

# The Scuba Sports Club of Westchester, New York

Our 45th year serving the local and northeast dive community !

## The Scuba Sport Club's Summer/Fall 2020 Newsletter



Gary Lehman, Newsletter Editor



The Anchor Line  
Al Miller, President



**Welcome to the Summer /Fall 2020 issue of The Scuba Sports Club Sea Swells!** We invite all members of the diving community to contribute; please contact Gary at [gary.a.lehman@gmail.com](mailto:gary.a.lehman@gmail.com) with your articles and photos! Our Club Newsletter includes features about our Club's diving and social calendar; our

diving adventures, social/educational events, occasional equipment and health issue discussions, and profiles on some of the more colorful and intrepid characters in our local diving community (of which there are many!), and other features of interest.

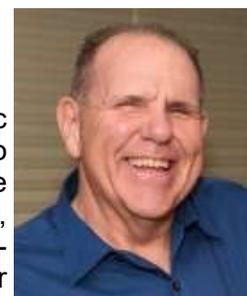
We had such plans for 2020. Roatan. North Carolina. Socorro Islands. Florida Wreck Trek. Sea of Cortez. It has been a terribly rough year for so many of us and operators involved with diving. But we've adjusted, we have been using Zoom for our meetings. Let's just get through this together, this too shall pass, and soon we'll be giant striding off the stern and backward rolls off the zodiak! What we save on diving vacations this year will fund us next year!

Still, we have a great issue here. There is fantastic local diving — we'll read all about it. And Australia, New Zealand and Statia! And 1000 Islands! And iconic fish species! And whales and moss bunkers! And our medical column, what diving means to us, our best dive times and mysteries of life! *Sustain us till we dive again- celebrating our best diving memories!*

And lets get inspired all over again by learning about Carl Brashear - *MAN OF HONOR* !

Let's wait till a vaccine, STAY HEALTHY, make our plans, dream diving, and make all our dreams come true — with... **The Scuba Sports Club!**

Gary  
Sea Swells Newsletter Editor



The Corona virus pandemic has changed the way we go about our lives. Fear of the virus has limited air travel, and closed borders have impacted our dive plans and our travel wish lists.

The Scuba Sports Club, with a normally-active social and dive calendar, has come to a halt this year in certain respects.

At this point in time though, businesses are beginning to reopen, and travel seems to be improving. There are hints of a vaccine by year-end.

As a Club, we had travel plans scheduled to several locations during the second half of the year. We also hoped to resume our regular monthly meetings in the near future and wanted to get back to a social calendar that promotes camaraderie among our members.

Until we feel it is safe to return to normal however, our Zoom meetings will continue to serve us well with exciting presentations offered to you.

I look forward to upcoming TSSC events -- but in the meantime, I hope that you and your families remain safe and healthy.

Al Miller  
President



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## TSSC CLUB OFFICERS and DIRECTORS 2020

( ...We always welcome our Club membership to join our leadership team !!! )

President	Al Miller
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Secretary	Michelle Memoli
Membership	Kevin Cushing
Dive Planning	Jack Ricotta
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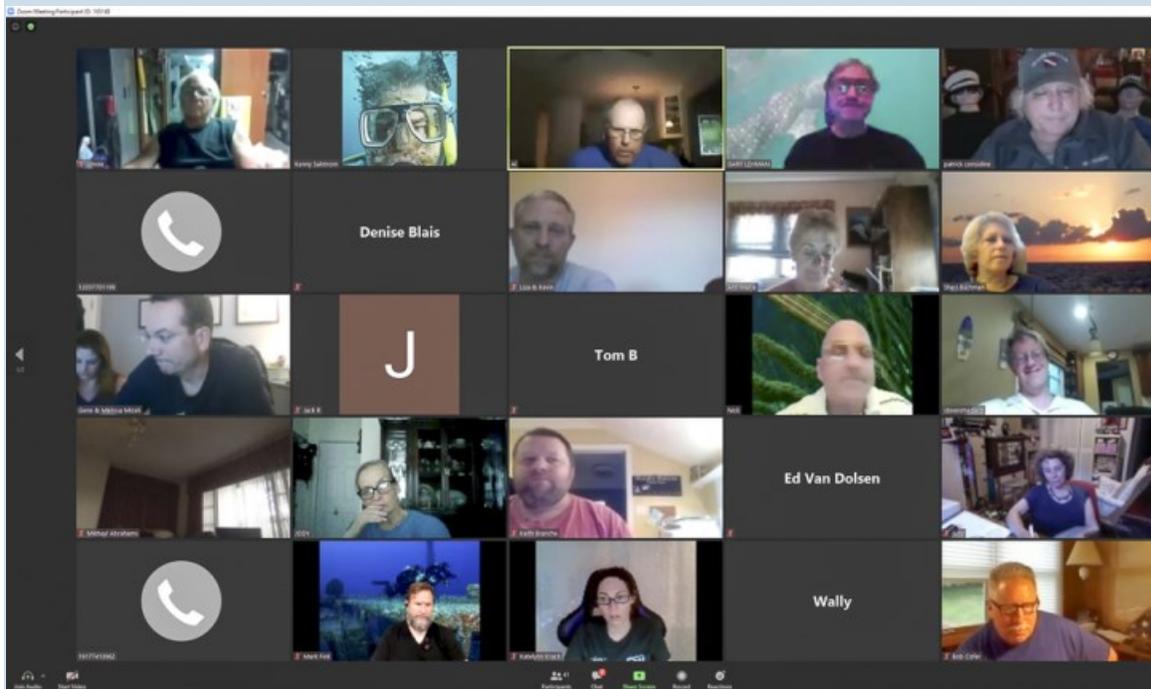
# What's on ZOOM ??

Who is ZOOMING WHO !!

Kenny Salstrom , Executive Director



Our General Meetings have been working out on Zoom....



Keeping our Club together, in style !  
Keeping the scuba diving dreams, ALIVE !!!





**Club Dive Trips —  
Club 'Deco' Events  
Dive Planning Calendar for 2021**



***What's on the radar !***  
**Jack Ricotta, Dive Planner**

This year has been a bust for all divers and the travel business in general – worldwide.

Our plans were scrapped left and right in 2020. The only benefit is that many of us were able to build up our slush funds for more scuba gear, and we can also squirrel some funds away for great plans and dive locations for next year.

Hopefully that will be the case. Let us just get that vaccine please....

The Long Island Dive Association Film Festival is “virtual” in 2021. We have been “zooming” our meetings. BTS was canceled this year, and WHO KNOWS if it will happen in 2021...HOPE SO ! The Explorers Club calendar is looking pretty bare, and there ain't no Sea Stories this year apparently.

So for now, we'll just look forward to 2021.

Thankfully the Roatan trip is still on for April, with availability for those still on the fence. Plans for Florida Wreck Trek II, Bonaire and maybe Explorer II Turks & Caicos are on my dive radar. Look for Egypt 2022: liveaboard and tour of Cairo, Luxor, Alexandria. Also for those techies, next spring, I am planning a Rebreather Certification course in Grand Cayman.

Where else do you want to dive? Let me know. We'll get it in the hopper.

Until we get thru this, just stay safe! If need be, a refresher course can be arranged. After the refresher course, the first round is on Al Miller! (sorry Al, it was Gary's idea)

Safe virtual diving (for now...)

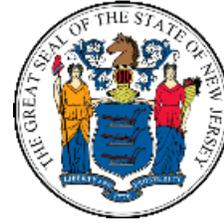
Jack





## Diving NJ and Long Island Sound

Keith Branche



There are several boats to choose from in the area of the NJ shore. I usually dive alone, since I have yet to secure a dive buddy who is willing to dive in cold water when the viz is great at 20ft. I use Spring Lake NJ as a home base for my diving the shore. I have a home in Spring Lake, so when I am there diving is on the menu. If I am just driving down for the day, I will rinse all my gear at the Spring Lake firehouse. I am a member.

I like to book with *Divers Two* in Avon-by-the-sea on dive trips. Joe and Dan are great people and their shop uses a couple boats. The *Venture III* out of Belmar NJ is a fine boat. It has plenty of room and a good crew. Captain Paul will hit a lot of closer wrecks or as they are now rock and wood piles. A great boat to visit is the *Gypsy Blood* in Pt Pleasant NJ. I was concerned that this boat had a Tech diver only reputation, but it really is not true. There may be rebreathers and lots of doubles, but the crew and captain are very helpful, plus the boat is really well set up for divers. They will hit some of the bigger wrecks with deeper water. Some other boats that run in the area are the *Blue Pathoms*, A smaller six pack boat where you will need to master the NJ roll for entry. Atlantic wreck drivers runs a boat through Capt. AL, but I am not sure if it is running this year. I have never been on the *Independence II*, but this boat is really just catering to the Tech Divers. It hits really deep wrecks and will do overnights. I have a friend planning to hit the *Doria* this year.

Diving the NE can be interesting. I usually go to work on just one skill, to find lobster for dinner, see wrecks and learn of their history, or just to get wet. During the summer, the bottom temp around 90 ft is around 50 degrees. I dive in a dry suit, so I don't mind. You will feel the layering of temps around 50ft. Most all of the boats will drop anchor on or near the wreck, set up a Carolina rig to the anchor line, send down a crew member to tie into the wreck prior to opening the pool. They all require you to have a wreck reel and a pony bottle. I carry 300ft of reel and a 30L pony. After you give the crew your dive time - DON'T BE LATE - get dressed and jump into the pool. We follow the anchor line to the wreck, tie off in the vicinity of the hook and explore. I have not had a dive buddy at the ocean floor for years. I run a line either around the wreck area or debris field to find those lobsters. The normal sites are crabs, lobsters, dolphins, lots of Black Bass, fluke and black drum. In NJ, you can get a free salt water angler card online, but in CT you need a license to take lobster (\$60/yr).

Long Island Sound is a bit different. I have only been out a few times with Capt. Sam's shop in Stamford CT. He has a boat out of Stamford called the *Silver Dollar*. My last trip was to the *Condor* Tug, which sank after the barge it was pushing split and took it to the bottom in minutes and killed several crew. It sits in about 60 ft of water. I have yet to see it because it was so dark at 50 ft, I could not see my hand in front of my face with my light on - ya! Forgoing the wreck, I love to hit the Stamford Lighthouse for clams. it is only 15 ft of water and you dig with your hands to find dinner. I prefer to make either Clams Casino or Stuffed Clams.

I am happy to speak with anyone further about the NJ diving!

# Diving NJ and Long Island Sound

Keith Branche





## St Eustatius

Suzi Di Firewire



As our plane approached St Eustatius Island from St Maarten, our excitement was building. There is not a lot of press about St Eustatius so our expectations were low. Since my friends were coming from all points within the US – we waited for the last to arrive in St Maarten before heading to the island. We caught the last puddle jumper of the day, the 640pm flight. Turboprop flights are always fun and watching the sun set and the island rising out of the sea always brings a sense of excitement for our group of 9 (8 divers and 1 bubble watcher) The flight is about 20 minutes.

The airport and customs office are what you would expect, TINY—but welcoming. The Dive Shop members were waiting for us to help us with our luggage, and they had arranged for a taxi to take us to the hotel. Our Driver, Bobby, was one of a handful of drivers on the island, and he ended up being our go-to guy for information and transport when needed.

Our short ride brought us to the Old Gin House which is conveniently located across the street from the Dive Shop, Scubaqua. Marieke, the Shop owner greeted us with a welcome cocktail and orientation information so we would be all set for the morning dives.

The Old Gin House is a quaint hotel –formerly a public guesthouse in the late 1700s and then a later a cotton gin. The center point is a lovely pool in the courtyard. There are 14 garden rooms that all face the courtyard. 2 ocean view rooms, 2 junior suites and 2 ocean view suites.

In the morning we had breakfast, which consisted of yogurt, fruit, juice, a baguette, cheese and a slice of ham, AND then eggs of your choice. We were instructed to put our gear outside our rooms and the gear would be shuttled to the boat.

Upon arriving at the dive shop, we confirmed we had all of our gear and met the divemasters and dive shop team. Our DM for the week, Dennis, gave us the dive briefing and we boarded an open back truck (think “MASH”) and took the short ride to the Port. Due to port rules, you must exit the truck, walk through a turn-style and re-board the truck while DM’s show paperwork to the Customs office. This process (ride, customs) takes less than 10 minutes.

Now the stuff you are waiting for – the DIVING! There are 36 dive sites, all within 20 minutes from the port. Our group of 8 was lucky, we had a private Boat, *YELLOW BOAT* (which was green!). Nitrox is preferred many dive sites are minimum 50 ft to 70 ft



## St Eustatius

Suzi Di Firewire



with a few exceeding 130+. Recommended entry off *Yellow Boat* is backward roll, then meet at the mooring line. The Dive Ops motto is - as long as you have bottom time and air – the dive continues! The conditions were great – excellent viz and abundant sea life –GIANT barracuda - turtles, turtles and more turtles, southern stingrays, spotted eagle rays, spotted drum, lobster hotels, file-fish, trunk fish, cowfish. The Marine Park is doing a great job managing the lionfish and we saw less than 6 our entire trip. Most of our dives averaged 70 minutes. Those divers low on air or bottom time must return to the line with their buddy.

