

Interview of Chuck Nicklin by Paul K. Dayton

Chuck: This is Chuck Nicklin and it's January 29th, 2014.

I was born in Massachusetts and my father was in the Navy, and in World War II he was all over the world in the Navy. He was reassigned to San Diego and we lived in Massachusetts when I was 13 or 14 years old. I was a teenager and I didn't want to go. There was no way I was coming to someplace called San Diego. Then finally we came to San Diego, on midnight of 1942, in an ice storm, we got on a train and came to San Diego. And we were in San Diego for maybe three months and my father come home and he was delighted that we were going back to Boston. He was being reassigned to Boston and I said not me. I'm a California boy. I'm not going. I'm not leaving. And they'd had to drag me from Massachusetts, but there was no way they were going to get me to leave San Diego. That was 1942. San Diego was at war. I mean there were gun placements and barrage booms and it was a different world. But that's was when I first came to San Diego. I was a 14-year-old kid. I graduated from Point Loma in 1945. We don't have any reunions anymore.

Paul: And do you remember when you first got into the water with a mask?

Chuck: I was a teenage kid at Point Loma and I had other kids that I met at high school and we'd go down to the area by Sunset Cliffs, the area down behind the University there in little coves down there. We'd hang out and drink a rum and coke and just be teenage guys. And one of the guys had a facemask and he had those old facemasks that were like a piece of pipe. And you'd just sand it until it fit your face. So I tried one of those and got in the water and it was, you know Sunset Cliffs, there was surf, it was dirty, so I said, that's fun I'd like to try somewhere else and the next up was the Cove. Went to the Cove and there was a guy that had just returned from overseas, from Japan and he had a mask that was like the Alma divers in Japan use. And he was just there with his kids and his wife and I said can I use that for a minute. I put the mask on and there was Garibaldi and little fishes and the water was calm and it was La Jolla Cove. I spent a lot of my life at La Jolla Cove after that.

Paul: You were just basically wading out there at that point. You were not---

Chuck: Snorkeling, swimming with a mask. There were no snorkels at that time. And when they first came out with snorkels I said what a silly thing that is. One of the greatest inventions.

Paul: What year was that?

Chuck: Must have been probably 55 or six

Paul: Did you remember abalones and lobsters and big fish?

Chuck: We used to dive for lobsters in La Jolla Cove. One of my friends, I dived with for many years after that would come with one of the the snorkels. Just a tube, not all the fancy stuff like today. He said you ought to try one of these I said nah and we were out night diving for lobsters and he's swimming around looking in the water. finally I said, I've got to try one of those and that was the start of snorkeling.

Paul: Yeah. Do you remember when you first started actually collecting, shooting fish and catching lobsters and abalones?

Chuck: Before I got into the diving business I was in the grocery business and I've got some old pictures of that that would blow you away. So finally I ended up owning that business. I would get some time off during the week and we made these big pole spears, big wooden pole spears with a little piece of bungee on the end. At my market I had a big a van and I'd take some of the neighborhood kids because this was in Logan Heights. It was a very, very down area. I would take some of the kids and I'd take them out, because they'd never been anywhere and I just wanted to show them the water and what it was like. A lot of times I'd take them to Torrey Pines. I'd go up out with my pole spear and shoot a stingray, or shoot something just to show what was out there. Then I got a little more involved and started going out of the Children's Pool, trying to shoot white Sea bass and yellowtail and stuff like that but I shot it with a big pole spear. Before I even got into the diving business or sort of had anything to do with spear guns.

Paul: Well, I was going to ask, because you and Wheeler and Connie started the Diving Locker, is that right?

Chuck: (nods)

Paul: When was that?

Chuck: That was in, wow, that was in 1959. Connie Limbaugh and Jimmy Stewart and Andy Reehnitzer and all these guys. There were eight of them. Scientific diving, had a job, a contract to do the research stuff off of Point Loma before they put in the out outfall and they'd dive with these meters squares and take pictures and collect things and they had a room in the back of an old building down on Cass Street where they kept all their stuff. Well then, all of the sudden they ran out of the contract and they had \$5,000 left and they said they wanted to start a diving business because they were all working out of Scripps. They said we will call it the Diving Locker which is what they called it at Scripps. They decided that none of them wanted to run it, but they needed somebody manage. Well I'd been diving with Connie and doing some photography out here so I knew a lot of the guys. So, they proposed either me or Ron Church. Ron Church was really into photography before I was for sure. And we were both up to run that thing. They finally decided I would run it and I'd sell my grocery store. They knew that I knew how long it took for checks to cash and I knew how to run a business with no money. We got some backing and we used the \$5000 to buy a RiX compressor, the best compressor you could buy at the time and we had US Divers and some of the companies to back us on consignment. We had a lot of empty boxes. We had to store and we took the front part of that store at 4825 Cass Street and made it into a diving business. We planned we would open the door of the diving business on the 15th of June 1959. On the 14th of June 1959 they had the only real shark attack in the history of San Diego and that was in La Jolla Cove on the 14th, the day before with the open the Diving Locker. We might've sold a snorkel in the next month or two but not much else because the first shark, I'm trying to think of his name, but the first shark attack in San Diego's history was in La Jolla Cove on Monday.

