

# undercurrent

*The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers*

January 2010

Vol. 25, No. 1

## Tufi Dive Resort, Papua New Guinea

*everything's nice -- during the wet season, that is*

### IN THIS ISSUE:

Tufi Dive Resort, PNG.....	1
One of PNG's Last Great Cultural Events.....	3
Other Takes on Protesting Dive Releases.....	4
Papoo Divers, Fiji.....	5
\$350 for a Pony Bottle?.....	6
Lying About Your Health Could Be Lethal.....	7
Taking Your Cell Phone Diving.....	8
Regulator Rebuttals.....	10
Good Dive Shop Technicians Are Going Extinct.....	11
How a Diver's Defense Came Undone.....	12
<i>Diving Raja Ampat.....</i>	<i>13</i>
Wear Your BCD on Board .	14
Advice for Not Getting Lost at Sea.....	15
Flotsam & Jetsam.....	16

[www.undercurrent.org](http://www.undercurrent.org)

### Editorial Office:

Ben Davison, Publisher and Editor  
3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102  
Sausalito, CA 94965  
EditorBenD@undercurrent.org

Dear Fellow Diver:

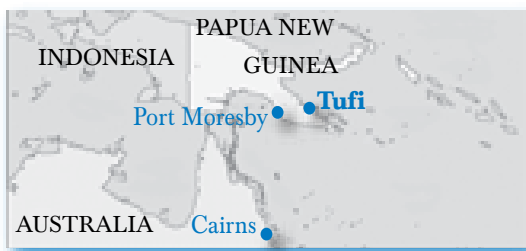
"Well, it's going to be a little bit bumpy today," dive-master Glenn Kibikibi warned. The trade winds that kept the skies clear, the mosquitoes away, and the evenings balmy at Tufi Dive Resort also blew the sea into white caps when Talio, our 29-foot dive boat, left the shelter of the fjord. Reef trips that would take 20 minutes during the flat-sea wet season were transformed into kidney-jolting rides of 45 minutes in August.

The fjord region of Cape Nelson looks like a tropical paradise should. After passing close enough to the mountain tops to see the birds in the trees, the Airlines PNG twin-prop taxied down the grass runway to where a sign announced our arrival at Tufi International Airport. Resort manager Simon Tewson stowed our bags in a Land Rover while assistant manager and occasional chef Matt Brugh walked with us the 100 yards to the resort. Tufi sits high on a ridge overlooking the fjord. Each dawn found me on the deck of my room, writing my log as the rising sun changed the waters from indigo to azure and the forest from evening gray to iridescent green. Each sunset, the clouds atop Mount Trafalgar slowly morphed peach to pink to purple while cackling gangs of red and blue Eclectus parrots swept past.

During the October-to-March wet season, the rains fall at night and the seas are flat. By the December holidays, the resort's 19 units are full and you can make the long runs to the storied Black Jack Bomber and Jacob wrecks "without spilling your tea," according to Simon. But when the



The Dining Veranda at Tufi Dive Resort



wind is up, the seas are too rough even to get to nearby offshore reefs. On three of my dive days, we did muck diving in the fjord.

After an orientation and welcoming fruit drink at the dining deck with brilliant views of the heartbreaking blue water, our gear was trucked down to the dive shop. I set up my tanks, then Glenn and Alex, another divemaster, loaded them on board and stowed our mesh bags under the center bench seat.

As captain, Glenn minimized the bouncing, working the swells by alternately gunning and backing down the Honda 225 engine. I had to hang onto the sun canopy strut with one hand and my camera with the other, as there was no rinse bucket. At Stewart's Reef, we tied off to a channel marker, back-rolled into the 80-degree water and dropped 20 feet down. The table tops and low spires of healthy Acropora corals covered the shallows in pastels. A quick descent to 85 feet and we swam along a slope that dropped below 130 feet before meeting the sea bed. "Jeez, where's all the fish?" I wondered. No need. As we rounded the bommie, the current picked up and we were into a mini Blue Corner dive. Hundreds of sergeant majors swarmed with blue fusiliers. White-tip reef sharks prowled close to the reef or snoozed on a shelf while gray reef sharks zipped back and forth in the current. Napoleon wrasse hung above, watching me watching them. Reef hooks aren't used; you have to pick a spot where you won't back into the coral and fin into the current. After a safety stop poking around the artist's palette of the bommie top, I handed up my weight belt to Glenn, as he requested, and climbed the wide aluminum ladder. I prefer to put my hands through the straps and let the fins dangle from my wrists when I exit. If I'm on the ladder and the boat bounces me off into the current, I've still got fins.

After Glenn served our post-dive break of tea, water, and cookies, we headed back into the fjord for our interval. Friendly and gregarious, Glenn explained which clans owned which parts of the area, pointed out hiking trails and told the requisite story of the whale shark that swam into the fjord "just before you got here." We did the second dive in Tufi Fjord at Hubert's Point and swam lazily along the slope at 40 feet for almost an hour. Alex found the critters. I counted five species of nudibranch, including an egg-sack-carrying black and yellow notodoris gardineri the size of a tennis ball. Nice, but not what I came for. We docked at the dive shop, and the staff rinsed our gear and hung our wetsuits up to dry.

Day two found my gear set up and waiting for me before we bounced out to Bev's Reef in seas higher than the previous morning. Divemaster Yukio Kumamoto dived in to check the current while Glenn gave a briefing from reef maps. Bev's is a figure-eight with a saddle that connects the two bommies. Cayman-esque overhangs and promontories are laden with blue sea fans, sponges and whip corals. As soon as we came into the current, the fish appeared. Spotted unicornfish, one brilliant Vlaming's unicornfish, emperor angels, clown triggers, mobs of butterflies, and gray reef and silvertip sharks. Spanish mackerel run in August, and several big boys zipped by. We zipped by too; the current was stronger and by dive's end, I was a horizontal flag flapping from the mooring line. Then back to the fjord for a shallow dive at Blue Ribbon Reef but no eponymous eels appeared. Just more healthy coral, lots of anemonefish, cowries, lionfish and deadly cone shells. A Spanish mackerel found its way to our lunch plates along with hand-cut fries and fresh salad, followed by cookies or cake for dessert.

By 6 a.m. each day, coffee was served in the lodge along with muffins, toast, fruit and cereal. Pancakes or eggs were available at 7 a.m., leaving plenty of time to hike down the steep hill for the 9 a.m. dive. On the way down, I passed locals on their way up, the heavily tattooed women carrying coconuts, yams and other produce to the market at the top of the hill. Kids arrived via dugout canoes and then hiked up to the school. After the second dive, the Land Rover took us back up to the lodge. Composed of native woods, thatch and a metal roof, the lodge was built from a kit but you wouldn't know it. High ceilinged, airy and adorned with native artifacts, it houses the office, gift shop, kitchen and dining room but we always ate on the veranda, where lunch and dinner were served at long tables with white tablecloths and fresh flowers. Dinners included killer Cajun calamari, pasta with fresh mushrooms, medallions of pork

and, on the last night, Aussie steak with local mud crabs. Desserts like key lime pie, homemade cakes or chocolate mousse left everyone applauding Chef Ephraim Reuben. Soda, beer, spirits and a good selection of Aussie and Kiwi wines were available. Tufi is supplied by local fishermen and farmers, plus a ferry boat whose schedule sometimes slips -- for days.

