

# undercurrent®

THE PRIVATE, EXCLUSIVE GUIDE FOR SERIOUS DIVERS

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## Admiral's Arms, South Caicos, B.W.I.

— *At least there are sharks*

Were it not for the omnipresent winds, South Caicos, 575 miles east of Miami, would never have developed an economic base to support its population. Those winds drove windmills and those windmills pumped the ocean's water into salt ponds and those salt ponds provided, from the early 19th century, salt to preserve the catch of Caribbean fishermen. With the development of commercial refrigeration in the 20th century, the South Caicos salt market stilled and so did the windmills. Now they sit motionless, slowly deteriorating from the sun and the wind. Those who worked in the salt ponds now find employment in the conch and lobster market, but that occupation too may disappear. One hundred million conch, it is estimated, have been taken from the Great Caicos Bank in the last 50 years. They are being taken faster than they replenish themselves. Without conservation that industry too will die.

It was the wind which made salt mining feasible, but I wondered, as I caught glimpses of the waves and whitecaps on my journey from the airport to the Admiral's Arms Hotel, would the wind make diving infeasible? I would soon learn.

The Admiral's Arms was purchased a couple of years ago by a group of active and retired Army officers, many of whom are divers. Since April, 1977, they have had four sets of managers (the current are Judy and Joe Esposito) and the hotel reflects the problems one might expect from the lack of consistent management. The thirteen rooms are small, yet attractive. During my stay five were closed because of plumbing problems, and my toilet refused to perform a complete flush. A few mosquitoes and cockroaches had taken residence in my room, not unusual in Caribbean hotels, but it is a problem which can be mitigated. I was also annoyed on two occasions when boys walked into my room and asked for money. I was told no one ever steals a thing on South Caicos, but I do object to the management not ensuring the privacy of its guests. That privacy can be further disturbed in the evening, because the bar is a local gathering spot and the noise of the carousers may disturb light sleepers.

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Meals were surely decent, but not elaborate. The main dinner course was fresh lobster, native-style fish or steak; breakfast and lunch were similar to what one might find in a mainland restaurant. The views from the dining room and bar are superb. The hotel sits on a small bluff overlooking the harbor of the picturesque fishing village of Cockburn. There is no beach for swimming (a public beach is a ten-minute walk away) but a lovely salt-water swimming pool has been carved out of limestone. Dress, of course, is always casual.

The dive shop, Turk-Cai Watersports, is adjacent to the hotel pier, where the dive boat is moored. Divemaster Kim Lane, a 24-year-old master diver from the Florida Institute of Technology, is overworked. He takes care of all gear, including filling the 40+ tanks between dives, he skips the boat, he leads the dives, and, during my stay, because one of the managers was in the hospital in Florida, he doubled in the evenings as bartender and innkeeper.

Kim is a likeable fellow and, although he was unable to dive because of a serious foot injury, he is well-regarded as a divemaster. He arranged our dives to be led by U.S. Coast Guardsmen stationed on South Caicos. But our departures were delayed by as much as 90 minutes for our 9 a.m. two-tank dive and our 2 p.m. one-tank dive. I'm annoyed by schedule delays; I hate to hang around waiting for a departure, and I like to have a return time I can count on so I can enjoy other activities with friends. Kim simply needs assistance.

The 34-foot trihulled dive boat makes the diving easy. There is plenty of room for passengers, and entry and exit, except for the rough water, are simple. Kim dangles an octopus 10 feet from a tank during dives and trails a long line to mark the current and add to diver safety. The boat handles the rough water well, although many landlubbers became nauseated during the 15-minute trip to the reefs. The wind, of course, keeps the waves and shoreline in constant motion. The stirred-up sand has less effect the deeper one dives, but I noted the effect as deep as 60-75 feet, where the reef ends and the wall starts. Our second dive of the day, in 10-15 feet of water, led us to scattered coral heads which were relatively uncolorful because, one could see, the sand had been kicked up in them. There were common tropical fish, but they were not particularly abundant. One highly touted area, called the Aquarium, had nice

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coral and staghorn and, again, common tropical fish, but in a place like, say, Bonaire it probably wouldn't even be dived. So the shallow and moderate dives were average. Does South Caicos redeem itself deeper?