Paul: Pamperin. I think the name was Pamperin who was lost.

Chuck: That was how the diving business started and how the relationship with Wheeler and all the SDC members at Scripps.

Paul: Just out of curiosity, because I'm interested in sort of a baseline of the densities of the big animals and things but I'm also interested what it was like diving with those Scripps guys in the 50s.

Chuck: Well I know, actually before 1959, we were just now starting to find out about wetsuits. You know, We had been making our own wetsuits.. Had funky dry suits. We would go out and I remember abalone season would start I think that first Monday in February or some darn cold time and me and my friend would dive for abalone and try and talk our wives into hanging out at the beach while we pounded abalone and cooked. And we were cold because this was before wetsuits and we just wore a bathing suit and heavy navy sweaters just because it would slow the circulation a little bit. Friends at the Convair, the dive club had a chance to get tanks, Someone at Convair was trying to make parts for Wally Potts for his spear guns. So I went to Wally and between my fumbling and Wally's help I built my first real spear gun. Up until that time we had some little French Arbalete guns but when I first started really shooting fish and being a real spear fisherman was with Wally Potts and Jack Prodanovich. Wally really made the guns. Wally would do the basic things and Jack would prime it up, so he would come up with new ideas like a new reel or all that kind of stuff. I spent a lot of time in their garage for a while, while they were trying to put together stuff so I can shoot fish. Then we got into spear fishing competition and stuff like that. And I'd be in one of these competitions and win a little gold, a brass trophy about this big and I'd go out there and dive for four hours to win the trophy and then I'd go out and shoot pictures and I found out if I shot pictures and I shot film, they'd pay me a lot of money and send me around the world and that was a lot better. So all of a sudden I became an environmentalist because, because I was not shooting fish anymore, I might as well be an environmentalist.

Paul: Did you actually dive off Macrocystis, Wheeler's old boat, and dive with Jimmy and those guys in the early 50s? Did you go with them?

Chuck: I remember Elizabeth Taylor's brother had a place down there just south of Rosarita and Connie and I and our families and Elizabeth's brother would all go down there and have big lobster feasts. Some of the guys from the bottom scratches, Jack and Wally and Emil etc. would go out on one of the dive boats to the Coronado's. And they'd let me tag along and Habecker was one of the early divers from the bottom scratches and taught me about big fish. I hate to, you know, this was a long time ago, to go and shoot a big black sea bass was a big thing. It was a big deal. And it was not looked on as being bad. It was looked on as, you're a hero. I used to have, after we started the Diving Locker and moved it down there on to Grand Avenue, we had a pole in front of the building with an arm on it and a hoist and we'd shoot a big black sea bass and hang up on the hoist, right there on Grand Avenue and the cars would all come by and stop and it was, the paper would send somebody out and they'd take pictures. And we'd take that big black sea bass and lay it on the sidewalk and clean it and there would be blood running in the gutter, and there's big pieces of meat, like this, four of them and we just cut off chunks and people going by, they'd put up their lunch bag or we were just giving away black sea bass for all of the neighbors going by. It was a different world. You know, if you cleaned a fish on the sidewalk these days even if it was a guppy, well somebody would find you and get you for making a mess.

Paul: It wasn't looked down on. I shot lots of big fish and I feel guilty about them now. It was food.

Chuck: It was part of life. Abalone. Before those wetsuits we'd go to the Children's Pool, jump in the water, swim around the wall underneath the wall there was abalone and you'd take, four or five or six abalone, whatever it was and you'd put some of them in your trunks and put them in your hand and swim in and you would be done. Now you know the abalone disappeared.

Paul: Just out of curiosity because I'm interested in what it was like before the black sea bass and white Sea bass and tail groupers were taken out, if you were to swim for say, half an hour, how many would

you see back in those days?

Chuck: Even back in those days. They were there. You know what they'd shoot mostly off the cove was the groupers, remember the groove tailed groupers?

Paul: So in the 50s and 60s there weren't that many black sea bass?

