

# undercurrent

*The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers*

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## WAOW, Indonesia

*fiery volcanoes, dangerous dragons and colorful diving*

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Dear Fellow Diver:

Sixty feet down on my first dive, I quietly admired a barrel sponge the size of a smart car. Tiny white sea cucumbers thrived in every nook and cranny. Then a thundering explosion ripped through the water. I quickly looked at my dive buddy. "What in the world was that?" A thousand thoughts raced through my mind, but I guessed it might just be local fishermen dynamiting. I shrugged it off. Upon returning to the surface some 60 minutes later, I had my answer. A towering mushroom cloud billowed from the lip of a nearby volcanic crater. The tiny island of Palau Palue had just erupted. "Awesome," I thought. "It doesn't get more primal than this." I climbed the ladder into the rigid tender, and the driver returned us divers to the mother craft. Fine volcanic ash rained down on us, covering chairs, tables, stairs, everything. I could not have asked for a more unusual way to begin my 12 days of diving on the luxury liveaboard WAOW.

That's an acronym for Water Adventure Ocean Wide. Just a year old, she is an impressive 197 feet long and can handle 18 divers in nine spacious, upscale cabins. When she unfurrows her three great sails, she is truly an impressive site. Her cabins are top-of-the-line: king or queen beds, cabinets and lots of storage space, full bathrooms with toilets, sinks and showers. I had a desk to set up my notebook computer to run on wireless Internet, and a large LCD TV with an enormous selection of movies and first-run TV programs (my wife and I actually watched the last season of Dexter



The WAOW



while on board). And ours was a standard cabin! Some had private decks and large view windows.

This voyage, which began in late April, included 10 days of diving off the remote Indonesian islands between Flores and Bali, and a walkabout on the island of Komodo. Yes, Komodo dragons! There's another item I would soon check off my bucket list.

Each morning, Jay Monney, our Swiss cruise director and divemaster, would sing out "dive briefing, dive

briefing, briefing dive." This simple cadence became an infectious tune that reverberated in my brain for weeks. Jay, an expert photographer, showed dive diagrams and photos of the critters we might encounter on a large LCD monitor. He had no problem communicating to the diverse divers aboard, effortlessly conversing in English, German, French and Indonesian (he speaks seven languages). Our dives were limited to a depth of 90 feet, but at times we dropped below 100 feet with no hassle. We were required to stay with our dive buddy but not with the guide. The protocol was divers first, followed by still photographers, followed by videographers. Underwater, Jay and the other guides, Howay (a man) and Kay (a woman), were quick to find unusual critters. On board, they were quick to fix problems, such as stopping the free flow from my new octopus or substituting a fin strap for one that snapped (yes, I failed to check my gear thoroughly before leaving home). Divers had their own gear boxes to store dive computers, masks and so forth. I would suit up, don the small stuff and board my dive tender (five divers traveled in one, six in the other) where the big gear was ready to go. On the count of three, we all backrolled into the water. I started diving in a 3-mil but soon switched to just a skin in water that varied between 76 and 86 degrees.

On our dive at Secret Garden, water clarity was excellent -- as much as 100 feet visibility (on some dives it dropped to 30 feet), and the current was non-existent. This was a macro photographer's ideal environment. Within 10 minutes, I saw beautiful nudibranchs, two fire gobies darting in and out of coral, a pair of signal gobies and a tridacna clam the size of a microwave oven. (I thought of some lost 1950s B-movie, where a solo native diver accidentally sticks his foot into a giant clam and struggles frantically to free himself.) Then my wife excitedly motioned to me. Sitting on a rocky ledge were two giant frogfish, each the size of a loaf of bread (that's huge in the frogfish world). They ignored me as I hunkered down to capture a few frames. (I shoot with a Canon G7 that is going on 10 years old. I occasionally get embarrassed when a 5D Mark III or a D800 is whipped out, but I try to deal with it gracefully.)

After all divers surfaced, our tender returned us to the WAOW, where Cindy, our dining room hostess, greeted us with a warm smile and refreshing drink. I peeled off my wetsuit with the help of a deck attendant, who rinsed and hung it to dry, then took a warm shower on deck. I soon fell into a pleasant routine -- rest followed by diving followed by eating.

The food ranged from good to excellent. In the morning, pre-dive breakfasts consisted of cereal, milk, coffee, fresh fruit, yogurt and toast. The first dive was around 8 a.m., followed by a substantial second breakfast of fried eggs, bacon, sausage, potatoes, excellent Indonesian stir-fry noodles, pancakes, pastries and fresh fruit. Dive 2 was around 11 a.m., after which came a quick nap in a deck hammock. Lunch, then Dive 3 at 2 p.m., followed by reading in a lounge chair or downloading my photos. Dive 4 was either a sunset or night dive. Lunch and dinner were sit-down affairs: soup or salad, followed by a main course like prawns and rice, a fillet and potatoes, or a fresh fish stir-fry. Regarding deserts, the crowning achievement was a molten chocolate cake that erupted in warm

liquid chocolate when I stuck my fork in. The first glass of wine each night was free, and the Fanta, Coke and juice were always complimentary.

As the sun set over Gili Banta, I eased into the water for a night dive. My light quickly illuminated a decorator crab moving through the staghorn coral. So bizarre was this crab that had it been human, it would have had a successful career in Paris as a high-fashion runway model. Each leg was adorned with cool stuff, a piece of sponge here, a shiny shell there. Lady Gaga would have been proud. Next up was an anemone about 10 inches tall. Its tubular base was about 1.5 inches thick and about eight inches long. From the top, flowing white tentacles seized a minute morsel, then the tentacle slowly delivered the prize back to the central cluster. Scores of tentacles appeared to move independently of each other. Mesmerized by this creature, I thought how prolific science-fiction writers use their vast imaginations to depict bizarre life forms on distant planets. Their imaginary visions pale in comparison to the reality of what divers see every day.

One afternoon, we went ashore on Rincon Island, a sister island to Komodo, to photograph the famous dragons. Trained guides escorted us on a two-hour hike. Only a few dragons were hanging out by the camp kitchen, asleep in the sun. Jay said not to worry, he knew a secret spot, so we boarded the tender and headed for a remote beach. As we neared shore, I spotted two dragons about six feet in length. When our tender approached, they sprinted with amazing speed toward us. This commotion caught the attention of two larger dragons, perhaps nine feet long, that were hiding in the bushes. They too bolted with alarming speed toward us. I looked at the eyes of one of these prehistoric creatures; there was no fear in there. He was the top predator on this island and I was the prey.

The Komodo dragon kills with one bite. Its saliva is highly infectious. It typically waits in ambush and inflicts a fatal bite on wild goats, feral pigs and even water buffalo (although it can take up to two weeks for the latter to succumb). Patiently the dragons follow their prey, waiting. I was surprised when a dragon entered the water to swim toward our tender. Jay was less delighted and directed the tender to a safer distance. Jay asked, "Still want to go ashore?" "Perhaps not," I said.

Cannibal Rock -- apparently named thus become someone once saw one dragon devouring another -- was an amazing dive. The colors of the soft coral were stunning, massive schools of fish swarmed everywhere, and the reef was pristine and healthy. There were crustaceans, nudibranchs and clownfish frolicking in their anemones. A map puffer and a moray eel shared a cleaning station with

## How Diving Inspires This Science-Fiction Writer

Dear Ben,

I wrote the book version of the new film *Star Trek into Darkness*, which includes a brief flash of diving. I had a strange moment when I found myself viewing the relevant footage and found myself thinking not of *Star Trek*, but of diving on the alien world in question. You'll spot the scene instantly if you happen to see the film.