I think so. Although some effect of turbulence was visible, there was beauty. On the first dive of each day we anchored in 60-75 feet and explored interesting spots over the wall. The "Grotto" is where the reef had broken apart and formed a canyon and an impressive arch. The "Chimney" is a vertical tunnel which one enters at 110 feet, and exits at 60 feet to end the dive. The coral, sponges and marine life were not as prolific along the wall as I had hoped, but we saw occasional creatures of substantial size along the wall, and less often in more shallow water, that do indeed redeem the location.

On nearly every dive, shy sharks watched. They hovered far out of camera range. Most were 4, 5, or 6 feet, but occasionally we spotted larger relatives. I never felt threatened and, in fact, wished they would approach for photography. They refused. On many dives schools of jacks swam through groups of divers. On several dives we found large green turtles, which were easy marks for photographers. We discovered an enormous jewfish in a hole, but he refused to come out. In more shallow water four-foot rays were common, and I came across a giant, 8-10 feet across, the largest I or any of the Coast Guardsmen had ever seen.

Wet-suit tops are important: although the water temperature during the summer was a constant 81° down to 80 feet, there it dropped rapidly. I watched my temperature gauge fall from 81 to 75 in four minutes. Visibility in the deeper dives ran about 80 feet, and 40-50 in shallower water. Night dives are offered, but they are frequently impossible. Because the boat has no running lights and the area in which Kim stages night dives is subject to tidal currents, Kim likes to keep certain shore lights in sight. Current times change daily, but the night we tried at 9:30 p.m. the tide was so great we gave up after five minutes in the water.

I did not find the consistently majestic diving I had enjoyed on neighboring Grand Turk. For me, a full week at the Admiral's Arms would be too much. Three or four days are interesting, perhaps even exciting for those seeking to view those big creatures hovering. But there's the paradox. Diving here seems better suited for people who have been around a bit. The uninitiated will not find the lush coral gardens; they will not find the full range of tropical-fish splendor; they may find the rough water difficult. Yet the experienced may balk at the strict regimentation of dives. Well-traveled divers quickly realize that the dives between 10 and 60 feet are quite standard. So with highly regimented three-tank dives, the only opportunity to descend to the good diving is on the first dive of the day. For me, that's not enough. If I were to stay longer than 3-4 days, it would only be because I just couldn't put down the book I was reading.

Should you decide to journey there, obtain your information or reservations from Caribbean Information Office, 777 W. Talcott, Chicago, IL 69631, (312) 763-2007. The three-dive, double-occupancy, three-meal-a-day package runs a reasonable \$50-\$56/day/person, depending upon the length of your stay. One may fly directly from Miami via Southeast Airlines on Friday, Sunday or Tuesday; baggage weighing more than 44 pounds is charged 35¢/pound or a flat \$7 for the dive bag. One can also fly between the islands of Turk and Caicos with Air Turk and Caicos; to make your flight enjoyable, do not perform a walk-around inspection of the exterior of the air craft -- if you do, you may not board the battered craft.

On South Caicos a car is unnecessary except for a short tour of the island. From Admiral's Arms one can walk to Cockburn in just a few minutes, where the locals are pleasant and friendly. There are few restaurants and shops, none of particular interest. The island is surely not a tropical paradise -- there

are no coconut palms waving in the breeze -- but the beaches are clean and attractive. The low stone boundary wall lining the salt ponds, now a haven for the island's birds, and the silent windmills lend themselves to interesting photography. After that, there's not much left to do on South Caicos, but some people won't care at all.