Chuck: There's more black sea bass now than there was when I was shooting black sea bass. They see black sea bass all the time at La Jolla Shores. The divers see black sea bass. And in Catalina there's a place off that point there where they have black sea bass dives. You go and take a boat full of people and you all go down and sit around and watch the black sea bass. We used to spend days you know, pounding my way through the water looking for black sea bass. So, it's not, they, I have no facts, but it seems like there are more now than there were then.

Paul: The ones that people see out there, I mean, they are seeing the same fish, so there are seven or eight at the Cove. It's not as though there are a hundred. But at this is interesting to me because if you go back to the 30s and 20s, the line fishermen were catching tons of them and it sounds like maybe they had fished them out before the divers showed up.

Chuck: Yeah. I think the fact that the black sea bass became almost extinct was because the fisherman worked them so hard and divers came along and were picking off the ones that were left. And then now they are all coming back. I'm amazed that they have come back the way they have. You know. The same with a lot of the animals. You know, like, the sharks coming into the cove now. What are they, seven gills?

Paul: Seven gills.

Chuck: Seven gills coming in the cove now. In those days we used to get some soup fins now and then. I'm not sure what the difference is between a soup fin and a seven gill, but then for a long time there were never any sharks. So I think on some things I think they are getting back to the way they were. Some things, you know one of the things you used to be able to do was stand on the cliffs there and look into the water and on a clear day you'd see Garibaldi swimming around and you don't see many anymore. You don't see them anymore because the seals ate them all. The seals and sea lions are such tremendous predators that the small fishes and crabs and stuff are being, there aren't any more. We've got a great Marine Park and we are filling with sea lions and killing everything else that's in there.

Paul: That's interesting because I hadn't thought about that. I haven't been diving in there for a long time.

Chuck: I feel that it's not... we are not being very realistic in the way we are handling the pinnipeds. In the old days we used to go take all our classes, take the classes and take them to the Children's Pool. It was a perfect place to teach them because they could walk out into the water and put all the stuff on and be all comfortable and stuff. And then swim around the corner and go diving. Now you put the stuff on the people and if it's a bad day they get smashed on the waves, probably good training for them, but it's not for everybody. You know, there's a lot of people that get through that tough part of diving. The ones that do usually take the diving class and then go with me somewhere in the South Pacific to go diving.

Paul: When do you think---

Chuck: See, I told you I would talk.

Paul: The sharks are coming back because the gill nets have been taken out.

Chuck: I think the sharks are coming back just like a lot of the animals along the shore because they moved the gill nets out. The gill nets are not, they used to lay the gill nets along the edge of the, we'd go out, remember the days of the big halibut? Go out there and get two halibut this big, everybody would. Then they moved the, and the big halibut are starting to come back. You don't see a lot of them but you see some of them and a lot, but they moved the gill nets used to go along the shore and they'd pick up all those animals and now the gill nets have to be three-miles out or something. They have to be out there. And they don't get the shore environment animals.

Paul: Do you remember any Pismo clams in La Jolla?

Chuck: (Shakes head no) I remember Pismo clams in Baja though. We used go there for Pismo clams.

Paul: Let me get back to The Diving Locker because I think it's a pretty important institution here. It certainly was when I came. Let me just run through. You started in June 14th, '59 and that was when it was on Cass Street, and then when did you move it to Grand?

Chuck: About five or six years later we moved to Grand.

Paul: Do you know of Wheeler North?

Chuck: Wheeler North was one of the most magnificent guys I ever met, and not just because of the story I'm going to tell now and I'm not even sure this is a story you want to hear, but when we went to move the Diving Locker to a building that was being rebuilt down on Cass Street, nobody had any money. So Wheeler put up the money for that building. Then he put it in the name of myself and my sons. I paid him back over the years. But, there would've been no Diving Locker if it wasn't for Wheeler. He got very little credit for some of the things he did. But I had no money. The group didn't have any money. And we wanted, we knew we needed a better building and to move down to that new location and Wheeler says, I'll do it.

We paid \$59,000 for that building. I sold it for a considerable more. So it was a very good investment for me. But I paid for it. I mean, you know, and Wheeler, Wheeler never asked anything. You know, he was a good guy. And Jimmy?

Paul: Yeah, talk about Jimmy.