There are a few wrecks – the *Charlie Brown*, *The Chien Tong*, *Stenapa*. When we dove the *Charlie Brown* we were joined by a MASSIVE old Turtle. He was literally prehistoric. He was not fazed by our presence and hung around for photo and video opportunities. These are no penetration wrecks. Our night dive on the *Chien Tong* wreck proved to be amazing, we dove among the turtles AND a first for me, the sponge crab !!

Humps dive site is the result of lava flow and lava balls and fingers, and full of juvenile sea life. Hangover reef had so much to see we couldn't keep track of all the sea critters.

The Blue Bead Dive is a treasure hunt. Blue Beads were used as currency by the Dutch West India Company to trade rum, cotton and tobacco and slaves. According to island legend, when slavery was abolished on the island, the slaves threw their beads into the sea. This is one of the shallower (muck) dives. One member of our group found a coveted blue bead.

The Dive Shop is a full-service PADI operation. They are well stocked with gear, and repairs are addressed promptly and expertly. New meaning is given to the term “dive bar” as the dive shop also has a bar to serve end-of-diving day cocktails. They have a happy hour for sunset views. Most days we enjoyed two dives in the morning, but on a handful of days we added an afternoon dive. On days where we scheduled for three dives, the dive shop arranged for lunch delivery at the dive shop. Each day, the dive shop crew took care of cleaning/rinsing our gear. Divers are responsible for their own wetsuit and booties, as well as anything else which they wish to manage themselves.

Getting around the island is relatively easy, walking distance (BUT UPHILL), and taxi costs were \$5 per person round trip. There are some awesome restaurants within walking distance of Old Gin House; an incredible food truck down by the Port (Boardwalk Café) and The Blue Bead restaurant are both short walk down the dirt road toward the port with views of the ocean. Ocean Terrace restaurant up toward town, had an eclectic mix of French, Indian and Caribbean. Meals at all establishments were reasonably priced at all the places we visited.



## St Eustatius

Suzi Di Firewire



### What to do on the off-gas day?

The Quill !! For those seeking adventure, hike the QUILL, the island's inactive volcano. You can hike to the rim and descend into the crater or circle the rim. The trails are well marked. Be sure to stop at the St. Eustatius National Parks Foundation office, (known locally as Stenapa) which is responsible for managing the ecotourism on the island to purchase your trail tag. A Tag cost was \$12.00. The trail head is about 2 miles from the hotel – but we opted to have Bobby drop us as the trail head.

The Fort Oranjestad, has an incredible view of the island and the port. A good visit for the history buff! And Statia was the first nation to officially recognize the United States of America in 1776!

### Churches and Cemeteries – some very cool old crypts !

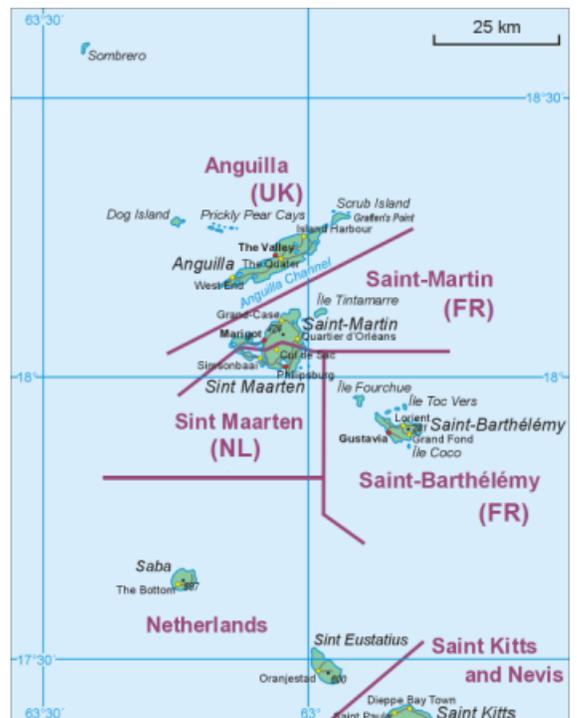
While the island's primary source of income is tourism; there are NO cruise ships and only a handful of hotel accommodations. So that old-world charm is preserved on Statia given it that discovered Gem feel !

Statius (St. Eustasius) is ESE from Virgin Island and directly south of Sint Maarten (St. Martin)... omg take me there....





**St Eustatius**  
Suzi Di Firewire





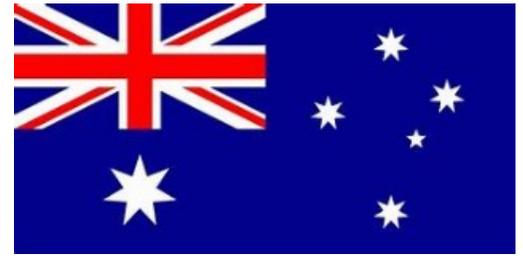
# St Eustatius

Suzi Di Firewire





## Adventure Down Under Corey Joyner



(...Be Sure To Check Out Photos at end of the article !! )

On March 2, 2020 a group of 12 hearty souls embarked on a trip of a lifetime. We came from all over the country: New York, Ohio, Philly, Maryland, and Florida. The group consisted of a conglomeration of people from different dive clubs and associations that I am affiliated with (including two from TSSC), a few family members and friends of divers. The package consisted of a 16-day trip to Australia and Fiji, with 5 flights included in the package (an additional flight for the divers). We all met up in Los Angeles which was the point of origin for our trip.

Our first stop after departing from LA was Brisbane, Australia; then we caught a connecting flight to Cairns. We bedded down for the night at an exquisite hotel and the divers had to repack gear for the divers' flight the next morning to fly out to Lizard Island to the liveaboard. Divers were only allotted a total of 45 pounds of weight for gear and belongings for the puddle jumper flight out to Lizard Island. The non-divers stayed behind to enjoy 6 night in Cairns to relax, take tours and sightsee.

On this date COVID was just beginning to be a global issue. Italy had become overrun with the contagion but by and large, the feeling was that it was limited to China and Italy, and the first cases were hitting the US but was not highly being reported or publicized.

The divers boarded the *Spirit of Freedom* liveaboard for 4 nights and days of diving pleasure. After arriving to the boat by late morning, we got our room assignments, got settled and did two afternoon dives. The dives on the first day were somewhat disappointing as they took us to a sand patch with one or two coral heads. It was explained to me later that they always do a dive at a simple location on the first day for a check out dive, so that everyone could get acclimated to their gear, the boat routine, and get properly weighted. The next 3 days we dove at better locations.



## Adventure Down Under

Corey Joyner



The itinerary for our cruise was the Coral Sea in North Australia. The viz averaged about 30-40 feet (and that is being gracious). The water column just seemed to be murkier than I had anticipated. The reef structures were expansive but not colorful. It reminded me a lot of Belize. There was enough marine life to make each dive enjoyable, but somehow I expected my dive senses to be totally immersed (no pun intended) in all types of marine life from plentiful schools of fish to pelagics and macro life. A diver wants it all, (especially after traveling that far!!!).

One of the highlights of the liveaboard portion was the shark dive. They took us to a site they call shark alley, and perched us in a cathedral type setting of coral to view the feed. We were perched in an arena of coral at about 50 feet, with about 100 feet more of bottom under us. The feed was staged on another reef pinnacle about 20 feet away and about 10 feet below where we were perched. The only part I did not like about the dive is that they perched us on living coral. None of the crew or staff seemed to think anything was wrong with this. It seems that their attitude (while not specifically vocalized and not in an arrogant manner) was that there is a limitless amount of coral around and us sitting on a perch and killing off some coral (by sitting on it) won't matter much. Usually when I go on a shark dive we are situated in a sand patch or somewhere where we are not hurting the coral and reef structure. The feed itself was awesome, with sharks swarming all around us and through us.

The food was great. The accommodations were somewhere between adequate and nice. The boat was average size, not a luxury liveaboard but not spartan accommodations either. Each stateroom had its own bathroom (a little snug but adequate) and our group had two people in a room. They also had two "steerage" staterooms that housed 4 people in bunk beds (I have no idea how they managed to share bathroom time!). The staff was very attentive, and the dive masters were knowledgeable.

Upon the divers return to Cairns, we reunited with the non-divers and enjoyed a cultural buffet dinner and were entertained with a fire making ceremony. During the evening, the non-divers regaled us with stories of their exploits on the various tours that they embarked on, and they brought us up to date on what they did around Cairns. Once again, the divers had to repack their bags to prepare for our 3-hour flight the next morning to Sydney.



## Adventure Down Under

Corey Joyner



Sydney is a bustling city. It is just as crowded and busy as midtown Manhattan at rush hour. If you don't keep up a quick pace you will get trampled. We only had 3 nights in Sydney, not nearly enough time to take in as much as we wanted to, but enough time to take in Sydney's signature attraction, the opera house. As part of the package we took a tour of the opera house the next morning. The tour was incredibly enlightening and entertaining as we learned the history of it being built, and the obstacles the builders and Australia had to overcome to finish it. To be brief, the project ran out of money and the country had to stage a national lottery (like the New York lottery where the proceeds go to education) in order to provide funding to complete the project. The opera house has to be one of the most magnificent structures I have ever seen. The pictures that you see of it just do not do it justice, and it is situated right on the river, which provides an impressive scenic backdrop. When you add in the equally iconic Sydney Harbor Bridge, there were many photo opportunities to highlight and photo album or journal. I simply could not take enough pictures of it.

Taking the day tour afforded us the opportunity to get discounted tickets to a performance at the opera house. A few of us opted to take in the opera that night while other opted to take in a play. Let me tell you. I am a New Yorker and have seen quite a few plays in my lifetime, both on and off Broadway, but they all pale in comparison to taking in a performance of the opera. The opera house is famed for its acoustics and there is no exaggeration there. The performance was absolute breathtaking. The choreography of the dancers and the sound of 60 people singing in unison was unparalleled to anything I have even seen. And although the lyrics and dialogue were in Italian, the opera house provides strategically placed teleprompters that translated all of the dialogue and lyrics so that you did not miss a beat. It was truly an experience I will never forget.

For the balance of our time in Sydney, we had a hop on/hop off river boat pass that allowed us to make a few more stops for sightseeing. But honestly, there were enough attractions in the area that we stayed at to walk around and get our fill. We stayed in the Central Business District which was walking distance to Darling Harbor, which afforded us a myriad of places to eat and sights to see. There were tons of bars and restaurants there, shopping, an aquarium, wax museum, and a zoo. After our third night in Sydney, we had to get up at 3AM to catch our 6AM flight to Fiji.

During our stay in Sydney, the contagion started to explode in the US. It was on March 10 that the virus ran rampant in New York, specifically in New Rochelle as that town was put on lockdown. I could not believe what was happening. I was wondering if the



## Adventure Down Under

Corey Joyner



reporting on the other side of the world was being reported accurately. It was surreal and like living in a dream. Being that there was nothing I could do about it on the other side of the world I kind of tuned it out.

Upon our arrival in Fiji, we were handed questionnaires to be filled out so that we could give an attestation if we were symptomatic or not. The officials in Fiji were adorned in full PPE from head to toe and we were thermal scanned to check our temperatures. It was by this time that I realized that this was truly a pandemic. Luckily, there were no active cases in Fiji at the time, so I felt that we could enjoy the last 5 days of our vacation without having too much concern for it and would have to deal with it when we got back.

We arrived at VoliVoli Beach Resort for 5 days of immersion in luxury and diving. Jean and I stayed in a luxury villa (next to Tyrone) that had two bedrooms and it's own pool. This, while having an expansive 180-degree view of the ocean. There are no words to describe the view and ambience of this setting and waking up to this view at the foot of our beds every morning. I don't know if a thousand pictures could do it justice. The food was exquisite and the service supreme. Everyone should have the pleasure to experience the type of service we were afforded. After 9 days of being on the go taking tours and hopping on and off planes, this was the perfect way to end the trip. We were able to roll out of bed to the dive shop, roll out of bed to be fed 3 sumptuous meals per day, and rolled out of bed to step out onto our own private patio and into the pool. My wife entertained the non-divers poolside at our place while the divers dove during the day, and in the evening after dinner the party shifted to Tyrone's place for libations, card paying, music, and general socializing.

The diving in Fiji is just as advertised, with Fiji being touted as the soft coral capital of the world. Wildly colorful reefs and limitless fish and marine life abounded. There is even one dive site called Purple Haze because it is saturated with a purple soft coral. I could have dived that dive site all day. However, once again we were not afforded the big viz that is every diver's dream. We were getting about 40 feet of viz per day, and somewhat on the murky side, but it was better than Australia. Having said that, the divers overall enjoyed the diving in Fiji much more than in Australia.