Chilled bottles of boiled water were the sole offering in my room's mini-fridge. The bungalows have polished timber floors and woven rattan walls. Screened louvered windows with lace curtains let in the breeze while keeping out the bugs. Open-air decks overlooking the fjord or Coral Sea have bilum bag hammocks for lazing away the afternoon. The bathroom was basic with a stall shower, plenty of solar heated water, soap and shampoo. Towels were changed daily. Sheets, every third day. The comfortable queen bed was surrounded with a mosquito net that covered about 90 percent of it. The overhead fan blew a lot of bugs away but it's PNG -- you will get bitten. I travel with my own pharmacy, including the antibiotic Lomotil, and Malarone as a malaria prophylaxis. Serious ailments have to be treated in Port Moresby, and Airlines PNG flies there to and from Tufi only three times a week.

Evenings found us and the other guests -- a Spaniard, a Japanese and two non-diving French journalists -- on the comfy bamboo furniture on the veranda or at the bar. Cocktail hour was presided over by Coco, the resident hornbill who perched on the railing and wrestled with Muji, Simon and Sharon's dog. Coco will hop over to your chair, ralph up some used papaya -- a friendship offering, I was told -- cock his head to one side, peer at you with wide eyes and wait for a handout. Other menagerie members included Lou the 'Roo and three caged cus-cus. Then there's the python under the steps to the lodge, and spiders the size of your hand.

Simon, born in PNG and schooled in Australia, regaled everyone with stories of well-meaning government types trying to stop native cultivation of a certain medicinal herb, and about his relations with the local chiefs. The area has seen native strife over the years, with one clan forcefully supplanting another. This

## One of PNG's Last Great Cultural Events

The annual Mt. Hagen Cultural Show was first organized by the Australians in 1964 as a way of furthering contacts among the remote clans and hopefully getting them to stop slaughtering each other for a few days. Times have changed. Now, cash prizes are awarded and competition is a matter of both pride and profit. Last year, the festival was billed as "The 2009 Coca-Cola Mt. Hagen Show." This sad fact aside, it was three days of sensory overload at 5,500 feet under a crystal sky, like Woodstock for Wig-Men. In 2008, 68 clans attended. When I attended last August, 107 clans arrived at the soccer field just outside the airport, where they burned off the surrounding fields and camped overnight. At daybreak, the 2,000 performers began applying make-up and adorning themselves with feathers, shells, cus-cus fur, flower, grass, you name it.

At noon, the 250 tourists wandered past the food stalls, face-paint vendors, artifact peddlers, HIV information booths, and yes, the reggae band, to find seats at the dilapidated grandstand or in grass huts thrown up for the purpose. One by one, each clan entered the stadium and marched to their spot on the field in full dress, carrying spears, bows, feathered totems, carvings and drums. After local plenipotentiaries made welcoming speeches, and a Christian minister presumed upon the Deity for 20 minutes, it was announced the contest would begin. With 107 clans performing, I thought we'd be there until 3 a.m. But at a given signal, they all cut loose at once. Look up "cacophony" in Webster's Dictionary. Five minutes later, the guards opened the gate in the fence and we were allowed on the field, mingling with the dancers and compulsively snapping hundreds of photos. This went on for four hours and resumed the following day.

I booked through the dive travel agency DiversionOz ([www.diversionoz.com](http://www.diversionoz.com)) and stayed at the Highlander hotel, got a smarmy but adequate room, breakfast, dinner, box lunch, transfers, and admission to the show for roughly \$550.00 a day. Steep? Yes. Worth it? Absolutely.



This year's show will be held August 14-15. There's no official Web site, but contact Papua New Guinea Tourism Authority ([www.pngtourism.org.pg](http://www.pngtourism.org.pg)) for details, or a dive travel agency that does PNG trips.

— D.L.

makes negotiating the fees for diving rights

## Two Other Takes on Protesting a Dive Release

In our September 2009 feature on the *Sea Hunter* in Cocos Island, our writer mentioned three attorneys on board who tried to change the dive release form, to no avail, and lawyer Larry Schnabel gave his take about protesting a dive release form. Then we got perspectives from two more lawyers.

Here's how David Concannon, a trial attorney in Wayne, PA, who litigates diving accident cases, sees it: "In my opinion, there is no way that the Sea Hunter Group's release would be enforced by a U.S. court. In addition to the points mentioned by Schnabel, an American court would make short work of voiding the Sea Hunter Group's liability release, due to unequal bargaining power between the parties, and on public policy grounds.

"There are plenty of cases that hold liability releases invalid because they were signed only after the participant traveled a great distance and paid for the activity, therefore they had no real choice but to sign the release or lose their money and time. Courts routinely find that this situation creates an 'unequal' relationship between the parties to the contract, because the participant had little or no bargaining power. In fact, when asked to enforce a liability release, most

judges ask, 'Where was it signed and how was it presented?' If the answer is 'On the dive boat, before leaving the dock,' the liability release probably will not be enforced.

"Liability releases are generally disfavored, and judges are usually looking for reasons not to enforce a release. Springing an onerous release on an unsuspecting diver after he arrives in a foreign country, and on the ride from the hotel to the boat, is an open invitation for a court to find the release unenforceable because it was signed under duress. This is not to say that some parts of the Sea Hunter Group's release would not be enforced under different circumstances, but it is the way the release is presented to the diver that matters in this instance."

Like the lawyers in our story found out, once you've paid your money and go aboard the boat, you're helpless. That's why you should negotiate the release before you commit, says Steve Coren, an attorney in Wellesley, MA, and author of *The Law and The Diving Professional*. "The best - and only - time to negotiate release language is when a diver first contacts the charterer or agent about a trip and bargains for appropriate release language along with the diving package. Hopefully the need by the charterer to fill the boat may result in a revised release. (Probably the charterer will ask that the lucky diver who gets to change the release not tell any of the other divers)."

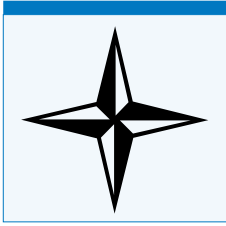
difficult. As soon as an agreement is made with one clan, another group would say their grandfathers settled the place and they should receive the money instead. Simon's good negotiating allows Tufi to offer overnight village stays, hikes, the dress rehearsal of a sing-sing, or an eerie trip up a jungle stream to witness the simulated facial tattooing of a local teenage girl. The last day is a non-diving day. You can take a dug-out ride to learn how sago palms are turned into food for the locals. Lunch is a barbecue on a pristine snorkeling beach near a village.

By my third day, the wind was strong and the morning reef dive was called off in favor of a planned decompression dive to two WWII-era PT boat wrecks. With our aluminum 80's filled to 3,100 psi, three divers and two divemasters took a short swim from the dock to where the tug-like *Raka*, Tufi's largest boat, is moored to one of the wrecks. While my partner and I drifted down to 150 feet, the Spanish chap -- he was on his 13th dive ever -- went Tarzan-like down the mooring, followed by Glenn and Yukio, each carrying a spare tank. By the time we were done poking our lights in the torpedo tubes and headed off through the silt to a wrecked bow section holding a 50-caliber gun, his air was gone and Glenn had handed off one of the spares. Visibility was poor as the bottom is mostly decaying foliage and the accumulated crap from 70 years of Westerners' presence. Tufi runs a cleanup dive every month but it has a long way to go.

Still, when the weather gave me lemons I tried to make lemonade of the muck diving in the fjord. I found ringed and banded pipefish, cuttlefish, a *Crocodylus*, blue spotted rays, five species of anemone fish, and plenty of nudis like *Chelidonura Electra* and *Thurdilla Splendida*. The wind kept us in the fjords for three days. The evening of the fifth day was warm and humid enough to use my room's AC. Next morning, the seas were calmer so we headed to Paul's Reef and Marion's Reef, then an afternoon reef dive at no charge. At Mullaway Reef, I hit the fish lottery -- a school of great barracuda, chevron barracuda, mackerel, pyramid butters, titan and ocean triggerfish, schooling trevallies and, of course, gray reef and white-tip sharks.

