

*Dave Cassotta:*

I think it was our second dive that we ever made there, the second one. I was wearing a Poseidon Unisuit, which is a dry suit, and I just had jeans and a T-shirt on underneath. And we were diving, and we came up. We were down a little bit longer. A lot of guys would go down, and they would just do what they had to do but only stay long enough where they had to stop at 10 feet. We stayed a little bit longer, and we stopped at 20 feet and did our stop there, and then we had a longer decompression period at 10 feet.

And so we were on the T-bar, and as John Walton mentioned, we had safety divers that would come, and they would take all our stuff from us. They'd take the tools and the bags and all of the paraphernalia that we had brought down there, so all we had to do is just relax and decompress.

And it was kind of a bumpy day on the ocean that day, and so I was kinda concerned about us breaking the surface at the 10-foot mark. And so I also, in addition to wearing the Unisuit, which also has buoyancy control, I was also wearing a buoyancy compensator. So I dumped all the air outta my suit, thinking that I'll just use the compensator to remain a little bit negative so I don't float up.

Well, I was enough negative where I was holding on to the bar with my right hand, and any air that was in my suit flowed up and filled up my right arm with air. And of course, I had a little suit squeeze going on in the rest of my body.

Well, it was cold. My hands were numb, and it was just a cold thing, and we were there probably 15 minutes, and then it was time to go up. And I was responsible for the decompression time for my team, which was Steve and John. And so I said, "Okay, it's time for us to go up," and started going up. When I hit about 5 feet, it felt like my left arm got about five times its normal size. I thought, "Oh, this isn't good."

And so we got on the inflatable, and they took us back to the *Pisces*, and the first question that Bob would ask any of us after a dive is "Do you have any symptoms?" And I had to say yes, and [45:00] so we sat around talking about it: "Well, okay, what do we do?" And Santilena wanted to call the helicopter, have it come get me and bring me to a recompression chamber, but we discussed that, and I thought, "Oh, that's great. Second dive. We're trying to get notoriety for Cordell Bank in a positive way, and a guy gets bent out there." And also, here I was – my livelihood was teaching people how to dive, and it was like, "Oh, great, dive instructor gets bends at Cordell Bank. That would've been really good headline."

So we thought, well, you know, are there any other symptoms? So Santilena and Kruse and the five of us sat around talking about it, and being that none of us had experienced that, we thought, “Well, maybe you just strained your arm. We were banging away on the rocks down there. Maybe you did something.” And so we thought, “Well, if it’s a pressure problem, if you go back down, it’ll go away. If it’s not a pressure problem, it’ll still hurt.”

So I geared up again and went back into the water, went down to 40 feet, and it went away. And I thought, “Oh, no.” And so I stayed there till that tank was almost done, and then the guys brought me another tank, and I went to 20 feet, and I was there about 40 minutes, and we figured maybe I could soak it out. And Santilena brought me a bottle of pure oxygen and stuck the hose in my mouth alongside the regulator. That froze my tooth and popped out a filling, and it’s very dry. I wanted someone to – they kept bringing me notes, jokes. I’d be down there, and they’d be – Santilena would draw a picture of a naked lady or something. You know, just trying to keep it light.

So then we came up to 10 feet, and I decompressed. When I got back up to the surface, it didn’t feel like it did before. So we thought, “Well, maybe we nipped it in the bud.” So I got on board, took some aspirin to thin my blood, had a couple beers on the way back to port – it was like an eight-hour ride back. By the time I got back, I was fine, so it was just – I lucked out. We called it, what, niggles or something, or some kinda weird form of decompression sickness, but only one arm got bent. The rest was fine, so it worked out.

*Dewey Livingston:* Your reputation was intact.

*Dave Cassotta:* Yeah, no one had to know, and we swore we would never talk about this again. *[Laughter]*

*Jennifer Stock:* Until today.

*Dave Cassotta:* Until today.