After 3 days of 3 tank dives, a day of rest was built into the package, to take tours and let our gear dry. Due to COVID, our options of places to go were limited because the



## Adventure Down Under

Corey Joyner



island was very paranoid about us bringing an infection to them. But we did manage to get a tour of a local village while some others went to the caves and waterfall.

As we said our sad farewells, we departed the resort and made our way to the airport, stopping to get in some shopping at the biggest mall on the island along the way. Our flight leaving Fiji was packed with people evacuating the island to make their way home due to COVID. I still had not grasped the enormity of the situation because we were in a news blackout for 5 days as our resort did not have televisions in the rooms. It was only when we landed in LA and the airport was virtually deserted did we truly start to comprehend what was going on.

Fiji had no cases when we left but I was to find out that they caught a few cases days after we departed. In addition, the last flights out of the country left a few days after we did as the country started to shut down, like many places around the world.

Our cross-country flight from LA to JFK had 23 people on on it, as the airplanes started to endure mass cancellations. In landing at JFK, it too was a ghost town and we were able to get our luggage 15 minutes after we touched down, a new world record for me.

As you can see this was the trip of a lifetime. Both for the trip itself and for the fact that were were able to get it in a dodge the contagion along the way. All of us were extremely grateful that we were able to navigate this trip of a lifetime safely and successfully. So we will all bask in the glow of this trip for quite a while as it may be a long time before we are able to travel safely again - and surely not a trip of this magnitude!





**Adventure Down Under**  
Corey Joyner





## New Zealand Awaits !!!

Charley Adams



My daughter Clare and I were able to dive the Poor Knights Islands off the northeast coast of New Zealand. This region is known as the Tutukaka coast. The Poor Knights Islands, which lie about 12 miles east {about 1.5 hours} from the coast, are unique: there is a biodiversity surge of species due to the mixture of warm and temperate currents coming down from the Pacific, and the colder currents flowing up from the Southern Ocean to the south.

We saw vast schools of blue mao mao, blue and gray moray eels, scorpion fish, short-tail sting rays, and so many others I couldn't even begin to name them. It was like we were swimming through a veritable fish stew! These are volcanic islands, and the underwater topography was just amazing. Many swim-through arches, banks of thick kelp, and stunning shafts of light penetrating the arches and kelp beds. Water temps run about 65 to 70 deg F. at surface and around 58 deg. at depth. I was able to get by with a 5ml wetsuit over a vest. But the recommendation is for 7 ml. Our dive operator, Dive Tutukaka was first rate. The staff was professional and expertly knowledgeable about the area and dive sites. The boat was spacious and comfortable. Sandwiches and fruit snacks were provided. If you are looking for a totally different and extraordinarily memorable dive experience, I would definitely add Poor Knights Islands to your bucket list!

Sea Swells was intrigued and captivated by Charley and Clare's dive experience !

Charley, how did you and Clare decide on Poor Knights as a dive site?

*Two members of our Maritime Aquarium Dive Team had made these dives, and highly recommended the area when we advised we were going to NZ (to visit my daughter).*

How big was the boat? Was this a day trip or was this a liveaboard?

*The boat was quite spacious, approx. 45 ft. in length which could accommodate 18 divers. We only had 12 for this trip. Dive Tutukaka, our dive operators, run five boats of various sizes. You should check out their website for more details. They run a very professional and competent operation. However, be sure to make reservations well in advance, because this operator does a robust business. This was a day trip: we left at 8:30 am and returned at 5 pm. We enjoyed two morning dives, lunch and one afternoon dive, snacks and boat tour of the islands*

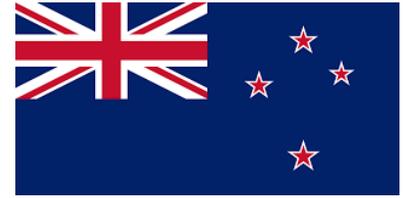
Did you drive nitrox? How many days did you go diving? How many dives a day?

*Yes, I dove nitrox. We only dived one day, there were three dives at different dive sites. Each one a little different but basically volcanic walls, swim-through arches and kelp beds. So many fish, rays, and colorful nudibranchs! On one dive we surfaced inside a small cave surrounded by walls, and we could take our regulators off and chat a bit. It was beautiful! We did not see the larger manta rays and spotted rays usually seen on these dives. Too bad. But overall a*



## New Zealand Awaits !!!

Charley Adams



*wonderful diving experience! Totally different from Florida or Caribbean reef dives. PS: There are wrecks in the area that can be dived. You need to find out when these dives are scheduled if you want to dive wrecks. For our one-day experience only, I specifically recommend the Poor Knights dive day.*

How many divers?

*We had 12 on this trip. They divided us into two dive groups with a dive leader for each dive.*

Did you experience any Maori culture of any kind? If so, what was that like?

*Yes, we visited a Maori village outside of Auckland. The residents give guided tours throughout the village where we learned about Maori culture, origins, language, arts etc.. The NZ government has given the Maori people lots of autonomy to practice their culture and language. There are Maori elementary schools for their children if the parents choose to send them.*

Who were some of the other people on the boat?

*There was a couple from California, two other US guys. Others were "mates" from Australia. We got along great.*

What was your total itinerary like; for example - where did you fly in to and how did you get from where you flew in to, to the dive boat?

*In summary: flew into Auckland via JFK – Houston – Auckland. 6 days touring the North Island – aside from diving, much to see, we recommend Maori Village, Redwood forest; Rotorua volcanic flats; an entire village dedicated to Lord of the Rings filmed in NZ.*

Did you tour anywhere else in New Zealand?

*Yes, the South Island is less populated but boasts spectacular scenery and wildlife: sandy beaches and rough sea coasts teeming with wildlife such as fur seals, sea lions; numerous bird species including and the rare yellow-eyed penguins -- and an albatross breeding center you can visit on the Otago peninsula. A must-see in the South Island is Fiordland National park. Take a boat tour on Doubtful Sound or Milford Sound! My daughter is studying at Otago University in the city of Dunedin, the oldest Univ. in NZ. Dunedin is a charming small city settled in the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century by Scottish and English immigrants and modeled on Victorian and Edwardian architecture. It is the second largest city on the Island next to Christchurch.*

Do you think you will ever go back? If you DO go back, what else would you do? *We would Probably not return even though it was extraordinary. It is a long journey, and when our daughter returns from her studies in NZ our incentive to visit will be less compelling. There are so many other places I want to see and dive before my diving and touring days are over. But, for the diving enthusiast, Poor Knights is definitely worth putting on your bucket list! There are some 50 different dive sites around Poor Knights Island that the tour operator visits. You could*



## New Zealand Awaits !!!

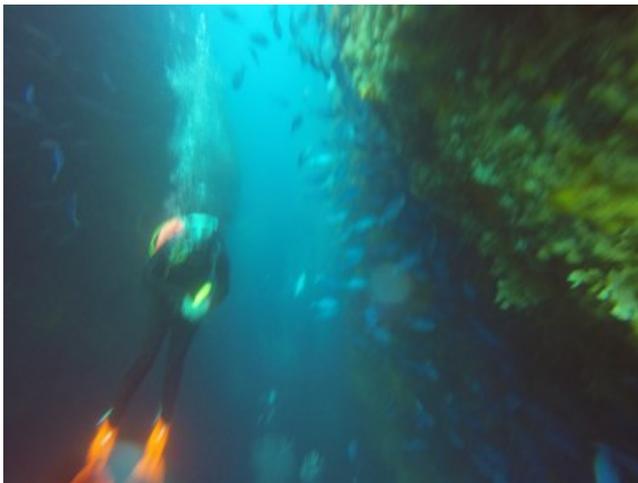
Charley Adams

*easily spend a week diving the different sites. Mid-November to end of March is their high season. Dive Tutukaka is open year round.*

Did you see any of the famous New Zealand Sea Dragons? Or, do they live elsewhere?  
*No. They are found more in Tasmanian waters and some waters around Australia I am told. But we did see colorful nudibranchs, large green moray eels; scorpion fish and other marine species mentioned earlier.*

How many hours were you in the air to fly to New Zealand from wherever it was you flew there from ?

*Depending on your route, its takes about 23 hours flying time to NZ. There are non-stop flights from Houston to Auckland. That flight takes about 18 hours. If you are going on to the South Island add 2 more hours to the trip.*





## Diving Is a Huge Part Of My Life !

Jody Deevy



Growing up I was always in the water. Long Island beaches and country club pools. I was lap swimming, synchronized swimming, springboard diving, lifeguarding and I advanced to swim instructor. But scuba diving had never really crossed my mind until my friend asked me if I wanted to go with her to Club Med in Mexico. She was going and wanted to try scuba diving. I didn't even know where the Sea of Cortez was! But they did offer a dedicated dive class for free, as well as horseback riding through the desert. I could try diving for free in the ocean and see if I liked it -- and could do so before I spent the money for gear and a class. This trip was right up my alley, but during this time my mother was battling stage 4 pancreatic cancer, and I wasn't going to leave her. My mom knew how much I loved to travel so she said to me "Go, I'll be here when you get back". This was the fall of 1988.

We started off in the pool as all dive classes do, but my friend was uncomfortable with the mask, and didn't even last one day. So I was on my own with 45 other guests. We had classroom lectures and our dive skills- practical training was conducted in the ocean, not the pool. We were directed to remove our masks and open our eyes in salt water, while attempting to kneel in the sand with the gentle ocean sway nudging you from side to side. And little fish swimming between your legs! This continued for 4 days; soon people dropped out because they would rather participate in bizarre games or have Tequila shots by the pool. Club Med frivolity got in the way. By the end of day 4 there were just 5 of us left to go on 4 actual open water dives over 2 days. We were limited to 40 feet, and it was at a place called Seal Island in the northern Sea of Cortez. The water was cool in October and we choose between a shorty or farmer John with no sleeves. I took a shorty and loaded up my weight belt, which was a tad too much weight (e they didn't want us springing up all over the place). This was not a full scuba certification class but was the only one recognized at Club Meds around the world. If I passed, I could dive at any Club Med, anywhere. And ... at that time -- it was free!

I was comfortable underwater with all the gear and mask and equalizing, but the neutral buoyancy thing was an issue. Too much up and down for me! So, while I was looking at all the stuff underwater, my real focus was on attempting to stay level in my position. At one point with a little extra puff of air in my BCD - WOW, I was NEUTRAL! I remember in my mind saying "Oh, that's what neutral buoyancy feels like!" We did our dives and there were of course seals and sea lions at Seal Island. I remember the instructor taking a photo of us at the end of the dive near some rocks with seals on it, and we had our masks on our foreheads, smiling.

So, I was indeed hooked! I still needed to take a full certification course, but that had to wait. Upon my return home my mother's illness progressed and she was soon moved to hospice care. She stayed for almost 5 months and passed away on Tuesday March 21st. On Wednesday, March 22, I went down to my local dive shop and through my tears uttered, "I want to sign up for scuba lessons".



## My Nephew's Great Diving Adventure

**Judy Keznord**



Since you are reading this article, you too might love to scuba dive or be interested in it. I enjoy it and think it is a wonderful activity to get your friends and family involved in doing. It is amazing what happened in my own family. We would watch some underwater nature stuff for a few minutes and I'd say to my nephew you can do that one day and check out what is underwater. For his 9th birthday present I decided to register my nephew Anthony for the PADI Seal Team, which is a program for kids to learn and try scuba in a pool.

The day came, as I was driving him to the pool for his first ever scuba experience and he wanted to ask me a question. I'm thinking he is going to ask: "Am I going to run out of air and die? Or will I pop a lung coming up etc". Then he said, "Aunt Judy I know you are not going to let anything happen to me but, how much do I have to read for this?" I laughed and said not too much, but you'll want to read about it. Then he laughed.

When we got to the pool, he met Bradley Gaiser the owner of Aqua Visions Scuba, who had already set up about 8 kids' scuba gear sets by the edge of the water. He gave the kids a lesson about the basics and it seemed like each of them were in their gear and under the water in no time. It was amazing how fearless my nephew was to just do it. After a few weeks he finished that course and I signed him up for the subsequent PADI Master Seal Team, which is more skills in the pool.

I asked him if he really liked doing the scuba stuff and he said yes, but the pool is getting boring after about 10 hours underwater in the pool. He jokingly reminded me there are no sharks in there. Sharks became his thing. He started to learn all about them and watched the *Shark Week* episodes. So, I bought him a subscription to *Shark Diver* magazine, which I knew he would only look at the pictures. He was an 11-year old boy and sharks are dangerously cool and he told me he would be diving with them one day. I thought that it would be important that he, his friends and the world realize that sharks are not the man-attacking creatures that movies have made them out to be. We talked about how sharks were used over time for food, the skin as sandpaper and teeth for weapons. But now, they are endangered mostly due to an activity called finning in which sharks are caught just so their fins can be cut off (while



## My Nephew's Great Diving Adventure

**Judy Keznord**



they are still alive), then they are thrown back into the water to a drowning death, and all for the sake of the upper-class people buying the high-priced shark fin soup to show off their wealth. I'm told it does not even taste good, so boycott it.