## Diving Business is Booming

*So there are more new divers than ever*

The business of diving is booming. Certification, sales and travel are up, way up. NAUI's new leader, Ken Brock, told *Undercurrent* that basic-certification graduates are up 5% and sport-diver certifications are up 30%. SSI, which certified 4,000 divers last year, has so far this year certified 12,000. Dennis Graver of PADI said he had expected their new manual to sell 10,000 copies in 1978; it has already sold 25,000.

Bob Gray, Director of DEMA, the Diving Equipment Manufacturer's Association, believes overall industry sales have risen by 10%-25%. A Dacor spokesperson told *Undercurrent* its business is up, especially in photographic equipment. Nearly all dive shops we spoke with find business up 10% or more, and many find their sponsored travel programs filling faster than ever. *Skin Diver* magazine circulation keeps growing; *Sport Diver* just sold to prestige publisher Ziff-Davis; a new paper for divers, *Diver's World*, is gaining in readers; a new publication for retail shops is underway.

Why the increase in business? We interviewed nearly a dozen people, who suggested these reasons:

- The movie *The Deep* has piqued interest.

- Better dive-shop management and promotion mean sales are being made that once were lost.
- The reduction of interagency squabbling means agencies now promote the sport instead of downgrading one another.
- Film festivals, club activities and agency publicity have created interest.
- From the turbulent '60's has emerged the hedonistic '70's; all leisure-activity business is on the upswing.
- People want to buy at today's prices; they expect inflation to drive tomorrow's prices even higher.

What will a healthy industry mean to the sport diver? It will mean more shops, more equipment innovation and, hopefully, more competition. These are pluses.

But for those who don't make a nickel off the sport and just like to dive, the growth has a substantial negative aspect. More and more divers take a greater toll on dive sites and on the underwater ecology. Areas that were virtually virgin twenty years ago now have been abused, and if that abuse continues ...

## *Will the underwater wilderness survive?*

Fifty years from now there will be no sport divers. People who journey below the surface will be scientists and explorers; they will not be people in search of weekend exhilaration, because there won't be anything worth seeing.

Twenty years ago divers off New England confronted armies of lobsters with claws longer than Bill Walton's hands; off San Diego divers found jewfish large enough to crawl into; in Puget Sound 100-pound halibut swam about the pilings of ferry terminals; the Florida Keys, underwater, looked like Bonaire; about the edges of tropical reefs pelagic fish of all species skittered, and the fish were several times the size of fish today.

Jacques Cousteau, for years, has been telling us

that the ocean is dying. Divers who have been at the sport for a score of years have witnessed the tragic changes in marine life. We all know about pollution, the problems of overfishing, the liabilities of coastal development. And we're quick to blame everyone but ourselves for the changes. But sport divers themselves bring their share of destruction to the reefs and it is to sport divers that we direct our message.

The most obvious form of destruction comes at the hands of the trophy hunters. Regardless of the rhetoric that makes the point that the fish taken in spearfishing contests are eaten by the participants or given to the poor, the intent of the contest is trophy hunting. Food is only an afterthought. Awards for

the biggest fish and the most fish perpetuate the notion that marine creatures exist to gratify our competitive instincts, and, of course, to many spearfishermen, that is what they exist for. Contests wipe out fish in a given area, there is no doubt, but the effect of a single contest is less severe than the larger effect of providing a goal for aspiring spearfishermen who, in order to excel, practice their sport year-round. And the attitude remains that the fragile sea is a harbor for living trophies.

Now we see that the sport-diving industry lashes out at fishermen who pursue sharks as if they are demons and slaughter them only to display their carcasses for photographers. At diving-movie festivals it is popular to publicize conservation and criticize the nondivers who brutalize marine creatures. But we refuse to challenge those who spearfish for trophies, and, in fact, we even laud the trophy fisherman who eats what he spears because of his "natural right."

