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# SCUBA & H<sub>2</sub>O

## ADVENTURE



**SOUTH  
CAROLINA**  
*Touching A Piece  
Of History*



**A SPECIAL SHARK  
CAGE DIVE**  
*In Montauk, Ny*



**CUBA  
AN ISLAND  
NATION**  
*Lost In Time*

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**About Cover:** Andy Lamb, Homo sapien Sharing a curiosity with Richard Salas, Andy Lamb enjoys the view while completing a safety stop below the dive charter vessel. The object of their attention is an undetermined species salp. A planktonic creature, this specimen is a colony of many individuals linked in a chain.

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# OUR AQUATIC WORLD: A Personal Perspective



Guest Editorial By  
Andy Lamb

**D**uring my youth, in the '50s and '60s, the oceans were trumpeted as an unlimited source of protein to feed the world's ever increasing population. Magazine articles and television programs proclaimed this glorious but totally false theory based upon no concept of reality. The vast expanse of the aquatic realm, beyond everyone's comprehension, was perceived as endless. This glorious concept was not based upon scientific reality.

And so a period of unfettered plundering of our planet's aquatic living resources began. There were virtually no rules or limits. After all, "the oceans are limitless." Harvesting ran amok as consumptive users took advantage of ever improving technology. Images of overloaded nets and vessels sinking with precious cargo and smiling anglers proudly displaying poles festooned with almost countless sport caught fish.

From my earliest memories, I have always loved fish. Initially, the only way I could interact directly with them was via a hook and line connection. Fishing outings with my dad and drawing/coloring sessions coached by my mom provided opportunity to further my passion for the finned fauna. In 1966, I was hired by the Vancouver Aquarium as a summer student - to sweep floors. A basic SCUBA course immediately followed. It was a start on a life-long career path initially focused on fishes but one that expanded to embrace other marine creatures.

I fast forward to the present. It is now obvious that our marine resources are under threat, very many severely. Fortunately, during that period of harvest un-sustainability, scientific investigations ramped up to investigate a better way. Unfortunately, politicians and bureaucrats have failed to keep pace with meaningful restrictions on consumption and conservation. Example after example occurs of realistic fishing limits introduced after a serious decline of stocks. The lesson is never learned. We are always behind the curve! Establishing a network total no take areas in perpetuity, a beautiful, common sense just seems to be beyond comprehension. This concept is a personal hobby horse worthy of another discussion.

But what amazes me most about this dramatic tragedy how many adults are simply unaware of the issue. But perhaps I am too close to it. On the flip side though, is the loud, ever increasing array of voices and organizations are crying out about the plight of our oceans. Knowledgeable and passionate individuals are loudly publicizing the plight of aquatic life.

One such individual is diver/author/photographer Richard Salas. While I have only known Richard for a relatively short time, his commitment to our watery world is exemplary. For many people, what exists beneath the surface of the sea is simply an unknown and beyond view. By introducing curious folks to the marvels of this largely hidden world, education is Richard's primary focus.

Through his trilogy of Sea of Light, Blue Visions, and Luminous Sea, Richard beautifully introduces marine creatures to their readerships. An outstanding underwater photographer, he captures the essence of selected creatures covered within the captivating pages of these tomes. Richard essentially makes these creatures "ambassadors for their environment" - with carefully crafted images. He also contributes half of the profits of his book sales to the Ocean Foundation, an organization working for marine conservation worldwide. Check them out at [www.askphotography.com](http://www.askphotography.com).

In addition, Richard routinely displays his photography at public venues, usually with informative, entertaining presentations. He also "teaches the teachers" by providing underwater photography workshops for divers wishing to improve their picture taking skills. A vector, by which a new generation of marine life "loving" disciples are out there, can show the average guy and gal images that eloquently explain why they should care.

Such advocacy lightens my heart and gives me hope for the future of the oceans, as we are intimately connected in more ways than we may ever know.

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# GABRIEL'S GREAT ADVENTURE:

## *A Special Shark Cage Dive in Montauk, NY*



*Text & Photography By:*  
Michael Salvatore  
Christopher Weaver  
*Eco-Photo Explorers*

**W**ith the early summer sun rising briskly off the horizon and a gently rolling sea pushing the vessel forward, the Sea Turtle dive boat quietly passed the watchful eye of the iconic Montauk Point Lighthouse and set its sights for the open Atlantic. The destination would be a general spot located an hour and a half away. The objective was simple: attract and then dive with sharks from the safety of a shark cage.

For the Sea Turtle, shark cage diving is a routine affair. But this was no ordinary day and no routine shark cage dive. On board was Gabriel Gideon Basquez, an eight-year old from Denver, Colorado, who was born with a congenital heart defect known as Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome (HLHS). Gabriel's dream of diving with sharks was about to become reality.