Chuck: Jimmy always helped, you know, Jimmy is sort of squirrely sometimes. And he gets Jimmy macho, but he has a really good heart. He would end up to lecture for a class or something when nobody else, you know a lot of the people that were involved, the eight people involved in the scientific diving they had their own gig, they weren't really interested, they didn't really care. The way, I digress a little bit, but the way I ended up with it was because they didn't care. And I did. I bought their stocks back little by little or they just gave it to be because we weren't making any money and they didn't want to be responsible. So I ended up owning the whole thing. But Jimmy and Wheeler and Connie, until we lost them, were great, The Diving Locker would never have got going without them. Oh, and then Ron Church when they made the decision that I would start the Diving Locker they also made a decision we'd start a photography part of the Diving Locker. And we built an area back there where he could do,

Ron could do his, he made those big prints in the old days Ron and I would sort of work together as a team. Not much of a team because he didn't help me much and I couldn't help him because I didn't know what the hell he was doing. That's what happened and then Ron started to work for Cousteau. And he was off on his other thing and that part all disappeared.

But one of the times, one of the first classes we had at the Diving Locker was in the backroom, in the funky little backroom at the store and Jacques Cousteau was in town when they were testing the little Socoupe little submersibles. He'd come to the store with Wheeler or Connie or maybe both of them and they were talking out front and we were starting this class and I asked him if he, would you say something to our scuba class. Captain Cousteau says, well of course. He goes back there and welcomed my first diving class. I think it was the first one. Maybe the second one. Welcome to his undersea world. Sometimes these guys are all in the 70s now that were in the class. Every once in a while one will come up and say remember when Jacques Cousteau talked to us? That's in my book.

Paul: Do you have, were you involved at all with the memories of Cousteau and the sea lab and his saucer thing?

Chuck: Not much. You know, in those days I was on the fringe because of all the relationships and everything and all the Scripps people would come to buy stuff at the store and everything. I was on the fringe but I wasn't really in the Scripps family at that time. But it was a great time. Cousteau's book and the movie influenced me a lot. That's when I stopped shooting things. Well I kept shooting them but I started learning about the nature and realizing this is a wonderful place.

Paul: Did that have an effect on you, his book and movie?

Chuck: You know the fact, yeah, the movie was great. What helped me, what got me started in filming and understanding the underwater was first because of Ron. Ron had a Rollie Marine. It would take 12 pictures. So Ron and I would go out and dive in the shores and he would take a picture and hand me the camera and he'd look for the next picture and I'd take a picture and hand him the camera and I look for, so we'd go out and make a dive and come back and each would have six pictures. There are points in your life that all of a sudden make the change. I was in the grocery business and I met Connie through the grocery, through the wine salesman Howard Rydell and he knew Connie and I met Connie through and then all of a sudden when they needed somebody to go into the diving business that was my next step. I got into the diving business. It was struggling along. And then it was not long before Connie was lost in France. When he was lost, they retrieved his 16mm camera housing and his Rollie Marine, and Nan, his wife asked if I would like to have that equipment. So all of a sudden I have Ron to sort of help me get started, teach me a little bit and I had the equipment. When somebody needed a photographer I had the equipment. I had the desire. I stumbled around but seemed to take the right pictures and I also could get away from the Diving Locker. By then I had an employee and I could get away. All of a sudden I had tanks and air and all this equipment and cameras and enthusiasm and maybe some ability and I was in the film business.

Paul: You know there's a story of Jimmy's shark bite out in the islands. And Ron Church was there. Did you hear any good gossip on that?

Chuck: No, just that I think the deal was, the deal was that they were making pictures. And they were trying to put Jimmy in the picture with a grey reef shark. The shark got backed into the corner and came back and bit Jimmy on the way out. Ron was taking the pictures it was nobody's fault. I don't think we knew, when the Grey Reef shark postured reef had to be careful.

In those days we didn't know much about sharks. You know just last year I was taking pictures of tiger sharks that are 15 feet long and this big around and they are as close as you and I have to push them away with the camera. People think that, never felt that you could ever get a water with a tiger shark. Tiger sharks are nothing. It's interesting. Now they are going with, the guys are going out I mean, I've gotten off the track here, but they've gone out and taken pictures of these oceanic hammerheads, the big ones. They have heads this big and they're 20 feet long. They're out digging in the sand for stingrays or something and you can come right up to them. They are doing things with sharks for, a girl that was our house sitter and was sort of the pseudo-daughter of my wife is Ocean Ramsey. If you've seen any pictures of blonde beautiful young girls with sharks it's probably Ocean Ramsey. That's her real name. It was given to her when she was born. But she swims around on the back of a, you know, 15 foot white sharks. Holding on to the you know, just snorkeling. I don't know if you've seen any of the pictures, but she's been in every magazine. We're doing things with sharks. I think as soon as, I just have to say this, as soon as they find a place where the white sharks could be fed like we're doing at Guadalupe or someplace else, where it is shallow, like with we do with hammerheads and the tigers in like 19, 20 feet of water. If you just go to the bottom and you have food for them I think they will be hand feeding white sharks in another couple years. The only thing is right now most all the places you find the white sharks is open water. That's a little more scary. Even with the tiger sharks, when you leave the bottom to go to the boat, you know, you don't lay there on the back of the boat kicking your feet. Okay, let's talk about the old days. These are the days of last year I'm talking about.

