cancer Center's Melanoma Research Program. Until next time, I am Ed Chu from Yale Cancer Center wishing you a safe and healthy week. If you have questions or would like to share your comments, go to yalecancercenter.org where you can also subscribe to our podcast and find written transcripts of past programs. I am Bruce Barber and you are listening to the WNPR Health Forum from Connecticut Public Radio.