

Kenneth Byron Hipp, Jr.

August 26, 1971 - June 8, 2000

Byron was at sea for over 200 days each of the last two years of his life. He worked for Cal Dive International as a commercial diver in the Gulf of Mexico. Beginning on January 16, 1999, and continuing until two weeks before his death on June 8, 2000, Byron kept a journal while he was working offshore. The journal contains descriptions of his work, his observations of the natural beauty that surrounded him, and his feelings about life and God, family and friends. We -- his parents, Ann and Ken Hipp, and his brother Andrew -- would like to share some of the things he wrote about his work and love of diving, some of his thoughts and observations of nature, and some of his spiritual thoughts and hopes for the future. There were many pages of entries; the ones that follow are just a few of them. At the end of the journal entries, we have included a list Byron had tacked next to his computer. We call it "Byron's List." It shows his spirit of adventure, intellectual curiosity, love of nature, and especially his love of diving.

### Byron's Work and Love of Diving

This is from the first entry in the journal: "January 16, 1999. Lying on my bunk aboard the Cal-Diver Barge, I am tired beyond words. Spent the last twelve hours salvaging a forty foot shrimp boat that was sunk four miles south of Galveston. Shrimp boat broke suction & surfaced. Much easier. Lids heavy. Feeling weak, I sleep."

All of the remaining entries that we will read are taken from the last six months of his life. The following were written between February 20 and March 1 while he was working aboard the Horizon barge "Brazos."

February 27 – "Today marked a return to the norm: running around keeping the dive crew going for 12 hours. It was nice to get back to serious work. The time passes much more quickly. The sky was clear and the winds light. I was able to follow Ursa Major as it made its clockwise journey around Polaris. Every now and again I would face the Southwest and think, 'Somewhere that away is home.' At about hour 111 began to think about this journal entry and how mundane it would seem. I started to plan what I would write when I was called into the dive shack. The supervisors informed me I would be making a dive. Oh what joy I felt knowing I would soon be down working in the place I love. Further good news came minutes later. I was going to be given the riser-clamp closing dive. I have never done this work in the field before so I was a little nervous. I went to the bottom, took depth measurements, put rubber between pipe crossings, came up to the 38' clamp, and had it impacted in minutes. The super wanted me to try his technique for the upper clamp. I was confused and while changing bolts I let the impact drift away on its lift-buckets. I went to grab it and found it was gone. They say you are only as good as your last bad dive, so I suppose I should feel ashamed, but instead I feel elated at the chance to learn new skills, even if I had to learn them the hard way."

February 28~ "Today was very eventful and I am glad to have much news to report  
The temperature dropped into the upper 40's last night but I was too busy to be cold.  
D We fixed the communication system in the dive shack within the first couple of hours.  
Then I dove on the jet sled, a beast of a machine the size of a Mack truck. It drags 400 feet behind our barge, straddles the pipeline, and pumps out high-pressure water that

digs a ditch 5' deep for the pipe to sit in. As I approached the noise was deafening, and I couldn't hear the supervisor. Further, the mud churned up made for no visibility. Good thing I memorized what I was to do. I ran out, checked the sled, went 200' beyond the sled making sure the pipe was in the ditch, and ran back in 18 minutes. When I came up the supervisor told me I would do it again in two hours. The second time took only 15 minutes. I hope to break 10 before I leave the barge in 2-3 weeks."

March 1—"Hipp headquarters has moved. I guess someone finally heard all of the complaints we made about the hole that we were living in before. I had all of the necessities in the old room, but most of the tenders did not. Now everyone should be happy, especially since we gave the other shift the bottom bunks. Some great kindnesses were done for me during my shift today. I made two dives on the jet sled even though the divers had to stay up extra hours to wait until their dives. Also my communications went out during the first dive and my supervisor gave me a new speaker. This would have cost me 30 dollars on the beach and is priceless out here. Yet and still, he would not take any money for it. A diver and friend Kevin then helped me solder and shrink wrap my old speakers with brand new wire so now I even have one extra speaker. I was given time to do this during shift, but when my second dive came up my hat was not ready. Kevin let me dive his hat and even finished fixing my speakers while I was in the water. A nice guy and a true friend."