So with spear guns and bangsticks, the thrill seekers have, for only twenty-five years, probed deeply into our fragile and finite ecosystem. But in those brief twenty-five years, all the trophy-sized fish have been removed from the reefs to become photographs on den walls. The aging hunter has his memories, and his photographs, of a prolific reef; divers young today, and tomorrow, will visit the barren bottom.

The problem is perhaps best illustrated by a clipping which came across our desk from the September

10 *Orlando Sentinel Star*, about a fellow named John Schmidt who runs a charter boat out of New Smyrna Beach, Florida. The article concluded:

"One of Schmidt's greatest feats with the spear gun was zapping a jewfish weighing 500 pounds. One would think the sale of the fish would more than pay for a day on the ocean. But Schmidt only got \$8 for the jumbo fish."

Certainly we must be less harsh with the legitimate meat hunter, but only if he takes responsibility for the degree to which his pursuits affect the sanctity of the marine environment. Divers must go farther and farther to find even small fish which are not spooked by their presence or to locate lobsters and abalone. And the areas from which hunted creatures have disappeared are unbalanced with respect to their other living inhabitants, as well. Everything is connected, we must remember; as we eliminate one natural creature, everything else is affected. As evidence, we need only look at the proliferation of the crown of thorns starfish on many tropical reefs. They have destroyed as much as 90% of the living tissue of hard coral reefs, and their population increase is attributed to spearfishermen and collectors who eliminate their natural enemies, in particular the Triton.

For that reason, we also must not overlook the shell collectors. Most somehow view themselves as having no more impact on the environment than rock collectors. Neither a rock nor a shell has a life of its

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own. But inside a shell is a creature with a life of its own, no less significant than the creature inside a pelt. At underwater film festivals around the country this year, divers were horrified by footage of people clubbing baby harp seals for their fur. Of course we divers can better identify with the woeful eyes of a seal than we can with the woeful eyes of a cowrie, so we bemoan the murder of the seal but pocket the shells. Animals in shells have a relationship to other life on the reef, so is it any wonder that our reefs are dying while we line library shelves with proof that we've been to the deep?

But perhaps at the top of our list of bad-guy trophy hunters is the tropical-fish collector who believes he has the right — the *moral right* — to capture fish on a reef and keep them in his house for his own entertainment. Tropical marine fish are not successfully bred in commercial pools; they are lifted from the reefs. Of those collected commercially, up to 90% die before they have been acclimated to their aquaria. So for every butterfly fish you see in someone's home, nine died for the collector's sins.

And there are plenty of private collectors who abscond with just a fish or two for their private aquaria. Most are well-meaning students of marine life, so they say, but they are still trophy hunters of a sort. Their respect for the ecology of the reef is no greater than the hunter who shoots the 500-lb. jewfish.

But the remainder of us, nonspearing, noncollecting sport divers, are not without sin, for the very

process of diving takes a toll on the reef. It begins when our dive-boat anchor, tossed overboard, crushes the coral head on which it lands. One need only explore the reefs on the west side of Grand Cayman to see how scores of anchors dropped daily have had the effect of a keg of dynamite.

Once underwater, we further trespass against the marine life. Our fins leave a wake of destruction as they break gorgonia and sponges. We grab for support against the surge and tear off limbs of life. We kneel in the coral for close-up photographs and crush coral polyps by the hundreds. We turn over rocks and coral, exposing eggs and shy creatures to surrounding predators.

One diver, one time, has an unnoticeable effect. Twenty divers, twenty times, and the effect is visible. A hundred divers, every day, for the rest of the decade, and we shall turn our underwater wilderness into an underwater ghetto.

So we are pleased with the growth of our industry, but we must already mourn the eventual passing of the sport. As business gets better, underwater beauty can only suffer. No matter what a business person tells you.

Still, we'll temper our pessimism in the next issue by reporting what a number of clubs and divers have done to forestall the trend. If we begin to take responsibility for the growth of our sport and our own actions, then we have a shot at maintaining the incredible marine world. Next time, we'll suggest how we might start.