Having done liveboards in PNG in the past, would I dive a land-based operation again? If it includes land-based cultural activities and I have limited time, then an emphatic yes. But my best advice whether you're doing land or liveboard - - go in the wet season.

-- D.L.



**Diver's Compass:** American divers generally get to PNG through Brisbane or Sydney, then fly to Port Moresby via Air Niugini . . . . When I checked Brisbane flights, round-trip fares were as low as \$273 but book early, and don't book the "Wild Fare" as this is Australian for "stand-by" . . . . I shlepped my own gear to PNG and paid \$200 just for the Brisbane-Port Moresby leg so in retrospect, I would have rented the resort's wetsuits, Sherwood regs, Seaquest BCs and Suunto computers . . . . Double-room rates are approximately US\$130 to \$155 per person per night, including meals and airport transfers; of the

19 units, three have double beds and two have singles . . . . Tufi is adding a spa with sauna, massages, and body treatments . . . . There's TV and Internet in the lodge, but no Nitrox . . . . A two-tank boat dive is US\$137, including tanks and weights; for every two prepaid boat dives, you get to take one free wharf dive before 5 p.m . . . . Web site: [www.tufidive.com](http://www.tufidive.com).

---

---

## Papoo Divers, Nananu-i-ra, Fiji

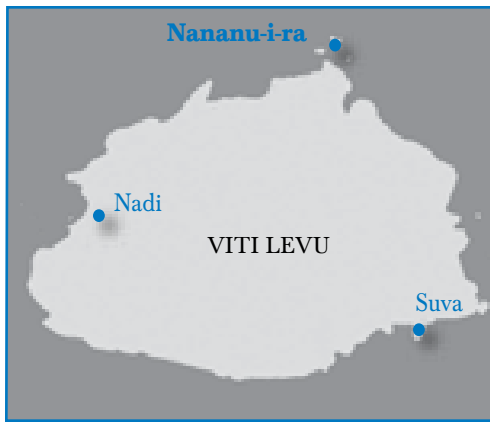
*"boutique diving" away from the crowds*

More than a decade ago, the American Dan Grenier opened a dive shop on Nananu-i-ra, a small isle on the north tip of Viti Levu, Fiji's main island. While he served divers at the resort Wanavanu, on the main island, he also put together packages using the few private accommodations on the isle. Sadly, Dan and one of his charges disappeared while diving in 2005; he was so skilled a diver that no one else on the boat was concerned when he was late to return. By the time they started to search, it was too late and no trace of him was ever found.

At last, another operation is up and running on Nananu-i-ra, although it gets few visitors. Ten minutes by motorboat from Viti Levu, the isle is so tiny you can walk around it at low tide in an hour. Papoo Divers is the main shop there. Divers can stay at Papoo's or at Betham's Beach Cottages. You can get some terrific diving for under \$1,000 a week, a bargain for the South Pacific.

Diving here is equivalent to Beqa, a popular -- and more populated -- island south of Viti Levu, but it's far less rainy. And it's also far more interesting than any Caribbean diving -- more animals, bigger sharks, better viz and fewer Americans. My dives averaged 60 to 90 feet, and sites are 5 to 20 minutes from shore. The two most notable are Pinnacles and Canyons, both with hard-coral pinnacles and canyons rising from 100-foot depths and draped with seafans. Maze and Dream Maker are some of the coral gardens and bommies swarming with anthias, triggerfish, Dascyllus, several species of butterflyfish, trevally, long-fin bannerfish and coral grouper. On some dives, I was surrounded by a few white-tip reef sharks or schools of yellow-stripe grunts and rainbow runners. It was fun to peek into the healthy multi-colored hard (brain, stag-horn, Millepora, Acropora) and soft corals to find porcelain crabs, prawns, lionfish and stonefish. The ferry Ovalau (at 85 feet) and cargo ship Papuan Explorer (75 feet) can be explored inside with wreck reel and lights. Otherwise, I checked out heavy-duty transport trucks, tires, cables and coral-encrusted hulls from the outside. The strongest drift dive was at Cannibal Cove, where currents were less than two knots. Water temps go from 72 degrees in October to an 80-degree peak in February.

Papoo Divers is owned and operated by PADI instructor Papu Pangalau, who was formerly with the now defunct Kai Viti Divers and caters to small groups. His custom boat



Rose of the Reef (O2, cell phone, marine radio, dry area and life vests but no head) holds up to 12 divers for two-tank dives, and he'll contract another boat for additional divers. Papoo Divers is a family business; Papu's son and divemaster cousin drive the boat while snacks are pancakes made by his daughters and mangoes plucked from his trees. Papu gives thorough briefs in excellent English, and experienced divers can dive their own profiles if they stay within air and non-deco limits. I dived with Papoo last year and liked the crew's personable feel and the boutique experience of just diving with a few other divers rather than a couple of dozen. I stayed at Betham's last time but Papoo now has on-premises lodging, so for my March stay, I rented its airy two-bedroom apartment with shower and toilet, a shared

but fully-stocked kitchen, hot water, AC and electricity 24/7. Before I boarded the launch to the island, I bought groceries in Raki Raki, the nearest town on the mainland. Then I cooked my meals in the shared kitchen and ate them with Papu's family and the other guests. One night, Papu's family gave me a special nightlight treat, a Fiji lovo (pit cookery) courtesy of Mrs. Papu and her sisters, while their teenagers did traditional songs and dances.

A standard two-tank dive is US\$80, or \$45 if you've got three-plus divers in your group, and a five-dive package is US\$175. Nanoo's apartment is around US\$65 a night. No Nitrox and no credit cards accepted but Papoo will shuttle you without charge to Raki Raki's banks/ATMs to change money. Papoo Divers doesn't have a Web site; e-mail them at papoodivers@mobileemail.vodafone.com.fj.

An alternative is Betham's Beach Cottages, a self-catering mom-and-pop operation owned by an Aussie-Fijian retired couple. It's not as spacious or new as Papoo's but the fully-furnished cottage I stayed at last October was clean and freshly painted. No hot water or A/C, and electricity is available only from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Betham's restaurant meals must be ordered before 3 p.m. I bought groceries at their kiosk and in

## \$350 to Fly with a Pony Bottle?

Frequent *Undercurrent* contributor Lawrence Schnabel had plans to fly from Los Angeles to North Carolina for a dive trip, only to find that his baggage charges would be about the same as his ticket.

"I flew on Delta for a dive trip in North Carolina. I had planned to take a 13 cu-ft., eight-pound pony bottle because the dives would exceed 100 feet in depth. I have never been charged extra when I pack my pony in my dive bag but Delta's Web site said any scuba tank would be charged \$175 to transport. I phoned Delta to see if this included pony bottles. Yes, indeed – and the Delta rep said the \$175 fee was each way, \$350 total! As the North Carolina dive shop had no ponies to rent, I shipped mine via UPS but paid \$91 because I needed it to arrive in four days."

Other airlines also slap a high price on a pony bottle. American Airlines charges \$100, United charges \$175. Head to Asia and the charges rise as high as \$250. And yes, these fees are for each flight leg.

So if you want to tote a tank, check the airline's policy before you go. Or, says Schnabel, "You can risk packing the pony in a dive bag and pray the check-in person does not bring up the exorbitant charge. But you may have nowhere to store it at the airport if you're asked to pay up." Forget about bringing it as a carry-on item – airline reps told us no air tanks, even small ones, are allowed through the security line.

