

TYING THE KNOT AND TAKING THE PLUNGE

A Tale of Newlywed Dive Buddies

My husband and I share many indoor interests, but when it comes to the outdoors, we are as far apart as our Southern California and Manhattan origins. He's an urbanite whose idea of a hike is walking to the corner to hail a cab. For me, a perfect day is heading to the ocean, river or lake and never spending an hour completely dry. Water to him is for bridges, ferries — and brushing your teeth. We discovered early on that our relationship may be "recreationally challenged." After comparing lists of outdoor pleasures, we found no common ground. Fortunately, there was one sport in which his curiosity overlapped my devotion — scuba diving.

When he proposed to me during our whirlwind romance, he saw no problem with being my husband, friend and future dive buddy. But shortly after our marriage, my main sport became maneuvering in Manhattan in winter.

Then one morning, I woke up feeling like there was something missing in my life. How could this be, with me a blissful newlywed? I looked out from our 22nd-floor apartment to the Hudson River, and it hit me! It had been six months since I had been diving. Sharing all my leisure time with this great guy had left me "high," but dry.

I left enticing dive magazines in every room and scattered travel brochures that pictured exotic diving on the coffee table. I had never resorted to Victoria's Secret lingerie, but for this grand passion I even walked around the apartment wearing my diveskin.

I culled the *Yellow Pages* and called dive centers around Manhat-



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tan. I found one that offered all the classroom certification work in one intensive weekend. I left the information on his desk — and waited. I knew that for it to really work, he had to be self-motivated and not feel pressured by me.

Within a few days Victor came home with booties, fins, a mask and snorkel, an Open Water textbook — and a big grin on his face. Classes started in a week. He was excited by the academics and settled into the couch to start the reading work required in advance. A half-hour later, I heard, “Honey, you didn’t tell me about any swimming test!”

Here was a slightly out-of-shape, middle-aged guy who hadn’t swum a lap since summer camp 20 years ago. He was horrified to learn that there was a swimming test as part of the certification process. While working every day, it was tough enough to read the textbook and take the quizzes before his big Friday night at the local YMCA. He had no time to practice strokes and opted for the “sink or swim” method.

On the first night of class he came home wet, smelling of chlorine

and wearing a strange expression on his face — a combination of victory and defeat. He had been embarrassed seeing the more agile and athletic (and

Good Buddying

- If your future buddy is having problems learning to dive, share a story about a part of the certification process that was awkward for you, too. If you want a buddy who will be your equal, don’t act superior.

- Share the learning curve as a fellow learner, not a know-it-all teacher. Some things may have changed since you became certified, and your novice partner may be able to teach YOU a thing or two.

- Remember, we all learn by DOING. Don’t step in and take over for the beginner. Stay by your buddy’s side without overshadowing him or her.

younger) around him make the swimming part look so easy. But he’d aced his written tests, scoring better than anyone else in the class.

Saturday morning was great fun. We curled up on the couch together to watch the instructional videos that were a part of his course. He previewed the upcoming skills he’d perform in the pool and I reviewed my scuba knowledge, but most importantly, we were becoming “dive buddies.”

Saturday night, Victor came home from class ecstatic. The underwater maneuvers came naturally to him, and he discovered that diving was tailored to his idea of recreation. He boasted, “This is the perfect sport for me. There are two basic rules: 1) Breathe. I can do that! and 2) Don’t overexert yourself. If you do, stop and relax. What a great sport!”