It was also imperative for me to teach him about people that work to protect sharks and other underwater creatures. I started by buying a whale shark to be tagged in South America for scientific research. He loved the idea and actually said, "It is the best gift as we are saving lives". So each Christmas; I sponsor or "buy" an animal to be tagged and give him the gift. It's easy and some organizations, like Oceana, are inexpensive and you can adopt different animals. He liked the idea so much that he brought a picture of his tagged Whale Shark into school for a presentation to his class. While at the Aquarium in Norwalk Connecticut he mentioned to his friend Bill, who heads up all the volunteer programs at that he wants to volunteer for their shark diver education program like his aunt does when he gets skilled, educated and old enough.

I wanted to make certain he liked diving for himself and not because I was pushing him. He was sincere in saying he liked it. So I bought him the Open Water scuba course when he turned 12. As a junior diver the certification would allow no more than 40 feet in depth and be with a certified diver and/or an instructor. It was a surprise to me when Anthony began to take his scuba book to school to read and he got half way through it, then other homework got in the way! Can you imagine the nerve of those teachers! Well, I figured now it might be a good time for a real trial so, I showed him a few pictures from my trips to Fiji, Mexico, Belize, Greece and other places (even in New England waters) and he said, "I can't wait till I go traveling with you to go diving."

I found a great travel deal in St. Croix and asked some scuba friends if they knew any dive shops in that area. It turns out that Jon Wilkins, owner of the REX Dive Center in Connecticut, who is an instructor, suggested The St. Croix Ultimate Bluewater Adventures aka: SCUBA. Pretty neat acronym for a dive shop! So I went to the computer and I sent several e-mails with many dive questions and asked for suggestions on other activities to which Captain Ed, the owner, answered every single question and I was very happy to have fast and detailed responses.



## My Nephew's Great Diving Adventure

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from him. So I decided to sign my nephew up for scuba diving in the ocean. Since he did not complete his open water course, he would need a resort course in trying scuba diving, which would be helpful anyway to review the things he already knew.

The time finally came when we were on vacation and the scuba shop instructor was on his way to our hotel pool for the training. Well, they sent Graham, a 23-year old from Connecticut, to teach my 12-year old nephew. I wasn't very happy at first glance, then after talking with him I learned he had been diving since a teenager and he had some experience teaching in Australia and was only new to this shop in St. Croix. I told them both I would sit and listen, but he was the instructor. I let my nephew know that I was there with him and would be beside both of them when diving. I expressed that you need to rely on your own knowledge of skills and to be responsible for yourself. So I sat with Anthony listening to Graham, who was very patient, easy-going, but also very attentive to safety. His talk on discovering scuba information was at the right pace for my nephew. The instructor and my nephew bonded by the back and forth discussion. Then they went in the pool, did some skills and then planned our dives for that afternoon.

On the dive boat Graham, my nephew and I got geared up and we all got excited for Anthony's first dive. Jon the captain was very helpful and made certain that my nephew or anyone never fell or had any issues getting into or out of the water. Jon was very patient with my nephew who was very hesitant standing on the platform for a





## My Nephew's Great Diving Adventure

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few minutes before his dive. I was in the water cheering him on saying your instructor and I are here for you. After standing on the ledge for a minute or two, he yelled to ask, "Aunt Judy, how do you get over your fear?" I just said, "I don't know". But you are not afraid; you are unaware of what it is like to do it in the ocean. You know how, so just take a deep breath and go for it". At this point we all thinking that he might chicken out, but then he took on the fear and jumped in like a pro.

All three of us began to go down. Graham was very receptive and concerned for my nephew as it took a few minutes of getting his ears equalized, then he went on his first dive. I commend Graham for being so physically close to my nephew at all times, which made him feel relaxed knowing his instructor and his aunt were by his side. It was an amazing dive for my nephew's first time, as we saw a nice size sea turtle up close, a sting ray, a few schools of fish and on the surface we came up to see a full rainbow over the boat. It was great, as we all got on the boat with Jon's help and my nephew saying it was awesome! After his dive my nephew was excited to do another dive. The next 3 dives were just as good, as we had 6 dolphins near the boat. Unfortunately, we were a bit to slow and I never rush a new diver of any age, so we jumped into snorkel to watch them below.



My point is the St. Croix SCUBA shop dive crews are very serious about your safety and you enjoying yourself! Captain Ed really does have an amazing group of people working there. I was so happy that I was referred to the SCUBA shop – so now I am referring others to dive, shop or stop in to ask questions, as they will help if at all possible. Each person in the shop was very kind and nice to my nephew, my sister Christine and me. We talked about getting him certified while there, and the instructors in the shop went over what would be needed. It was a surprise to me that Molly in the shop, suggested doing it another time, so that he can





## My Nephew's Great Diving Adventure

**Judy Keznord**



enjoy his dives and read the materials at his pace to really learn about diving. My nephew was keen on doing it, and they even offered him their old books to read to see if he was interested. The next day, he decided that he would get certified at home by Bradley who taught him previously and he'd just enjoy our vacation at this time.

Who does really care about your happiness when you are on vacation? I can tell you that most dive shops have amazing staff which are typically friendly, welcoming and fun to be around. We have plenty of dive shops which have kids' programs and adult try scuba classes.

Getting my nephew involved was one of the best things I could have done for us both. I was able to spend time with him as he is learning something new that is fun to do. Now I am thrilled that I've got my best buddy, who is my nephew as a diver.

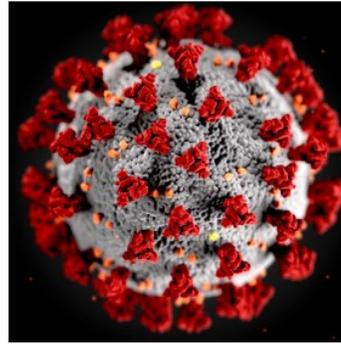
So he will eventually read his open water book completely and he will be able to spend his school time break by focusing to be a certified diver this summer. Anthony is excited to be getting back into training with Bradley again as he trusts him and they've built a good foundation working during his first scuba lessons with seal and rangers. Now we all can be diving in the open water and it is a win-win situation, as the world now has another scuba diver who loves the feeling of being underwater and wants to learn about the environment and protect the oceans for the future. Since I shared my love of diving with one child; his learning how to dive has led to several children hearing of his adventures diving and now more kids and their parents are interested in scuba diving and enjoy being outside.





## **Covid-19 Refuses To Go Away**

*Nick Lappano*



While Covid-19 has leveled off in many areas and some communities have reopened successfully, in other areas the pandemic has gotten a second wind and continues to disrupt lives and activities throughout the United States.

As divers, we are probably among those most anxious to get back to our passion of underwater exploration, however that is proving to be quite a challenge. As of this writing I, for one, have logged only 10 dives so far in 2020. Usually by mid-August I would have at least 25 dives, more if I had been able to get away on a trip.

While there is some great local diving here in the Northeast, even many of those opportunities were limited as many sites were inaccessible due to shutdowns until mid-July. But for many of us the most enjoyable diving is in locations which require traveling.

Although you can drive to Florida, and enjoy some great warm water diving there, many of the most popular destinations require travel, usually by air, either to a domestic site or a foreign locale.

Even if you were to drive to Florida, as of the time that I am writing this you would have to self-quarantine for 14 days upon your return to New York which would necessitate taking three weeks off from work for a one-week trip. This would also apply to almost all international trips.

In addition, many countries have banned travel to their nations by US residents which makes travel to them impossible.

So, the conundrum: If you can travel is it safe to travel to dive and are the risks worth the reward?

We can clearly say that it not as safe to travel now as it was before the pandemic hit as far as health issues go. Despite any screening, it is always possible that we may come into contact with an infected individual, possibly someone who is not displaying any



## Covid-19 Refuses To Go Away

*Nick Lappano*



symptoms and isn't even aware that they could be capable of transmitting the virus to others.

If you are flying it is unlikely that you will be able to practice social distancing from the time you enter the airport until you claim your bags at your destination. You can try to maintain distance as much as possible and airlines are making some adaptations to boarding and exit procedures to minimize close contact among passengers. But no matter how hard you try you will inevitably be closer than 6 feet to others at some point of the journey for more than 15 minutes which the CDC describes as "close contact". So, if you are flying, check out what your carrier is doing to minimize the chance of contagious infection and do whatever you can to protect yourself.

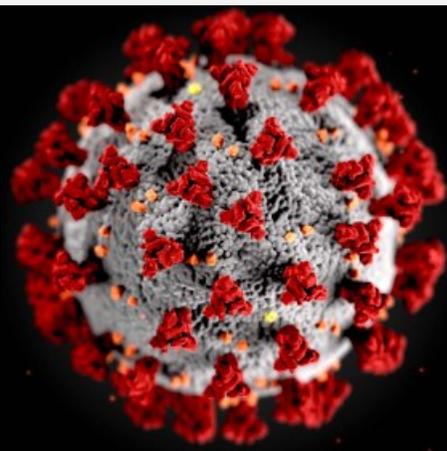
Of course, wear a face covering. A PPE type mask would be best and these have become much more available as time has gone on.

Carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer. TSA has relaxed their carry-on restrictions to allow you to have a bottle larger than the usual three ounces but check before traveling to make sure that it is permitted on all legs of your flights. Be diligent and use it whenever you touch a surface which may have been contaminated by others. Although the most recent studies indicate that the ability to contract Covid-19 from surfaces is not as great as once believed, why chance it?

Also carry some sanitizing wipes which can be used to disinfect surfaces like the fold down tray and armrests.

If you use the bathroom, either in the airport or on the plane, thoroughly wash your hands and avoid touching your face until you have done so. This is something which we have all incorporated into our daily lives and we must be especially vigilant to practice it when traveling.

When you arrive at your hotel or other accommodations sanitize anything which may have been touched by the previous occupant. A swipe with a germicidal wipe will help to kill off any nasties.



This illustration, created at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reveals ultrastructural morphology exhibited by coronaviruses. Note the spikes that adorn the outer surface of the virus, which impart the look of a corona surrounding the virion, when viewed electron microscopically. A novel coronavirus, named Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), was identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, China in 2019. The illness caused by this virus has been named coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).



## **Covid-19 Refuses To Go Away**

*Nick Lappano*

Before signing up with a dive operator try to see what they are doing to minimize the chance of contagious contact among divers and/or crew. Try to find out what the operators' anti-virus protocols are before booking. If they have not addressed the issue you may want to seek out another operator

Until this passes the days of shoulder to shoulder in your face camaraderie are on hold. Wear a face covering any time that your reg is not in your mouth and try to maintain some distance from other divers. I know that social distancing on a dive boat is just about impossible, but we should try to do the best we can. At least we are in the open air with a breeze so any droplets should not be hovering in the air like they would in a more still environment.

On a liveaboard the challenges increase greatly since we are on a boat for a week or more with the same people. Can you maintain a safe distance from others during meals? How cramped are the cabins and how many people share a cabin? In this case the "more the merrier" is NOT true. Some operators have decreased the extra charge for a single occupancy cabin. If so it may be worth the additional cost.

Another thing to consider about liveaboards is that it is not a day charter. It is a cruise, usually at least a weeklong, and there have been quite a few unpleasant news stories about cruise ships and their inability to safely return to shore to dock during the pandemic. Although most of these incidents involved large cruise ships with hundreds of passengers, I would assume that something similar could occur on a liveaboard with a few dozen passengers and crew members. What are the plans and options if someone contracts the virus during the cruise? What is YOUR contingency plan if this happens?

Getting back to the diving, the virus has been shown to survive for a short time on the surface of fresh water so be careful about using shared rinse tanks if they are still being used where you are diving especially for anything that comes into contact with your face. If, at the end of the dive, you rinse off your regulator in a shared tank, be sure to sanitize it before using it again. You can use any germicidal cleaner and rinse it off with plain water to get rid of the chemicals. In a pinch, a 70% alcohol solution should work. Or you can just wait until you get back to your room if land-based, to wash off your regulator and other more personal equipment, like your divemask, thoroughly.



## Covid-19 Refuses To Go Away

*Nick Lappano*

from other folks' stuff and rinse it off with a freshwater hose or seawater after defogging it.

When returning home, exercise the same precautions which you were following on your outbound trip. You can just as easily be infected on your way home so do not stop taking measures to protect yourself and others.

So, there are risks now which we never had to think about before and they will continue to play a part in our decisions for the foreseeable future. We have always had to make a risk vs. reward decision before making any dive. This is another decision which we must make before planning any dive trip. Are you comfortable with the process and does the reward outweigh the risk? If so, go for it.

If, however, you are going to be super anxious the whole time, you may want to wait a while. After all, this is supposed to be fun, right?

Every diver must make this decision for themselves.

Someday in the future when a vaccine is developed and widely distributed we may be able to resume our past routines, but this is the new world which we are now in -- and we must each make our own decisions as to how to handle it.