Many years ago I did a novel, *Cachalot*, set entirely on an alien water world, to which we transported all the surviving whales. One whole chapter was nothing but a description of the underwater life. My editor cut it. Said it slowed the story down. Bah.

-- Alan Dean Foster

*Alan, an Undercurrent contributor who takes some pretty spectacular dive trips, is an award-winning science fiction writer. Visit his website at [www.alandeanfoster.com](http://www.alandeanfoster.com)*



A Komodo Dragon Coming for the Tender

## WAOW, Indonesia

Diving ( <i>experienced</i> )	★★★★★
Diving ( <i>beginner</i> )	★
Snorkelling	★★★
Accommodations	★★★★★
Food	★★★★
Service and Attitude	★★★★★
Money's Worth	★★★★★

★ = poor      ★★★★★ = excellent  
*World Scale*

dozens of hinge-break shrimp. A sea cucumber slowly marched across a coral head with its bizarre padded feet. The variety of life blew me away.

That night, under a sky full of stars, dinner was set up on deck, on two large, hand-made, wooden tables. Afterwards, we rocked the night away to a large selection of music choices. The diverse group of 11 divers -- four from Germany, two from France, four Americans (two living in Paris) and one from Canada -- created even more interesting conversations. (Other nights, the captain joined me for a game of chess.) There was plenty of room to separate myself from the group -- common areas had two upper decks, one with hammocks and the other with reclining chairs. The lower deck had three large tables for outside dining. The indoor dining area

had a well-stocked library, bar area and a dedicated photo room with a computer.

One day we dived Manta Alley, which didn't live up to its name. Though absent of mantas, it was still a beautiful dive. However, on another morning, we made a drift dive at Makassar, off Komodo Island. I backrolled off the tender in sync with the group, but the stiff current grabbed me straight away. My dive buddy grabbed the collar of my BC and held on for dear life. Our dive guide and two other divers were about 50 feet away, so I signaled to my buddy to make our way toward them. It was futile. The current had us in its grip, and we were going wherever it was taking us. Howay, our dive guide, rapidly faded from site. We descended to 60 feet so that we were hovering about 10 feet off the sea floor. Now I could see how fast we were flying. I let go, relaxed, embraced the current and went with the flow. It was exhilarating. I grabbed my buddy's arm to get her attention and pointed to a shape 65 feet away. It was a huge manta ray with its mouth open, feeding in the fast current. As it receded into the distance, two more appeared just 30 feet away. Then came mantas number four, five and six. My buddy squeezed my arm and pointed straight down. Just six feet below us, a gigantic manta with a wing span of at least 15 feet, hovered effortlessly in the current.

By the end of our dive, I had lost count of the number of mantas we saw. We surfaced miles from our entry point, but no sweat. WAOW staff equips each diver with a dive locator. I depressed Button 1, which allowed me to send a voice transmission to the boat captain and the two tenders. (Button 2 would have sent out a distress signal to all boats in the area.). The tender arrived in less than a minute.

On the last night, we enjoyed a BBQ on deck under the stars with a menu of steak and prawns, corn on the cob and salad. Afterwards, I took a few notes of the bigger fish I had seen -- dogtooth tuna, Spanish mackerels, giant trevallies, Napoleon wrasse, humphead parrotfish, reef (Manta Alfredi) and giant mantas (Manta Birostris), mobulas, white-tip and gray reef sharks -- then listened to music until 1 a.m.

I must repeat that the luxurious WAOW is a first-class operation from start to finish. The entire crew was genuinely friendly and helpful. While the dive locations are very remote and seldom visited, those are the spots that resemble diving like it was elsewhere a generation ago. The reefs are pristine, healthy, vibrant and alive with fish. All I can say is WAOW!

-- A.D.



**Divers Compass:** My 12-day trip was a pricey \$5,604 per person; Nitrox was available . . . When arriving at an Indonesian airport, you must obtain a 30-day visa for \$50 . . . Flights from the U.S. to Asia take 10 to 14 hours, then there is another set of flights to get to Bali, so next time, I will bring a selection of movies and a good book . . . Website - [www.waowcharters.com](http://www.waowcharters.com)

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## Bahamas, Hawaii, the Red Sea. . .

*one Micronesia resort worth visiting, another that's not*

**Royal Evolution, Egypt.** While European divers flock to the Red Sea, Americans continue to steer clear -- especially from boats that venture into more southern areas and the Sudan -- without good reason. So we find this report on the liveaboard *Royal Evolution* by subscriber Michael Joest (Kehl, Germany), very intriguing. "There are boats starting out of Port Sudan (like *Andromeda* and *Don Questo*), where you come in via Dubai on a not-too reliable airline, or the *Royal Evolution*, which starts out of Port Ghaleb, Egypt. I went from Frankfurt with Sun Express, one of the airlines where you have to pay for everything. The flight was 4.5 hours into Marsa Alam. You need two visas for Egypt and Sudan; the Egypt visa was only \$29, but the Sudan visa plus the dive permit costs \$547! Two weeks on the *Royal Evolution* cost \$3780), and with the flight and all these mentioned extras, one can easily reach \$5200. This is steep compared to Egypt's liveaboards, where you might get the same for much less. The big question is, will there be so much more in the Sudan compared to places like Brothers, Elphinstone, Daedalus, etc.? The boat is nice -- good cabins, large bath, good food. I even got gluten-free breakfast and pastries. We were a mixed group of four Egyptians, eight Swiss, four Germans and four British divers. With 24 divers, the dive deck sometimes got a bit crowded when all groups together geared up. A good idea would have been to start each group 10 minutes apart. Diving is from the dive platform of the mother boat or by Zodiac. They offer Nitrox at \$180 for the two weeks. Water temperatures were 84 to 86 degrees. The thermoclines were deeper but not that bad, with temperatures only one degree cooler.

"The staff insists on buddy teams, one hour or 500 psi to the surface, and you can choose to follow the dive guide. I got a buddy who was not that fit. One dive guide told me not to pass him in the water because he always wanted to stay in front. This was a bit too kindergarten for me. Visibility most times was good, 130 feet or more. The reefs were beautiful, with a good variety and abundance of healthy soft and hard coral with plenty of colorful fish life around. We often had big schools of jacks, barracudas, humphead parrotfish, some tuna, groupers and fusiliers all around, which was a pleasure to watch. Some places had triggerfish nearly everywhere. I hate these guys; one took a bite on my fin. Twice when we swam along a reef, there was nearly nothing; the only fish life was on top of the reef. Often we found small schools of hammerheads at 130 feet; some came really close, and it was awesome to see these big guys. Silkies were circling above us, and once in a while some gray reef shark cruised by. We had dolphins in the water twice, and one group encountered a tiger shark near the top of the reef. We dove two wrecks, the *Umbria* and *Blue Belt*, and visited the Cousteau underwater housing, which is not really worth a dive. Dive sites were chosen well. Only a few times would the outer reef on the windy side have been the better choice, as there was sunlight in the afternoon, but the dive guides felt these were too difficult to reach and dangerous to get in and out of. Once we swam with a strong current, but most dives were in calm waters. I would have liked a bit more challenging dives, a bit less control underwater and longer reins to dive my own ways. When going back into Egypt, it got rough and windy, and water temperatures dropped down to 80, which I noticed immediately." ([www.royalevolution.com](http://www.royalevolution.com))

