

Location in Kruse Audiofile #1: 36:29- 48:01. Pages 17-21

*Dewey Livingston:* Now, okay, your first dive. How about if each of you just tell a story of your first dive, everything, as much detail as you want to go into from looking down to the water to descent, what your tasks were, what it was like?

*Tom Santilena:* Well, of course, the task, as always, is to bring up samples. Pictures are wonderful, too. I brought a little Nikon with a macro camera with me and for us, it was our very first dive. I remember, we went down the anchor that time. We thought we set the anchor and it'd go over the side and I remember it was just crystal blue. It was so blue I couldn't believe it could be that blue 'cause we're so used to low visibility areas. We'd go down this anchor line in the blue and it just went off into nothing. You could see nothing. It just disappeared.

And as we went down the line there, it would start getting darker and darker and darker and the further down you go, the bubble – the sounds of the bubbles change. And at first they go *[bubble noises]* like they do *[bubble noises]*, and as you go further down, they start getting higher in pitch *[bubble noises]*. And then we get into the dark area. Now you don't know where the bottom is. You look up, you can't really see the top and you're in it now. And I remember thinking, "Where's the bottom? Where's the top?"

And then we just kept going down and going down and eventually, you'd come to where you could see the bottom, maybe it was 60 to 80 feet below you but the reflection of whatever light was left would shine off the sand at the bottom and things would get more illuminated.

So we started going further down and all of a sudden, we noticed the anchor was floating freely and it was not anchored at all and it was just going further down into the blue. If we didn't do something now, it was never, ever going to get done, so it was at that time, I just decided let's go for it. I went as fast as I could to get to the bottom and it was – the narcosis was just really, really screaming at that point in time and basically, I just went down and it was 205. I remember getting down to the bottom. I don't know why I had the wherewithal to look at my depth gauge but I looked at my depth gauge and it was 205 feet.

So I knew that this was much further down than we needed or wanted to go, so I went down as fast as I can, shoveled sediment or samples, as we would call them, in to my bag, reached over, snapped a picture, snapped a picture, and then got out of there as fast as I possibly can. 'Cause now we're in free water. There is no anchor line. We're just coming up free and we had to deal with that thought process going up. There are no little T bars with SCUBA tanks on them for decompressions. You had to somehow in the rough seas take care of yourself, so you were totally, totally on your own. Knowing this from the time you were going to leave the bottom, knowing there was no rope, that's when things in your head really start to go and when you're narced out, things are always intensified.

00:40:14

More questions have been asked of me on what is this nitrogen narcosis? How does it feel and what does it mean? And all I can say about narcosis is it's predictable because everybody gets it. Everybody gets narced. Maybe at different times and different days it's worse than the other but it's always there and everybody knows it's going to be there.

So how do you prepare for something like that? In my book, you have to prepare. You have to know exactly what you're going to do so you don't have to make any decisions and just do it. Now for me, it's extremely simple. Get in the water. Go down. Take a picture. Scoop. Come up. Just as simple as you can possibly get.

Now the real heroes are the guys, the photographers, because the photographers, of course, who make the hall here beautiful for people to come in with all the pictures, they have the same thing that I had but now how do they plan for their dive. All of these unknowns going on and they've got to position the strobes, shutter speeds, aperture, all these decisions that you have to make on the fly at the same time you're all narced out. So these are the people who have it harder than anybody and they're the people who make the sanctuary alive. So to me, the photographers are the heroes.

*Bill Kruse:* Thank you, Tom.

*Tom Santilena:* You're welcome.

*Bill Kruse:*

That's very nice of you. I guess I'll have to pay you. No. I remember it similar to Tom but different, as well. We had attempted to get the anchor hooked and as has been discussed since then many times, hooking the anchor in exactly the right spot is challenging, even when you roughly know what you're doing. And we tried to get the anchor hooked but perhaps it wasn't a big enough anchor or perhaps it didn't get in the crevice it was supposed to. Perhaps it was on the down current side of the ridge rather than the up current side of the ridge, so it wouldn't catch on anything.

But we had actually dropped the anchor more than once before this trying to get it and it had drifted. This time it had been dropped and, as far as we could tell with our expensive navigation equipment, it wasn't moving, but we didn't know. So we assumed the anchor was supposed to be at 150 or shallower when the dive plan was made.

And I agree with Tom that my first impression was that it was really clear and really blue and really beautiful and when you've been in the water a lot and seen really nasty conditions, this was just pretty wonderful. And I thought this is gonna be a really cool dive because we're gonna get to see all this stuff on the bottom that we've heard about. And as we went down and didn't see the bottom coming up, that started to concern me, but once you start getting to 100 feet is when the narcosis begins and it kind of sneaks up on you and we just kept going down 'cause we knew the bottom was at 150 feet 'cause that's where we put the anchor.

When we realized that we were looking at sandy bottom rather rocky bottom covered with lots of life and small fish that we assumed were there – we didn't know at the time – it was like this doesn't look like we expected it to. And I remember looking at my depth gauge and it said 180, which was deeper than the whole dive plan was supposed to be, except that as Tom mentioned, the anchor appeared to be freely bouncing along the bottom and not catching on anything and it was going from shallower water to deeper water. It obviously had been on a ridge or nearby. We didn't see it but it was sloping up in the up current direction, so it was getting deeper.

And much as Tom did, there was a decision point of we knew how much everybody was counting on this dive happening at all because we were about to give up. It was becoming a real problem for money, resources,

and with zero to show for it. We had been to 180 or 190 feet before and we knew that we probably could function and that we had enough air, air being the problem. It was clear enough the bottom was right there. You could almost touch it but it was 20 feet lower.

00:45:00

So we made probably the right decision for the sanctuary but the wrong decision for ourselves and went down and decided to do it quickly and *real* quickly. And Tom described about one minute of activity on the bottom that he was involved in and John, next to him, was doing roughly the same thing but without the camera. He was collecting sediment, as well, as I remember.

And I believe I had a camera and was taking pictures of them though I don't know whether I actually took any pictures because what I found is this was the day that narcosis affected me more than I had had it affect me in the past. It started to affect my vision. It wasn't just thought processes. It started to affect my vision and as I've mentioned before and we've talked about before, I decided that I'd rather have those problems on the surface than at the bottom, 'cause like I said earlier, also, I wanted to become old and cantankerous and I'm making progress on both of those things.

So I actually decided – not really consciously but automatically – to start ascending and since we were away from the anchor and away from the line, it was straight up. The water was clear. We had a clear day. There was no fog. So getting to the surface was the priority.

But the tunnel vision continued to close down until I was able to get much higher, but meanwhile, I had left Tom and John. We weren't attached to each other any longer. We were no longer a dive team. We were dive individuals and didn't know what was going on with anybody else. The reality of the fact is I made it to the surface very quickly. Fortunately, we were down a short enough amount of time so that the risk of bends was minimal, although probably not insignificant, and managed to exhale so I didn't get an embolism, and as I'm told, came to the surface quite rapidly. It was important to me.

But still, I don't remember actually becoming aware of what was going on clearly until probably a few minutes after reaching the surface and then it kind of hit me, where's Tom and where's John? And that became my

focus 'cause I was at the surface and I was not feeling – I didn't have any problems except that I had got there quickly out of control. At that point in time, here's two people I had spent many years with doing many things with and I thought, "My gosh. I survived this and they didn't."

It really bothered me for a few minutes until we figured out that everybody had gotten up. But we came up in different places and everybody on the surface did their job to come and pick us up and take care of us and find us.