-----  
Whether you are diving local or somewhere else, take care to practice certain behaviors to limit the spread of the corona virus.

- ◆ Practice social distancing as much as possible. For example, on a boat try to spread out so that you are not right next to other divers any longer than necessary.
- ◆ If at a place like Dutch Springs, avoid sharing a table with other divers.
- ◆ Wear a face covering, especially when closer than six feet to others.
- ◆ Avoid handling others' gear. Wear gloves if you do.
- ◆ Practice social distancing on the surface of the water especially if you or others are clearing noses, sinuses, throats, etc.



## **Covid-19 Refuses To Go Away**

*Nick Lappano*

- ◆ When using common areas use a plastic bag to store your belongings rather than leaving them on benches or tables which may have been touched (and possibly contaminated) by others.
- ◆ As other recommendations are made by responsible sources incorporate those ideas into you diving activities as well as your day to day life.

I look forward to the time when this situation passes, but that will not be in the immediate future. Until that time comes, do whatever is possible to protect yourself and others.

Stay safe!

### **Resources**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<https://www.diversalertnetwork.org/membership/dan-coronavirus-faq.aspx>

<https://www.padi.com/sites/default/files/documents/2020-05/PADI%20Best%20Practices%20to%20Reduce%20Transmission%20Risk.pdf>

<https://www.scubadiving.com/scuba-diving-coronavirus>

<https://www.divetech.com/post/diving-in-the-era-of-covid-19>



**Featured Creatures**  
**The Eastern Oyster**  
***Crassostrea virginica***

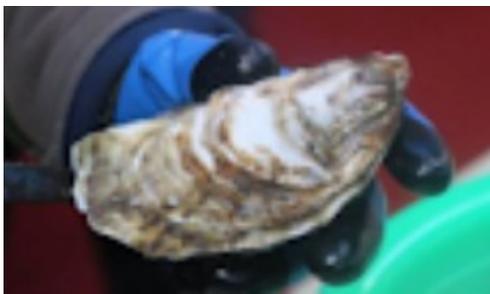
Rick D'Amico



Author Jonathan Swift once commented that the world's bravest man was the first one to eat a raw oyster. While it's probably true that raw oysters won't score many presentation points in food competitions, they are interesting creatures with a noteworthy role in history. It is the official State Shellfish for Connecticut and was designated as such in 1989.

**DESCRIPTION**

The Eastern oyster is a *bivalve* mollusk, meaning it has two shells. The shell material is hard and calcium-based, which serves to protect the oyster from many predators. While the left and right shells of clams are equally symmetrical, each of the oyster's two shells are different. The bottom shell is deeper and longer, while the top shell is relatively flat and is shorter (see photo to the left). The



hinge on the upper shell is slightly forward of the hinge on the bottom shell, which is what makes oysters relatively easy to shuck (open). Typically, the shells are 3 to 5 inches in length. The outside of the shell varies in color from brown to grey, while the inside is white. Generally, the shells grow into a teardrop shape, however, in habitats that tend to get heavy silt deposits the oyster shell will develop into an elongated shape so its siphon (which takes in water, food and oxygen) will be

above the sediment. (see pic to the left) The shell is secreted by the oyster's mantle, which is the most outward part of its living body. The mantle also secretes shell material around foreign objects or parasites inside the oyster, creating pearls.



## Featured Creatures

### The Eastern Oyster

### *Crassostrea virginica*

Rick D'Amico



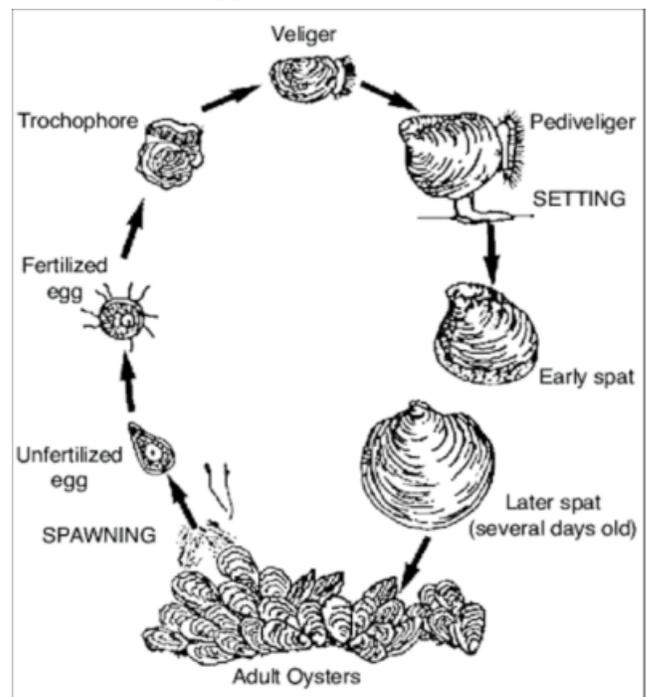
It should be noted that the Eastern oyster does not produce pearls that are of value for jewelry. Most pearls used by the jewelry industry are produced by freshwater mussels.

## LIFE CYCLE

Spawning takes place when oyster sperm and unfertilized eggs are released into the water column. Once the eggs become fertilized, they develop into trochophore larvae which live in the water column. Continuing a life as plankton, the trochophore continues to develop into its veliger and pediveliger stages. The pediveligers settle along the bottom. They can travel short distance and seek a suitable habitat for setting. Pediveligers have been shown to prefer setting on oyster shell material.

Once a suitable setting site has been found, the pediveliger cements itself to the substrate and becomes a spat. The spat then develops into an adult.

Commercial oyster harvesters will spread out large amounts of oyster shell (called "cultch") in known oyster spawning areas. After spawning season, they recover the cultch, which is settled with spat, and transfer them to grow-out areas and (if necessary) decontamination areas. A farmed oyster is likely to have been caught at least three times.



## RANGE AND HABITAT

The Eastern oyster has a wide geographic range. It is found on the East Coast of North America from the Gulf of the St. Lawrence River through the Gulf of Mexico.

Oysters inhabit marine and estuarine waters. They tend to do well in the lower portions of large rivers (such as the Hudson River, the Chesapeake River system and rivers in



## **Featured Creatures**

### **The Eastern Oyster**

### ***Crassostrea virginica***

Rick D'Amico



Connecticut) where the water is salty enough for them to thrive, while it keeps out some of their predators (e.g., sea stars). They can be found in intertidal and shallow subtidal areas. Unlike the larvae, the adults are sessile and stay in one place.

## **OYSTER REEFS**

Over time generations of oysters will settle on top of each other. The shells of adult oysters can serve as a habitat for settling oyster larvae. When this happens on a relatively large scale, and the oyster shells become attached, an oyster reef can form (see pic to right).

Oyster reefs provide a rock-like habitat for many types of marine plants and animals. Marine algae grow on the shells. Animals like mussels, barnacles, and sea anemones settle on them, which provides food for a number of numerous fish species. The oysters themselves are also a food species for fish, birds, and shoreline mammals. The crevices and spaces between the oysters also provide refuge for juvenile fish and invertebrates.



Besides providing a food source and habitat, oyster reefs improve water quality. Oysters are filter-feeders, so they remove particles from the water column. A single oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day. This produces clearer water, which promotes bottom vegetation by allowing more sunlight to penetrate the water column.

In addition, oyster reefs provide protection to upland areas from waves, floods and unusually high tides. Oyster reefs clearly benefit the marine environment and man. At the end of the article, there's a link to a video that shows how effectively oysters filter water.

## **DIET AND PREDATORS**

The Eastern oyster is a filter-feeder. It opens its shell slightly and its siphon takes in water. It filters out microscopic algae and animal plankton, which is its natural food,



**Featured Creatures**  
**The Eastern Oyster**  
***Crassostrea virginica***  
Rick D'Amico



As for the oysters' predators, we humans aren't the only ones who like them as food. Predators of the Eastern oyster include: birds, shoreline mammals, sea stars, boring sponges, crabs, lobsters, oyster drills, whelks, worms (e.g., oyster flatworm and oyster leech) and fish. They are particularly susceptible to predation during their developmental stages.

They are also vulnerable to parasites such as MSX and dermo, which devastated the oyster population in Long Island Sound during the late 1990s/early 2000s. Although these parasites can be deadly for the oyster, they do not affect humans.

## REPRODUCTION AND GROWTH

The Eastern oyster is a protandric hermaphrodite, that is, that it begins its life as a male and becomes a female. During its early life, it functions as a male and releases sperm into the water column during spawning. However, after a few years it becomes a female and releases eggs into the water. They are very prolific, as an adult female can produce up to 100 million eggs during a spawning event. However, only approximately one in 1,000 survives to spawn.

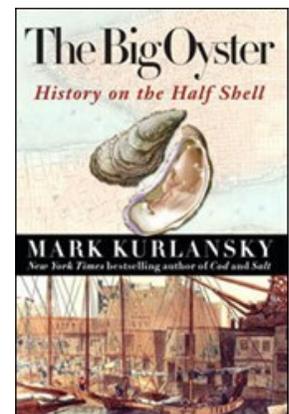
Rising water temperatures induce oyster spawning. In our area, when water temperatures reach 60 degrees F, spawning commences. For approximately the first two weeks of its life, the oyster lives as plankton; then it settles on the bottom, frequently on other oyster shell material.

Once settled, the oyster spat will feed. It takes in calcium carbonate from the water column, which it uses to enhance its shell growth. Oyster growth is determined in part by water salinity and water quality. Oysters grow faster in saltier water, but lower salinities restrict some of their predators. That is why many oyster farmers will raise oysters in the lower portions of tidal rivers.

## THE OYSTER AND NEW YORK

In 2007, Mark Kurlansky authored a book entitled "THE BIG OYSTER: History on the Half Shell." (see pic to the right) It describes the role that oysters played in the early history of New York City.

We know that oysters were an important food for early Americans. The aboriginal residents of what is now Metro New York, even before the Lenape Tribe settled the area, used to gather and eat oysters (perhaps Johnathan Swift's bravest man was among them). When they were done eating them, they





## Featured Creatures

### The Eastern Oyster

### *Crassostrea virginica*

Rick D'Amico



gathered the shells and made large piles of them along the shoreline area of the waterways where they caught them. These piles of oyster shells were known as "middens." The oldest oyster midden was located in Dobbs Ferry, NY, along the Hudson River. Radioactive carbon-dating places this midden back to approximately 7000 B.C., long before the Lenape arrived in the area.

Interestingly, archaeologists discovered that, with some middens, the oyster shells at the bottom were larger than the shells at the top. This indicates that there was some overharvesting in some of the oyster beds, even before Europeans began taking them. Oysters were being taken at a faster rate than they could regrow and replenish an area.

European settlers considered the oyster a delicacy, and traded with the native tribes to obtain them. The settlers also used to put oyster shells in the ground where they grew crops, as the shells would neutralize acid in the soil. They would burn the shells to produce lime paste, which they used for house construction.



The oyster became an integral and interesting part of New York's culture. During the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century oysters were sold in street carts and from Dutch boats tied up along Manhattan's shoreline. New York (New Amsterdam at the time) became noted for oysters, alcohol, and prostitution, and the three were not totally unrelated. Bordellos and oyster houses were often in close proximity and alcohol was popular in both settings.

Piracy was also rampant, as Manhattan provided a market for goods captured by the pirates. In fact, Captain William Kidd made his residency in Manhattan.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, oysters were part of New York's booming economy. They were somewhat comparable to what pizza is today in NYC. It was available almost everywhere and was sold at exclusive venues and in lowly dives. Like pizza, oysters were enjoyed by rich and poor alike.

## RESTORING THE OYSTER

Oyster beds and reefs provide important habitat and water quality benefits. To improve water quality in New York Harbor, the Billion Oyster Project, a New York-based nonprofit



**Featured Creatures**  
**The Eastern Oyster**  
***Crassostrea virginica***

Rick D'Amico



organization, has been formed. Its objective is to restore a billion oysters to New York Harbor by 2035. This would help improve water quality and habitat in New York Harbor, which would have the potential of significantly changing the Harbor's viability as a marine/estuarine habitat.

The Long Island Shellfish Restoration Project (LISRP) established five shellfish sanctuary sites that are to be stocked with juvenile and adult shellfish. They are: Bellport Bay, Huntington Harbor, Shinnecock Bay, South Oyster Bay, and Hempstead Bay. A coalition including New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Stony Brook University, municipalities, local businesses, and volunteer organizations are working to produce, plant oysters and monitor shellfish and water quality enhancement throughout the project areas. One of the coalition's objectives is to obtain biological and environmental information on shellfish growth, survival and spawning success. This will include monitoring the effect on water quality, phytoplankton consumption and filtration. This information will be used to guide and support future restoration efforts.

Naval Weapons Station Earle and NY/NJ Baykeeper became partners in restoring oysters. Oysters that became established on concrete blocks have been planted in nearshore waters of Naval Weapons Station Earle on Sandy Hook Bay. The oyster reefs are improving local water quality, providing habitat for marine life, and protecting the shoreline from storms.