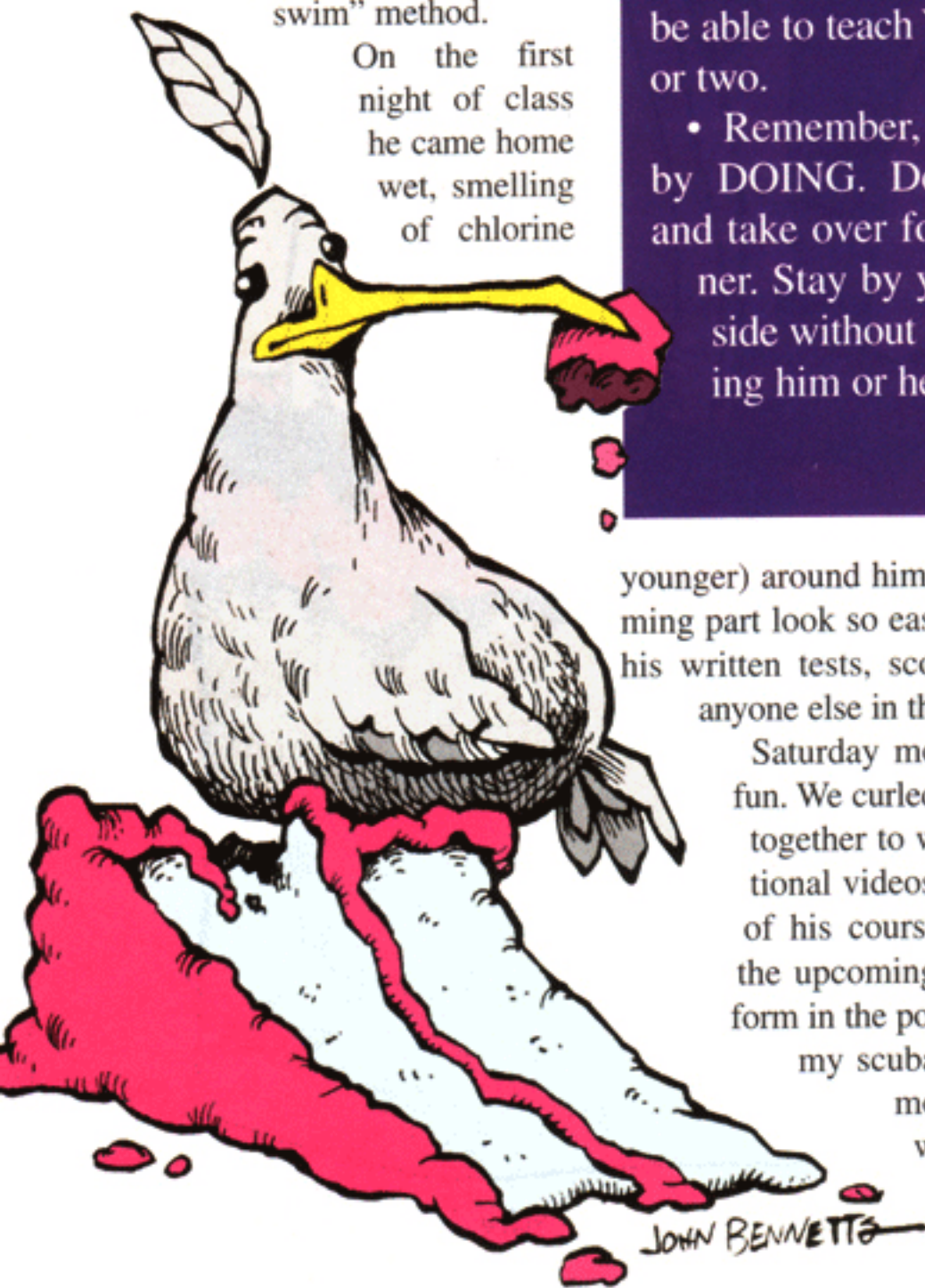
By the end of the weekend, he was ready for his certification dives. My certification dives were in cold water with visibility of about 15 feet/5 m. I wanted Victor to have better visibility and more fun. Our schedules were hectic, but we wanted to make sure we didn’t let a lot of time go by between his classroom/pool course and the check-out dives. We decided to piggyback his certification dives on an upcoming work trip to California.

I called the Catalina Island Visitors Bureau for information on dive centers, how to get to the island from Long Beach or San Pedro and places to stay. I chose a dive center that had its office on the pier and was very accommodating on the phone. They could give us “two easy shore dives the first day” followed by boat dives the next day.

When we arrived there were some mix-ups at the dive center. The instructor we had lined up was called away on a family emergency. The “easy shore dives” were from Casino Point — a boulder jetty that requires climbing over slippery rocks, then timing the waves just right to land in the tangled embrace of a kelp forest. This was not the “walk across sandy beach into clear water experience” I envisioned, but Victor said he was up for it.

The instructor, Jamie, was amiable and thorough. He said you can tell a lot about a couple by how they dive together. He began by supervising our pre-dive buddy check.

The hike to the water was a challenge. During the surface swim out to the dive buoy, Victor began experiencing something he hadn’t expected — a panic attack. Even inhaling through the



regulator, knowing he was getting air, he felt like he couldn't breathe. The instructor talked Victor through it as we rested at the surface, reminding him to breathe normally. I stayed nearby but out of the way.

Victor believed he'd feel more comfortable once underwater, so he and Jamie descended slowly down the line together. Underwater, Victor appeared calm, his breathing regular. He completed the required skills like a veteran, and Jamie gave him a big "OK." I held Victor's hand as we floated side by side 30 feet/9 m down. I smiled so broadly my mask leaked.

The second dive went just as smoothly. While Victor completed the next set of requirements, fish swam right up to his mask to check him out.

Topside, Victor was tired but enthralled. He kissed me and asked, "What do you call the long, silvery fish?" Jamie grinned at the two of us and said, "I can tell you two are going to be married a long time."

The next day started early at the boat. With perfect weather, we headed out to two choice spots. I watched my husband "giant stride" off the boat and felt a new era in our marriage was beginning. The tall kelp plants looked like the ocean's version of a redwood forest. I found enormous lobsters that seemed to know it was the off-season while Victor completed his open-water checkout dives.

Hours later we were on a ferry boat heading back to San Pedro Harbor in Los Angeles. I was satisfied, Victor was certified, and we began to plan our future adventures as dive buddies.

My biggest concern had been that Victor wouldn't like diving, but would force himself to participate in the sport simply because I loved it so much. Days after we returned to New York I overheard him talking to a friend on the phone: "When you get it right, it feels like you're flying underwater. Diving is a whole new mind-set." I guess those dive travel brochures on our coffee table are going to come in handy after all.