**Aqua Cat, Bahamas.** Of course you don't have to travel to the Sudan for liveaboard diving with sharks. Doug Moore (Thornton, CO) was on the *Aqua Cat* in April. Our readers, both experienced and inexperienced, always report excellent trips aboard, and Doug is no exception. "This was my first liveaboard, and I find it hard to imagine that it could get much better. The food was good and plenty (mostly comfort food, which is what I like) and the price includes adult beverages. There was always something to do if you wanted. The *Sea Dog* took people to the shore excursions, most of them planned. One evening I asked First Mate Chris if he would take me fishing, which he did. We saw plenty of sharks, even without a shark dive. The reefs weren't as filled as some of the other places I have been, but there is still plenty to see. I found the dives to be within my abilities. I made Dive #100 on this trip, and I would suppose if you had thousands of dives, you might want something more, but for me it was safe, comfortable diving. We were allowed to dive our own plan or be led on a tour. After the tour, usually in the 25-minute range, the divemaster would surface and we could go about the rest of the time on our own. The dive deck is well set up, and I really grew to appreciate not having to haul gear around. Once you are set up, you are set up for the week. We did two drift dives, and it was amazing to me that they could use the *Aqua Cat* as a pickup for a live boat." ([www.aquacatcruises.com](http://www.aquacatcruises.com))

**Diving Florida's Blue Heron Bridge.** We did a fine review last November of the exceptional critter diving there, only to learn soon thereafter that the hotel we touted converted to another use. Paul Seldon (Portage, MI) writes to tell us that the lodging of choice is now the Hotel Paradise and Cottages on Singer Island, a two-minute drive to the entry point ([www.patioisland.com](http://www.patioisland.com))

**Lahaina Divers, Maui.** After all these years (see the Reunion story later in this issue), this operation is still getting high marks, especially since they dive where others fear to tread. Steven M. Dunn (Orting, WA) choose them for an April trip "because of reports in *Undercurrent* and because they operate two Newton 46s. They have a well-run, safe operation. They are the only operator than goes clear around the

## Lawsuit over Diver Death on San Diego's *Yukon*

The owners and employees of Oceanside Scuba and Swim Center in Oceanside, CA, as well as the San Diego dive boat *Humboldt*, are being sued for the wrongful death of Staci Jackson, 26, a Marine based at Camp Pendleton. On December 1, 2012, she and four other divers were exploring the *HMCS Yukon* shipwreck, two miles west of Mission Beach. Jackson failed to surface. Hours later, her body was found in a crevice of the *Yukon* wreck.

Jackson's mother has filed a lawsuit, saying the organizers of the dive trip share the blame for her daughter's death. Her attorney, Jim Frantz, says an ocean surge pushed Jackson either into her dive partner or into the hull of the *Yukon*, and knocked her unconscious. Frantz says the dive boat operator and diving instructors should have called off the dive because the surf and swells were much too big for a safe dive. "It was seven- to 12-foot surf," Frantz told NBC 7 in San Diego. "Extremely heavy surge. Extremely hazardous. Two other boating companies refused to go out, it was too dangerous. And this was a novice diver they took down to the bottom."

Veteran diver Neal Matthews, who helped establish the *Yukon* for diving 13 years ago, agrees that diving there can be very dangerous. He told NBC 7, "I dove it twice, and after the second dive, I said 'Never again.'" He's not surprised that at least three other divers never returned alive from the *Yukon*. "The surge rushes into those holes and causes all kinds of swirling and strange currents," Matthews says. "On a bad day, you can really get slammed up against a bulkhead."

While a representative from Oceanside Scuba declined to comment about the lawsuit, Ryan Wilbarger, the *Humboldt* captain, insists that he and his company did nothing wrong. Wilbarger says he warned Jackson and the other divers to surface immediately if the waters were unsafe, and that December 1 was "not a bad day" for diving. The allegations in the negligence lawsuit are "absolutely asinine," and in his words, "a complete fabrication." Wilbarger says the lawsuit is nothing more than a financial "shakedown" that will damage San Diego's diving industry.

backside of Lanai, and their large boats are better for the often rough run to Molokai. Molokai and the back wall of Molokini Crater had 200-foot visibility; the rest of the dives averaged about 100 feet. This area had much better fish life and hard corals than Kauai. The coral reefs are younger than those in the Caribbean and do not have the size or diversity, nor do they have the soft corals of Fiji. At least there was no fire coral. Reef fish were abundant and diversified. Based on an *Undercurrent* report, I went through [www.HawaiiConnection.com](http://www.HawaiiConnection.com) and got a great rate on a studio with a full kitchen at Lahaina Shores. We were on the sixth floor and it was very quiet, with a great view of the mountains." [Note from Ben: Lahaina Shores has been my favorite choice for years, because I don't like the touristy beach hotels north and you can walk to town for meals] ([www.lahainadivers.com](http://www.lahainadivers.com))

**Kona Diving Company, Hawaii.** On the Big Island, Kona Diving Company has been getting good reviews from our readers. Liveaboard veteran Gina Sanfilippo (San Francisco, CA) visited in June and says, "From the moment I stepped into their shop to sign all the paperwork to the last day when I settled up the bill, everyone was polite, friendly and professional. Boat trips seem to be limited to 10 guests, plus guides, and split into two or three groups. All guides are instructors, so they are trained to work with inexperienced divers, but they are respectful of experienced divers. There is no attitude here, and no 'I'm the divemaster, so I'm better than you' going on. Other divers on the boat had anywhere from 20 to 2,000 dives. My dive guide would point out rare and interesting creatures, while keeping an eye on everyone without being intrusive. We were allowed to stay in the water after the heavy breathers got out. Eighty-minute dives were the norm for me. Afternoon winds mean that as a rule dive boats don't do afternoon dives, although Kona does run three-tank, long-range trips on occasion. Dive sites have lots of hard coral and often interesting topology with lava 'fingers' sticking out from land, and the occasional lava tube. The boat itself is a comfortable catamaran with an on-board head, hot-water shower and lots of padded seating, both in the sun and in the shade."

*"There is no attitude here, no 'I'm the divemaster, so I'm better than you' going on."*

Jeff and Pat Maeda (San Ramon, CA) selected Kona Diving Company based on *Undercurrent* reviews. "Best diving operation we've experienced -- so well organized, special attention, great attitude. It was our first time to dive in Hawaii, so it was exciting to see so many new fish. On one dive we were able to hear a whale song. The highlight was the manta night dive." ([www.konadivingcompany.com](http://www.konadivingcompany.com))

**Kosrae Nautilus Resort, Micronesia.** Going to Palau or Truk requires lots of airplane time, so to get their money's worth, divers often select two distinct Micronesia destinations, the second often being Yap for the mantas. But Kosrae is a serious and delightful alternative. Holly Bent (Kaawa, HI) visited the Kosrae Nautilus Resort in March and says, "I have never dived anywhere else in the world where the reefs are in such great condition. Not much in terms of macro or large pelagics, though. I spent 10 days at the Nautilus resort and booked seven days of boat diving, and I had a fabulous variety on the dives. I did two per day, and each dive was an hour plus. The diving was mostly 50 feet or less, and there are enough sites where you won't be repeating any. A typical dive day is get up, enjoy breakfast, meet at the gear storage area by 8 a.m., load in the van and head to one of the two dive boats at different harbors. Do your two dives, eat lunch on board and head in. Getting back to the resort varied between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. at the latest. I went with the intention that I would be able to work on my graduate school work at night, and I did -- there is no nightlife or shopping, TV is limited and Internet is painfully slow. I booked the two-bedroom apartment with a full kitchen, and brought a few spices and canned goods from home, as grocery shopping here is severely limited. I usually ordered the green salad every night from the kitchen to complement our home-cooked food, and the resort has a great selection of fruit and veggies from its own garden. On Sundays, everything shuts down, including the diving. I took the United island hopper -- Honolulu to Majuro, Kwaj, and Kosrae. This took eight hours, including the stops on the ground. Going home, I went through Guam, the other part of the island hopper, stopping in Pohnpei and Chuuk." ([www.kosraenautilus.com](http://www.kosraenautilus.com))

