

wilderness.



Fabien Cousteau

A legacy
of exploration

Photo credit
Joe Pugliese
AUGUST IMAGE



When carrying on a family legacy, you can either recreate the past or mine your heritage for new inspiration. You can take it farther. Fabien, grandson of Jacques, is a modern day explorer with his family's characteristic love of the deep. He has expanded on his family's past, translating the mysteries of the ocean in new ways to share it with a new world. He wants us all to fall in love with our seas as wildly as his grandfather did. He wants us to see what they see. He wants to spread his obsession.

*Forward and Interview
by Steve Dubbeldam*

Story photos courtesy of the Fabien Cousteau Project

SD *How has your commitment to relentlessly exploring the ocean really pushed you to grow on a personal level?*

FC I think it's something that I always grew up with and something I'm addicted to, learning about the unknown. Being able to share that with others, that's a reward and it makes me grow as a person because it allows me to understand not only the natural world but also the human world that I may not be exposed to on a daily basis. It makes me want to encourage others who can take the time and the resources to be able to step out of their comfort zone, to do the same.

How important has perseverance been in your work?

The greater the endeavor, the more difficult the mission, obviously the more preparation there is, the more difficult the fundraising aspects are. If anything, as a Cousteau, it's probably even more difficult to get funds because people see or expect certain things. They don't realize we're normal people like everybody else. But that said, the rewards really outweigh or make everything worth it.

So, those challenges sometimes even feel even greater than if my last name were just Smith.

Legacy and heritage are obviously big powerful themes in life and especially I think, in a man's life. What's your perspective on how to honor your family heritage but also kind of create your own path?

I could have been pressured into the family business, so to speak. I wasn't. I chose it of my own free will. As a matter of fact, if anything, we explored things as kids beyond what our family does to see if there was not something else that might interest us. I thought that was a really enlightened way to grow up. There was never pressure to fall in the footsteps but there was certainly a sense of responsibility. I certainly have a philosophy and a messaging and a desire that's very much in mind. But at the end of the day, it's still the same philosophy.

What would you say is the hardest or most challenging thing that you've done to date?

I think not comparing, it's easy because a lot of people unintentionally do this but not comparing myself to

the past, to achievements of past generations. I think that's probably the most difficult in the sense that it's a natural part of life to want to compare what it's like when growing up and comparing everyone else. At the end of the day, it's very self-impedes. It brings you down and sometimes it could even kill your enthusiasm because there's no comparing anyone to a pioneer, especially like my grandpa who was a pioneer and a trailblazer. You can only build from there if you're going to do the same thing.

Aside from that, the most difficult thing, it's really, at the end of the day, and it's not so much captivating people because people have imagination. People have a desire to be part of or virtually be part of adventures. It's really more about finding support, support for these adventures because it's financial. It's very different than my grandfather's day. So for us, it really is finding that support in admittedly very costly projects.

Sometimes, they always want a tangible result in a nature adventure and you don't know what you're going to find. But to quote my grandfather on this: "If I knew what I was going to find, I wouldn't go because it wouldn't be adventure."

Well, I think that everything's worth a try and worth exploring if it's a valid idea. I don't take obstacles into consideration in a sense that if I really truly believe that it's a valid platform for exploration and I'm learning about science and all that, then we have to try it because just because nobody else has done it, doesn't mean that it's not valid. Just because people say it's impossible does not mean that it's not going to succeed. If you're truly an explorer, then that's the daily rhetoric around you, is people saying stuff like that. That's why you're an adventurer. That's why you're an explorer. That's why you push beyond the boundaries of the comfortable and the known. The shark submarines are a perfect example. The fact that our prototype, which wasn't even really supposed to be out in the ocean, ended up getting us shark behavior, and getting us footage that had never been seen before and stuff like that. That was exactly the kind of validation that we needed.

Which qualities of the ocean itself do you relate to the most and why?

To me, the ocean is a home. It's that sense that we all feel when we get back into our neighborhood, when we look at our house; it's just a fundamental comfort



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Particularly with ocean exploration, when you're going out to raise support, is there a sense of people saying, "Haven't we done a lot of that already?"

Oh, always. There's always that comment of, "Oh, haven't we explored everything in the ocean already?" I laugh because it's like saying, "Haven't we explored space already?" We've sent a couple satellites up and we sent a couple probes to Mars, so we probably know everything we need to know about space, right? Well, today, as far as our planet's concerned, the ocean is kind of the final frontier. We have a whole lot left to discover. Once you get people to understand that there really is a lot left and it's worth the dollars and sense and it's the final frontier, so to speak, do it. It's of course the proverbial cancer curing agents waiting to be discovered. There's a lot of reasons why we should keep exploring.