Paul: How about, so you didn't ever get involved with Sea Lab, either. How about the La Jolla coastal reserve, the reserve up here that went in in '72, were you involved in that at all? Early on Jim Stewart and the divers were trying to protect the groove tailed groupers by making a reserve and protecting them from...

Chuck: the whole reserve?

Paul: At least across cross rock and around the corner, Jimmy was working on that in the 60s. I think they did, didn't they? There was an underwater jetty out there somewhere where they piled a lot of like, jetty rocks to make an artificial fishing reef.

Chuck: Jimmy was trying to do that in the 60s to protect the grouper and he couldn't. Didn't go through. It finally went to through in '72 and it was a much smaller, less functional reserve.

Paul: Well it's, you know, it's still pretty basic the way it was. You know, it goes from right off of the left hand side the Cove out to those buoys out by skylight rock and out there. Then goes all the way down to the pier.

Chuck: But they, yeah. I thought it was a great idea and it has worked out fine. But you know, even in spite of the fact that the cove has been a reserve for all these years, there's no way you're going to find a lobster or an abalone La Jolla Cove. No way. I still think that people tend to put a lobster in their vest pocket, and you know. But I guess the abalone are coming back, Now Dave Rudy owns a big company that does sea urchins, and he says they've seen lots of abalone and they've seen lots of small abalone.

Paul: The abalones coming back off Point Loma are threaded and pinks. And there are some greens coming back to the reserve especially in the intertidal it is a little harder to poach where everybody can see you, but they still do. Poaching is a problem.

Chuck: A big red abalone is worth 100 bucks. That underlies the poaching problem.

Paul: They poach everything out there. It's sad. Do you maybe want to shift gears because you defined much of your career with your photography, and go back and walk us through when you first met Al Giddings and when you really got into the photography in a big way?

Chuck: When I started photography?

Paul: Yeah, when did you start doing photography and you hooked up with Al and you did a lot with him.

Chuck: I hooked up with Al because we were both spear fisherman and he had a dive shop in San Francisco and I had, actually actually San Rafael or somewhere up there and I had the dive shop here. We both spear fished and in La Jolla they had a spear fishing contest, Pacific Coast and he was down there and we met. And he'd already started making film. He made a film called Painted Reefs of Honduras, funky film, but he made it for US divers.

He showed it at one of the first film festivals. I started, Connie and I and some of us started the first film festivals in San Diego. And Al came and showed that film. And then he was telling everybody he was going to Cozumel to shoot the next film, Twilight Reef. And he said, and your local diving, whatever, fancy words he put on covering up me that I was going to go with him as his cameraman. And I didn't have any money and I couldn't go. I was still just closing my other business. And I just said, well I can't go.

A couple weeks later he called up and I answered the phone at home and he said well, we're getting ready to go. Where should I send your ticket. Airplane ticket. And I said well, I really can't go. My wife says, who's that? And I said it's Al. He wants us to go, and he was taking group of people. That's the way they wanted to do that, make it on a group driving to Cozumel. I say it's Al and he wants us to go to, and I'm telling him, no I can't go and she said you've got to go. And it was another one of those points all of a sudden I was the cameraman. And I just inherited the stuff from Connie and had the camera equipment. And this was a good chance to shoot it in clear water and I was off and running.

So Al and I hit it off. From then on we did funky films and they kept on getting better and better and better until the last one we really worked on was the Abyss and that was, you know, we were both getting long in the tooth and that was sort of the, and Al Giddings is an amazing guy and he's a hard-working, good film producer. I don't think he was the best photographer in the world, but I was his right-hand man, so that helped him. One day he decided, you know, this is too much. I'm not going to do it anymore.

He had cases of books and stuff like that and all memories stuff from our works for those many years and he got a dumpster, he has a ranch in Montana, he got a dumpster and pulled it up to the ranch and dumped all that stuff and threw it all away. He was just, it was too bad. If I had just known that a lot of that stuff, books and stories and stuff that was, would've been great for anybody interested in the history of diving. And he decided he was going to restore cars. He probably restores the fanciest, best cars, old times cars. And he wins many prizes, and he is just the kind of guy that was really dedicated and really perfectionist. And all of a sudden his perfectionist in building housings and all that stuff went to fixing cars. It's funny how things change.

Paul: That's going to be a good book, isn't it?

