

Commander's Palace

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Water, water everywhere,
and all the boards did shrink;
Water, water everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

(Thank you, Mr. Coleridge)

You may talk o' gin and beer
When you're quartered safe out 'ere,
An' you're sent to penny fights and 'aldershot it;
But when it comes to slaughter,
You will do your work on water
An' you'll lick the bloomin' boots of 'im that's got it.

(Thank you, Mr. Kipling)

The subject of my essay tonight wrote the following words:

"Two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen. Water. The commonest, most abundant substance on the earth, yet how rare this liquid is in the rest of the solar system.

The sea, the great unifier, is man's only hope. Now, as never before the old phrase has a literal meaning: We are all in the same boat. That boat is the spaceship earth, a blue jewel glowing in the night of space, radiant and shining with the fluid of life--the all-encompassing sea."

The thought of writing about this man came to me in June of last year as I was walking in the morning in Paris. All of the flags were at half mast. A country mourned the loss of a native son. As I passed the Notre Dame Cathedral, the street was cordoned off and preparations were being made for a state funeral. A large contingent of French Navy personnel in dress blues and white gloves were gathering off to one side of the church. On the other side, dignitaries were arriving and forming a group. For days, the front page of the papers featured him. One headline read, "Adieu Commandant". He was the commander and his palace was the sea.

Jacques Cousteau, the man in the red wool cap, the underwater explorer, the filmmaker, the ecologist -- had been perennially voted the most popular man in France. My favorite notice of his death in this country was headed, "Everybody's Favorite Frenchman Dies".

He was born June 11, 1910, in a small town near Bordeaux. A sickly child, he learned to swim early for exercise. His first dive was in Lake Harvey, Vermont, in the summer of 1920. He was on vacation from New York City, where he and his parents lived briefly.

In 1930, Cousteau passed the highly competitive entrance examination to enter France's Naval Academy. He served in the navy and entered naval aviation school. A near-fatal car crash at age 26 denied him his wings, and he was transferred to sea duty, where he swam vigorously to strengthen badly weakened arms.

"Sometimes we are lucky enough to know that our lives have been changed," he wrote, "and to discard the old, embrace the new, and turn headlong down an immutable course." He added, "it happened to me...on that summer's day, when my eyes were opened to the world beneath the surface of the sea."

Cousteau began experimenting with diving. To see more, dive deeper and stay longer, he fashioned masks from inner tubes and snorkels from garden hoses. He and Emile Gagnan worked on a breathing regulator that led to the Aqualung or SCUBA (self contained underwater breathing apparatus). Their invention in 1943 would open the world under the sea for Cousteau and countless others.

His career as a naval officer had been put on hold from the time of the French fleet being scuttled at Toulon to the end of the war. Recalled to active duty, Cousteau convinced his superiors that the scuba gear would prove useful in removing mines along the coastline. He and his crew removed live torpedoes from sunken submarines and marked on navigational charts the location of mines that none of them knew how to disarm at the time. Other mines were located and exploded.

He received permission from his unit to film submarine maneuvers. The result was a short documentary giving a whole new point of view of underwater activities. Torpedoes were shown being shot from the submarine and gliding through the water toward the target. The project allowed the team to test emergency evacuation of a submarine by aqualung. Diving and filming would remain a lifelong passion of Cousteau.

Throughout 1948, Cousteau searched for a boat of his own. What he wanted was a floating laboratory and diving platform that would serve his needs and aspirations.

His reputation began to spread and he met Claude-Frances Boeuf, a brilliant oceanographer with the La Rochelle Laboratory on the Atlantic coast and Jacques Bourcart, who had surveyed the Toulon trench. They in turn brought him in contact with other scientists.

Cousteau knew what kind of ship would make the best research vessel: a minesweeper. In the course of its duties, a minesweeper is expected to be

subject to occasional underwater explosions, so they are generally well built. They are usually easy to handle and they have a shallow draft that is ideal for maneuvering in and out of waterways or bobbing above knife-sharp coral reefs.

