

“We found that the water is dead, the life is gone.” J-Y. Cousteau

# Jacques-Yves Cousteau:

# 100 Years

: JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU

JUNE 11, 2010 MARKS THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF JACQUES-YVES COUSTEAU, MY FATHER, AND THE MAN WHOSE VISION OF THE WORLD CHANGED HOW WE SAW IT AS WELL. HIS INVENTION OF THE AQUALUNG OR SCUBA WITH EMILE GAGNAN IN 1943, COMBINED WITH THE APOLLO 8 IMAGES OF THE EARTH FROM SPACE 25 YEARS LATER, FOREVER ESTABLISHED OUR WORLD AS THE WATER PLANET.

From space we saw a world swirling and alive with oceans and atmosphere. At 30 feet below the surface of the sea, we also saw a world swirling with life we had never imagined. The personal access we acquired with the Aqualung and the subsequent inventions and films my father created made the ocean not only accessible, but also personal. He always hoped that close contact would also create an ethic in those who entered this kingdom of wonder and that they would protect it.

The more I look back on my father and his legacy, the more I realize how much he is still a part of our times and how, had we listened more carefully, things might be different.

It's true that he was a pioneer who broke barriers with his inventions, like SCUBA and underwater cameras, but he was also a visionary in the sense that he understood the consequences of the trends he was witnessing. He foresaw the risks of nuclear technology and waste; he projected the devastating results of over fishing, overexploitation of habitat,



and global warming; and he spoke consistently and passionately about population growth and the strain on the natural system.

Jacques Cousteau, along with my brother and I and Fred Hyman, founded one of the earliest environmental organizations to communicate the issues we were encountering and to educate an international audience. He wrote the draft of “The Rights of Future Generations” for the United Nations as a vehicle to embody the principle of sustainability in responsible resource management of all the world's natural resources. He constantly exercised his brilliant intellect in the service of global solutions. He never stopped until, in his words, he was “unplugged.” Although he claimed to have a “stainless faith” in mankind, his view of the future became darker, not because he was aging, but because the world was not changing fast enough.

He wielded another power that is rare—he poetically made sense of the incomprehensible and gave us each a way of looking at the world that made action possible. For example, on an isolated riverbank in the Amazon, just as we had released a rescued sea otter named Cacha to the wild, my father turned to me, full of emotion, and said, “Jean-Michel, people protect what they love.” That became for me a motto of my father's work and an emblem of the commitment we all must make to the world that surrounds us.

But his personal evolution is almost a model of where we stand now, in the midst of crisis and changing with the times. From the first global environmental rally in Rio de Janeiro, where my father was honored, to the endless meetings of Johannesburg, Kyoto, and now Copenhagen, the environment has been discussed and then filed away. These meetings suggest that as a species, we are not good at anticipating, but a crisis motivates us and we are now surrounded by crisis. The difference with the meetings in Copenhagen is that the entire world is now engaged, not just bureaucrats and politicians, and there are real, workable solutions on the way. It is the crisis my father saw coming but never lived to experience, including the changes we must now undergo, and quickly.

Jacques Cousteau realized, as we do now, that while we should want to protect the natural system, it comes down to protecting ourselves. He summed up much of his illustrious career by saying “In teaching people to love the sea, I learned to love

## SOME UNDERSEA FIRSTS OF JACQUES-YVES COUSTEAU AND HIS TEAM:

- 1943: Invention of the Aqualung, or SCUBA, with Emile Gagnan.
- 1948: Development of the first underwater scooter for French Navy combat divers.
- 1949: World's first decompression chamber for simulated dives to 200 metres.
- 1950: Acquisition of *Calypso*
- 1953: Creation of the French Office of Undersea Research
- 1955: Construction of first underwater 35mm camera, named *Calypso Phot*, predecessor of the Nikonos.
- 1957: First undersea television broadcast off Marseille, transmitted throughout Europe.
- 1959: Completion of the first two-man diving saucer, capable of depths to 350 metres.
- 1960: Construction of an inflatable airborne 20-metre boat with Zodiac.
- 1962: Conshelf I experiment with two men living 10 days at 10 metres and working down to 25 metres off Marseille.
- 1963: Conshelf II experiment in the Red Sea with six men living one month at 10 metres with two men in the other shelter for one week at 25 metres, working down to 70 metres.
- 1965: Conshelf III off Nice with six men for 27 days at 100 metres, working down to 120 metres.
- 1966: Construction of diving saucer *Cyana* to work at 3,000 metres for French company COMEX.
- 1967: Construction of first integrated 16mm underwater camera and first trials with a hot-air balloon for filming.
- 1968: First application of currentmeters to measure aquatic radioactive pollution from nuclear plant in Spain.
- 1979-83: Research and construction of Sea Spider sensors to measure sea-surface temperatures.
- 1980: Research begins on new wind-propulsion system for commercial application with Professor Lucien Malavard and Bertrand Charrier
- 1982-85: Construction and sea trials of prototype turbosail system with *Moulin a Vent* and construction of *Alcyone*.

people.” The global response to the tragedy in Haiti is testimony to our honoring the fundamental connections we all share that my father felt and to our communications revolution.

And, while fascinated with history, my father was an impatient man and looked ahead, anxious to influence the future. On the deck of our wind ship, *Alcyone*, he presented me with an honor and with a challenge, which belongs not only to me but to all of us who want to be part of a future that matters. He said, “And it is you, Jean-Michel, who will carry the flame of my faith.” It is the flame of this brilliant, charismatic, impassioned man that continues to bring us illumination and direction at a time when we continue to need it.

Jacques Cousteau understood all too well the challenges we would face and they often disturbed and concerned him. Sometimes, after a serious moment, his entire face would light up and he would laugh and remind me, “Ah, but Jean-Michel, the impossible missions are the only ones which succeed!” The world is better for the fact that he led and succeeded at many such missions.



From left -

- Jean-Michel listens intently to his father Jacques Cousteau as he gives a briefing on the next dive site.
- The co-inventors of the demand valve that led to the Aqualung system – engineer Émile Gagnan and Jacques-Yves Cousteau. Photo by Berni Campoli
- Jean-Michel Cousteau, standing in the Amazon expedition's river raft *Pirarucu* confers with his father Jacques Cousteau, diver Bertrand Sion, and Paul Martin, *Calypso* engineer. Photo Private Collection
- Jacques Cousteau and Jean-Michel Cousteau onboard the windship *Alcyone* at the end of her maiden voyage, shortly before she arrived in New York City. Jacques charges Jean-Michel “to carry the flame of my faith.” Photo Private Collection
- The expedition vehicle *Jacare* and the Amazon River behind a group of *Txukahameis* (choo-kah-HAHM-eyes) people who befriended members of the *Calypso* team, and were impressed by ‘the truck that swims.’ Photo Private Collection