**Majuro, Marshall Islands, Micronesia.** If you're in that neck of the woods, you can skip Majuro, says Glen Kitchens (Cedar Crest NM), who has 1,000 dives under his belt. "My group of experienced divers selected Majuro for a May trip simply because it seemed off the beaten track. The only dive operator (Raycrew) is located at the Marshall Islands Resort (MIR). Sato, a young Japanese divemaster, was quite competent, cautious and helpful. Most dive sites within Majuro Atoll are less than 30 minutes from MIR, except the Arno Atoll, which is over open ocean and can be a very wet and rough ride. The boat is low-railed with a canopy top but no seats, camera bucket or dry areas. Getting into the water is accomplished by struggling into your BC while sitting on the floor, then hoisting yourself to a boat rail for a backward flip. Not an easy feat for the older crowd. I was disappointed in the diving, since I expected to see soft coral and wrecks, but saw none. The diving is easy, with current at only a few sites. MIR is the best hotel on the atoll, but is average by international standards. The restaurant is OK, but they deal in 'island' time. The on-site bar is reasonably-priced, and that's a good thing, because there's not much else to do but dive and drink. The rooms had TV, but no signal was available while I was there."

-- Ben Davison

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## DEMA's "Reaching Out" Award

*not worth winning, says Bret Gilliam*

Every year since 1989, the Dive Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) gives its Reaching Out Award to honor the best and brightest in the recreational dive industry. Past recipients are a Who's Who list, ranging from Jacques Cousteau and Clive Cussler to Lloyd Bridges and Stan Waterman. Steve Barsky, a consultant for the dive industry, decided to nominate Bret Gilliam, a regular contributor to *Undercurrent*, to receive the award in 2012. After all, Gilliam has worn multiple hats in the dive industry; he founded nine companies that included manufacturing, publishing, liveaboards, resorts, retailers, luxury yacht charters, training agencies, even a dive cruise ship line that was the largest diving operation in history. For his accomplishments over 40-plus years, Gilliam is also receiving the NOGI award given by the Academy of Underwater Arts & Sciences, the oldest and most prestigious award in the dive industry.

But Gilliam did not get the 2012 award from DEMA. It went to Dick Rutkowski and Dan Orr, both deserving fellows and good selections. This story is not about Gilliam, but rather DEMA, which changed its criteria for the 2013 award. Gilliam and many other people in the industry, especially those who are gadflies, will no longer be eligible. Why? It's not officially clear, but as Barsky wrote in an article for the March/April issue of the trade magazine *Dive Center Training*, DEMA changed its eligibility criteria this year for the awards. Instead of the test being whether the person has made significant contributions to diving, the criteria now includes the (paraphrased) following: "Nominee must have continuously supported the dive industry in a positive manner which reflects agreement with DEMA's mission and nominees whose actions and efforts do not reflect positively on the dive industry are precluded . . . Examples include acting as a plaintiff's expert witness against members of the industry . . . and DEMA members in particular." Both Gilliam and Barsky regularly serve as expert witnesses in dive accident litigation, both for the plaintiff and the defendant's cases.

By those criteria, several previous recipients of the award would be ineligible today, Barsky writes. "[They] advocated ideas that moved our industry forward into new, profitable territory. Anyone who advocates a new diving technique, program or equipment that DEMA finds heretical will be denied recognition."

Lee Selisky, CEO of dive gear manufacturer Sea Pearls, is a former president of DEMA and was on its board when nitrox started becoming popular in the early 1990s. He remembers how DEMA took all the actions it could to stop its acceptance. "DEMA plastered big signs at its annual trade show that said

'DEMA neither supports nor endorses the use of nitrox.' Members then didn't understand the difference between nitrox and nitrous oxide, no lie."

Selisky says that anyone who disagrees with DEMA on its official view of anything is shunned. "Everything has got to be in a positive light, but so many people have taken a stance against DEMA with a counter-position that they would never qualify for the award. We need people who bring up challenging questions that should be debated and discussed. DEMA's position is that they don't want to see any debate or discussion."

***"We need people who bring up challenging questions that should be debated and discussed. DEMA's position is that they don't want to see any debate or discussion."***

Glen Egstrom, Professor Emeritus in the department of Physiological Sciences at the University of California in Los Angeles, was the principal investigator of UCLA's Diving Safety Research Project for 34 years. In his role of evaluating diving equipment, emergency procedures and training methods, he also became a top expert witness in dive-related cases. He stated that a good expert witness will accept a case based solely on its merit. "There are good plaintiff and good defense cases that deserve to be adjudicated. "I rarely worked on plaintiff cases, but I did work on a few that I felt had merit. Unless DEMA had a complete understanding of the issues in every case, they would have no facts upon which to determine any impact on the dive industry. Should DEMA develop discriminatory policies that would attempt to control the behavior or opinions of professional experts involved in litigation, they would be interfering with individual rights to a fair hearing. DEMA is in no position to prejudge the impact of an expert's work on 'the best interests of the industry.' To do so would likely create far more problems than it could ever solve."

So while Egstrom acknowledges the fault in DEMA's behavior, had he had the chance to vote for Gilliam, he may not have. "Brett Gilliam is a controversial figure within the dive industry. I am not a personal fan of his, but I recognize that he has many faceted talents and has provided many positive, as well as negative, contributions, to diving. In order to balance his net contributions, it would be necessary to develop an objective record of his works." And that is the point. When someone who has made such major contributions to the industry still has done a thing or two to piss off the leadership, how do you avoid giving him the award? Easy. Change the rules.

After Barsky's magazine article was published, DEMA put a public rebuttal on its website, saying Gilliam was never specifically discussed or considered when the board decided to change its award nomination guidelines. In fact, guidelines that include an objective, numerically-based rating, in combination with a subjective rating, have been in place to assist in the honoree selection process since 2004.

As for the guideline about nominees supporting the dive industry in a positive way, DEMA writes, "It is important to note that this has been publicized because it alerts nominators as well as reviewers on the Board to research and consider the individual nominees' actions in this area. As a subjective consideration, it should be apparent that any individual not acting within the best interest of the dive industry on any topic area, including the area of litigation, should be carefully reviewed. Just as obvious, a nominee who has consistently acted within the best interest of the Industry, including during litigation, should also be carefully reviewed. The key phrase has always been 'acting within the best interest of the industry.' Unlike the implication of the article, nothing in DEMA's mission precludes taking a controversial stand or prevents self-policing."

We asked DEMA's executive director, Tom Ingram, to further expand on that statement. He wrote back in an e-mail, "I don't have anything to add to the commentary which DEMA posted on its website in April regarding the transparency of the Reaching Out Award guidelines, other than to say that DEMA did not receive a Reaching Out Award nomination for Mr. Gilliam in 2013. For *Undercurrent* to

produce an unbiased report on the subject being raised by Mr. Barsky and Mr. Gilliam, your article must include DEMA's *entire* commentary on the article which Mr. Barsky published earlier in the year."