Thomas Loél Guinness, a wealthy Englishman, a former member of Parliament, and an old salt pointed Cousteau toward Malta. There in a harbor full of surplus ships, he found the Calypso. It was both a surplus minesweeper and working car ferry. She had been built in 1942 under the lend-lease program and gone to war as a Royal Navy minesweeper. Guinness, as a silent benefactor, financed the purchase and never asked for payment. The sales contract was signed July 19, 1950, five weeks after Cousteau's fortieth birthday.

Acquiring the Calypso signaled the beginning of a voyage of discovery that would last for the rest of his life. Everything to this point seems part of a prelude for the things to come. Because of the years involved, I hope to focus on what I believe to be the highlights of Cousteau's life. We will try to get to know the man as well as his work.

The fifties would remain his most thrilling decade -- the intoxicating years when his ocean discoveries included so many "firsts". He quickly learned the twin arts of organizing enthusiasm and raising money. "We must go and see for ourselves" became a collective credo of all involved. There was almost a fanatical insistence that human beings belong in the sea, that to understand our watery planet, we must dive into it.

~~Early on, a nonprofit organization Compagnies Oceanographiques Francaises (COF) was formed to commission, manage and administer the finances of the Calypso's future expeditions.~~ As Cousteau dove to find ancient shipwrecks off of Marseilles to continue the funding he desperately needed, he continued to court the National Geographic Society. In September of 1952,

the sponsorship of the prestigious American society made the backing of the French Navy, Ministry of Education and Academy of Science fall into place.

Cousteau learned that in between carefully planned expeditions the need to raise money would bring a wide variety of different voyages for the Calypso. Sunken ships such as a Roman freighter that went down in 230 B.C. off the coast of Marseilles is one example. The cargo proved to be thousands of wine amphoras, or two-handed storage jars. Cousteau learned early not to miss a good photo opportunity. He called television and press reporters to witness the opening of one jar. With Gallic aplomb, he sipped the twenty-one hundred-year-old vintage, spit it out, and announced, "That was a bad century."

Cousteau was obsessed with diving into the virgin depths below the aqualung threshold. While in the Red Sea, he had toyed with the idea of a one or two-man craft. In the Calypso mess one day, he had picked up two soup plates and paced them rim against rim. The ideal shape would probably be a kind of diving saucer, resistant to pressure, easily maneuverable, and small enough to be carried aboard the Calypso. One or two men would ^{LIE} ~~lie~~ flat on their stomachs and see through a pair of portholes. Pumps delivering seawater to strategically placed jets would deliver the power. A group of investors in Marseilles agreed to build a prototype for him.

From the logs he had kept for the past fifteen years, he wrote with Frederic Dumas, "The Silent World." It was published in 1953. The book begins with the first dive made by Cousteau with the new aqualung in June, 1943. His two companions that day had been diving with him for the past eight years using sea goggles. Frederick Dumas and Philippe Tailliez would remain life-long friends.

The photos in "The Silent World" start in black and white--and then change to color. It graphically illustrates the improvements made in color-

corrected flash-photo technique below the surface of the ocean. The flash used at that early time would light up a six-foot radius to make the color photograph. Beyond that range, you would see this mono-chromatic blue of the twilight world that the world had to settle for before 1948.

Cousteau and Dumas first experienced color in that year by taking below an electric lamp as powerful as a movie sunlight, with a cord to the surface. They dove to one hundred and sixty feet down. A reflector was trained on a coral reef. Then the light was snapped on -- dazzling color appeared.

It set Cousteau and his team off in a technical drive to make color photography in the blue zone that begins roughly one hundred and fifty feet down. Originally, he did not dive to make movies. Movies were made to record dives. Now with color, it would take years for the Cousteau teams to blueprint, systems engineer, manufacture, and train themselves to use reliable underwater lighting equipment.

The chief geologist of British Petroleum read "Silent World". He wondered whether men diving in aqualungs could be used in oil prospecting. Oceanography was put on hold as Cousteau set sail under his first contract to find oil. A young twenty year old cameraman was recruited to go along. Louis Malle was fresh out of film school and knew how to scubadive.