## **“R” OYSTERS OKAY TO EAT YEAR-ROUND?**

Conventional wisdom has been that one should only eat oysters during months that had the letter “r” in its name (September through April). Correspondingly, eating oysters was advised against during the other months (May through August). Is this true? The quick-and-dirty answer is that millions of restaurants serve oysters year-round without any problems.

Part of the rationale is that the months without an “r” were the time of year when oysters spawn. Back when most oysters were caught in the wild, it was sometimes necessary to close the fishery to ensure a continuous supply of oysters. Now, most oysters are farmed, so this doesn't really apply. In addition, some claim that the oyster isn't as appealing during spawning season—it's a matter of taste.

There are some health concerns. During the warmer months, there are greater levels of bacteria in the water. Also, toxic marine algae, which can cause paralytic shellfish poisoning, grow in some waters during summer, although there has never been a case of paralytic shellfish poisoning in our region. To protect consumers, there is more monitoring and accountability in the oyster fishery and safe handling techniques have been developed to virtually eliminate bacterial contamination.



**Featured Creatures**  
**The Eastern Oyster**  
***Crassostrea virginica***

Rick D'Amico



So, the answer is that it's safe to eat oysters year-round, although some may prefer oysters harvested during colder weather. However, it is important to handle oysters properly after purchasing or catching them. That said, keeping them refrigerated until they are consumed is of utmost importance.

## HOW TO SHUCK AN OYSTER

With its asymmetrical shells, it may at first appear harder to shuck an oyster than it really is. Nonetheless, with the right tools and a little practice it becomes easy.

To begin with, one needs an oyster knife and a towel or glove to protect the hand in case the knife slips. Holding the oyster with the flat side up/cupped side down in the non-dominant hand, so that the hinge is exposed, put the tip of the knife into the crevice at the hinge, and push inward. (see pic to the right) When the knife has penetrated the oyster's valve, it can be pried open by simply twisting the knife, steady and firmly.



The oyster has a muscle on each shell (adductor muscle) that connects the oyster to the shell. Both need to be severed. When the top shell can be lifted upwards, run the knife along the inner edge of the top shell to free the oyster. (see pic to the right) Remove the top shell. With the oyster in the upright position, slide the knife along the inner side of the bottom shell to free the oyster so it can be removed. One should try to not spill the liquid inside the bottom shell (called liquor) as it adds to the flavor of the oyster.



Serve with lemon juice, cocktail sauce, hot sauce, or anything else you'd like. Enjoy!

Here's a great video of how oysters filter water, produced by the Woods Hole Marine Biology Laboratory.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvR0RIZd8HU>



## Adventure on the Saint Lawrence River

*Nick Lappano*



In early August, six of us ventured north to the Town of Alexandria Bay in upstate New York to dive the warm (by Northeastern US standards!) waters of the St. Lawrence River in the 1,000 Islands Region. Al Miller, Ed Van Dolsen, Tom Butcher, Greg Dietz, Pat Considine (who put together the excursions) and myself met to do some shore dives on the *Islander* wreck as well as boat dives on the wrecks of the *America*, *Keystorm* and *Vickery*. We would be diving with Captain Ken of Thousand Island Dive Excursions from his boat, the "2 Dive 4" a six-pack which is well configured for diving - with tank holders, a dive platform and "Christmas tree" ladder which allowed us to board the boat with our fins on. The boat also has a dry cabin area and marine head.

I would like to thank Pat for making these dives available and booking us on the boat,

The weather cooperated and most of the time it was warm, with lots of sunshine. Even the wind cooperated as it was minimal and there was little chop or waves out on the river, making for pleasant cruising and riding at anchor while diving.

The dive conditions were nice with a surface water temperature of 78 degrees "dropping" down to 72 at 100 feet. The visibility varied. Sometimes it was as high as 30 feet, sometimes dropped to as low as 10 feet. Being on a river there was always a significant current, so the use of a line to get to the wrecks was a necessity. Once on the wreck you would seek the leeward side of the flow to drop out of the current. The wrecks were all interesting and Captain Ken filled us in on the history and layout of the site on each pre-dive briefing.

There was little drama over the course of the dives – but being the instigator that I am, I changed that on Sunday's first dive.

We were going to make two dives on the *Vickery*. The plan was to follow the line to the bow at about 90 feet, then swim back to the stern where we would visit the rudder at 120 feet.



## Adventure on the Saint Lawrence River



I was buddying with Al and Tom. All went well descending to the ship, and we maintained good proximity to each other.

However, that changed when we got to the stern, as we encountered a group of divers from another boat approaching us. Just as I got to the stern I got tangled up with two divers coming from the opposite direction. As they were swimming into the current there was quite a bit of arm flailing going on which forced me off my intended path, separating me from Al and Tom. As soon as I cleared the melee I looked around trying to relocate them.

I realized that I could not see either of them and worse still, I was no longer on the wreck, probably having been blown off by the current. The visibility was only about 10 feet at this point and I tried for about a minute to locate either of my buddies or the wreck. Unfortunately, since we were following a line along the bottom all the way to the wreck, I had not recorded a compass heading which would have helped me to orient myself.

Unable to locate either Al or Tom, I proceeded to follow the standard lost buddy procedure, and headed to the surface.

In a lake or even on an ocean dive this probably would not have been too problematic. However, we were in a river with a strong current. Using a safe ascent rate of 1 foot every 2 seconds and making a 3-minute safety stop it took me seven or more minutes to get to the surface. I inflated my SMB at 40 feet and sent it to the surface before starting my safety stop at 20 feet. Although I was anxious to get to the surface, I made sure to take my time to do everything necessary to minimize the chance of taking a DCS hit.

I finally got to the surface and inflated my BCD. Looking around, the “2 Dive 4” was nowhere to be seen, and I realized that I had drifted a long way underwater.

I made sure I was comfortably buoyant, figuring that the boat would eventually head my way. A boat spotted my safety sausage and asked if I needed help. I declined his offer and resumed my wait. A few minutes later another boat also asked if I needed help or wanted a lift.

Looked toward shore I saw that I had already drifted quite a distance downstream in the short time that I was on the surface, so I accepted his offer. After getting on board I



## Adventure on the Saint Lawrence River



directed him upstream in the direction where our boat would be. In about 5 minutes I spotted the boat and stood up so that they could see me and gave them a big “OK” signal, which they returned.

Upon boarding I discovered that only Tom and Al were onboard with Ken. The other divers, suspecting the worst, were searching for me down on the wreck. It was then that I began to feel terrible over the worry and inconvenience which I had caused my friends and fellow divers.

After about 10 minutes had passed, the remaining divers had returned. Needless to say, they were relieved that I was okay. I explained what had happened and we determined that the only thing which I might have done differently would have been to pop my SMB a bit sooner. Perhaps if I had sent it up as soon as I started to head to the surface Ken would have spotted it and known where I was and that I was heading up.

Unfortunately, the second dive had to be cancelled since too much time and air had been used while I was missing and the others were searching for me underwater. Luckily all ended well, and neither myself or any of the others suffered any ill effects and we all gathered our gear and after packing our vehicles headed back home.

Although I followed the usual recommendations regarding lost buddies, I did take a few lessons away from this experience.

--Always make a note of at least a cardinal compass heading when traveling underwater, even if following a line. If I had done this, I probably would have been able to either locate the wreck or the shoal which we were anchored on. I then could have found my way back to the boat.

--If separated from the group (and the wreck) when diving and if you need to use an SMB, it is probably better to send up a marker sooner rather than later, especially in an area with significant current where you can rapidly be carried away from your boat.

--Have a powerful dive light with a somewhat narrow beam for use in an emergency situation. I have always had a preference for a wide beam light to illuminate as large an area as possible. On the dive in question I had two lights. However, both of them had very wide beams of 100 and 120 degrees. When I tried to use them it was like turning on your high beams while driving your car while it is snowing. Had I had at least one narrow beam



## Adventure on the Saint Lawrence River



light I think I may have been able to relocate the wreck before drifting too far away since it would have penetrated the water for a greater distance.

--If offered assistance, accept the offer. When the first boat offered to help me it would have been prudent to accept their help. Luckily, another boater offered assistance in only a few minutes. However, if I had not been so fortunate, I may have been floating and drifting for much longer which would have delayed my return to the boat, increasing risk to myself and adding to the concern of my companions.

Luckily everything turned out well. I just regret the inconvenience and apprehension which I caused my fellow divers. It was still a fun trip with some really nice dives.

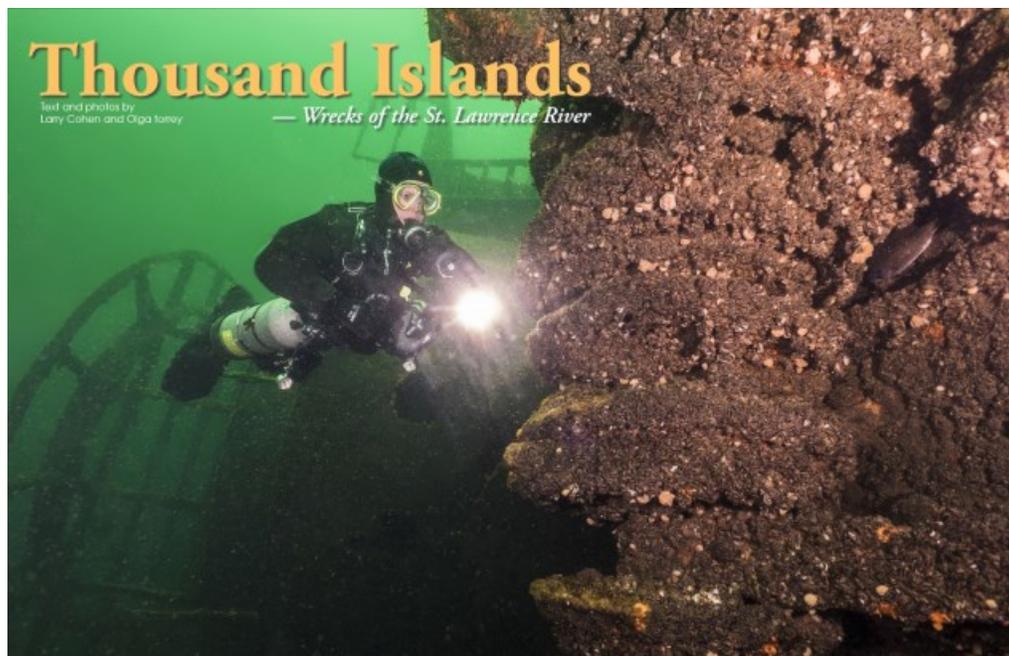


Photo Courtesy X-Ray Magazine and our friends Larry Cohen and Olga Torrey

<https://xray-mag.com/content/thousand-islands-wrecks-st-lawrence-river>



## **Men of Honor – Carl Brashear (US Navy) and Phillip**

### **Brashear (USN, US Army)**

By Gary Lehman

#### ***Man of Honor* : Carl Brashear**

*Sea Swells* caught up to Carl Brashear's son Phillip in Richmond, Virginia to talk about the Carl Brashear Foundation and about his father's US Navy career, his life and times and achievements. Some of our readers have seen and will remember the fine film *Men Of Honor* (2000) starring Cuba Gooding as Seaman (ultimately Master Chief Petty Officer and Master Diver) Carl Brashear, with Robert De Niro as his antagonist-turned champion Master Chief Bill Sunday, and actress Aunjanue Ellis as Carl's wife Junetta Brashear. The film did an exemplary job portraying the inspiring life of Master Diver Brashear.

And what an exalted life -- shimmering with achieving full human potential and the triumph of the human spirit! It will be a singular privilege in this article to recount Carl's life and journey. We can all draw inspiration from Carl Brashear, his intrepid determination and ultimate success in the face of multiple, overwhelming odds. His life offers a lighted pathway for us to pursue our personal commitment to achieve maximum potential in our own lives. *Haze Gray and UNDERWAY!*

Carl's historic life achievement was to become the US Navy's first African- American Master Diver, first to earn the rank of Master Chief Petty Officer -- the highest enlisted sailor position in the United States Navy. Only one percent of all enlisted sailors ever reach this pinnacle of US Navy ratings.

#### **From Rural Kentucky to the US Navy**

Carl was born a sharecropper's son in rural Kentucky in 1931 at the height of the Depression, and joined the US Navy in 1948 at age 17 at the insistence of his parents. Directing their son to leave the subsistence farm where he worked the land so arduously with his brothers and family was a huge sacrifice for his parents, but their desire for Carl to have a better life impelled them to send him off to make the best possible life for himself.

President Harry Truman desegregated the US Armed Services in 1948, and while this was a major advance for racial equality providing opportunities for people of color, this legislation did little to suppress -- and actually inflamed - the pervasive racism which lived in the hearts of much of the leadership and enlisted ranks of the US Navy. The film *Men of Honor* has many searing, painful scenes depicting the racism encountered by sailor Brashear. Phillip advised during our interview that the racism portrayed in the film was a "once over lightly" for the racism that Carl experienced; it was much worse than shown in the film.