A lot of your projects are marked by innovation; you designed Troy, a filming submarine disguised as a shark. You also found a way to live 31 days under water in a research station. What helps you validate whether an idea could move into reality?

of security, of peace, of bliss. You know, just sort of a deep soulful feeling of, "Wow, I'm home." The mystery, that's the exciting part, but I have some very little renaissance or actually no renaissance when I think about it of going into the water because to me, immersing myself back in that environment is always a sense of peace and well-being and of connection with the rest of the planet.

That's fascinating. Most people would probably answer that very differently, you know? Often it represents fear of the unknown because they don't understand it.

That's a natural behavior for human beings. The unknown is always something that's scary but to me, the unknown is exciting, it's comforting. I think the status quo, the routine for me is probably the least comforting thing. I get very antsy and I don't like routine for the rest of my life.

Do you think space exploration and ocean exploration are the last bastions of exploration?

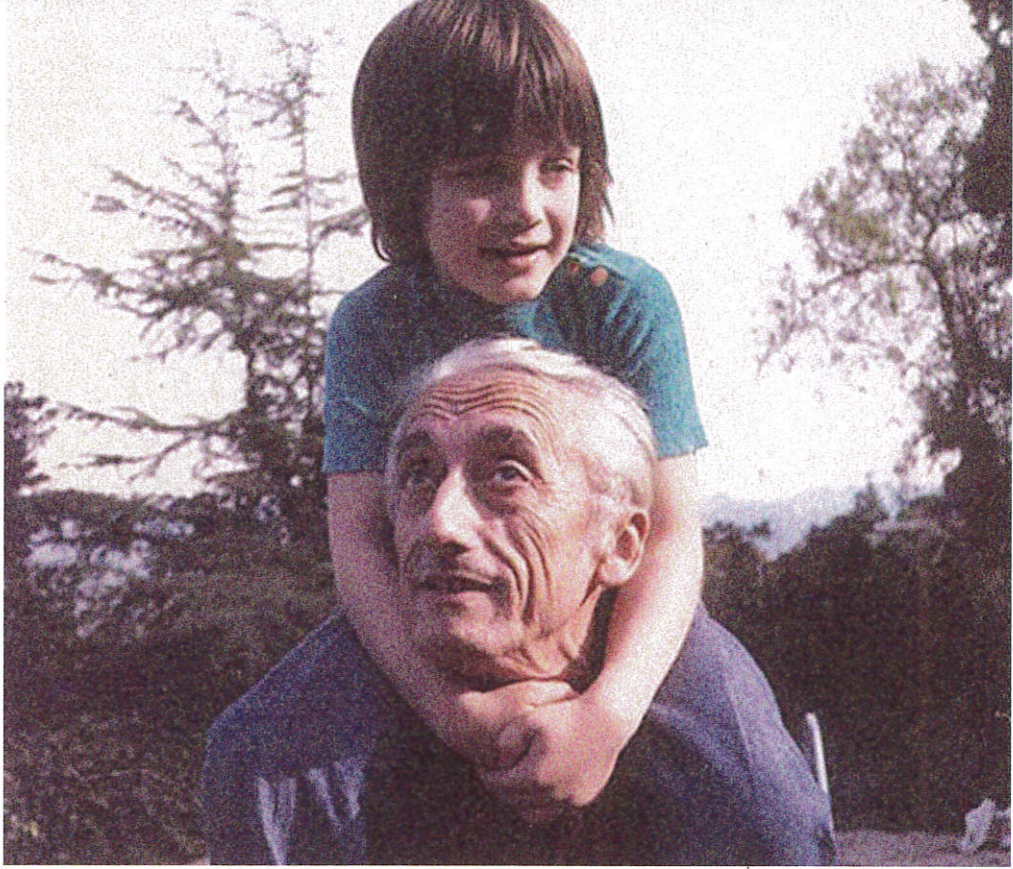
I mean neuroscience is another kind of exploration. As far as the physical world, the physical universe,