HLHS is a birth defect that affects normal blood flow through the heart. As the baby develops during pregnancy, the left side of the heart does not form correctly. Diagnosed during the pregnancy, the options for Gabriel were limited to four: terminate the pregnancy, offer compassionate care, conduct the Norwood procedure (a complicated surgery that attempts to reconstruct some of the heart components to create a somewhat functioning system) or receive a full heart transplant. After much soul searching, Gabriel's family elected to pursue a full heart transplant, and he received his new heart two weeks after birth.

Despite the success of that operation, Gabriel's condition is chronic and life-limiting. He will likely be fine and healthy through his teen years, but will require yet another heart transplant after that. Of course this makes his projected life span uncertain, and at eight years of age, Gabriel is almost half-way through this period of relative health. With the encouragement and support of his mother, Dr. Lisa Vallejos, and the rest of his family, Gabriel has begun assembling his very real "bucket list", which now includes Paragliding, meeting President Obama, and seeing the Martin Luther King Monument.

But topping the list is shark cage diving.

"He seems to have a special connection to sharks," says Vallejos. This was evident as Gabriel boarded the boat wearing a San



*Photos By: Michael Salvatore & Christopher Weaver of Eco-Photo Explorers*



Jose Sharks NHL cap, shark-patterned swim trunks, and shark themed sunglasses.

Accompanying Gabriel on this life-altering journey were his mother Lisa, his grandmother Lydia, and his younger sister Eden.

The journey to the dive site was spent musing about sharks, talking about the procedures for entering and exiting the cage, and learning about the proper use of masks and regulators once inside the cage. It was also a time to enjoy the sunshine and the rolling swells of the Atlantic Ocean.

Soon enough, the engines were cut and the crew began its well-established procedures for attracting sharks: a chum slick was created as the boat was allowed to drift in the current. Sea birds such as opportunistic shearwaters and storm petrels quickly descended upon the site, looking for easy food as bits of fish were released into the water. Quiet descended upon the boat and only the lapping of water against its sides punctured the serene silence as the crew and passengers waited for the first arrival of a shark.

After about an hour, the wait was over.

"Shark!" was the cry as the dorsal fin of an eight-foot blue shark pierced through the water off the starboard side of the boat. Suddenly, the excitement was palpable and the familiar quotations from the movies



Photos By: Michael Salvatorezza & Christopher Weaver of Eco-Photo Explorers



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began to fly: “We’re gonna need a bigger boat!”

Gabriel and his sister raced to the side of the boat and looked into the water in awe as the shark slowly swam back and forth several inches below the surface. As they gazed intently into the water, the cage was lowered and preparations for the cage dive began in earnest.

The Sea Turtle uses a hookah system for breathing and attaches the cage to the stern with specially adapted hinges. The cage can also be released and allowed to drift several feet from the boat to minimize rocking in rough seas. With sharks circling the boat, and with over a hundred feet of seawater below, the cage never leaves the surface.

It was now Gabriel’s time to enter the water. Shy and unassuming, but plucky and determined, Gabriel quickly donned his wetsuit, put his mask on and began to gingerly

step onto the top rungs of the cage. For an eight-year old from Denver, this was quite a moment. With his family intently watching from the boat, we watched from below in the cage as he slipped below the surface. By now, a significant ocean breeze had kicked up the water, and the chaotic rocking and clanging of the cage as it banged against the back end of the boat startled the youngster, who quickly made his way back to the surface.

Undeterred, however, he tried again: slipping down into the cool Atlantic water only to quickly return to the surface once more as his regulator slipped from his mouth.

The third time was the charm. Gabriel dropped into the cage, grabbed onto our arms, and gazed out into the clear blue of the Atlantic to see the magnificent blue shark, with its iridescently colored back, pointed nose, and aerodynamic pectoral fins languidly swimming within inches of the bars of the cage. Whatever discomfort

Gabriel had with the cage, the ocean, and the gear faded instantly as he locked eyes with the shark. His body relaxed momentarily, and he was transfixed by the experience of seeing a shark in the wild. A life’s dream had been fulfilled, and a bucket list item checked off. In that special moment, as the two species connected through the bars of a cage, all of the stresses and burdens of Gabriel’s condition disappeared. In that fleeting instant, it was simply an eight-year-old boy, filled with wonder and admiration, and an eight-foot blue shark, one foot for each of Gabriel’s years.

When asked later about which part of the day was the best for him, Gabriel flashed an infectious smile and simply said, “Everything!”

Soon, the shark had departed, off to find other prey in its daily struggle for survival in the open ocean. The Sea Turtle pulled the cage, packed its gear and headed for home. Gabriel and his family similarly headed for home, back to Denver, Colorado. For them it was a magical day. For us it was a heartwarming experience. But for Gabriel, it was a story he will tell with pride for the rest of his life.

Many thanks to Captain Chuck Wade of *Sea Turtle Charters* for hosting Gabriel and his family free of charge on this special day and for helping to make Gabriel’s wish come true. ■

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