As for shipping ahead, an eight-pound pony bottle going cross-country runs about \$50 on second-day delivery by FedEx, UPS and the post office. If you're diving in Micronesia, an American territory, the postal service charges \$17.15 for three-day USPS Priority Mail, while UPS charges \$230 for five-day shipping. A five-pound box to the Caymans is \$86 for USPS, \$112 via UPS, and it will take five days to get there.

As for other baggage, there are plenty of overage charges. On a recent flight, I had four pounds too much in my one checked bag, so Delta wanted \$150 extra. I removed two books and carried them by hand.

-- Ben Davison

Raki Raki, cooked on the two-burner stove and enjoyed sunset suppers on the beachfront porch. For two adults, it's US\$65 per night, and Betham's takes Mastercard and Visa, travelers' checks, and foreign currency ([www.bethams.com.fj](http://www.bethams.com.fj)).

With advance notice, both Betham's and Papu will arrange for the two-hour taxi ride (approximately US\$60) from the Nadi airport to connect with their boats at Ellington Wharf. Betham's charges around \$17 for the round-trip boat transfer and Papoo does not charge (you may find yourself riding the boat with Papu's kids coming home from school). For more information about the island, go to [www.nananu-i-ra-fiji.com](http://www.nananu-i-ra-fiji.com).

-- N.M.

---

---

## Lying About Your Health Could Be Lethal

### *our medical expert tells you why you shouldn't fib to dive shops*

*Last month, we published reader comments about how much, if any, health information you disclose on the dive shop medical questionnaire. Most of you say you keep mum. I saw many of the reasons you gave for why as quite valid. Doc Vikingo, a frequent Undercurrent contributor, does not. Here's his opinion:*

Scuba diving, perceived by much of the non-diving public as risky if not outright dangerous, has avoided government meddling to an astonishing degree. Regulation by federal, state and local governments has been avoided largely because the dive industry polices itself. This includes common practices like asking divers to complete a medical history questionnaire before training or a taking a dive trip. This self-policing has benefited divers by giving them freedom to dive whenever, however and with whomever they choose. Much of this is obviously due to divers adhering to industry practices. But when it comes to being forthright in completing medical questionnaires, it's sometimes a different story.

When *Undercurrent* asked readers about whether they disclose medical conditions to dive operators, a surprising number of you replied that you didn't, for fear of an operator not permitting you to dive. But I'm with much of the dive industry and medical experts in believing it's a mistake not to tell the truth about your health. It could cost you your life, and possibly the lives of the buddies and guides you're diving with.

The risks are real. For example, Divers Alert Network's annual report on dive-related accidents and deaths routinely indicates that cardiovascular events cause 20 to 30 percent of all fatalities. Moreover, medications like tranquilizers, antidepressants and narcotic pain relievers and certain cardiac and respiratory drugs that cause no problems topside may act differently at depth, and may combine with or increase nitrogen narcosis, resulting in significantly impaired thinking and behavioral control.

#### **"The Diver's Responsibility, not the Dive Center's"**

Consider this tale sent in by an *Undercurrent* reader about a Bahamas dive he did last June. One of his fellow divers was a 68-year-old woman who looked physically fit and at least a decade younger. However, during the first dive, one of the divemasters had approached her at 75 feet, motioning for her to ascend a bit but she kept descending. At 100 feet, the divemaster physically tried to force the woman to ascend but was pushed away. He partially inflated the woman's BCD but she immediately dumped the air through her shoulder valve. Another divemaster then descended to 170 feet and could see the woman's bubble line starting well below his depth. He used the backup tanks suspended below the boat to decompress from the extreme depth. The woman's body was never found.

Our reader later learned through a mutual acquaintance that the woman had had a minor stroke the month before that Bahamas dive. "There has been considerable speculation about the cause of her actions and subsequent disappearance," he wrote us. "While we may never know for certain, the leading theories are that she either got nitrogen narcosis at 70 feet, or suffered a stroke and became confused and disoriented. If she had a transient

ischemic attack, or TIA, (a ‘warning stroke’ or ‘mini-stroke’ that produces stroke-like symptoms but no lasting damage.) the month prior, my medical friends indicate it is dubious she would have received a physician’s clearance to dive. There are generally other underlying medical issues, and a greatly increased risk of suffering another stroke after a ‘minor’ TIA stroke.”

Out of curiosity, our reader e-mailed PADI and asked about its fitness-to-dive policy. The reply: “While dive students are required to complete a medical history questionnaire before participating in any PADI courses, PADI diving facilities are not required to medically screen all of their customers. Divers learn during their training that, after certification, they must always ensure that they are medically fit for diving before doing so. This is the diver’s responsibility rather than the dive center’s.”

## Taking Your Cell Phone Diving: Dumb Idea or Good Safety Tool?

Richard Glock (Tampa, FL) had this question for us: “Have you considered carrying a cell phone with you while diving? Granted, if you’re miles offshore, you won’t have reception but I’ve been impressed by how many dive boats get service on their cell phones on the water. A Verizon Wireless rep told me that the Casio G’zOne Boulder phone is water-resistant to six feet. A water-tight container to carry the phone in that would fit in a BC pocket would sure be helpful if I were in trouble at the surface.”

The first thing I would say is there is nothing more repulsive than a diver on a dayboat calling someone on land between dives, especially because they tend to be loud and obtrusive, too often checking on their market position. But maybe safety is a reason to carry a phone on board, so first we checked with Verizon Wireless about its waterproof phone. Spokeswoman Brenda Boyd Raney says the G’zOne passed military specs that make it safe to take into water but Verizon will only guarantee it to be water-resistant, with all ports closed, for up to 30 minutes at a depth of three feet. As for reception, “boaters and divers can often get cell signals while in lakes and close to the shoreline while at sea,” says Raney, but that kind of depth limitation makes it pretty useless for divers.

We contacted the Coast Guard’s Florida sector to see if it ever gets 911 calls from stranded divers bobbing offshore. Public affairs officer Marianna O’Leary said not as of yet. “We issued a press release in August telling boaters not to rely on their cell phones to contact us. Instead, we’re encouraging marine radios because they’re a lot more reliable and water-resistant.”

We’ve seen divers’ anecdotes of their cell phones and BlackBerries being able to work on dives, at least shallow ones. Bob Darwin (Seattle, WA) got a call during a safety stop. Jeff Sohn (Carbondale, PA) and his dive buddies took a few old cell phones on dives to see what would happen. “We used ziplock baggies for some and a watertight camera housing for others. The baggies kept them dry but

the LCD screens imploded around 40 feet. The camera housing worked well, though. We lost cell service around 35 feet. Texting worked the best.” Rick Preston (Olympia, WA) accidentally left his BlackBerry in the pocket of his drysuit undergarment and had it vibrate with a calendar reminder at 130 feet. “At first, I thought I was having a heart attack.”

Other divers don’t see the point of bringing the devices on a dive. “I could text my buddy: ‘omg shrk bhnd u totlly cool,’” said one. “Oh, and take a pic when the shark bites his leg off and send it to my friends.” “I thought the purpose of diving was to get away from things like cell phones,” says another.

If you must bring your cell phone along, store it in a waterproof canister (OMS makes a small one that costs around \$10 and is waterproof down to 300 feet). While making a call during a dive is impossible, you could use it for a 911 call on the surface. Program your dive boat’s cell number into your phone before backrolling in case it has disappeared when you surface. Or if you prefer to keep your \$400 iPhone at home, buy a cheap cell phone to make a 911 call – the FCC requires that all cell phones, regardless of service status, must be able to reach 911 services if they’re in range of any cellular carrier.