Paul: I want to know what happened to the videos that he took with the ROV at McMurdo. He had that ROV at McMurdo and he took some interesting footage. Do you know if that still lives or did he throw that out, too?

Chuck: Yeah, I don't...and he had this old stock footage it he sold some of it really cheap and got rid of it and then he just dumped the rest. I'd love to have a piece of film of the 16mm, the Twilight Reef we did in Cozumel, because we were diving in 200 feet like it was, nowadays, 200 feet you're going to die. We would just single tank, go out there and fool around and come up slow. Anyway, all that stuff was just gone.

Paul: In those days did you follow the tables really closely?

Chuck: Well we didn't have, they had at first it was no tables, then we started using the Navy tables. And we use the Navy tables for a long time and they started coming out with, the first depth gauges were, they had a little piece of plastic like this with a tube. And the deeper you get, the more the air was forced into the tube and it would tell you how deep you were.

Paul: And you couldn't see it.

Chuck: For a long time we couldn't use pressure gauges. When we did get pressure gauges they wouldn't let you use them at Scripps because at Scripps they felt that you should not have to depend on something like that. You should be good enough at gauging the amount of air you're going to use and knowing when to come up and go, [rapid breaths] oh, time to come up. One of those things.

Paul: That's how I did it.

Chuck: Not going to put that in the book. There's some stuff I will not put in the book. The Navy and Scripps and some of the scientific people were far behind the sport divers. The sport divers developed a lot of, the sport diving companies developed a lot of the stuff and sometimes it was hard for Scripps, for long time they wouldn't let them use the BCs. You remember that.

Paul: I do remember that

Chuck: Couldn't use a BC. Everybody else was using the compensator and Scripps and the Navy wouldn't let them, it should be good enough with your buoyancy and your ability to swim, so you shouldn't have to depend on something that is mechanical. And a lot of different history in how things came together. It was not all one trail. You know the scientific people are doing something and the military people are doing something else and the crazy sport divers are doing something else. And gradually as time went on, everybody went this guys got it, this guy's got a good, and it started coming together. So we ended up with a safe sport of scuba diving.

Paul: Who were the early companies making equipment that was innovative? Was it US Divers?

Chuck: Well, US diverse was about the first. That came from Gagan and those guys from France. But then Sam Le Coke and the Voit Avalon were the first single hose regulators. There was just a lot of companies. A lot of them didn't make it, but they'd come up with ideas.

Paul: Did you test stuff before you sold it at Diving Locker? Or did they just give it to you, and you put

it on the shelf?

Chuck: No, that was not my job. Somebody tested it though, it was tested by the company that built it. Then the guys, Jimmy and them would go out and test the stuff even if they couldn't use it, they liked playing with it, you know. It was, we used to dive on the Andria Doria at 200, actually the bottom was 250, but most of the dives were about 170 or so, but we used the little Bendomatics.

Paul: I have one. SOS.

Chuck: Just the air blowing through the tube was what decided whether you were going to get bent or not. It was so basic. But we use those on a lot of dives, that used them conservatively and lived. And I feel very fortunate. I am still diving. I feel fortunate I've never been bent, I've never been bit, I've been very lucky and I'm also very careful. I swim in the pool three days a week and sometimes I get out and it's cold and I go stand in the shower and let the, at the pool and let the water run down the back of my neck and every time I do that I say, oh this is so good because I never would do that when I was diving. I would never let the hot water run down the back of my neck after a dive. I always felt that the chance of a bubble increasing in my spinal cord is more apt to get me.

I made a dive to 130 feet with Giddings when we were doing a film in San Clemente and we both dived at the same spot to film the same thing and came up at the same time and Al would always jump under the hot shower and I would never do it and Al got a bubble and he was okay. He was able to come out of it, but he had an embolism hit and I felt it was because of that hot water running down the back of his neck. It was really cold, we were really cold when we would come out of the water. So I would never, I always felt that was an important thing. If you are diving remember that don't let the hot water run down your neck if you are cold.

Paul: Did you say you started of the film Festival in San Diego? How did you go about doing that?

Chuck: Actually when we first started at the Diving Locker, Connie and Jimmy and Wheeler had made a film called Rivers of Sand. You remember that?

Paul: Oh yeah.

Chuck: They entered it, there was an international film festival underwater in Santa Monica. They entered it and won some prizes. Then the next year we all entered pictures that Ron and I and then we said, well, this is a pretty good deal. They were filling that auditorium up there. We should start a festival here. So we started the film Festival in San Diego. At the big auditorium downtown.

Paul: What year was it, do you remember?

Chuck: I've got the old thing somewhere. It must have been, I guess it was 63.