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# Ten Dumb Things Divers Do

## *Which cost time, money and lives*

Divers make mistakes. Most never matter much, but once in a while a single mistake matters a lot. Often, that single mistake could have been prevented.

We'll cite ten that are particularly irksome to those who strive to make the sport safe and enjoyable.

★ *Diving with a buddy with whom you have just had a quarrel.* An unresolved surface argument taken below the surface can have tragic results. Consider the effects of the following thoughts:

"So he's out of air and I've got 700 lbs. left. Let him get back to the boat himself. He knows where it is."

"So his weight belt is under his BC strap. That shows the kind of dumb son-of-a-bitch he is anyhow. Let him figure it out."

"So the water is murky and we've lost each other. I'm not going to burn up my air looking for him. Maybe he'll go back to the boat with a full tank and ruin his dive."

Even the slightest negative feeling can be harmful if the buddy loses his sensitivity and fails to respond to the needs of his partner. Under these circumstances, break up old buddy teams for new pairings.

★ *Tanks mounted too high or too low in the back pack.* Tank positioning affects the diver's center-of-gravity when he is standing. If the diver's tank is mounted in a position other than that to which he is accustomed, he may fail to adjust and, if standing on a boat, get in rough water.

A tank too high in the pack puts the valve right behind the diver's head, and a bump on the cranium smarts.

A tank mounted too low affects mobility underwater, and if the band isn't tight the tank could slip out before being noticed. In 1976 a diver died when his tank fell from his pack and somehow caused the straps to strangle him. That's the truth.

★ *Snorkeling without a BC.* In warm tropical water it's easy to find oneself a half-a-mile from the shore in no time at all. Sometimes a BC comes in handy for resting. Other times it comes in handy for rescue.

★ *Gear that doesn't fit.* Extra-long weight belts and straps can become tangled in other gear or in obstacles underwater. Trim them to your size.

Sloppy-fitting wet suits increase the chances of hypothermia.

A too-large BC increases underwater drag and can cause fatiguing struggles.

Loose-fitting fins can be lost in a surge.

Poorly fitting equipment contributes annually to at least one diver's death — and probably more.

★ *Wearing your mask on top of your head like Farrah Fawcett wears her sunglasses.* When you're entering the surf, wandering around a boat deck or resting in water, a mask can easily be knocked off. When you're not using your mask, bring it all the way down over your face and wear it like a necklace.

★ *Holding your breath while photographing in mid-water.* Being perfectly still is a requisite for good photography, but in mid-water there are no stable points of reference. Without a coral head or an anchor line as an indicator of motion, the concentrating photographer can inadvertently rise to the surface while he is framing his subject. If, like most photographers, he is holding his breath, we shall bid him farewell.

★ *Diving with a j-valve but no pressure gauge.* Thousands of divers still hit the water without pressure gauges. We're not going to repeat again why this is damn stupid. If you don't know you're not a serious diver and you might as well cancel your subscription to *Undercurrent* because you won't be around long enough to renew it.

★ *Jumping off a boat without your BC inflated.* Inexperienced divers often overweight themselves.

Experienced divers occasionally jump into the water without their regulators in their mouths. Some divers cannot clear their ears rapidly. Under any of these circumstances, a fast drop to five or ten feet can lead to unnecessary problems. A few pounds of air in your BC will ensure you'll bounce back to the surface if you have unforeseen problems upon entry.

★ *Relying on dive guides.* Never rely on a dive guide to tell you where you stand in the dive tables. Did he notice that you went deeper than the others?

Never rely on a dive guide to tell you how much time you spent on the surface between dives. Did he remember that you were the first one in and the last one out?

Never rely on a dive guide to give you a five-pound weight belt, to turn on your air, to give you a full tank. Does he remember everything all the time?

The final responsibility in diving is with you, the individual diver. A good dive guide can make your diving easier and more enjoyable. But if he makes a single error, it is you, not he, who pays.