Or you can go all out and splurge on the Alpha Underwater Cell Phone System. For the princely sum of \$1,790 you can make and take calls while diving. It buys you a full-face mask with hose and first stage, a 130-foot-long cable with waterproof connector, a Bluetooth-integrated waterproof interface box for your cell phone, and an inflatable buoy with flags. SkyMall sells it, so you can read all about the gizmo on your next flight.

But don’t tell anyone you read this in *Undercurrent*. We’re a bit embarrassed that we even published this, but I suppose I’m old-fashioned.

- - Ben Davison



Because so many of you readers admit that you are untruthful on the medical release, we wondered if dive medicine experts did the same, just to avoid the hassle of dealing with dive operators who have far less medical knowledge. Ern Campbell, M.D., a.k.a. the blogger ScubaDoc, said that even if he had a condition he feared may prevent a dive operation from taking him on board, he still “would disclose the condition to the operator and expect an appropriate explanation of any denial to dive.” Dr. Michael Bennett, president of the South Pacific Underwater Medicine Society, told us: “I believe the medical risks of diving are real and present a threat to my well-being. Therefore, I would not be selfish enough to cheat and put my fellow divers at risk when they might be called upon to save me!”

*“If divers knowingly conceal their conditions once they know what the risks are, it’s not just themselves they’re putting at risk . . .”*

### **Drugs Work Differently Underwater**

Common reader statements we received included, “I’m capable of monitoring my own medical problems” and “I don’t pose a danger.” In many cases, such assertions are not accurate. For example, common conditions like asthma, diabetes and seizures may appear well-managed but can unexpectedly and rapidly spiral out of control. When they do so underwater, the results can be deadly. The altered environment in diving (e.g., water that’s cooler than body temperature, exertion, increased partial pressures of gases) can precipitate relapses. The fact is the potential effects of such changes upon most medical conditions – and the drugs used to control them – are not known with certainty.

Other readers responded along the lines of, “What does the dive op know about the implications of my medical issues for scuba?” The answer is, “Probably very little.” This is why the shop can quite reasonably ask you to report your medical status, and may require a signed clearance to dive from a physician who does understand the implications. Remember, if a dive crew is unaware of your medical disorders, appropriate treatment could be substantially delayed.

In a related vein, some readers believed that a dive operator asking for such personal information was in violation of their right to medical privacy. Actually, it isn’t. The privacy provisions of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) are binding on healthcare insurers, providers and facilities, not dive operators and training agencies. You voluntarily waive your “right” to keep your medical information private when you contract for dive certification or a two-tank dive. It is the operator’s perfect right to ask the diver to be honest regarding medical conditions that could mean additional risks to the business, other customers and the diver himself. There is nothing illegal, unethical or inappropriate about this. From a liability standpoint, dive businesses would be insane not to.

### **You’re not the Only Diver on the Boat**

Perhaps the lamest of the excuses was, “It’s my life and my choice to dive with a disease.” This might be arguable if you are an unemployed solo diver without family or friends. However, if you are diving with a dive operator and other customers, then your fitness to dive most assuredly is of concern to them.

When you are less than honest in revealing your medical status, not only could you as the diver be harmed, but so could your buddy, divemaster or others who risk their lives to save yours. Karl Huggins, program director of the University of Southern California’s Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber, says that if individuals “...knowingly conceal these conditions once they know what the risks are, it’s not just themselves they’re putting at risk but also those who may need to respond to them in an emergency situation.” He goes on to say, “Divers may rationalize that ‘It’s my life and I can assume any risk I want because the damage I do, I do to myself.’ But when they’re paralyzed and can’t do their job or function normally in their work and personal lives, is it just themselves they’re affecting?”

Not to mention that you could cause a dive trip to be aborted for everyone, possibly on an expensive liveaboard in a far-flung location, because the crew needs to rush you to medical care. Under these conditions, liveaboards make no refunds to any divers on the itinerary. If you’re lucky enough not to expire from your previously undisclosed medical condition, you might be thrashed to death by the other passengers.

If and when enough divers lie, incidents will occur and they eventually will catch the government's eye. When that happens, laws will be passed, like requirements of medical exams before receiving dive training and mandatory completion of a medical history form in Australia, Malta and other locations. A number of preventable diver deaths due to medical reasons have occurred in Australia's Queensland region over the past several years. Many were the result of divers being untruthful about their medical status and made news headlines. This resulted in the government considering even more rules and tighter enforcement. Do you want some random diver's failure to disclose medical conditions that led to a bad dive accident or major fatality to lead to tighter restrictions on your own dives?

You participate in recreational scuba on a voluntary basis. No one is forcing you to do it. It's a recreational pastime, a fun thing to do. If you don't like being asked to properly and truthfully complete a medical questionnaire, a practice intended to protect customers and the businesses that offer them scuba services, you don't have to participate. You can find diversions with rules that better suit you and don't require total disclosure of your medical history. Heaven knows there are dozens of them that don't put you and others in such a potentially hazardous situation.

-- Doc Vikingo

---

## Rebuttals About Regulator Servicing

### *and how to keep yours in good shape*

After reading my "Servicing Your Regulator" article last month, some dive industry folks wrote in with their take on regulator repair and replacement.

Nick Bailey, a dive-incident investigator in England, says the cost of servicing a regulator and the cost of replacing one are approaching each other, and the latter may soon be more economical. "When I started diving 20 years ago, my first regulator cost \$190, fairly expensive at the time. To get it serviced, parts and labor were around \$50. To buy basically that same model today is \$230. But over the intervening years, the price of spare parts has risen far more and that is probably where manufacturers have kept profits coming in."

Ken Kurtis, owner of Reef Seekers Dive Co. in Beverly Hills, CA, thought my article made it seem like dive shops invented a myth of annual service as a way to generate profits. "We just follow the manufacturer guidelines. If those guidelines say 'annual service,' that's the standard to which we must adhere. If they say 'inspection only,' then we can follow that. Our hands are somewhat tied. One thing that's been drilled into our heads is that once a regulator has been physically opened up, you have an obligation not to put the old parts back in. All the o-rings need to be replaced, sometimes a few other things, and then the reg is adjusted to fall back within the manufacturer's specs. If we don't do that and there's an accident subsequent to service, we've opened ourselves up to a legal challenge about the competency of our repair work."

Kurtis also takes umbrage to our take on how divers could skip an annual servicing. "I'm a forensic consultant for the Los Angeles County coroner with regard to scuba fatalities. While I have yet to see a case where regulator failure has caused someone's death, I've seen cases where the victim's regulator performed far outside of the manufacturer's specs and where we couldn't ascertain when it had last been serviced. Would the accident have not happened if the regulator had worked better? We can't say for sure. But we can say that a poorly performing regulator, had it been properly serviced in a timely manner, would have been one less thing for a diver to deal with in an emergency, and that that possibly could have affected the outcome. The bottom line is this all relates to life support. If \$100 is too much for you to spend annually to get a regulator to perform as it should, then maybe you should re-think your priorities. If things go wrong, I'm sure you'd prefer to deal with the emergency knowing that your regulator is functioning correctly, rather than have your last thought be, 'Maybe I should have gotten that thing serviced after all.'"

Regardless of how you service your regulator, more important is how you take care of it in between dive shop visits, especially after you're done using it on a dive trip. If you don't rinse it thoroughly, the remaining saltwater

## Good Technicians Are Going Extinct at Dive Shops

Servicing can be hit or miss, as many divers find out when their newly serviced regulators free-flow or don't perform on their first dive. Some *Undercurrent* readers noted on our online forum that the most dangerous moments they had with their regulators happened just after they were serviced at the dive shop.