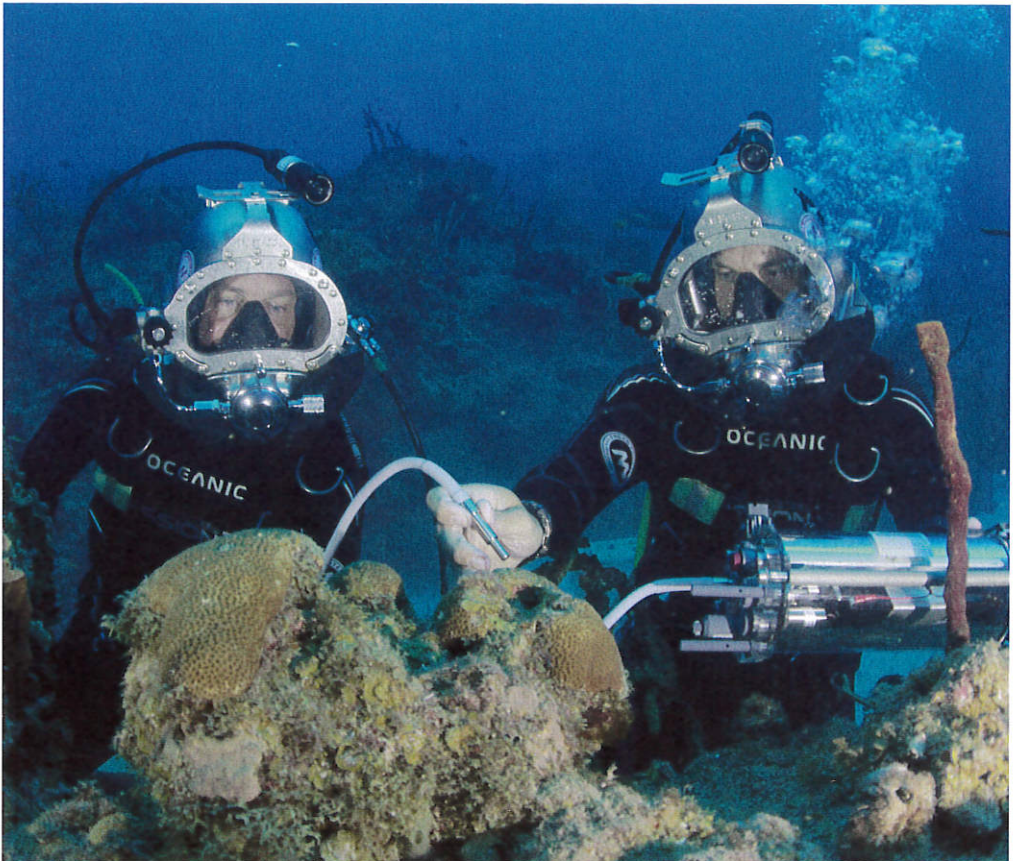
Mission 31
Capsule
Deep Atlantic



Troy the shark
submarine



Fabien and his
Grandfather
Jacques Cousteau



Fabien and
a colleague
studying coral

space and ocean exploration certainly are still full of mystery. Space exploration as a rule is certainly comparatively more vast, comparatively more difficult to get to, but the ocean is certainly there for us to explore. We have the technology; we have the ability to explore the ocean. Have we done so is a different story and unfortunately we've explored less than 5 percent of our ocean to date.

Even to me, that's pretty shocking. At the same time, it excites me because it allows for the understanding that it's going to give us jobs for the next several generations. Ninety-nine percent of our world's living space is the ocean. In the United States, we spend more than 100 times more on space exploration than we do in ocean exploration. I think in many countries the disparity is even greater.

What surprising things did you learn about yourself when you spent 31 days living underwater?

The best part of the experience was I didn't want to leave. It really felt like home. I mean, yeah. It was small and cramped and we were on top of each other but the house, the habitat itself was just a staging ground for us to sleep and eat and then most of the

Tell me a little bit about the next project you're the most passionate about.

I have another shark documentary project which I can't really talk about yet. And a few projects where we're looking at places in different parts of the world that just haven't been explored the way they should be. Beyond the documentaries, I decided to open up a platform called The Ocean Learning Center where the knowledge that we accumulate with our fellow scientists and so on and so forth needs to be shared in several modern ways. The Ocean Learning Center has three buckets of engagement which we call: see, learn and do. So, we have the education components, which would be available online through Board of Education certified packets to be sent to educators interested. The second bucket is the do, which is piggy-backing on the education portion by actually going out there and engaging communities, schools, kids, adults, fishermen, etc, to go and do aquatic restoration, whether it's planting mangroves or releasing sea turtles. The third one is special projects. Special projects goes into the more audio visual stimulations that have to do with the ocean that are engaging in a visual way.



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time we spent outside, anywhere from eight to 12 hours of diving every single day.

The freedom of time was really kind of the biggest luxury and probably one of the happiest thing about it. It made all the challenges worth it, you know? Between the training and the boo-boos, everything else, the pressure, the nitrous effect the whole time which made us lose our sense of smell, which is a good thing because the food was terrible.

One of the things that people don't know is when you're in a habitat and you're having a problem outside diving your only recourse, if, is to get back to the habitat. You can't go to the surface because of decompression sickness and in this case, it would be extreme cases of problems, including eventual paralysis and death. You really had to be comfortable with living underwater and knowing what to do.

So, it was like staying in the international space station in a way. For me personally, I could have stayed down there another month. I was perfectly happy.

In your own words, can you define character?

Well, I guess in a sense, character is having enough self-awareness to be comfortable with who you are and what you do and the perseverance to execute that. Someone who is comfortable with themselves and what they believe in is not afraid to share that in a respectful way and to go forward with that philosophy to execute whatever their mission is. That mission could be being a good father. That mission could be anything but I guess what I'm saying is it also falls kind of in the realm of the chivalry code.

Having strong or good character is an essential part of being a knight of the round table. You protect others. You respect others. You carry out your mission.