★ *Waiting until you're at the dive site to check the equipment.* Some weight belts don't make it from the basement to the beach; others don't make it from the truck to the boat. Five miles from shore is too late to check on your gear.

And if a strap for your mask or fins snaps because you haven't checked it since your last vacation, don't get angry at the divemaster because he hasn't brought along extras.

And if your last dive was in a full wet suit and now, in the tropics, you only need your bikini briefs, waiting to adjust all your gear until the boat anchors means you'll be the last one in the water — if you get

in at all. And your buddy, who sits and waits, suffers for your negligence.

In fact, hurrying to get everything in order is the best way to start a dive ornery, tired and hassled. And that's the best way to make a mistake upon entry. And that's the best way to begin a dive with a fit of panic.

As the old scout would say, "Be prepared."

## Should Pregnant Women Dive?

### *New research says not below 60 feet*

As more women enter diving, more interest is being shown on the effect of diving on the physiology of women and especially pregnant women. Until recently only two studies had been performed, and both suggested that diving may have no effect on the women or the fetus.

In 1968 researchers subjected a number of female dogs to a depth of 165 feet for periods of from 30 minutes to 120 minutes. Although the mothers were seriously bent, only 4 of 193 fetuses were affected. In 1974 the study was replicated with rats and the results were similar. Researchers therefore concluded that if the mother did not suffer decompression sickness — that is, dive beyond the tables — the fetus would be safe.

Texas A&M researchers, recognizing the great influx of women into sport and commercial diving, decided to look further. They realized that the failure of earlier researchers to detect circulating bubbles in the fetus did not eliminate the possibility that bubbles were indeed present. It could be that the bubbles had been too small for detection by the techniques employed.

They selected seven pregnant female sheep for

their subjects, believing that the relevant physical characteristics of sheep are closer to human beings' than are the characteristics of rats or dogs. After taking the sheep on 17 dives, the researchers found most surprising results.

In all dives to depths greater than 100 feet which exceeded the U.S. Navy tables, the mothers developed no circulating bubbles. Yet their fetuses were indeed bent. In fact, for a dive to 100 feet for 25 minutes, a dive *within* the U.S. Navy tables, the fetus was bent.

The results are more dramatic because human beings are generally *more susceptible* to the bends than are sheep. The findings must be interpreted as an omen for pregnant divers.

*Researcher Clark Simmang says that any woman who believes she is pregnant should limit her dives to 60 feet or less, otherwise she is risking serious injury or death for her unborn child.*

The citation for the Texas A&M study is: W.P. Fife, C. Simmang, J.V. Kitzman, "Susceptibility of Fetal Sheep to Acute Decompression Sickness," *Undersea Biomedical Research*, Vol. 5, No. 3, September, 1978: 287-292.

## The Undercurrent Hot Line

### *Discovering a potential regulator problem*

Dive-shop owners and subscribers have frequently tipped us off to potential problems with equipment. On several occasions those tips have led to solutions which might otherwise have been longer in the coming.

In early September a dive-shop manager told an *Undercurrent* writer that the new models of the U.S. Divers Calypso and Aquarius Regulators he had received were "wet breathers." Some regulators allow just a bit of moisture to enter the airflow, but in this case the spray was abnormal. When a diver in-

haled with gusto the water that entered greatly concerned the diver using the regulator. The problem had been discovered by divers practicing in a pool and in one ocean-water checkout.

We called U.S. Divers and informed them of the problem; two days later their regional representative visited the shop to test the regulators. By blocking off the first stage with a dust cap, a diver should be unable to draw any air into the second stage with a sharp inhale, but with these regulators excessive air did indeed leak into several regulators. Apparently,



sharp inhalation unseats the diaphragm slightly, causing leakage.

According to a U.S. Divers spokesperson, U.S. Divers has been able to replicate the problem in its laboratory, on regulators whose diaphragms have not been fully cured. Its research is continuing, and its representatives are checking with its retail outlets to determine if others have found the problem. We called several shops ourselves to determine if others had found wet breathers, but so far the problem

seems to have confined itself to the batch shipped on shop.