Joel S. (Sacramento, CA) said, "Once I had a free-flow problem after the annual servicing. Another time, the hose from the second stage wasn't tightly secured to the first stage." Ken Katz (Livingston, NJ) tested his Mares regulator on a tank just after servicing and found it wouldn't breathe. "The seal was installed backwards. Very embarrassing to the technician."

A qualified, certified technician is hard to come by. "That's why it takes two weeks for your regulator to get serviced," says Al Pendergrass, senior technician at regulator servicer AirTech in Raleigh, NC. "Many dive shops don't have qualified technicians, so they send the regulators to us."

How does one get certified? Each regulator manufacturer offers a number of technical training seminars every year. Training is held at big dive shows like DEMA and Under the Sea but manufacturers also have regional training sessions and even send trainers to big dive shops. The more

seminars one attends, the more experience one gleans. There are specific regulator-servicing schools; LeisurePro's repair department head went to one for a week, spending up to eight hours a day doing servicing and earning an official certification. But the standard method is just attending as many seminars as possible. LeisurePro repair technician Brett Holmes says, "I didn't go to a specific school but I came here after working in the service departments for two dive gear manufacturers. I attend each manufacturer's service course, and each one recommends two to three courses a year. Each course is a half-day of cases about general servicing, plus specific requirements for that brand." But for dive shops with a thin profit margin, the costs to travel to DEMA and other places for training can be too much."

Low salaries mean technicians come and go quickly, says Roy Gresham, a dive gear technician in Seattle with 18 years of experience. "Besides me, there's only one other guy in the Puget Sound area who can be considered a professional. Most technicians are making \$10 to \$15 an hour, some earn less, darn few of us earn more." He knows poor service is a problem because people bring in their regulators to him right after servicing them elsewhere. "Many facilities don't have the necessary items to run a service shop. But I wonder if the boss is pushing his technician to get stuff out the door rapidly, or the guy's just not qualified?"

What's a diver to do? Before you turn over your regulator to a dive shop for a tune-up or a repair, ask who will do it and what his training is.

evaporates but leaves behind salt, forming crystals that can cause valves to seat improperly. This leads to problems like free-flow, costly repairs or, even more expensive, having to buy a new regulator. While it's important to keep your gear freshwater-rinsed, don't panic if the day boat lacks a rinse tank. You have a day or two before crystals begin to form, so it's safe to wait till you're onshore.

When you're done with a dive trip, thoroughly clean your regulator and BCD. Jack Kuhn, owner of Harbor Dive Shop in Sausalito, CA, follows this checklist: Take the inflator off the BCD, drain saltwater out, rinse the BCD interior with fresh water, then drain again. Submerge the BCD in fresh water, like in a bathtub overnight, to get the salt off. Thoroughly soak the inflator and its mechanism. Soak the second stage and rinse the first stage, both in fresh water. Then thoroughly dry everything before storing it. "I hang my BCD and regulator together on a sturdy hanger and store it in a room that is not hot, dry or damp," he says. "For me, that's the room with the water heater in it."

A regulator bag, duffel bag or a padded case is ideal for storing the regulator. Don't store it in sunlight, and definitely not in the garage, where mice and rats may find the rubber hoses tasty.

Reader Rob Courter (Raleigh, NC) recommends taking an equipment maintenance class at your dealer. "I took one at my local dive shop and while it didn't teach people how to do their own service, it did let us tear apart regulator stages, BCDs, tanks and other gear to see how they really tick. Learning about my gear from the inside out helped me become a better diver."

If you're in the market for a new regulator, know that the price can determine how much you'll pay for servicing and parts. On its customer-service phone line, OnlineScuba.com says it divides its regulators into two categories: "balanced-adjustable," the more expensive ones that feature more bells and whistles, and the "reliable-economical," simple piston types that are easier to service because the second stages don't have swivels.

“For those who aren’t diving too deep or that often, and if you have a budget in mind, the reliable types may work best.”

Kay Wilson, owner of Grand Cayman’s Indigo Divers, agrees. “If you’re a once-a-year vacation diver, select a regulator based on its ease of servicing as much as on its ease of breathing. Ask yourself, do you really need the additional bells and whistles? The ideal regulator for you is not necessarily the most expensive or the best looking one.”

-- Ben Davison

---

---

## How a Diver’s Defense Came Undone

### *David Swain gets a life sentence for murdering his wife*

Three years ago, after a civil jury found him responsible for his wife’s death, David Swain, a one-time dive-shop owner in Jamestown, R.I., stood in the emptying courtroom and told reporters he “would welcome a criminal trial” someday to clear his name. At least then, he said, “all evidence gets evaluated.” Swain was accused of taking his wife, Shelley Tyre, to Tortola for a dive vacation and attacking her underwater by turning off her air and holding her tight until she drowned. (See our April 2006 story “The Yellow Fin in the Sand” to read the details of Tyre’s death and the civil case.)

Lawyer J. Renn Olenn, who had pursued the wrongful-death case against Swain for four years, stood nearby listening as Swain spoke. Olenn was there again on October 27, in a criminal courtroom in Tortola, when another jury found him guilty of murdering Shelley Tyre 10 years ago while on a scuba-diving vacation.

Yesterday, in sight of the Caribbean waters where Tyre drowned and a few miles from the hilltop prison where Swain, 54, returned after the jury’s verdict, Olenn recalled that moment in Providence on a February day in 2006. “He told the newspapers that once he got his chance to tell his story and that when all the facts came out, it would be clear he couldn’t have committed this crime. Well, he got a chance to say everything he wanted to say, and explain every question that ever existed. From what I could see, it was completely rejected by the jury.”

It was only by chance that Olenn, who drew the blueprint that Tortola prosecutors followed over three weeks to convict Swain, ever entered the case. His wife, Mary, and Tyre’s father, Richard, were acquaintances who shared an appreciation of art history. One day in 1999, four months after Shelley’s drowning, the Olenns visited the Tyres in Jamestown to drop off a museum booklet. The Tyres related the loss of their daughter, an expert diver whose marriage to Swain was in obvious trouble, a fact known by all her friends. Olenn outlined his expertise in investigating aquatic deaths. He offered to take a look at Shelley’s death, which Tortola officials had then ruled an accident.

“It was then just two parents helping each other,” he said. “That went on for a little more than a year until I was able to assemble the evidence that this was very likely murder. I didn’t start out looking for that, but when I discovered it was murder, it became a lawsuit.”

That lawsuit, which ended in a Providence jury awarding Tyre’s parents almost \$4 million in damages, forced Tortola officials to reopen the case. Then last October, in the cool confines of the narrow courtroom in Tortola, the Tyres and the Olenns held hands as they strained to hear a soft-spoken jury foreman say the word: guilty. The nine-member jury unanimously found Swain had murdered his wife of almost six years, accepting the prosecution’s – and Olenn’s – theory that he had done so to collect hundreds of thousands of dollars in insurance and other assets while pursuing another woman, and while knowing that a nuptial agreement prevented him from profiting if they divorced.

“I had, at that point, no feeling at all,” Olenn said. “When the verdict was read, [the Tyres] finally had what they needed, and I must say I was thinking about them.”