Paul: Yeah that's about, I was going to think mid-sixties. But, the Rivers of Sand, much of it was filmed...

Chuck: Much of it was filmed off Baja California and Cabo,

Paul: That was one of the early underwater films from this era, anyway and then there was Lamar Boren that was doing all the work with Mike Nelson. Mike Douglas?

Chuck: Yeah and anyway Lamar Boren was doing all that work and then when Lamar Boren did one of the first Bond films called Thunderbolt. I'd shot a couple films for Warner Bros. And they were funky little, they still show them sometimes at three o'clock in the morning I think, but I went to Lamar Boren, and told him I wanted to work with him. I was dying to work on the Bond films. Lamar Boren said oh yes, I have a place for you, Chuck yeah, I'll give you a call. Well, he never called. I talked to him again and finally I realized he just didn't want any other photographers. He was a good guy and a good photographer. He was probably the prime, Lamar Boren was probably the first of the real professional cinematographers underwater. And even more so than Jacques's guys Lamar was making real housings for real cameras. Him and I we were always friends but he never had time to help me. So pretty soon I was shooting Bond films without him.

It was really interesting in the early days when I first hit it off with Al was that Al was the guy who would go out and find the money, he would come up with the idea and find the money, put it together and then when it came time to shoot he would call me and say Chuck, your check, your ticket is at the airport. And I would go, I would go off and I'd shoot for the week or a month or 10 months or whatever it was, whatever the job was. And then we would have a wrap party because the filming was done and I would say see you guys later and I'd go home and go back to the Diving Locker and I'd show up there and most of them remembered who I was. And Al would go back and spend the next two or three years selling the thing, editing, making the music, and pretty soon he'd get another idea and say Chuck, the tickets in the mail, the tickets at the airport and I would go off somewhere else. And it was, I always, I was always the shooter. I mean I was always the photographer. And I never, because of my other relation with the Diving Locker and my business and all that I didn't really want the rest of the stuff. I just wanted to shoot. So that's, that became my career. I mean, I was not hired because I was going to tell people about whales. I was hired because I could take pictures of the whales that somebody else could talk about. I always felt that I wanted to be the shooter. That's the way it worked out.

Next will be my book. It will be available at amazon.com and will be about my life as an underwater photographer. It will be released at DEMA in Orlando this year 2015.

Book will be "CAMERA MAN" an inside look at filming Hollywood films and documentaries.

Paul: I was thinking about hearing the rest of the story of the Diving Locker. Did your sons take over?

Chuck: I had the Diving Locker for 42 years. I owned that thing, eventually owned it in charge of it for 42 years. My sons grew up there teaching and diving and Flip is a big-time, well he's trying to retire from National Geographic now. I'm going next week to Hawaii for, they have a whale trust. So they have people come and a seminar sort of thing on whales and a film display. And so the boys grew up there. And I would zip off and go off and do a film and then come back and shake the trees and say okay everybody work. What's going on? I remember Howard Hall was probably one of the better cinematographers in the world worked for me. And Marty Snyderman and of course my son Flip has done really well at Geographic, and all those guys, there's a ton of them. People ask me what would my legacy like to be?

And they think it's because I did deep diving, or did all of the diving, none of that stuff that I think, I hope that my legacy is the fact that I helped a lot of people get into the business. And still do. I still have people call me and say Chuck what can I do? I want to get in. I tell them where to dive, or if they

are in, I say hold the camera still, whatever it is. And I like to feel that my legacy was that I helped people not only get into the film business but to get into business period. Because a lot of these college kids going to college or going to high school worked at the Diving Locker and learned something about what a business is, especially a business with no money, but still successful. So I think finally we decided to sell the Diving Locker. We sold it to a guy that didn't know what he was doing and he had it for a couple years and then I had to take it back and I sold it again to a kid that had money backing, but he had no ambition, didn't want to run it and had it up there close to 08. Then by that time when I closed the Diving Locker we been taking people to Grand Cayman and places like that. I'd done a bunch of traveling sort of on the side thing.

