

Foreword

Peter Benchley

Ladies and gentlemen, are you in for a treat! You are about to make the acquaintance of one of the most extraordinary gentlemen of this or any recent age. And not just a gentleman but a filmmaker, an adventurer, an explorer, a daredevil, a gallant, a poet, an intimate of creatures as exquisitely exotic as the leafy sea dragon and the sloe-eyed cuttlefish and – this above all – a true pioneer in the discovery of our last frontier, the sea.

Stan Waterman has spent more than half a century in, on and under the sea, and in these pages he takes you with him on the amazing ride he calls his life. There is excitement enough in his encounters with wild animals and weird people to fill a hundred lives and all their fantasies. To cite just one example, have you ever wondered what it would be like to dive in the open ocean with a huge school of certifiably anthropophagous sharks as they gorge on the carcass of a whale ... at night? Probably not. But hang on, because when Stan recounts scenes from the filming of the classic 1971 documentary feature film, *Blue Water, White Death*, you'll be there beside him, and astonished that anyone lived to tell the tale.

Stan is on intimate terms with many of the seas' most formidable denizens, including that ultimate marine predator, the Great White Shark, and he writes wonderfully about the contradictions inherent in this magnificent creature: the incomparable natural beauty, the perfection of function, all manifest in the creature's capacity as a killing machine.

Sea Salt is far more, however, than just a catalogue of critters and close calls. Stan has a profound rapport with the sea, and his command of language and literature eloquently conveys the depth of his feeling. The thoughtful, graceful writing sets the book a full step above most memoirs about the sea; not only does Stan appreciate good writing – you'll be pleased to encounter an occasional quote from Joseph Conrad or Henry Beston – but he'll often turn a phrase or craft a paragraph that could well have come from the pen of a master.

Born in Montclair, New Jersey, one of two sons of a cigar manufacturer, Stan served in the Navy during the last days of World War II and then graduated

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from Dartmouth College. He was a blueberry farmer in Maine for a while, and tried his hand as a charter-boat captain in the Bahamas. Scuba diving was in its infancy back then, but as soon as Stan discovered that there was a way for him to be able to both see and breathe underwater, he was hooked. Soon he added a movie camera to his kit, and thus was born a career that would lead to five Emmy Awards and would inspire the next two generations of underwater filmmakers.

Today, this gentle man still leads dive tours all over the world, and he is equally at home pursuing schools of whale sharks and sitting at home by a fire on a blustery autumn evening, re-reading “Hamlet” for the twentieth time.

I’ve had the privilege of knowing Stan since 1974, and I must admit that, like many of Stan’s friends, I take a tiny measure of pride in the publication of *Sea Salt*. For at least the last couple of decades, we’ve been urging him to commit himself to paper because we felt it was important that his vast archive of memories not be permitted simply to evanesce.

As you enjoy each grain of *Sea Salt*, I hope that your richest reward will be a sense of comradeship with the very special man who’s sharing with you the story of his utterly beguiling journey.

Foreword Howard Hall

I last dived with Stan Waterman in the Tiputa Pass of the Rangiroa Atoll. On an incoming tide, a dozen of us slipped off a large aluminum skiff and began dropping into the cobalt-blue water just outside the lagoon. All were exceptionally experienced divers including Australian superstars, Ron and Valerie Taylor, and acclaimed author, Peter Benchley. As we fell, Stan rolled onto his back, raised his video camera, and shot a silhouette of our group descending.

We hit bottom at about one hundred and twenty feet, and began drifting into the pass with the current. Gray Reef Sharks glided past by the dozen and seaward we could see legions more silhouetted against the dark water where the mouth of the pass plummets into the abyss.

The current increased dramatically further into the pass as the bottom rose and the channel narrowed concentrating the current into a raging undersea river. Soon the bottom was hurtling past us as the current approached a veloc-

Stan Watrman

ity of nearly five knots. Five knots may not sound like a great deal of current, but to a diver it's a hurricane force. Even if a diver could hold to a rock in a five-knot current, his diving equipment would be ripped from his body and his arms would soon dislocate at the shoulders. Drifting with a five-knot current, however, can be absolutely delightful, providing one can avoid being swept miles out to sea and lost. To avoid this unpleasant consequence, we would all have to end our dive by moving laterally across the pass and into an eddy created by the reef just inside the lagoon. The timing of this move is somewhat critical and the effort it takes to move through the current, even laterally, is considerable, especially when carrying a bulky camera.