The problem seems no cause for alarm, but if you have a new Aquarius or Calypso and find that air enters when you close off the first stage and inhale sharply, return it to your dive shop and have the shop inform U.S. Divers. Repair is in order.

If you wish to contact U.S. Divers, its address is 3323 West Warner Avenue, Santa Ana, CA 92702 (714) 540-8010.

## — *Rediscovering a real regulator problem*

In the February issue of *Undercurrent* we reported that 2000 hoses for the Poseidon Cyklon 300 regulator had been recalled by their U.S. distributor, Parkway Fabricators/Poseidon Systems. The hose on the regulator (numbers 15024-16523 and 18050-18549) could slip from their fitting, thereby cutting off the air supply to the diver. The potential problem was indeed serious.

In February we discussed the recall with Parkway Northeast Sales Manager Keith Chodak, who told us that they had learned of the problem after receiving an unusual number of requests for hose replacement. Chodak also told us that Parkway had not received any reports of in-use hose or regulator failure, and that no accidents had been reported. We reported those words in the February issue.

As we were to learn, just as Parkway's hose did not hold air, their story apparently did not hold water.

John MacKinnon, a diver for NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) at Alaska's Auke Bay Fisheries Laboratory, responded to our story with a letter and a bundle of communication between NOAA divers and Parkway. MacKinnon said that the Poseidon hose had, in fact, failed three NOAA divers and one sport diver in Alaska. Three of these divers were submerged at the time. There were no fatalities, but MacKinnon's hose had popped at 85 feet, requiring him to make an out-of-air emergency ascent.

These incidents prompted the NOAA divers to contact Parkway by telephone on November 8, to alert them to the problem. At Parkway's request, MacKinnon sent them his regulator, and on November 22, MacKinnon said, he received a note from Bill Kerner, Director of Customer Service at Parkway, stating that the defective hose had been returned to Sweden for evaluation.

On November 15, Lou Barr, NOAA diving officer, sent a letter to Parkway President Frank Sanger, documenting the accidents. Of one accident he said:

"A diver was working at 45 feet with a Poseidon regulator (serial #18207). He heard an explosive sound next to his head and had the second stage

blown out of his mouth. He safely made the ascent to the surface. The hose had blown off the spigot at the second-stage end of the hose."

Of MacKinnon's incident at 85 feet, Barr wrote Sanger: "About 12 minutes into the dive, the diver heard a loud, explosive sound behind his head and began to get water through his second stage. The diver immediately ditched his scuba unit and weight belt and made a safe ascent to the surface, venting his Unisuit through the zipper to control his rate of ascent. When his gear was recovered, we found that the crimped fitting on the hose to the second stage had failed, with the hose pulling off the spigot at the first-stage end of the hose."

Sanger acknowledged Barr's letter on November 21.

On December 21, Sanger wrote Barr to inform him of the recall, stating, "I want to personally thank you for your information, in that it has helped us to a decision beneficial to our customers' safety."

It was February when Chodak told us that they had not received reports of accidents.

In September we spoke again with Chodak, and asked him again about accidents. He said none had been reported to him. When we apprised him of the information we had received, he said we would have to speak with Parkway President Frank Sanger. We did.

We asked Sanger how he had become aware of the hose problem. He said it was because hoses had been forwarded to Park for repair.

We asked Sanger if any accidents had been reported. "No," he told us.

We explained that we had a file of correspondence between him and NOAA diving officer Barr, which indicated that he had been told of four accidents in Alaska. Although in February we had printed that there were no accidents, it appears the information Parkway conveyed to us was erroneous.

Sanger replied, "We were asked if there were accidents and there were none. Nobody got hurt. There were no fatal accidents ... We're entitled to make any statements as long as they are basically true ... We look at accidents as fatalities."