#### **Carl Brashear's Early Life in the US Navy**

Carl loved swimming in local ponds and lakes as a youngster growing up in rural Kentucky, and he proved to be a strong, fast swimmer. In 1950 while assigned to US Navy ship ARS-40

## Men of Honor – Carl Brashear (US Navy) and Phillip

### Brashear (USN, US Army)

*USS Hoist*, Carl witnessed the rescue of a downed pilot by a Navy diver. At that point a dream was born: Carl would become a US Navy diver. Carl's exalted reality in the Navy however, was grilling hamburgers for his shipmates aboard *USS Hoist* - a far cry from his dreams of glory in the US Navy. Working in the galley merely earned him the humiliating title of "cookie" (a mocking appellation which infuriated him and which he had to endure from his officer superiors for years). But racist name calling was the least of his concerns, compared to the abusive racism-inspired 'team building' and 'disciplinary actions' meted out to him. Worse, he received actual death threats from his shipmates who threatened to drown him; threats to that effect were posted on his bunk bed after he finally earned the opportunity to train to become a US Navy salvage diver.

### **A Day in the Life of a US Navy Diver...**

*Sea Swells* readership includes divers, and as such we have good understanding about the complexities of deep/technical/wreck dives. We understand and internalize decompression concepts and tables; understand and manage breathing gas mixtures; master all the complicated equipment both in usage and maintenance; divers must have autonomic understanding of dive procedures; absolutely must avoid entanglement or entrapment in wreckage or other underwater structures as a matter of life and death; and must be perpetually mindful of the critical nature of timing in everything we do while diving. In short, being a technical/wreck confined-space diver is *not for the faint of heart* - considering the dual requirements of multiple task management and exceptional situational awareness. These can spell the difference between a successful dive mission or... a lonely, cold, panic-stricken death. Consider that being a US Navy diver is *orders of magnitude* more dangerous and complex than the dives we 'recreational' divers encounter. US Navy divers are assigned a variety of missions including harbor channel clearing and demolitions; experience repeated exposure saturation diving; perform underwater repair including welding and construction; engage in rescue operations including submarine crew rescue (and recovery); encounter the worst-imaginable hazardous and toxic materials and radioactive materials; Navy divers must recover live ammunition and heavy weapons ordnance from accidents and ships sinking; must provide discretionary (covert) operations support (sometimes in combat conditions). US Navy divers are considered to the premier underwater environment subject matter experts. US Navy divers are not missioned to photograph underwater landscapes, seahorses or marveling at manta ray 'fly-bys'-- they are there to successfully execute complex and inherently dangerous missions. Murphy is a constant companion to Navy (and all) divers, and the complicated and outright hazardous tasks performed combine with Murphy to create an exceptionally challenging mission set.

### **Carl Brashear: "It's not a sin to get knocked down, it's a sin to stay down..."**

Brashear was finally accepted for US Navy diver training after requesting the assignment for several years, but the rigorous training required to conduct the Navy diver mission represent a likely insurmountable obstacle for a diver with limited academic skills. K-12 schooling for an African-American sharecropper's child in rural Kentucky in post-depression America was vastly sub-standard. Imagine the challenge of studying the details of Boyle's Law, memorizing US Navy decompression tables, and mentally calculating diving decompression obligations – all subjects about as alien to Carl's Kentucky childhood as life on Mars! The complexity of that level of technical material is daunting for *everyone*, and much more so for an individual not accustomed to cut-throat competitive exams. When Brashear

## **Men of Honor – Carl Brashear (US Navy) and Phillip Brashear (USN, US Army)**

showed up to the US Navy Diving School in picturesque Bayonne, New Jersey, his academic challenges were only one of multiple strikes against him, which taken together predicted a high likelihood of a rapid dismantling of his quest to become a Navy diver.

At this point let's consider the challenges arrayed against Carl Brashear: he was from a *poor family*, who could offer no political, social influence or economic privilege which might be leveraged in support of Brashear's experience in the US Navy. He did not have a *strong elementary or high school education*, which placed him at a disadvantage relative to all his shipmates and the Navy officers to whom he reported and who assessed his performance. And on top of these obstacles, we layer on the eliminationist shroud of *racism* in the US Navy at that point in US history.

Carl Brashear – through his personal commitment to professional and technical excellence, faith in his abilities, and steadfast courage and level-headedness under personal trial and dangerously threatening underwater situations – was not to be denied his ascent to his goal of Master Diver!

Thus, Carl's defining quote: ***"It's not a sin to get knocked down, it's a sin to stay down..."*** Brashear's challenges didn't end with poverty, scholastic challenges, and racism. These Carl overcame, and following his graduation from US Navy Diving and Salvage School in 1954 after six years in the Navy as the first African-American US Navy diver, he earned the respect and trust of his shipmates and fellow divers for his successes in his diving missions. These included recovering live ammunition from murky North Atlantic waters and recovering multiple bodies of lost Blue Angel airmen. Thus - against all odds - Carl had come up to flank speed in his Navy diving career. In 1966 however, Carl's circumstances were about to radically change for the worse...

### **A Double-Tragedy Strikes... or, 'when the going gets tough, the tough get going...'**

The United States and the Soviet Union were at the height of the Cold War in 1966, and each country amassed massive nuclear strike capabilities delivered by bombers, submarine-launched or land-based missiles. Constant training by the crews was required to hone the skills to successfully execute a nuclear response; these exercises included air-to-air refueling of B52 jet bombers by aerial tanker aircraft. This is a dangerous venture, and mistakes can lead to tragedy. Thus, it was on January 17, 1966: a B52 bomber had a mid-air collision with a KC135 aerial tanker while refueling over the Mediterranean Sea over the coast of Spain. The KC135 blew apart, killing the four crew members and the B52 broke apart in mid-air. Three of the four hydrogen bombs fell onto farmland near the Spanish town of Palomares (causing radioactive contamination, but no explosion) and the fourth hydrogen bomb fell somewhere into the Mediterranean.

After two and a half months of intensive US Navy searching, the bomb was located in 2,500' of water by deep submersible *Alvin*. Brashear was awarded the Navy's highest non-combat award – the *Navy and Marine Corps Medal* – for his courage and performance excellence in the Navy's effort to find the missing bomb. However, tragedy was to strike again. Brashear was managing the recovery crew operations topside on the deck of the *USS Hoist* while the recovered bomb was being retrieved, when a tow line broke. Brashear saw the accident about to happen and pushed a crewman out of harm's way just in the nick of time, but took the full brunt of a flying pipe which hit his left leg, shattering it in multiple places. He almost died from loss of blood on the deck. He survived, but after months of medical treatment, his left foot and leg became necrotic from loss of blood flow, and gangrene set in. The leg had to be amputated. Navy brass directed that this effectively ended Brashear's diving career - and set the stage for a medical discharge.

## Men of Honor – Carl Brashear (US Navy) and Phillip

### Brashear (USN, US Army)

*Carl Brashear was to have none of that.* He wanted to continue to dive. He had his sights set on the becoming the Navy's first African-American Master Diver, and on earning the highest enlisted rank in the US Navy – Master Chief Petty Officer. In April 1968, after over two years of recovery, intensive physical training and rehabilitation, Brashear became the first amputee to be certified (actually Brashear's *second* certification) as a US Navy diver! In 1970 he became the Navy's first African-American Master Diver and one year later, achieved the highest rank of MCPO (E9). Thus, Carl Brashear overcame *yet another* (literally) crippling challenge, physical disability of an amputated leg. During the final part of his career, Carl supervised a team of divers aboard *USS Recovery ARS-43*. He was revered as a leader, and his team knew that Carl understood their job, had their back, would advocate for them -- and keep them safe. These divers were his surrogate children while he was aboard the ship.

### **Phillip Brashear and the legacy of Carl Brashear**

During Sea Swell's meeting with Carl Brashear's son Phillip, the discussion also revealed some aspects of Carl's life which are not as well-known as his legendary Navy career. Some of these were obliquely hinted at in the film.

Despite the triumph of the human spirit which Carl marshalled to overcome poverty, illiteracy, racism and physical disability – Phillip reminds us that *his father was not a 'mythical' figure...* but was all-too human, with human weaknesses. As his father's career started to wind down in the mid to late 1970's, Carl himself started to reflect back on roads taken, and those *not* taken. He realized belatedly and with some regret that he had sacrificed his family relationships, subordinating them to his Navy diving career. There is a searing scene in the film *Men of Honor* in which Carl's wife Junetta confronts Carl in his hospital room with this insight, and sadly walks away. This may have been part of a process and turning point in their marriage, for they divorced some years later; Carl was married three times. And then there was the alcoholism. These are painful truths for us all to acknowledge about legendary Carl Brashear, but important in order to establish "Carl Brashear" as a human being. After serving more than thirty years in the US Navy, Carl passed away in 2006 at age 75. Before he passed, he successfully completed his final mission – returning to his family.

*Phillip's insight is this: the true testament and powerful legacy of the 'real' Carl Brashear – is that he was **not** a mythical god, but rather a human being who - unlike any other American hero in American history, overcame five major adversities to achieve his dreams, namely: poverty, illiteracy, pervasive racism, physical disability and alcoholism. In this light, Carl would proclaim **"It's not a sin to get knocked down, it's a sin to stay down..."***

## Men of Honor : Carl Brashear (US Navy) and Phillip Brashear (USN, US Army)

### **The Carl Brashear Foundation**

Reflecting back on Carl Brashear, a question surfaces: what message would Carl have for young people today? Phillip believes that Carl's answer to that question would have changed over the course of his father's life, mirroring his father's personal growth over the years. Initially, the answer would have been "*Never Give Up, and Never let anyone steal your dreams*".

Carl never wavered from that personal commitment to excellence, and directing those close to him to expend the energy and effort necessary to achieving their individual goals. However, Carl's answer would become enriched with his additional life insights: that commitment to education, loving your family, extending a helping hand to those in your community who are in need, and calling out social injustice and abusive behavior in whatever form – are building blocks for a fulfilling life in the spirit of 'Love Thy Neighbor'. Phillip also believes that his father would enjoin young people to *look up from their smartphones now and then* (and actually speak to each other, instead of texting!).

Phillip Brashear is the President of the Foundation ( [www.carlbrashear.org](http://www.carlbrashear.org) ), and oversees extensive community outreach in various initiatives in pursuit of these objectives. Outreach includes presentations to area schools to inspire high schoolers to learn what Carl accomplished



under adversity - and to realize that they too, can and should strive to achieve their personal best; the Foundation also makes presentations to numerous armed services teams all over the country; provides and supports human and family services to veterans and their families; delivers the message of empowerment to African-Americans through various advocacy programs and organizations. Collectively, the Foundation energetically brings the message of Carl Brashear's success against all odds, revealing the human capacity to achieve personal best to people all across our country.

*US Army Reserve Chinook pilot Phillip Brashear, President of Carl Brashear Foundation*

### **Carl and Phillip Brashear: Lightning Strikes Twice!**

Phillip is Carl Brashear's son, but they also share a life experience! After graduating high school Phillip joined the Navy like his father before him, and worked as a crewman aboard Navy helicopters with a minesweeping and anti-submarine warfare mission. He decided he wanted to go to flight school, but that was not an option for him in the Navy because he did not have a college degree. After mustering out of the Navy, he joined the Virginia Army National Guard (which did not have a college degree requirement for piloting helicopters) and Phillip qualified as pilot. He flew Hueys, Blackhawks and eventually was cross-trained to fly multi-rotor Chinooks, serving in Bolivia on peacekeeping assignments, helping to build community centers, schools, hospitals and infrastructure. He also served in Bosnia as a member of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission, conducting infrastructure development, logistical and discretionary missions; and while in Iraq, performed a variety of missions including troop transport, equipment relocation, VIP transport, air assault, and discretionary missions. It should be noted that in many cases Navy divers are responsible primarily for their own well-being or small numbers of other divers on that particular mission; Phillip's "Blackhawk driver" responsibilities frequently had a different, but exceedingly high stress and danger level. For example, Phillip had to stay cool and dodge anti-aircraft fire and surface to air missiles being shot at *his* Blackhawk, and execute low-level penetrations into hostile areas (sometimes at night in snow, sleet or

## Men of Honor – Carl Brashear (US Navy) and Phillip Brashear (USN, US Army)

dust storms) - and hoping that coalition forces would not mistake him for an incoming enemy. Sudden panic underwater will end up in a bad day for an individual... but is a horrible prospect if flying a Blackhawk with a platoon of soldiers in the back... *DNN* says 'Hats Off' to Phillip for his valorous service!