We can do that -- to read that entire statement, go to [www.dema.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=820](http://www.dema.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=820)

As the person under the spotlight when it comes to DEMA's award and who deserved it, what does Gilliam have to say? We asked him to give his perspective.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I never asked to be nominated for the Reaching Out award and, in fact, warned those who pushed for this that it was an exercise in futility. DEMA has always been political, and I just don't play that game. Most industries change from within by persons who buck the status quo and lead new ideas into growth. My outspoken support for innovation and the embrace of new technology and practices was fundamentally grounded in safety. But it has been over 40 years of pushing the ball up the hill against those who opposed nearly anything new in diving and branded those who disagreed with them as infidels. The ultimate validation for me is that everything I advocated became mainstream practice, over the objections of the less enlightened. It also made me a multimillionaire. As for this new policy of exclusion, it merely reinforces the impression of paranoid delusion. Yes, I have done expert witness work for plaintiff's cases where negligent acts killed or injured people. I have absolutely no apologies for that. I've also done an equal number of defense cases, including seven that are ongoing right now. I guess I'm guilty of having a moral compass.

"For DEMA now to come out and exclude anyone who ever was involved in plaintiff's litigation makes about as much sense as having an NFL Hall of Fame only for defensive players. Or the American Bar Association barring all plaintiffs' attorneys. And just wait until this policy is unveiled at a trial in the future. This policy will get brought out as evidence and used to show that the diving industry (DEMA board) is trying to bring negative pressure and undue influence on an objective plaintiff's expert. . . and the judge and jury will feast on it.

"I'm almost in wonder that any group of supposed leaders (from any industry) could act with such blissful ignorance of the public perception of such blatant policies of exclusion. It's comical and telling.

## The Disappearing Dive Shop

After 44 years, the Sea and Sea dive shop in Redondo Beach, CA, is closing. The number of dive stores nationally is declining, but the loss of this store, owned by Barry Friedman and his wife, Nancy, is newsworthy because they bought it from the late Mel Fisher, who operated Mel's Aqua Shop. Fisher sold out to follow a dream, which became years engaged in hardscrabble searches for gold off Florida, eventually culminating in his discovering the wreck of the *Nuestra Senora de Atocha* and \$450 million in booty.

But that's not the story. While Friedman says his sales have been hurt by the downturn in the economy as well as by Internet sales, he has seen fewer people buying scuba equipment because of costly airline baggage fees. That has prompted people taking diving trips to rent their gear rather than buy it, he said, which has also meant fewer repairs for his business. We traveling divers who travel light are having a broader impact than imagined.

So how does a dive store stay in business? Once upon a time, so that they could make money year-round, many local dive shops also sold skiing equipment, and sported names like San Francisco Ski'n Dive. That's the past. Maybe Maui's Scuba Shack has seen the future: Skin 'n Dive. It has taken the first step toward creating a spa for aging male divers by promoting, via press release, its new line of products: FaceLube Eco-Friendly Men's Anti-Aging Skin Care. Says the FaceLube founder, "We're ecstatic to introduce our products to scuba diving enthusiasts. Proper masculine men's skincare isn't about looking pretty or young -- it's about looking good for that extra edge over the competition. FaceLube is excellent for men who work hard and play hard. Recreational divers contend with sun, sand, sea and dirt that can deposit debris on the masculine face, and strip it of vital nutrients and moisture, causing premature aging and stress."

Well, Mel, you gritty old bastard, it has come to this.

## Navy Divers Got it Wrong

Two Navy divers from the Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2 were training in the “superpond” at Maryland’s Aberdeen Proving Ground in February to prove they were competent for an upcoming deployment. Both died on the bottom after spending 24 minutes underwater, when they only had enough air in their tanks for 11 minutes.

Something during their 150-foot dive went terribly wrong, with testimony suggesting that their lines got caught on something at the bottom, keeping them from resurfacing on time. Problems also came up with the diving equipment. Two of the unit’s Mark 16 Diving

Systems, which allows them to be at deep depths longer, were not working when they arrived in Maryland. And when the leaders chose to use scuba to get to the bottom, one of the rescuers who tried to save them had his regulator freeze over in the 40-degree water.

Now the unit’s master diver, Senior Chief James Burger, and its officer in charge, Chief Warrant Officer Mark Smith, are accused of culpable negligence in allowing those in their command to dive outside normal training limits (130 feet depth) and without adequate safeguards. The possible charge is involuntary manslaughter and dereliction of duty.

*-- from a report by Channel 3 News, Hampton Roads, VA*

In a reverse irony, I’m actually honored to be the subject of their delusional behavior. Interestingly, the DEMA board makes no attempt whatsoever to address the points that Barsky, Selisky and others raised about retroactive exclusion of other award recipients such as Jon Hardy, Glen Egstrom, Dick Long, Bob Hollis, Jimmy Stewart, etc. Or that all industries move forward by rocking the status quo. And again, the blatant attempt to justify exclusion of anyone who was on the side of a plaintiff’s litigation is breathtaking in their ignorance of how that will even more ironically be played directly into an expert’s testimony in future litigation.

“But I wasn’t the only target. There is one other obvious “gorilla in the room:” Dick Rutkowski was one of last year’s awardees. Dick was the earliest champion of nitrox and was vilified by the DEMA board at the time for his heretical views on such new innovative practice. I still remember trying to explain to Dick (when DEMA briefly banned any nitrox vendor from its trade show in 1993) that their actions were illegal under restraint of trade law and would have to be rescinded. Dick thought it was a personal attack on him. I think he summed it when he observed, “Science always overcomes bullshit.” The man had a gift of clarity.

“Nitrox, of course, not only became mainstream, but fueled an entire growth segment of the industry that had never existed before. Diving computers were initially condemned but revolutionized diving for everyone. These two technological advances advanced both safety and profits, an unusual combination that confounded the critics and archconservatives. It also led to the ultimate demise of *Skin Diver* magazine that raised negative ‘advertorial’ publishing to a previously unattained level of absurd self-indulgence. As I noted at the time, the diving public was far smarter than those clowns figured and wanted real information backed by facts. Consumers ultimately spoke with their wallets. And *Skin Diver* crashed in disgrace, leaving a putrid odor that forever tarnished the pioneering role once played by the publication.

“The diving industry is shrinking. It has no respected leadership at a time when leaders have never been needed more. I’d estimate that the Gross National Product of diving is less than 40 percent of what it was when we turned the corner of the new century in 2000. The decline has expanded like a downhill snowball’s course, and DEMA has no clue how to arrest the monster than hurtles into the abyss. Barsky’s nomination of me and his subsequent article have evoked a Pavlovian response that is almost beyond belief.

“There is much in diving that fundamentally has to be changed. Training of instructors has been dumbed down, and initial experience requirements drastically reduced by some agencies. Accidents and fatalities are occurring that simply shouldn’t happen. And the industry just sticks its head farther into the sand.

“For me, I’m glad to watch this from the sidelines. I was extremely honored to receive the NOGI award -- it is untarnished by politics, as the only persons allowed to vote are past recipients and inductees into its Hall of Fame. And I had no idea I was even nominated until notified that I had won. Recognition by professional peers is pure and meaningful. Sadly, the DEMA award no longer is. Steve Barsky took a bullet from DEMA because of his courage to speak out. He’s the guy who deserves an award for honesty.”

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## Shark Baiting and Feeding

*what’s so wrong with it, John Bantin asks*

Recently, on a liveaboard in the Maldives, I happened to show some close-up shark pictures that were on my computer from my previous trip. “We don’t believe in shark feeding,” the dive guides commented rather snootily. We then spent 30 dives seeing plenty of sharks but only at the periphery of our vision and certainly none close enough to photograph.

Our last dive was a night dive. The dive guides dropped in a punctured can of fish cleanings, and two dozen nurse sharks and numerous assorted big rays competed for what smelled like a free meal. It was frenetic and the best dive of the trip, but what was it if it was not shark feeding?