## “Every One of These People Was Convinced It Could Only Be Murder”

Olenn said he believed it was the prosecution’s expert witnesses – the same witnesses he had used in his successful civil case – that persuaded the jury in the circumstantial case that Tyre, 46, had no pre-existing conditions that might have caused her to panic, as the defense tried to suggest, and that her death could be nothing else but murder. Those witnesses included a designer of diving equipment, a pathologist who dove the site where Tyre died, and a premier researcher in the U.S. with over 60 years of experience in diving medicine, who calculated how much air from her tank Tyre had used prior to her death. Together those experts “represented over 200 years of diving investigation, science and medicine,” said Olenn. “Every one of those people was convinced it could only be murder, it could not be an accident. Even the defendant’s witnesses conceded they could not rule out murder.”

Swain, now 53, and Tyre had traveled to Tortola with another couple and their young son for a week of scuba diving. Olenn and Tortola prosecutors theorized that Tyre died about eight minutes after she entered the water with Swain near Cooper’s Island on the last full day of diving. They suggested Swain climbed onto Tyre’s back when they had reached the wrecks of two tugboats at 80 feet and turned off her air until she had drowned. In the struggle, Tyre’s mask strap was broken, the mouthpiece of her snorkel fell off, and Tyre had jammed one of her swim fins into the sand toe-first. A dive shop owner who had rented equipment to them found Tyre’s broken equipment the next day at the site.

Olenn said the dive’s time sequence was a critically important point, and Swain’s own testimony may have worked against him. “His testimony was it took them a minute or two to get down the mooring line, took them about four or five minutes to swim to the wrecks, and then it took five to ten minutes to visit the wrecks,” before the two divers separated, as Swain said they often did. Using that time sequence, “when she took her last breath, he was with her.”

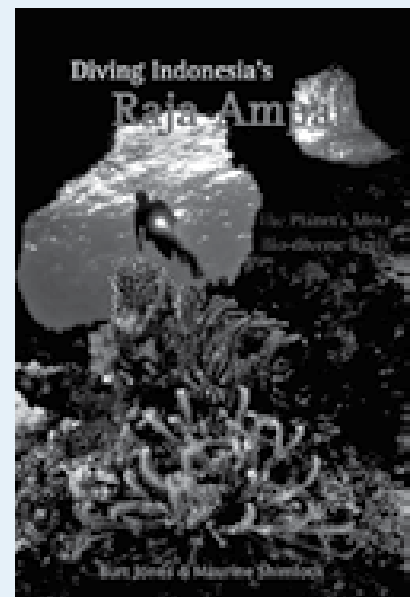
Swain, who has always maintained his innocence, said he never knew what happened to his wife after they separated. Her body was discovered and brought to the surface by Christian Thwaites, Swain’s friend, who entered the water after Swain surfaced alone.

Olenn said Swain’s defense team presented their own expert witness, Glen Egstrom, a retired kinesiology professor from UCLA, who arrived at a different air-use calculation that supported Swain’s claim that Tyre was alive when they separated under water. But, said Olenn, Egstrom “changed his calculations over the weekend, and when he came back on Monday, they were really absurd ... The jury didn’t buy it.” Egstrom also reportedly acknowledged under cross-examination that Swain’s reports to authorities after the dive were inconsistent at times.

## *Diving Raja Ampat*

Here’s a definitive guide book on what authors and marine photographers Burt Jones and Maurine Shimlock call “the greatest repository of tropical marine life on earth.” And anyone who has dived it knows they speak the truth. This 146-page book is filled with descriptions of mind-blowing dive sites, along with good descriptions of the area, the people and what you need to know to dive there. And the photos of unusual critters will knock your socks off.

Burt and Maurine, who post frequently on *Undercurrent’s* online blog, work with Indonesian branches of several NGOs, including Conservation International, to show Raja Ampat’s incomparable marine life to the world and explain why it should be treasured. Whether or not you think you’ll ever get to Raja Ampat, you should own this book just to nurture your dreams. Order *Diving Raja Ampat* now by going to [www.undercurrent.org](http://www.undercurrent.org) and clicking on a photo of the cover. Our profits will go directly to tropical reef conservation.



## Skip the Travel Vest, Just Wear Your BCD

In the last issue, I recommended buying a travel vest to hold your carry-on items and beat airline luggage weight restrictions. Reader Harvey Cohen (Middlefield, NJ) has a cheaper idea: Just put on your BCD over your shirt, wear it onto the plane, then stow it in the overhead bin.

“There’s lots of room in my carry-on bag for dive gear because I wear my Aqualung Pro QD i3 on board. I’ve done this on trips from New York to Nassau, Providenciales and Cairns. I unclip all hardware that’s not an integral part of the BCD, except the weight pockets and my PADI C-card tag. I do sometimes use the two zippered pockets to carry small stuff like snacks or a book. While I’ve never had any comments from airlines or security, I’ve had a couple from passengers. In the boarding line for the flight from Sydney to Cairns, the fellow behind me said, ‘Just can’t wait to start diving, eh?’”



## A New Defense for Appeal: PTSD

Swain was sentenced to life in Tortola’s hilltop prison. He is reportedly considering appealing the verdict to the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court. The possible defense: post-traumatic stress disorder. That’s because 33 years before he would hear his own jury convict him of murder, Swain sat in a Minnesota courtroom as a jury foreman declared his brother Richard guilty of bludgeoning their mother to death. Richard Swain, then 19, had clubbed Betty Jane Swain with such force that pieces of the plastic bag covering Betty Jane’s head had been embedded in her shattered skull. Their father, a violent man, had run off to become a woman.

The ensuing ordeal traumatized him for life, says his daughter, Jennifer Swain Bloom, and she hopes that if it’s disclosed to another jury, it could spare him from spending the rest of his life behind bars. She says the conviction will be appealed, in part, because the criminal trial judge erred by prohibiting Swain’s past and its mental effects from being introduced into evidence. The jury heard no explanation for his memory lapses of the day Swain died, so consequently, they may have thought he was lying.

“Part of the problem with post-traumatic stress disorder is when terrible things happen to you, you can have memory block,” says Bloom, a California yoga instructor who is raising money for her father’s legal defense. Many PTSD victims are haunted by memories of terrifying moments. But Bloom contends that in her father’s case, the disorder has manifested itself in Swain’s repression of those moments.

His inability to explain appeared evident in a videotaped deposition heard by both the Providence and Tortola juries. Swain is heard answering questions about the day Tyre drowned with the vaguest of recollections. His reply to numerous questions: “I haven’t a clue.” Asked if, as a certified diver and former emergency medical technician, he had ever drawn any conclusion about how his wife might have died, Swain responded: “Nope.”

Swain’s defense team had wanted to call Providence psychologist Paul Block as a witness. He had held 34 therapy sessions with Swain between 2003 and 2004. Block was also to testify that Swain exhibited no violent tendencies. The Tortola prosecutor objected because Block wasn’t a medical doctor, and the judge agreed.

The judge granted Swain a chance for parole in 23 years. Bloom says her father rarely cries but he did the day after the judge sentenced him to life. “If the jury knew [memory loss] was a symptom, and had understood what the guy had gone through, and how that affects the human psyche, they would have understood him better,” says Bloom.

Oleyn's response: "I've always felt that David Swain's children were caused to suffer unbearably due to his actions. I don't believe, as his children, they will ever be able to accept his guilt."

The CBS true-crime documentary *48 Hours Mystery* was in Tortola to film footage of Swain's murder trial. The crew interviewed a number of officials linked to the case, and went underwater to film the Cooper Island wrecks where Swain drowned his wife. However, the presiding judge denied their request to film inside the courtroom during trial proceedings. The episode is expected to air this month.

