

A Shrink Studies SCUBA



TWR building mural (see column 1)

Believe it or not, I had never heard of Bonaire until Dave Farrar of Gypsy Divers in Raleigh (North Carolina) recommended it to another family with whom we were planning a dive vacation. We had the usual stressful travel experience dealing with now-defunct ALM, but Lynn and I fell in love with Bonaire as soon as we arrived. We bought a studio unit at Sand Dollar Condominium Resort for family vacations and our future retirement and began bringing our friends. The fellowship at International Bible Church of Bonaire and the underwater scene and Bible verse on the side of the Trans World Radio building inspire my photography of the Lord's underwater creation.

A look at the Table of Relative Risk of Panic that was in the column two weeks ago shows why Bonaire has long been known as "Diver's Paradise." While I have not dived all around the world like some of my dive buddies, I have dived

West Palm Beach, the Florida Keys, San Diego CA, Cozumel, Eleuthra, St. John USVI, Nevis WI, and North Carolina's "Graveyard of the Atlantic" wrecks. Bonaire offers many advantages that make it a preferred dive destination for many divers, especially those who might already be prone to panic due to above average trait anxiety, i.e. Nervous Nellies. Someday I would like to see statistics on all those dive students who panic on their first or second open water check out dive and never complete their certification. At least one very large training agency has told me they do not track the incompletes.

Among the top relative risk factors for dive panic are fear of the unknown, cold water, poor visibility, task overload, fear of scrutiny or embarrassment, loss of orientation, fatigue or overexertion, low on air or out of air, deep dive, separation from buddy or instructor, strong current or surge, and entrapment or entanglement.

We all look forward to finding a sea horse or frogfish or octopus or seeing something new or different, like a whale shark or manta ray. If your name is Jerry Ligon, then you might even discover a

new species of goby or blenny. But, it is hard for me to imagine what unknowns there might be in the Bonaire Marine Park that would strike fear in a diver aside from suddenly having Charlie the Tarpon as your "up close and personal" dive buddy on your very first night dive off Capt. Don's Habitat or Sand Dollar.

The usually warm, clear, blue water around Bonaire qualifies as "Tidy bowl" diving to me, especially compared to the 10-cm visibility I encountered a few years ago when I agreed to check out the clogged drain in a park's chilly duck pond. I suppose a diver could get task overloaded on Bari Reef, but only because he or she was carrying too many cameras while doing REEF fish surveys and trying to keep his or her kids from taking off each other's weight belts. The people of Bonaire and the dive professionals are so friendly and encouraging that I cannot imagine how anyone could fear scrutiny or embarrassment.

With the reef within easy swimming distance from shore and easily identifiable landmarks both underwater and along the shoreline, I am not sure how anyone could become disoriented on Bonaire. Diving is so easy here that fatigue and overexertion are rarely problems unless a diver is on his seventh or eighth dive of the day. (Women are smarter than that.)

Divers on Bonaire can run low on air or out of air. My daughter's dive buddy once had to grab my octopus (see photo) after waiting forever for her to photograph a bashful fish. New divers who have not mastered efficient breathing or those who actually chase fish trying to get a better picture can run low, but they are the exception.

Relatively deep dives are possible on Bonaire, but hardly necessary. Some of the diver fatalities on Bonaire have resulted from poorly planned and poorly executed deep dive attempts. For my purposes pursuing the next winning photo contest shot, I rarely need to go below 20 meters.

If a diver gets separated from a buddy on Bonaire, then it is probably because a photographer's dive buddy got tired of waiting or somebody was just plain not paying attention. Usually, the only significant current or surge on Bonaire is found on the windward and southern wild sides visited by Wild Larry's



octopus-breathe

SEAL wanna-be's. There are a few dive sites on Bonaire where you could get entrapped or entangled, but I have not heard of any recent diver fatalities from such. Not that it is impossible. My son once received a torrent of scolding after an unplanned penetration and swim through the Hilma Hooker without dive lights "leading" his sister and my friend Jonathan's kids. Meanwhile, I had to hover outside hand-holding the kids' panicky mother who just happened to be another psychiatrist with whom I had trained at Duke University Medical Center. Funny how that works.

All in all, it is my professional opinion, as a psychiatrist and clinical researcher and divemaster, that Bonaire has about as low a relative risk for panic as any place short of a swimming pool. Wait a minute. My initial confined water training in 1979 was in a poorly maintained motel swimming pool in West Palm Beach that could have easily doubled as a filthy duck pond.

Bonaire, just what the Dive Psych ordered. Fill as prescribed. Accept no substitutes. □ David Colvard

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