It seems that many modern-day divers have very mixed feelings about methods to get close-up and personal with sharks. They want to say they have dived with sharks but many don’t want them close enough to see properly or for them to feel it’s they that have been seen by the sharks. Dive guides in the Red Sea will protest that they get plenty of close-up interaction with sharks without baiting. But these are oceanic white-tip sharks that are ocean wanderers and opportunistic feeders. They will make a close pass at anything including a diver to see if it’s a potential meal. Interactions are exciting but brief in the extreme.

These sharks are regularly fed because they follow the busy shipping movements on the Red Sea, a main route between Asia and Europe. All the trash is thrown overboard from these vessels. They’ve been doing this for more than 100 years. The bigger dive liveaboards now in evidence make the same noises and ring the dinner bell for these animals. On the other hand, the big populations of grey reef sharks and other reef species have generally long since gone from Egyptian waters. Most sharks are cautious. That’s how they get to grow old in a shark-eat-shark world, and size matters. Divers are usually bigger in comparison to most sharks, and sharks usually prefer to stay away from them rather than risk injury from what might be another large predator.

I was once on a long liveaboard trip in the Sudan. The divers seemed obsessed with the chance of seeing a shark. We did a dive at Sha’ab Rumi, a reef that used to be famous for its shark healthy population -- famous that is before the Yemeni fisherman found out about it. There were no sharks in evidence, and everyone returned to our liveaboard disappointed. I decided to do something about that, so on the following dive, I covertly took down a bit of dead fish in a screw-top jar. Releasing the smell into the current attracted half a dozen grey reef sharks up from the depths. Everyone was overjoyed and returned to our vessel full of the experience of having these animals circling round us. On the third dive, they noticed what I did. The sharks came round but many of the passengers complained to the captain afterwards that I was feeding the sharks. My response was, “Did you want to see sharks or not? The sharks weren’t going to come up from the depths and get close to divers just because they were curious.”

As one of the young shark feeders from Stuart Cove’s famous shark diving operation in the Bahamas laughingly put it, “How else do you get sharks in unless they are being fed? They are not like dolphins; you cannot simply do yoga on the back of the boat and expect them to come!”

Of course, there are many different ways to do it. Bearing in mind that sharks tend to be big animals with mouths full of sharp teeth, my opinion of the different methods I have seen around the world is quite variable, from the orderly method of using one piece of bait at a time at the end of a short spear, as developed by Stuart Cove, to the rather risky methods I witnessed in French Polynesia. There, the dive guide carried a severed mahi-mahi head under his BC and would cut bits of with a knife, offering it in his bare hand to passing hungry sharks. I questioned if this was not just a bit too risky. I think he finally agreed after he had his hand sewn back together later.

It's not my job to tell people how to do it, and different folks play different strokes, but I take great exception to the British dive tour operator who is, on the one hand, vociferously against any kind of shark feeding, but on the other, sells trips to dive with the bull sharks at Jardines de la Reina in Cuba. How does he think they attract the sharks?

In the Bahamas, shark diving has become an important industry all on its own. The money it generates for the economy (provided you go with a Bahamas-based operation) has ensured that the healthy shark population there has endured. Thousands of people have been given the opportunity to see these magnificent animals close up, and have gone away with a different view of sharks to that propagated by the media, and that's got to be a good thing. In the Bahamas, a live shark is worth a lot more than a dead one with its fins cut off.

I recently spoke about the latest generation of shark-feeders with David Graham Cove, Stuart Cove's cousin, who used to feed sharks for the benefit of my camera when he was a young man. He went in protected only by chainmail gloves and arms, offering the bait at the end of a short spear. Today, the feeders at Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas do the same, but wear full chainmail suits and helmets. I asked him what he thought about those people who were so against shark feeding. He said, "I'm sick of people living in cubicles looking at YouTube and chiming in with rubbish on things they know nothing about. It's crazy how people generate opinions not based on observation and sensible thought, but more on a 30-second spot on the Internet."

*"Many passengers complained to the captain that I was feeding the sharks. My response was, 'Did you want to see sharks or not?'"*

I asked him if he thought that every operation was doing it in a safe way, and he replied, "I have found myself questioning it from time to time. Stuart has it down to a science, yet I find many other dive operators don't take same care or precautions to keep it safe in the long term. There are examples of lack of organization and dedication to safety and longevity of a dive area. The Tiger Beach dive site [near Grand Bahama] needs to be refined and controlled so that not just anyone can be allowed to rock up without proper safety preparation, but at the moment they are!"

What about the people doing it, the feeders themselves? Are they doing it for the thrill or the glamour? Most of them sustain a bite at some time and I've noticed they soon lose their enthusiasm for it afterwards. Graham said, "Now that the shark feeders have full suits and helmets, everyone wants to do it. Even so, when I was back at Stuart's recently, it was clear some people did not have a gift for it, though."

We hear all sorts of arguments about how sharks lose their ability to hunt naturally if they are fed. I would suggest that the amount of food offered at a typical shark feed is tiny in proportion to the number of sharks present, so it represents nothing more than a free snack. According to shark behaviorist Erich Ritter, a bull shark needs to eat four percent of its own body weight in fish each day. That means some of these animals are eating up to 30 pounds. So with 30 sharks at a feed, the feeder would need to take in 750 pounds of fish cuts to substitute for their normal feeding behaviour, when around 20 pounds is a generous estimation of what they actually use at Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas' feeds. Sharks have a

## A Win for Shark Fins: Fiji Airways Reverses Its Stance

In last month's issue, we wrote how Fiji Airways, Fiji's national airline that recently changed its name from Air Pacific, has been exposed as one of the world's major carriers of shark fins into Hong Kong. Well, on June 24, we got an e-mail from a Anna Gaidaenko at Ogilvy Public Relations that Fiji Airways is banning "unsustainably harvested" shark fin as cargo on its planes.

Our story gave details from an extensive investigation by the *South China Morning Post*, which reported that the airlines' new Airbus A330 aircraft were, according to a group of pilots, "basically a thinly-disguised freighter" carrying shark fins to Hong Kong from Pacific islands.

In the press release, Air Pacific's acting CEO Aubrey Swift says the move is the result of a month-long review of its freight policies relating to shark products. "We believe a ban on the shipment of unsustainably sourced shark fins is the right thing to do, and have implemented this policy effective immediately."

We'd like to take a little bit of credit in helping Air Pacific's higher-ups to change their minds. Still, keep in mind that it's only banning the "unsustainably harvested" ones. Swift said Air Pacific would still accept shipments of such products from sustainable sources. "We will now work with conservation partners and the fishing industry to prepare and implement policies and processes that will ensure future shipments are sustainably sourced.

The airline's announcement comes during a time when other Asia Pacific airlines were doing the same. Korean Air announced its policy change last week. Its rival, Asiana, told CNN that the airline had already banned shark fins from its flights. Air New Zealand had temporarily suspended transport in May after the New Zealand Shark Alliance exposed the practice in local media, but two days after Air Pacific's announcement, it announced it was stopping shipments altogether, even of sustainably harvested fins.

All these changes were made after pressure from ocean-focused groups, reports on the media, and divers who announce their displeasure by withholding their dollars. To date, 99 countries have now banned shark finning. In the U.S., eight states have banned the buying and selling of fins -- California, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, New York, Oregon and Washington. Nine nations and territories, from the Bahamas in the Caribbean to the Cook Islands in the South Pacific, have recently created sanctuaries to protect the animals in their waters.

hierarchy and defer to larger sharks. None want to get injured by another shark, so when dead bait is offered, there is little sense of competition among the animals.