British Petroleum had a 12,000 square mile oil concession off Abu Dhabi. The Calypso dropped anchor four hundred times and rock samples were flown to London for analysis. An oil find offshore of huge proportions would develop. At this time, Cousteau simply needed the money. There is a note of irony here that when his social consciousness turns to the major polluters of the ocean, the oil companies are high on the list.

On the return trip from the oil exploration, notice was received that the French Ministry of National Education had agreed to underwrite a major part

of future explorations and that the Calypso was now the official oceanographic ship of France.

In March of 1955, the Calypso left on a four month 22,000 kilometer voyage. Louis Malle and others had developed cameras that would record some of the most dazzling underwater footage ever seen. It would be a breakthrough voyage. A world of fish that had never seen man as well as extravagant hues and visual poetry were filmed by Louis Malle.

Counting the film from the Abu Dhabi and Indian Ocean trip, Cousteau had thirty kilometers of film with which to fashion a full-length documentary. He wanted a film that not only overwhelmed its audience with footage of undersea wonders but also showed how such images were obtained. Malle wanted to stretch the viewer's mind with true other-world type poetry. Cousteau decided the credit for direction should be shared with Malle. "Le Monde du Silence" stunned its first audience at the Cannes Film Festival. It was an immediate, lasting, and worldwide success. "The Silent World" won the Oscar for the best documentary.

Cousteau was a naval officer for twenty-seven years. His wife, Simone, was the daughter of three generations of navy men. He sensed his growing reputation was also resented. His ideas were turning toward a kind of oceanic frontier. "The Silent World" had made Cousteau a household name, it had made scuba diving the new sports fad. He resigned from the navy with the rank of Captain.

New opportunity almost came immediately. Monaco's Prince Rainier, who had just married Grace Kelly, offered to make him director of his country's venerable Oceanographic Institute. He accepted the position and immediately plunged into controversy. The French army had decided to try dumping nuclear waste in the Mediterranean.

Raymond Vaissière, a biologist at the Oceanographic Institute, said later in the mid-1980's, "You won't find the word 'pollution' in regard to the marine environment before 1960 -- just as the word 'ecologist' really doesn't exist before 1970." For Cousteau, the antipollution fight began here. He demanded a ten-year moratorium on dumping nuclear waste in the Mediterranean. He said, "What becomes of this talk of 'limitless resources' and 'mankind's last dependence' if we are now spoiling the sea forever?" Vaissière, who would later replace Cousteau as Director of the Institute, went on to say, "Here comes the foremost promoter of exploring the deep to say man was perhaps mismanaging the oceans". The French reconsidered their plans.

In 1961, President Kennedy presented the National Geographic Society's gold medal to Cousteau. The medal inscription eloquently paid tribute to him, "To earthbound man he gave the key to the silent world". Cousteau in accepting it included his crew, and his friends at National Geographic, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, and MIT.

There is a curious mixture of irritation and contempt ^{FOR} among scientists who become popular stars. It is true that Cousteau was not a trained scientist. He explored the ocean. He invented and discovered things. He lead scientists to perform feats of scientific discovery. He stepped on many scientific toes.

If you add in the non-scientific attributes of Jacques Cousteau it is easy to see why. He had a touch of P. T. Barnum, Walt Disney, and Ted Turner in him. He promoted, commercialized, and sold what he did. He wanted exposure and sought it. This is how he brought his product, exploration of the sea, to the attention of millions.

Jacques Cousteau and Carl Sagan suffered peer scorn and studied ostracism because they made television series about the oceans and the universe. The Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Jolla, California, would

not let Cousteau near its labs and classrooms lest he corrupt young scholars with his showbusiness ways. Carl Sagan was a scientist and despite diligent service on seven of the National Academy of Science panels and committees, there was reluctance to invite him to join. Both had been dismissed by others as mere popularizers. All they did was engender popular enthusiasm for science.

~~Cousteau lacked scientific training. He started out to be a pilot and became a naval officer. He was a seaman. But~~ Unlike Carl Sagan and his exploration of the universe, Cousteau could explore the oceans by going directly into them. He liked to call himself an oceanographic technician.