As we drifted through the pass I held to the side so that when the time came I could more easily move across and into the eddy. Sharks, however, tend to stay in the deepest water at the center of the pass. The current was at its peak when I noticed a dozen Gray Reef Sharks hovering. Then, upstream, I noticed a column of bubbles racing toward the sharks. Stan Waterman was deep in the channel and poised to film the sharks as he hurtled through the center of the pass. If he stayed there too long he would never make it across the pass and into the eddy before being swept far into the lagoon where for miles the lagoon surface was a nightmarish fury of six-foot standing waves; conditions that would make surface rescue difficult.

Stan triggered his video camera as he flew through the center of the school of sharks and as he rushed into them the predators scattered like an exploding grenade. The shot recorded on video tape, Stan then made his move across current at the last possible moment kicking ferociously and using his free hand to help pull himself laterally across the pass. For a minute or two I was afraid he wouldn't make it. But his timing had been perfect and soon he joined the rest of the group decompressing in the calm eddy behind the reef. As he swam up to me and the others, Stan, filled with enthusiasm, pumped his fist, rolled his eyes and yelled "Wow!" loudly through his regulator mouthpiece.

And that is how Stan Waterman celebrated his 80th birthday.

In a sport that celebrates big-game hunters who arm themselves with underwater cameras, Stan Waterman is a legend. He is one of the extraordinary few who, compelled by adventure at the dawn of a new sport, cast-off the security of ordinary life and set out to pioneer a new and dangerous wilderness. In those early years there were no dive instructors, no dive resorts, no live-aboard dive boats, no dive guides, no rules, and no articles in dive magazines that might have allowed Stan to predict what he might find on his next dive. There was nothing but the unknown and every dive was an adventure filled with uncertainty and the possibility of life-threatening danger. Today it's hard to imagine

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what it must have been like to dive at night, swim with whales, or leave a shark cage when no one had ever done it before.

I was studying biology in college when I saw *Blue Water, White Death* playing in the movie theater. Even then, many years after Stan had become a veteran diver and noted underwater cinematographer, leaving a shark cage was considered insanity. I remember watching Stan and his companions open the doors to cages surrounded by ten-foot sharks, then swim out among the monsters to what seemed like certain death. I was thunderstruck. Today it's something you can see almost any night on the Discovery Channel, but back in 1970 leaving the cage was simply unthinkable.

Years later, and by wonderful circumstance, I had the privilege of meeting Stan, working with him, and becoming his friend. As is the nature of such relationships, the protégé benefits from the friendship far more than does the mentor. Certainly, no one in this business has been more influential or more instrumental in the development of my career. His uninhibited gifts of wisdom and opportunity are debts that can never be repaid. But sharing hundreds of dives with Stan is the gift I most cherish. Stan dives with an almost childlike enthusiasm that has never dulled. And the more challenging and dangerous the dive, the more Stan seems to relish it. Though he often tells hilarious stories about acts of foolish bravado by screwball divers who "know not the meaning of fear," I suspect that he has never been truly afraid himself. Many times I have dived with Stan in situations that, at the time, seemed dire and sometimes life-threatening. Yet he always led these dives without reservation or hesitation and often without even serious consideration. If in the following pages one senses a lack of reverence for the dangers this man has faced over his long diving career, it may simply be that he does not describe fear well because he really doesn't experience the emotion as most of us do. I once saw Stan paralyzed from the chest down by decompression sickness. Then only hours later, after what can only be described as a miraculous recovery, he was eager to dive again as if nothing had happened.

The following pages are filled with stories culled from a lifetime of diving adventure written by the man who pioneered exploration under the sea and the art of capturing this exotic and often dangerous wilderness on film. And the adventure continues. As I write this, two years after our dive together in the Rangiroa Atoll, Stan has future diving expeditions scheduled to Palau, Truk Lagoon, Grand Cayman, Cocos Island, Sulawesi, Tonga, the Galapagos, and to Guadalupe Island, Mexico to, once again, confront the Great White Shark. For Stan, each dive continues to be a great adventure.