Many years ago, I wrote an article that compared the different shark feeding operations in the Bahamas. In some cases, safety was less than assured. Spearing live fish on site sent the sharks into a frenzy, whereas dead bait left them circling round in a relaxed manner. I've noted that many of the suspect operations have changed their methods now or are no longer in business.

Sharks are not the undiscerning predators depicted by the media. Stuart Cove will tell you that he uses different types of bait for attracting different species of shark. For instance, Caribbean reef sharks love grouper heads, while great hammerheads look for stingrays in the sand. In the absence of any stingray cleanings being available, they'll use barracuda parts. For an expedition to photograph oceanic white-tips, I saw Stuart buy 500 pounds of bonito, and so on.

We also hear that shark feeding encourages sharks to associate humans with food, yet there are no facts to back this up. There are far more shark attacks off the coast of Florida, where shark-feeding has been banned for years, than almost anywhere else in the world. Fiji-based David Diley, who gave up his career to specialize in shark-awareness films, says, "Between 2001 and 2012, Florida recorded 257 attacks, Hawaii 57 and Brazil 24. Feeding is banned in each location, or at least there are no recognized feeds. In the same period, Fiji recorded 11 attacks, and the Bahamas, where feeding is a major industry, had nine."

Even so, it's an emotive subject. A recent exchange between underwater photographers on Facebook revealed a lot of passionate opinion after a well-known photographer received a minor injury from a

grouper during a shark-feeding dive. However, it soon became apparent that those vehemently against it had never witnessed such a dive.

David Diley says, "The feeding discussion has been done to death, but rarely in a public medium by people qualified to discuss it with any real credibility. By that I mean behaviorists, researchers studying the effects on location-specific individual sharks, dive operators and science-based local conservation groups in areas where feeding provides economic and or ecological benefit. Feeding sharks has been happening since the first time man went to sea, and when done with correct protocols, it's perfectly acceptable and causes no harm whatsoever.

"That said, not all shark feeds are run responsibly, and not all shark feeds use proper protocols designed to ensure their well-being. Also, shark feed protocols are specie- and location-specific; some dives are riskier than others. The arguments for and against feeding seemingly center around people speaking on behalf of sharks. Unfortunately, most of those people don't understand how sharks work, their behavior or the influence of the locations, and so the arguments rely on hearsay, rumor, misunderstanding and misinformation on both sides."

Thailand-based underwater photographer Pete Atkinson says, "Sharks desperately need economic value with their fins still on, and shark feeds are one way to do this. Because it gives the sharks value, and that value can be turned into dollars, for example, for Fijian villages. Without shark-feeding dives, they have far more value as fins. As a secondary benefit, feeds create thousands of ambassadors for sharks. And these ambassadors have helped push through protection for endangered species that might otherwise have failed."

Mike Neuman, owner of Beqa Adventure Divers in Fiji, says he is against the "shark huggers," those people who say that sharks are harmless and need our affection. I think we can all agree with him that sharks generally have a mouth full of sharp teeth, and if you want to get close to them, you should be aware of that.

A final word from Charlotte Faulkner, a young shark feeder presently working for Stuart Cove. "Seeing shark dives daily, and a variety of species firsthand, I know the massive difference they make to educate people about shark behaviour and conservation issues. They are not completely safe, but I am proud to say no spectator has ever been injured here. All participants sign a statement of risk. Feeders get bitten and expect to be so, but they are people who are most passionate about sharks and won't even register the injury as a shark bite. The importance of re-educating the brainwashed public about the nature of sharks is of such importance for the future. There have been many studies that feeding does

## ***Undercurrent* Is Awarded a Grant for Environmental Coverage**

In June, *Undercurrent* was awarded a \$1,000 grant from diver Jonathan Scott, who heads the Singing Fields Foundation, for "your coverage of environmental issues, advocacy and fundraising for marine conservation causes." It's quite an honor for our little nonprofit 501 (c)(3) to receive such an honor -- Singing Fields has made the grant for six years running now -- which only encourages us to do more.

Since our inception, we have had a strong point of view about protecting the environment, such as chastising guides and photographers for handling creatures, as early as the '80s, when riding a turtle or inflating a pufferfish was all the rage. We've criticized those who fed fish with Cheez Whiz (yup, a squeezing a tube was common practice for many years). We've decried the shark-finning trade that, for odd reasons, never made the pages of dive magazines. And we've explained to divers how global warming induced by burning fossil fuels is destroying our reefs and oceans (a discussion which many in the dive industry still seem to avoid). Like him or not, Al Gore is right, or should I say, "correct."

Thanks, Jonathan and Singing Fields. We'll keep at it.

-- Ben Davison

not significantly affect the spatial pattern or sexual segregation of some shark species. The more we can narrow the gap between human and sharks, the more chance we have to stop sharks being wiped out in our lifetime.”

*John Bantin, a longtime contributor to Undercurrent, is the technical editor of DIVER magazine in the United Kingdom. For 30 years, he has reviewed virtually every piece of equipment available in the U.K. and the U.S., and makes around 300 dives per year for that purpose. He is also a professional underwater photographer.*

**Note from Ben:** Readers, what say you about shark baiting? Do you agree with John Bantin, or do you believe shark feeds are an unnecessary shark-human interaction? Give me your opinion -- send your comments to me at [EditorBenD@undercurrent.org](mailto:EditorBenD@undercurrent.org)

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## What Happens to Those Aging Dive Guides?

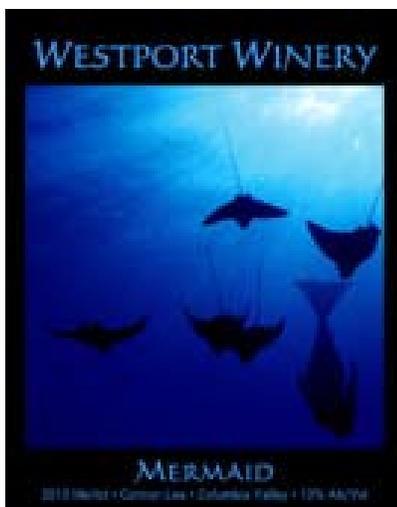
### *the Lahaina Divers 35th reunion*

I once wrote a story entitled “Getting Wet after Forty,” in which I mused that for divers of any age, diving was a great lifestyle, but for many dive guides who were in their 20s, I hoped eventually they would either own their dive store or find another occupation. From my perspective, schlepping tanks with bad backs and wobbly knees for tourists, and getting low wages for it (nobody tipped them back then), would be no way to live out the years.

When I wrote that, I was thinking about people I had dived with on Grand Cayman, Bonaire and, of course, Hawaii, which I visited frequently in the 70s because it was the only tropical Pacific/Indian Ocean dive destination we Americans visited. Fiji was a dream and Indonesia wasn’t even a consideration. In clear Hawaiian waters, I would see white-tip reef sharks, cowrie shells the size of my fist, and creatures not found in the Caribbean, at least not then (such as lionfish). The guides were great, and I loved Lahaina, a small, friendly town on the island of Maui, before the tourist onslaught had yet to start. (You might enjoy reading about diving in Maui then, so with this online issue, I’m including a copy of the 1977 print issue.)

I’ve been wondering what happened to those youthful dive guides with sun-bleached hair and sun-browned bodies, now that they’re graying and paling. Did they remain mesmerized by the lifestyle and end up in eternal Margaritaville, or did they move on? I got a partial answer during the first weekend in June, when I attended the 35th Reunion of Lahaina Divers. I accompanied my wife, who, as a Lahaina Divers PADI instructor, was a pioneer in those days, perhaps the first woman actually teaching diving on Maui. She certified hundreds of new divers.