It was through long head to head negotiations between Cousteau, his television producers, and the three major networks that the television series emerged. The contract Cousteau signed with David Wolper Productions and ABC for twelve hour-long television films changed everything. The deal made possible the most ambitious multiyear expedition to all the worlds oceans. "The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau" would be made up of individual sixty-minute true stories as nature adventures. Each segment would relate to an oceanographic problem, or challenge, and the story line would tell how the issue was solved. There were options for additional episodes beyond the four-a-year run of the three-year contract through 1970.

The Calypso was to undergo major refitting and remodeling. There would be early attempts of trial and error, experimentation, and wasted effort as Cousteau embarked on filming the television series. In the early times, it was an emotional roller coaster of despair and hope. Cousteau said, "We can spend three months waiting on Calypso, unable to do any work, and then suddenly the weather turns perfect, the animals are there and the film can be picked up in twenty-four hours."

The ratio of editing the voluminous footage of film taken into exciting television fare was often seventy to one of exposed negative to final cut. Cousteau was very protective of his image and aware of the film editor's ability to improve audience understanding and to shape the final product.

The series would bring changes in perception of whales -- from seeing them as monsters to seeing them as gentle giants. Cousteau wondered about the spark in the eyes of dolphins and "the keen look, both melancholy and mischievous". It was so different from the fixed icy stare of the shark. His stories showed encounters with great groupers, and enchantingly curious octopuses. The viewer met gentle morays, and were inspected by penguins and squids. The manta ray is pictured as an object of admiration, as anyone who has "been lucky enough to see one in flight: can testify. "We explored shipwrecks, felt the icy bite of Antarctic winds, and cruised in exotic inner-space craft into deep, dark seas flashing with swimming stars.

Whether fiction or documentary, prime-time television thrives on subjects that can be shaped into morality plays. Ideas become dynamic when they are turned into emotion -- confrontation, affection. A Cousteau television hour became a slice of aquatic life with the dull bits cut out, factual observations structured into information that will astonish, amuse, and possibly influence.

Cousteau felt the oceans were sick through overall mismanagement, but ignorance was the first cause. Education was one solution. With *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* -- he could reach 40 million people in one night. Television was a largely passive means of persuasion. He felt the times called out for persuasive activism.

The Cousteau Society was founded in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1974. It was dedicated "to the protection of life". Within a year, it had 120,000

members. Cousteau began to fight energy policies that he felt polluted the oceans and the system that fostered such ideas.

The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau series was cancelled by ABC in 1976. It had been a great run for eight seasons. For millions of people who saw the ocean through the porthole of television, the voice of the sea had a soft French accent.

The ABC broadcasts focused on colorful animals and dramatic adventures. His later efforts on PBS dwelled more on problems; environmental disasters; lost cultures; human tragedy. His wave of successful film-making and story-telling had crested. The popularity of Cousteau personally would continue until he died but the reasons for it would be based largely on his earlier achievements.

With the loss of his son, Phillippe, in 1979, he lost not only his successor, but in many ways, his focus on the things that had brought him success. Future films were made ^{BUT} ~~but~~ they proved to be uneven and his viewing audience declined.

We have seen others take to the television stage such as Dr. Robert Ballard. Trained as a geologist and chemist, he mapped the uncharted mountain ranges of the ocean floor. Working out of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and funded by the U.S. Navy, Ballard and his crew located the sunken H.M.S. Titanic two miles beneath the Atlantic in 1985. He works within his disciplines and specifically with deep submersible projects. New technology has greatly assisted his discoveries in this area.

The range of interest and curiosity of Cousteau was amazing by comparison. You could say he started from scratch. He invented apparatus he needed; developed cameras and lighting equipment; and took one first step after another in exploration of the ocean. His 60 year odyssey with the sea was a great adventure for all of us. He was able to communicate with millions

of people and bring the mystery and beauty of the oceans into their personal lives. Cousteau helped awaken the awareness of people all over the world that the ocean is a treasure to be protected and preserved.

The late John Denver wrote a song entitled "Calypso". Some lines from it are:

To sail on a dream on a crystal clear ocean,
To ride on the crest of the wild raging storm,
To work in the service of life and the living,
In search of the answer to questions unknown.

For though we are strangers in your silent world,
To live on the land we must learn from the sea.

Thank you, Mr. Cousteau.