- - from reports by Tom Mooney, Providence Journal

## Reader Advice for Not Getting Lost at Sea

After reading our October cover story about Jim Abernethy's Scuba Adventures and how our writer got separated from his group in a strong current and spent two hours bobbing at sea, readers wrote in to express their concern – and give advice about how he could avoid a second mishap.

"A diver has to give some thought to survival before it becomes survival," says Robert Boyd (Ransom Canyon, TX). "Ask yourself, 'What can I use each thing I have on me for if I need it for survival?' When I began drift, wreck and night diving, I had redundant systems from the get-go. Yes, it cost more to double or triple everything but I always tried to stack the deck a little more in my favor. My son and wife both thought I was a crazed fool when I insisted they carry sausages, horns, whistles, strobe lights, flashlights, spare air and mirror-signaling devices on all dives."

Most recommendations were about buying a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) to add to dive gear. Everyone had their favorite. "I highly recommend the PLBs made by ACR Electronics," says Craig Munson (Lakeland, FL). "They can tell the search party exactly where you are within 10 feet anywhere in the world ([www.acrelectronics.com](http://www.acrelectronics.com)). Another good item is a waterproof strobe light approved by the Coast Guard."

John Fraser (Saipan, Mariana Islands) has ACR's Aqualink PLB but it has some flaws. "It's waterproof but not to the recreational dive limit of 130 feet. I did ask ACR about carrying its PLB inside several waterproof plastic bags, but they said the unit might be accidentally activated by the water pressure alone. So I carry mine in a waterproof plastic bag inside an OtterBox 9000, which is rated to 100 feet ([www.otterbox.com](http://www.otterbox.com)). The drawback is that the box is too big to put in a BCD pocket and is positively buoyant. I have to attach the box to the outside of my BCD, and it really gets in the way. The new Aqualink is smaller than ACR's previous one but will not fit into the smaller OtterBox 8000. I would very much like to see a PLB waterproof to at least 130 ft and small enough to fit inside a BCD pocket."

While good PLBs are expensive at \$500-plus for beacon and canister, Harry O'Neil (Great Falls, VA) recommends McMurdo's new FastFind series, priced under \$300. "I'd recommend the model 210 only, as it includes a GPS feature that sends your coordinates via the international search-and-rescue satellite system. ([www.fastfindplb.com](http://www.fastfindplb.com)). I also bought an OMS canister, model 298, for \$50 and made a harness to attach it to one of my tank bands ([www.omsdive.com](http://www.omsdive.com)). The only downside is I must remove my BC to get to the canister, but I'll have plenty of time to do so if I ever need to use it. Given the money we spend on dive equipment, cameras, travel and insurance, a PLB is a drop in the bucket. Plus, the battery is good for at least five years."

Some readers asked for more clarification from our writer about what happened on the dive. For instance, did Abernethy do a head count? "Yes, there was one, a careful one, on each dive. As mentioned, there was no alarm on the part of the crew until I didn't appear after an hour and ten minutes into the dive. They knew I was under and were waiting for me. That's why they called the Coast Guard after that time."

Why did he ditch his tank, still full of air? "Dropping the tank was not due to weight, it was to free myself of the encumbrance so I could swim more easily." As for losing the mask, did he make the dumb mistake of pushing it on top of his head? "The mask loss was, yup, a stupid mistake. The mask was not on top of my head, to my knowledge, but must have instead come off just as I surfaced. I wear it very loosely when diving, allowing water pressure to keep it on my face."

No, he has no plans to sue. "I think it is a vital, reasonable right to sue for injury and/or damages when warranted. I do abhor the wanton filing of lawsuits that has poisoned our economy. That's why I have no intention of filing a lawsuit against the Abernethy dive operation, even though I believe there was some negligence involved in their case."

His dive mishap got the attention of "The Story With Dick Gordon," a radio program from North Carolina Public Radio, and his interview aired in November. Listen to his tale, titled "Stranded at Sea," by going to <http://thestory.org> archive and scrolling down to the November 24 program.



The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102  
Sausalito, CA 94965

Periodicals  
Postage PAID  
Sausalito, CA  
and Additional  
Mailing Offices

*Undercurrent* is the consumer newsletter for sport divers that reviews scuba destinations and equipment. We accept no advertising. Subscriptions in the U.S. and Canada are \$78 a year (addresses in Mexico, add \$20; all other foreign addresses, add \$35).

*Undercurrent* (ISSN 1095-1555, USPS 001-198) is published monthly by Undercurrent, 3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102, Sausalito, CA 94965, with the November/December issue being the annual book-sized *Travelin' Diver's Chapbook*. Periodicals rates paid at Sausalito, CA, and additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:**

Send address changes to 3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102 Sausalito, CA 94965

**Letters to the Editor/  
Submissions**

**Undercurrent**

3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102  
Sausalito, CA 94965  
Fax 415-289-0137  
EditorBenD@undercurrent.org

**Subscriptions/Address  
Changes**

To subscribe, renew, change address, or order back issues, call 800-326-1896 or 415-289-0501, Mon.-Fri., 9-5 Pacific Time  
E-mail: [pete@undercurrent.org](mailto:pete@undercurrent.org)  
or write:

**Undercurrent**

3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102  
Sausalito, CA 94965

**Editorial Office**

Ben Davison, Publisher and Editor  
Vanessa Richardson, Senior Editor

E-mail:  
EditorBenD@undercurrent.org

[www.undercurrent.org](http://www.undercurrent.org)

Printed on recycled paper 



January 2010 Vol. 25, No. 1

## Flotsam & Jetsam

### Give Your Dive Gear to a Good Cause.

Subscriber Lydia Klein (New York, NY) recommends donating used gear to Project Seahorse, a Vancouver nonprofit that helps set up marine preserves for seahorses worldwide. "I've been sending my old masks and snorkels to them for years, and I see on their Web site they'd like all kinds of dive gear." Project Seahorse says old dive masks would be particularly welcomed on its Philippines project. "It will be given to a Filipino fisher to recognize his or her involvement in seahorse conservation." Go to: <http://seahorse.fisheries.ubc.ca/AboutPS/Donate.html>.

**Fiji Aggressor in Flux.** Reader Jeff Snyder (Newrk, DE) had a July trip scheduled on this liveboard when he got notice the boat will be taken out of service in late January, and the franchise owner wasn't sure when or if he would put the boat back in service in Fiji. "Aggressor did contact Peter Hughes, who had spaces for our week, and would transfer the deposit if we chose to go with them." We contacted Aggressor's reservations manager Anne Hasson, who confirmed the boat will have an extensive drydock as of January 24. "The franchise owners are considering several

new destinations and will make an announcement once everything is finalized." We'll keep you posted.

**Old Sow Sucks Up Diver.** If you're diving near the Maine-Canada boundary, stay clear of Old Sow, the largest tidal whirlpool in the Western Hemisphere. This swirling hole can reach 200 feet wide. It recently sucked up Kevin Steeves, 34, when he unknowingly drifted into it while diving with a friend off the New Brunswick shore. His friend called the Coast Guard but when a boat arrived, Steeves had managed to wriggle out of Old Sow and reach the Maine shore, exhausted but unharmed.

**Check Your Teeth Before Diving.** Teeth feeling funny? Get them checked out before your next dive. Mitchell Josephs, D.D.S., says diving can exert pressure on any air trapped in the nerve canals of an abscessed tooth or under faulty, leaky fillings. If you're flying, the trapped air can expand and cause intense pain. So get your dentist to check his work before your next dive trip.

**Enough Said.** A few years ago, Tiger Woods was asked why he likes to go diving. His reply: "The fish don't know who I am." The fish probably will be seeing more of Tiger underwater this year.