Blain Roberts arrived in Maui in 1976, after hanging on Southern California beaches and winning a few surfing championships. He bought a car (he had \$400 left over), slept in it and eventually found gigs guiding dives and captaining dive boats before opening his own business. In a few short years, Lahaina Divers became the biggest and best on Maui. One day, he went to Westport, WA, to buy serious dive boats, and met and married Kim, an architect and charter boat captain. In the ‘90s they sold their business, though retaining the building they owned -- a smart move to buy Maui real estate in those days. In 2007, Blain and Kim (with daughter Carrie and son Dana, a graduate of Washington State University’s viticulture and enology program) broke ground for Westport Winery ([www.westportwinery.com](http://www.westportwinery.com)), where they held the reunion. They import grapes from eastern Washington, and now, in less than six



Putting the Diving on Wine Labels

years, the winery sports the best restaurant in the area, a great bakery, a fine tasting room, and has become a significant tourist destination. Clearly, Blain and Kim got out of the water when they should have. But I wondered about all the old crew members, who might show up.

As it turned out, the competent yet fun crew (a few were known to close down the bars on their days off) have grown up, of course. There was a television producer, a realtor, an orthopedic surgeon, a restaurateur, a realtor, a craftsman, an Alaskan fishing boat owner/skipper, a medical marijuana clinic proprietor, an oncology nurse (my wife), and the current owner of Lahaina Divers, who worked for Blain for many years. Clearly, these people had moved on -- quite successfully, I might add. To a person, they said they were all thankful for the responsible training and management Blain offered to his employees in those days.

And there were stories. One spoke of peeling down his wetsuit between dives as he briefed his divers, only to realize that he had forgotten to put on his Speedo in the morning. He decided to stick with the briefing, as if that was the way they did things on Maui. Another told of catching his regulator hose on a swim-through and being left with only his mouthpiece. As he started to inhale, Blain noticed only the mouthpiece in his mouth and passed him his second stage. Another told of the Navy foolishly exploding a long-lost bomb it discovered in the Molokini crater. As as they went to dive the next morning, scores of reef sharks were gorging themselves on thousands of tropical fish dead from the concussion. Divers avoided the crater for three days. They talked of celebrities on their dives and in their shop -- Bonnie Raitt, Boz Scaggs, Billy Crystal and Robin Williams. And then there was that Star Wars star who they certified, but only after a debate about whether they should flunk him because he arrived at each class stoned. In 1978, who cared?

Clearly, the attendees had all fared well, though I suppose there are others who stayed trapped in the island lifestyle, or didn't develop a serious occupation, or just seemed to have disappeared. But the Lahaina Divers Reunion proved to me that if you're smart, play your cards right, train your staff right, and treat them and your customers well -- as did Blain and Kim -- spending your youthful years diving in the tropics is a great way to live the dream.

-- Ben Davison

## Lost Your PADI Card? How to Avoid the \$37 Fee

*Undercurrent* subscriber Robert Ferrero (Warrensburg, MO) wrote us to ask what he should do about his lost PADI certification card that he's carried around for 23 years. "Is there a place I can go to get a new one issued?"

Well, you can go to PADI's website to request a replacement, and it will cost you \$37 to get it shipped to you. Or if you want to upload your certification onto your cell phone via PADI's eCard app, it will also cost you \$37 -- for each certification. NAUI charges \$32 for a replacement card and \$21 to replace a certificate. But there are ways to get around that.

If you do have your certification card, simply scan, Xerox or photograph the front and back of it, then keep that copy as a backup, as you would do with your passport. As long as a dive shop can read the information clearly, it's considered a legitimate way to identify yourself as properly certified.

Or just ask the dive shop to log online to PADI or NAUI's website and cross-check that you are who you say you are. If you're in the database, having the physical card isn't needed, although you can ask the dive shop to print out a copy for you to use on the next dive trip. (Ironically, the way they verify PADI divers is by going through the motions of ordering for a replacement card for you, but they stop before they submit the payment). PADI's verification website is <https://www.padi.com/scuba/applications/studentRCOI/SearchRecord.aspx?languageID=5>, and NAUI's is at [www.naui.org/diverlookup.aspx](http://www.naui.org/diverlookup.aspx).

Even if it's not a PADI or NAUI shop, no matter. You can ask the shop person to call any dive agency to verify who you are, as long as you have a photo ID.

SSI wins hands down for card-replacement service. You can pull all of your certifications up on its website to print them out, and its free Android app lists all your certification info.

# Flotsam & Jetsam

## Online Sales of Nurse Sharks are Shut Down.

The US Attorney's Office in Miami charged Dean Trinh of Milpitas, CA, last month with buying and selling juvenile nurse sharks illegally trapped in the Florida Keys. Authorities say Florida Keys resident Allan Wagner, who died before the case reached court, harvested nurse shark pups from lobster traps he placed in Florida waters in 2009, then shipped them to California by commercial air for further sale by Trinh, who operated a business known as Aquatop USA in California and reportedly advertised the sale of nurse sharks on websites like eBay and Craigslist. Prosecutors believe the men sold and transferred approximately 74 sharks. Trinh, 43, faces 30 years in prison if convicted. It's not determined yet whether he'll face trial in California or Florida.

**It's Chapter 7 for Diving Concepts.** The drysuit maker in Santa Barbara, CA, had a reputation of service problems with its dealers and customers, so it was not a total surprise that the company filed for bankruptcy in April. After hearing a rising crescendo of complaints about the company not replying to calls or e-mails about drysuits sent in for repairs, the John McKenzie of the dive news website ScubaGadget found court records showing that Diving Concepts filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy, meaning it intends to liquidate. Its assets are listed in the range of \$100,000 to \$500,000, while its liabilities are between \$1 million and \$10 million. Diving Concepts' court-appointed trustee is Jeremy W. Faith (his phone number is 818-705-2777). For customers and dealers who have suits in for repair, Faith says that if they contact him and have "ironclad proof of ownership," they should be able to get their drysuit returned. All other creditors should hire a lawyer.

**Learn How to Microdive.** Now you can get certified to dive all the way down to 10 feet! But only 10 feet. An English man named Rob Hart has created a "Microdive" certification course that's being taught at a few U.K. dive stores at a cost of \$230. "Until now, only people with the time, money and the commitment to study for weeks to qualify to dive to 60 feet could experience the wonders that lie below the surface of our oceans," said Hart. "By removing the obstacles of time and cost, it is now possible for anyone to dive if they want to." He says the government-approved course qualifies students to Microdive independently to 10 feet anywhere in the world. Truth is, Hart's course is mainly directed to people who want to scrub barnacles off their boats, which hasn't got much to do with experiencing "the wonders that lie below the surface." And I'm shocked -- as I'm sure other American divers are -- that PADI didn't think this up long ago.

**Will Florida's New Lionfish Rules Help?** At last, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) have seen the light and lifted restrictions on how many lionfish people can catch or kill. FWC Spokeswoman Amanda Nalley told news station WZVN in Fort Meyers, "What we did was allow folks to target them without needing a recreational fish license when using any spearing device or net geared toward lionfish." The rules will also allow anglers and divers to take as many of the invasive fish as they can." Prior to the change, anglers and divers had a 100-pound limit. That doesn't mean anything goes for spearfishers. "The rules do not change where you can spearfish currently," says Nalley. "All normal spearfishing rules remain in place [in Florida counties]." After a decade of the lionfish's lethal march down the Atlantic and into the Caribbean, we're wondering why it took the FWC so long to change its tune. The new rules are good news -- but still, it's a Band-Aid on a problem that may be too big for any government agency to ever control.

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