

John Otterbacher

Love, Adventure, and the other 4%

About John

When John Otterbacher talks about “living out beyond your fears,” he is speaking from experience.

He grew up in the working-class neighborhoods of Grand Rapids, Michigan, paying for college with a series of factory and construction jobs.

After graduating from Aquinas College with a degree in Psychology, he completed his Masters and Doctorate degrees in Clinical Psychology at St. Louis University. He has done additional post-graduate studies in Urban Affairs, Human Relations, Political Process, and Organizational Development, prompting the *Detroit Free Press* to describe him as “being educated within an inch of saturation.”

John first became politically active in the efforts of Robert Kennedy and Dr. King. Upon returning to Grand Rapids as an assistant professor and clinical psychologist at Aquinas College, he was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives at age 29 and the Michigan Senate at age 31. During his eight years in the legislature, John was a firebrand on health issues, leading successful fights for nursing home reform, the development of a statewide emergency medical service system, and passage of both a new Public Health Code and the Michigan Mental Health Code. The *Detroit Free Press* described him succinctly as “a refreshing change at a moment when political thought is wallowing in stagnation.” John ran for the U.S. Senate in 1978, losing in the Democratic primary to Senator Carl Levin.

John returned to private practice after his tenure in the legislature, spending a decade providing consultation to individuals and organizations.

In the mid-1980s, John took up sailing, spending three years “learning” in the Great Lakes. He and Barbara then took their children, John Ryan (13) and Katie (8 months) on a fifteen-month cruise to the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. During this period, he also sailed single-handed across the Atlantic, from Casablanca to Barbados.



About John (continued)

In 1998, John and Barbara did an extended encore cruise with their girls Katie (9) and Erin (5), spending the next six years sailing the Atlantic (four crossings), the North Sea, the Baltic, the Mediterranean, and the Caribbean. During those years John began writing seriously.

Since returning to Grand Rapids in 2004, John divides his time between writing, speaking, and a limited private practice. He has been published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *Sailing, Cruising World*, and *Yachting Monthly* (England). He has recently been published in *Thin Ice* (Eerdman Press). *Sailing Grace*, his first full-length book, has been honored as “Best New Non-Fiction Book” by the National Indie Excellence Awards, “Michigan Notable Book,” and as a finalist for “Best Book” Award by USA Book News. It was retitled *Outrageous Grace* for international distribution by Adlard Coles (London).

A screen adaptation of *Sailing Grace* is currently being circulated in Hollywood.

With the growing acclaim for *Sailing Grace*, John has become a sought-after speaker to diverse groups and organizations including health care and corporate, educational, nautical, and literary.

Additional Information

[Read more about John in this MLive article.](#)