Do you know of serious problems with the potential to affect divers' safety? Then call us collect at (415) 332-3684. Ask for Mike Stern.

Thirteen hundred defective regulators are still being used. If you know of a Poseidon user, have him check his regulator number against those published in the beginning of this article.

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Regardless of the rhetoric, we suppose that the Parkway respondents understood the intent of our questioning. It may be that Chodak had not been informed of the incidents, although it seems that someone in such an important position — Northeast Sales Manager — would be kept informed of his company's product problems. If he were not, how could the retailers have faith in him?

Sanger's argument that the Alaskan incidents were not "accidents" (even though once in our conversation he in fact called the MacKinnon incident an "accident," before he used "misfortune") led us to discuss the concept of "accidents" with other industry people. It seems that there is no agreed-upon definition; to some, "accidents" means "injuries," to others it means "misfortunes." To us, the ambiguity suggests serious gaps in incident and accident reporting in the diving industry.

We believe that the diving public — and Poseidon users — were not given all the information they needed to make the recall as successful as it should have been. According to a spokesperson for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the recall was handled well although only 700 of the 2000 faulty regulators had been returned for repair. (Sanger said that Parkway had the names of only 1000 owners; the other 1000 failed to return their warranty cards.)

We are certain that the antiseptic way in which the recall was handled — and the problem explained — does not drive sufficient concern into the hearts of the users and professionals in the industry to produce better results. The Poseidon recall information did state that, if there is failure, "the air supply would be cut off." That point of information inspired 700 people to seek repair. If the incident were reported to the public as graphically as NOAA's Barr reported it to Parkway, we wonder if the repair rate might, say, double. Furthermore, the fact that MacKinnon knew of the specific symptoms of the malfunction is why, according to MacKinnon, he is still alive. In a memo to his fellow NOAA divers, MacKinnon wrote:

"At a depth of 85 ft. it began with a loud ringing "crack," then the sound of bubbles. The details of Bob Schultz's incident flashed in my mind and I instantly recognized my problem. My reflexes took over; I ditched my goody bag, tank, and weight belt and started

for the surface. The expanding air in my Unisuit accelerated my ascent. I purged all air from my lungs around 60 feet and started to blackout when I saw the surface from around 40 ft. I came to when I literally 'popped' to the surface. During the last part of the ascent I had grabbed the Unisuit zipper and pulled it to release some of the air. The entire incident took less than 20 seconds, but had I delayed either by not immediately recognizing my predicament or by groping for straps and buckles, these details would probably be speculative and second hand."

Had this personal story been provided the diving public, the level of concern would be dramatically higher. Anyone using a Poseidon regulator would be warned by his buddies and the shops. Instructors and guides would know the symptoms; if they heard the "loud, ringing crack," they might respond "reflexively," rather than first try to determine the sound source.

Parkway did what the law required. We do not believe that was enough. Divers decry increased government regulation, but in this case government regulation did not produce adequate results, and Parkway apparently made no effort to go further than required and voluntarily disclose the seriousness of the incidents. Sooner or later, another piece of critical diving gear will be found faulty. The manufacturer, whoever it is, will attempt to walk the tight rope between full disclosure and maintaining the company image. To us, there is no tightrope. Complete candor can only enhance a company's image, by demonstrating its unswerving concern for the safety of divers. So far, neither industry nor government seems to believe that. Next time, *Undercurrent* may be forced to play a role so far abdicated by them.

We hope not.

## A DISAPPEARING ACT

Chuck Hettle, of Scuba West in New Port Richey, Florida, bought a compressor from a Toledo, Ohio firm known as Aqua Products. When the compressor stopped running Hettle tried to order parts for replacement, but he was told, "No parts are available to customers." He requested an overhaul, and received a memo saying, "Compressor overhaul service not available."

We made several calls to Aqua Products, but received no answer. We sent a Mailgram requesting a response, but received none. Now our calls are answered by a recording: "This phone is disconnected."

Are there any diving barristers in Toledo looking for business?