In June 2014 Phillip took the required annual instrument flying checkout certification -- and scored so highly that he celebrated by engaging in a rigorous 4-mile run the following morning! After his run, he had his annual flight physical assessment. To his surprise, he was diagnosed with a cardiac condition known as Atrial Fibrillation. Unfortunately for Phillip, A-Fib is a flight career 'show-stopper'. Army brass said Phillip's flight career was honorably concluded. But *Phillip is Carl's son*, and 'no more flying' was just *not an option*. Phillip's Army Flight Surgeon referred him to a Navy cardiologist, who during the examination, *recognized Phillip's last name*, and realized with incredulity that he had treated Phillip's father Carl some years earlier. The stage was therefore set for Phillip to follow in his father's footsteps to plan with his doctor how to somehow - *find a way* - to keep flying. And they did. The 'Frankenstein' procedure was used to shock Phillip's cardiac rhythm back to normal (*It's ALIVE!*), and Phillip still is flying those tricked-out Chinooks. With their faith and steadfast commitment to personal excellence and fulfilling their dreams, these Brashears just keep getting back up; resiliency in adversity is in the DNA of this family!

### ***And On a Personal Note...***

Phillip remembers with great excitement the 2011 conference (attended by *Beneath The Sea* founder Zig Zigahn and Women Divers Hall of Fame members US Navy Captain Bobbie Scholley and Vreni Roduner) at the Mariners' Museum at Newport News ([www.marinersmuseum.org](http://www.marinersmuseum.org)), documenting the recovery of the turret of the Civil War era (Union) ironclad warship *USS Monitor* off the bottom at Hampton Roads, Virginia. (The turret is now being preserved in the Museum). Being on the Department of Defense-funded NOAA teams in 2001 and 2002 directing the salvage the *USS Monitor's* turret under heavily-heaving seas was Bobbie Scholley's most famous mission in her storied US Navy career, and involved twenty dives to 240ft on surface-supplied mixed gases to manage her team during the salvage (read more at: [sanctuaries.noaa.gov/news/features/barbara\\_scholley.html](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/news/features/barbara_scholley.html)).

*And of course, Sea Swells* also asked Phillip if he or any members of his family are divers! Phillip demurred on that, but did indicate that he enjoys snorkeling. And there is our opportunity with Phillip! He admits to enjoying warm, blue water with pretty, colorful fish – a nice break from instrument flying through anti-aircraft fire at night in driving sleet with a load of leathernecks in the passenger compartment -- so let's collectively encourage Phillip that *if ever he decides* while on vacation to trade his flight suit for a wetsuit, and his flight goggles for a face mask and fins, we will be there for him - and gladly help him *discover our and his father's world* -- up close and personal!



*Phillip Brashear and the author,  
Richmond, Virginia December 2016*



## Humpback Whales -- RIGHT OFF BROOKLYN !

Gary Lehman

A few years ago, our club did a whale watching trip out of Brooklyn to watch the whales. I missed that trip, but recently had the opportunity to do a whale watching trip in the waters of the NY Bight. The waters we patrolled just south of Manhattan and Brooklyn, and offshore near JFK Airport. The day we went whale watching there appeared to be only three whales out there. It was reported that sometimes six or ten are in this general area. The whales we watched were busily feeding on a fish called 'menhaden' – more popularly known as 'moss bunker' or just plain 'bunkers'. Bunkers are the same fish upon which voracious bluefish feed. Sometimes our inshore waters roil with splashing; that is usually menhaden or bunkers desperately trying to escape marauding bluefish.

Menhaden are a keystone species, a crucial foundation for the entire aquatic food chain. Without these diminutive little oily fish, our oceans would be in a world of hurt. The waters of the NY Bight are widely reported to be much cleaner than they have been in many years; consequently, the menhaden are back in full force (along with white sharks and sand tigers!). In fact, on the way out to see the whales on this afternoon, we saw the water boiling. This resulted due to feeding predatory fish (possibly bluefish) corralling the menhaden towards the surface in big 'bait balls' (aggregations of terrified little fish wildly gathering together for protection). Predatory fish, such as our humpbacks, would then cruise through the mossbunker / menhaden bait balls with open mouths. The little fishes' fear was justified, because the humpbacks and other predatory fish gulp them down by the thousands. Not to fear though; mossbunkers are not in any way shape or form endangered at this time in these waters.

To read more about bunkers... <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menhaden>. A scholarly work - with fascinating historical insights - is by H. Bruce Franklin, *The Most Important Fish in the Sea: Menhaden and America* and is available at Amazon <https://www.amazon.com/Most-Important-Fish-Sea-Menhaden/dp/1597265071>

We don't have to get into an extensive discussion here about humpbacks; the naturalist on board our trip did a great job revealing the biology and habits of the whales we were observing. And suffice it to say that *they are right here* in our own watery backyard and there are plenty of whale watching operators out of Brooklyn and New Jersey. It is a fantastic family day! Bring your children, nieces, nephews, grandkids, spouse, and friends! And, bring your binoculars for an even closer 'up close and personal' encounter, and bring water a hat, ...*and sunscreen!* Our whale watch operator was *Sea Streak* (information is available and reservations can be made at <https://seastreak.com/tour-and-event-cruises/whale-watching-cruise/>).

Enjoy the photos which follow, and I hope you can take the time in September to see (and even hear!) these beautiful animals!





## Future of Life on Earth As We Know It... **MENHADEN**

Gary Lehman



So this diminutive fish is oily and not fit for human consumption. I would not eat one if I had the opportunity to do so. Why are we bothering to write about it? And what is the title of this article supposed to mean -- "The Future of Life on Earth As We Know it...?"

There are several reasons that whales -humpbacks in particular - are returning to the NY area. Among the reasons are that the water is cleaner – after years of recovery from urban raw sewage dumping and sludge and poisonous crap flowing into NY/NJ harbor area via the Hudson (originating from the high tech manufacturing companies upstate...). There are also no whaling ships in this area.

When there is cleaner water, the plankton returns; fish can survive and even thrive. We now have flourishing schools of this little fish – menhaden. Also known as moss bunkers, or just 'bunkers'.

Guess which species loves to eat them? *Every bigger fish species*, like dolphins (both the marine mammal and the fish). And striped bass, tuna and bluefish. And avian raptors such as ospreys. And.... whales.

Ever see the harbor or ocean water "boiling" in Mamaroneck or Larchmont Harbor? Or elsewhere in the Sound, or off Brooklyn? That is because there are marauding schools of (most likely) bluefish eating these schools of menhaden. And in open water, the humpbacks are feasting on them, gulping down dozens or hundreds with each upward, mouth-open lunge.

It was not always easy street for this species. Menhaden used to be caught by New Englanders for lamp oil and used as fertilizer for agriculture, food for cows and farmed fish, and used in cosmetics. The species suffered serious declines in the 1960's through the 1990's – near collapse - stocks down up to 75% from the first census in the late 1950's. Fortunately, they have rebounded, and now we all have to keep the positive momentum going.

A fundamental point we observe with so many threatened species- they are interdependent in the food chain. The dirty ocean water meant less plankton, which resulted in less bunker, which in turn meant the stripers suffered – along with the fishermen going after striped bass.

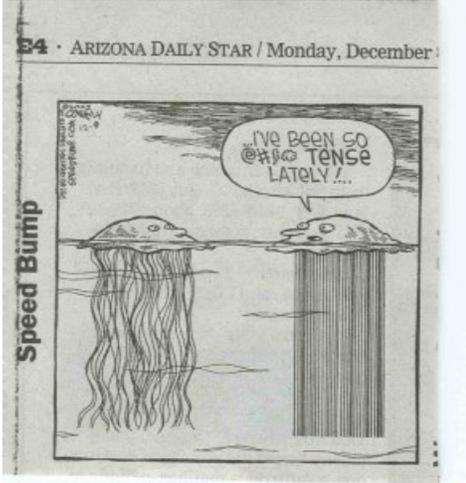
The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is on the case to maintain close watch over menhaden and direct appropriate continued recovery scenarios capping catch limits. This group knows what is at stake. A recurrence of the Atlantic cod collapse will not happen on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's watch! To read more about their work, visit <http://www.asmfc.org/> The Pew Charitable Trust has also fiercely advocated for menhaden and the Atlantic marine environments. Sustainability is the key. Keeping all stakeholders on the same page and working towards mutually agreeable objectives. You can learn about their work on behalf of Atlantic fisheries at <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/projects/archived-projects/new-england-ocean-conservation/priorities/forage/atlantic-menhaden>

Is this the future of life on Earth as we know it in the balance? Well, maybe not – *but certainly the future of the fisheries we now enjoy from Maine to Florida!*



## On the Lighter Side !

Submitted by Lada Simek



## Life's Many Mysteries

Lada Simek



When you spend a great deal of time on the water, you are bound to experience the strange, the bizarre, the unexplainable. Some months ago I reported of my finding a perfectly good regulator attached to a tank valve while diving in Milton harbor, Rye. There was no sign of a tank or damage to the threads. It was not an explosion. In spite of contacting dive shops, I was not able to explain this mystery. Who attaches a regulator to a tank valve and then drops it overboard in 12 feet of water?

I experienced the second mystery only about 200 yards from the first. I was alone on my boat. The water was a little rough out on the sound, so I decided to make a shallow dive at the entrance to Rye harbor. By the way, Rye or Milton harbor is a mile long and experiences four tides a day with a range of about seven feet. Understandably, there is a current four times a day, of respectable intensity especially three hours after a high or low.

I like to dive close to rocks that are covered by water at high tide. There is where boats can get into trouble when operated by dumb or inexperienced skippers and that is where artifacts can be found. I am seldom disappointed. I even found two wrecks on top of each other close to a shallow "rock" a quarter of a mile from shore off New Rochelle, but that is another story. I found a good spot- a rock about two feet high protruding from the water at low tide. I anchored about 80 feet from the rock in a flat, sandy bottom in eight feet of water. The daily current washed the mud out of the area. I decided to check out the vicinity of my rock I got suited up and jumped in the water. I took a compass heading for the rock. The



## Life's Many Mysteries

Lada Simek



visibility was about five feet which was pretty good. The spot turned out to be uninspiring and too shallow for boat traffic, but I did catch a legal lobster.

When I got back to the boat, I decided I was hungry and did not feel like driving a mile long harbor back to the marina. I decided to cook the lobster on my boat. When I purchased my boat, it came with a small alcohol stove which I never liked. It was troublesome and unreliable, but I set it on my boat's transom, put the lobster in a big aluminum pot and began cooking.

After the water got to a boil, I saw a frightful thing. The alcohol stove was leaking and the burning liquid was running down on top of my engine and the bilge! This called for fast action. With my foot I kicked the stove, pot and lobster overboard. A quick inspection showed no damage but what a stupid way to lose a boat!

I did not want the stove- let it rust in peace. The lobster can be shared by other creatures, but I did want the pot back. I had six good buoy lines with five pound weights aboard but that seemed excessive in an eight foot bottom. I managed to find some string and cutting a twenty foot piece with a bleach bottle at one end and a nice, heavy brick at the other I marked the spot where the pot was. My boat was not swinging at the anchor since a slight current held it in position. I was convinced the brick was within four feet of the pot. I would come back tomorrow and recover my pot.

Well, tomorrow turned out to be three days later. Again it was low tide and I could see my rock from a distance, and THERE WAS MY BUOY! Still exactly where I had left it! Minutes later I was in the water. When you follow a buoy line, you must never touch it because the movement will either move the weight or stir up the bottom, affecting your visibility. I followed the line with my eyes only and



## Life's Many Mysteries

Lada Simek



when I got to the bottom, about four feet of string were lying on the sand AND THAT IS ALL! I did a search. The brick was gone, the pot – everything was gone!

My first thought was that my stuff was raided. I can see a diver telling his friends “I got a lobster diving and it was in a pot and already cooked!” Not very believable, and why would he take the brick? How about the bleach bottle? If the twelve tides did not move it, how about the wind doing it? Who untied the knot of the string?

Lada Simek

- Q) What is the difference between a cat and a comma ?**  
**A) A cat has claws at the end of its paws.**  
**A comma is a pause at the end of a clause.**



# And Around The Dive Shop.....

## LOCAL DIVE SHOPS.....AT YOUR SERVICE!

*Looking for dive-related gifts? Need to upgrade your gear?*

*Here is a list of shops that may just have the right one for your best dive buddy or for yourself!*



**Ski and Scuba Connection**  
26 Saint Roch Ave  
Greenwich, CT 06830  
Tel. 203-629-4766  
www.skiandscubaconnection.com



**SCUBA NEW YORK**  
2037 Central Park Ave  
Yonkers, NY 10710  
Tel. 914-779-2966  
and  
2672 Gerritsen Ave  
Brooklyn, NY 11229  
Tel. 718-769-0099  
www.scubany.com



**Abyss Scuba**  
Where the fun begins!  
www.abyss-scuba.net  
(914) 244-3483  
29 Marble Avenue, Pleasantville, NY 10570



**Captain Mike's Diving School**  
530 City Island Ave  
City Island, NY 10464  
Tel. 718-885-1588  
www.captainmikesdiving.com



**Oceanblue Dive**  
108 Bedford Street  
Stamford, CT, 06901  
www.oceanbluedive.com



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