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Row, Bob, Row!

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Beginning as a young boy, Bob Lynch spent as much time as he could in a dinghy out on Buttermilk Bay. He just loved to row.

But rowing eventually took a back seat in life for Mr. Lynch, who ended up working for 24 years as an administrative law judge, or "appeals referee," for the State of Florida.

Now, however, the Monument Beach summer resident is back on the water some four or so mornings a week, rowing out from the Monument Beach marina in a bright yellow wherry. Written on the side of the rowing boat is "Row Bob Row."

Some people walk for the fight against cancer. Bob Lynch rows. This summer, he is preparing for a 175-mile row along the shores of the Florida Panhandle.

In 1995, when he was 47 years old, he was diagnosed with cancer and told he had somewhere between three and seven years to live.

He learned he had Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia, a rare cancer that affects plasma cells. He was unusually young to have the disease, which usually attacks those 65 or older.

It is so rare a disease, he joked, that only those who have it are able to pronounce it.

It was not so funny when he was diagnosed, however. Those with the disease have abnormal plasma cells that multiply out of control. They invade the bone marrow, lymph nodes, and spleen and cause the blood to thicken.

His doctor told him at the time, however, that it was lucky that he had consulted him, since that doctor had already treated three patients with Waldenstrom's, making him something of an expert. When Mr. Lynch asked whether he could get together with those other patients, he was told that, unfortunately, none of the three were still living.

"Zero for three. This is not good news," he said, adding that he had never before felt so alone.

He underwent 18 months of chemotherapy, continuing his judicial work in south Florida.

About six months later, while surfing the Internet, hoping to learn something more about Waldenstrom's, he found a support group operating in Sarasota, Florida.

He contacted the group, and two days later had all this paperwork containing information about different treatments and names of people to contact.

There was, at that time, no money for research and the group only had about 25 members.

In 1998, Mr. Lynch decided to take early retirement. He and his wife, Sue, who worked for 30 years as an educator, including working for many years as an administrator at Florida State University, began to make plans to raise money for Waldenstrom's research. He planned to row all around the State of Florida.

So far, he has rowed from Key West to Miami, from Melbourne to Miami, from Stuart to Ft. Myers (across the Florida Canal) and from Melbourne to Jacksonville, in other words, across the state, around Key West, and all along the state's western shores.

To date, the rows have raised over \$130,000 for Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia research.

In November, he and his friend, a cinematographer named Cork Friedman, will again row in support of cancer research for the International Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia Foundation.

The row will cover approximately 175 miles of the Florida Panhandle, from Pensacola to Carrabelle.

In previous rows, the duo rowed in two single dories. This year they are teaming together in an 18-foot double Heritage rowing dory, donated by Little River Marine in Pensacola.

A 40-foot boat, the "Miss Marisa," will serve as an escort for the row, a place where the men can sleep during the event. Its captain has donated the boat's services; another person will be paying for its gas; Sue Lynch takes care of all of the administrative details of the rows.

All the men have to do is row.

Aside from the larger sponsors, many people will be donating from 50 cents to \$5 a mile for the row, either to Mr. Lynch or directly to the IWMF.

That foundation, Mr. Lynch said, has already given about \$1 million to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute for research. Mr. Lynch considers Dr. Steven P. Treon of that institute one of the leading Waldenstrom's experts.

The IWMF also funds research studies in a number of other institutions, Mr. Lynch said.

Unlike other cancers, according to information provided by the IWMF, Waldenstrom's is a slow-progressing disorder and treatment is geared to symptoms, not a timetable.

For more than 10 years, Mr. Lynch did not have another series of chemotherapy.

Instead, he rowed.

A short time ago, however, his doctors told him that his blood had thickened so much that he needed further treatment. This time, he said, he had the advantage of 10 years of medical research. He had a three-month and then a six-month course of targeted treatment, using some of the cutting-edge drugs that IWMF fundraising helped to discover. He has, himself, participated in clinical trial studies.

Mr. Lynch's recent treatments did not have the same side effects as the treatment he had originally undergone.

He was quickly back rowing.

During the summers, Bob and Sue Lynch live in Monument Beach with his sister, Patricia Moore. Mrs. Moore, in turn, lives in Florida with the Lynches during the winter, an arrangement that they made after Mrs. Moore's husband, longtime Bourne Middle School teacher and coach Alan Moore, died in 2002.

His rowing wherry, a recreational and not a racing scull, has oars that are so light (1.5 pounds each) that one could twirl them like batons if they were not 9.9 feet long. The seat on the boat is on a track. One rows, Mr. Lynch said, by using primarily thigh muscles 80 percent of the time, and arms, just 20 percent.

November will be his last long row, although he hopes to continue to help support the IWMF.

With the help of their cinematographer friend, Bob and Sue Lynch have made a documentary. It turned out to be as much about his spiritual journey as about Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia, rowing, or battling cancer, Mr. Lynch said.

He hopes individuals and church groups will show it, and talk about how one handles bleak times. There has been discussion of network broadcasting of the film.

Those wanting to donate to the upcoming row or take a look at Mr. Lynch's videos of past rows can visit RowBobRow.com or, alternatively, donate to the IWMF directly at iwmf.com.

Those who would like to sponsor showing of the documentary can call Mr. Lynch at 508-759-2160, or stop and talk with him mornings at Monument Beach.

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