And because of my traveling around the world as a photographer I met people everywhere and knew every spot, all the good diving spots. And so after I sold the store, Werner from Ocean Enterprises called me and said, Chuck why don't you come up here and help me with travel. I said well, I'm sort of retired but Werner and I have become friends and I've run travel trips through Werner. So I rather than just closing the store and watching baseball, I've taken people on travel trips. I still film, and with the UPS, the UPS got to a point where they didn't realize that the world was changing. They didn't realize that film, that video was here to stay and even more so that it was going to be other than 16mm film, that video was happening you know. And so I started the [UFX] group that runs the shows we have now. And so I think if I wasn't so old the next step would be back to the old style of film festivals. In the old film festivals we had people bring their half-hour films and they were 16mm films but they wouldn't cut them because it was a big deal to edit them and stuff. So video was coming along. So some of the people didn't realize that video was here to stay. Okay well video had come along. And now video came along, then there were so many shows on TV, documentary shows, that the idea of having somebody come to see something at the auditorium that they could see on the TV wouldn't work. So that sort of fell apart. And so then we came up with the idea of shows that were five-minute shows, like on our [UFX] shows we have [Folcom], they're five minutes because every photographer has got an hour film and five minutes of it is really good. And so all the film, all the shows are five-minute films. I think what is happening now is that because of YouTube and Vimeo all that, the fact that you're going to go and pay money to see five-minute films is really nice, but it's never been name-oriented. You know it the old days we'd have Jacques Cousteau would come see the film. Everybody would come see this half hour film. Nowadays it's just quick, everybody's attention span is three minutes, maybe two and a half. So a three minute film was three minutes yeah, film I say film but of course it's video. So a three minute film became a good step. Now, the three minute film, everybody can watch it on their computer. I think the next step, in Santa Barbara recently they have a festival. They do every four or five years or something. And they had a real name. Somebody that's really, really been doing something. They had the guy that's been shooting, diving the 800 feet and shooting the coelacants and he came from France and people went to see it and they could see a half-hour film.

Paul: I really just liked the way they you said earlier that you kind of went to shooting fish to shooting photos of fish and in doing so it made you more of an environmentalist and I'm wondering now with all this accessibility to, you know, using go Pros and kind of, enabling a lot of amateur, enabling a lot of divers to be amateur photographers I'm wondering if you think that would lead to more of a trend in environmentalism throughout sport diving overall going forward.

Chuck: You know, in photography, underwater photography, one of the first steps, one of the big steps was the Calypso. Now the big step is the Go Pro. I think the Go Pro is making a lot of people that have been [snorkeling] or flopping around out there for a long time all of a sudden they have a Go Pro and with the Go Pro they are taking pictures underwater and they're not only making them enthusiastic to protect the environment but making everybody they show it to, if they edit it a little bit anyway, making

everybody. So I think the photography, for a while there if you didn't have a Nikon and a \$5000 housing you couldn't take pictures. With strobes and everything. And now, I have four go pros, and we use them in all kinds of, put them in safaris, we put them by the tire of the car and put them everywhere. But I think the photography and the ease of photography, even little Canons in a plastic housing take wonderful pictures. I think that is making diving grow again, and making diving in the world more aware of the environment and what is in there. And what's not in there. Because also you're seeing people showing pictures of places where the coral has died, or some big anchor dragging through the coral, or, so I think it's making people aware of underwater. I love to take pictures. I still love to take my camera and everybody's taking pictures. But you can always do it better. You know. No matter what the picture is, it could've been better lit or something. Any picture I've taken I always like to take it again. It could've been better lit, or better framed. There's always a way to make it better or more interesting or longer or shorter or something, bluer or greener.

Paul: With the switch to digital cameras do you feel like you lost some of the maybe techniques, or were the quality of pictures down, or was the switch...

Chuck: There's so much competition. I have friends that are trying to be in the magazine business, like, what are you doing? Nobody's watching magazines. I mean, they are but it's growing smaller and smaller. And there's people, I have a lot of friends that have a lot of money and have a lot of fancy cameras and can travel anywhere in the world and they do and they take pictures that are so fantastic that the competition it's unbelievable. And a lot of these people that are great photographers with a great budget and great equipment and everything they don't care if they get any money for their pictures. You know, the competition is that you are competing against somebody that just wants to have the name under their picture on a magazine or on the TV. So it is really tough. A lot of my friends that have been in the magazine photography, still photography business had to give it up, you know.

Paul: Even in the film business. Actually film you can take the go Pro and do some amazing stuff.

Chuck: But, I loved being in the diving business. And the people I've met and the places I've been are so much different than if I had been a professional tennis player or something. I mean, it's a different thing. I go to places, I've been to places where other people would never go, and I don't know. Anyway.

Paul: I was thinking if you stayed at the grocery business and went with it for a while

Chuck: I went to the store at 604 88th St. at about if you know National and Ocean View and that area, 38th St. it is a tough area. And I went there with a buddy in his truck because I wouldn't take my little Mercedes and we went to look, and the store is still there. And I took a picture of it, and it just changed hands. So I've got a picture of it with signs plastered all over it and then the new guys got it and he's cleaned it up, but in both pictures it still says Chuck's Market at the top.

For the rest of Chuck Nicklin's story go to his book "CAMERA MAN" soon to be released on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).