February 20 - 'Today went much better than yesterday despite worsening conditions. We set up on the lee side of the barge and kept dry most of the shift. The hot water machine pump was in the water on the windward side. Waves still at 6~ feet smashed the pump until it broke. A diver was down and started to freeze so I got soaked trying to fix it in all the waves. There was no cloud cover so the air temperature dropped to the 40's. It felt like the teens to me. An octopus came up stuck to a diver's helmet. I played with it and let it go. I made a 2 hour dive jetting out a pipeline and sandbagging a riser tube turn. After a one-hour chamber ride I was done with the shift. Good lunch and now I hear we are done and moving locations. Good deal.

#### Byron's Observations of Nature

March 5, 2000, aboard the Brazos—"Speaking of Light, if yesterday's sunrise was incredible today's was spectacular. It worried me some though, too red to portend anything good. The old saying goes, 'Red skies at night, sailor's delight; red skies in morning, sailors take warning.' Sure enough, the seas are picking up even as I write this. The platform we are working on has created a nice little ecosystem: snapper, angelfish, squid, rock shrimp, some kind of free swimming eei and Portuguese man of war all thrive in only 36' of water. Also the water is very clear, especially for being so shallow."

#### Byron's Spiritual Thoughts and Hopes for the Future

12/31/99—aboard Balmoral Sea: ``Here it is the end of the Millennium and I get to spend it stranded 50 miles from shore at work. In some parts of the world it is already the year 2000. I guess this means that the world is not coming to an end this New Year's. I only hope that my children or grandchildren never ask what I did for new years on the eve of the year 2000. 'Worked like a dog many miles from shore and many more away from the people I love' will have to be my answer. Maybe next year I will be able to spend New Year's with my family in Hawaii. Who knows, maybe by then I will be starting a family of my own."

The following entries were written during a two-week period in late February of this year while Byron was aboard the Brazos:

2/1 5/00~Reading a great book from Mom & Dad, Tuesdays with Morrie' by Mitch Albom. Some jewels: "Life is like a wrestling match. But who wins? That's easy: Love always wins.~

2/ 16/00—This book "Tuesdays with Morrie" is very lifting or maybe uplifting is the word I'm looking for. So many great concepts are discussed. They are things that we feel and implicitly know: Love and happiness are synonymous. Our culture is one that is not designed to make people feel happy about themselves. We're teaching the wrong things. And you have to be strong enough to say, 'if the culture doesn't work, don't buy it." I'm avoiding talking about the day because it wasn't exactly rosy and I want to sound upbeat. Fog as wet as rain and as thick as soup, and awful food. I still feel happy because I found out love is much stronger than hate. Thanks, Morrie Schwartz."

2/22/00—"When I got on shift today they were taking the other shift's second-in command off in a Stokes litter. He was unconscious and from what I hear damaged badly. I will pray for him when I turn out the lights tonight. Today I also got to see karma work in full effect. I always try to put kindness out there because I often notice you get back what you put into life. A diver asked me to wash his gear. Normally we don't unless the diver is in the chamber. I decided to go ahead and clean it since I wasn't doing anything else. Within minutes I found out the diver is my new supervisor, and he gave me my pick of replacement crew, truly doing me a good turn."

2/23/00 - 'The leader man who was smashed by the jet pump last night is doing much better. His pelvis is cracked at a couple of places, but it looks like he will walk again without surgery. I am glad I prayed for him. Even though it may seem egotistical, when I heard he was O.K. today I felt as if my prayer in some way helped him to pull through. God always listens. Today I watched a movie called 'A Faraway Place.' Also I finished a book called 'Sailing Alone around the World' by Joshua Slocum. Both the movie and book had main characters who kept Journals so I felt a certain empathy. The book is fact; the movie, fiction. The journal entries of the characters amplified this. The movie character's entries were always moving and eloquent while the book's author is real, and his entries reflect this. Sometimes his entries are moving beyond words; other times they bore to tears. I think this entry qualifies as the latter."

May3, 2000, aboard the Cal-Dive barge Uncle John -- tonight when we came out on shift there were hundreds of small birds swirling and diving in the deck floodlights. It was spectacular until I later realized that we were at least 50 miles from shore and the birds would probably not survive offshore for the weeks that we will be out here. Sumping, a Malaysian rigger, caught a bird and fed it bread and water. It hopped away once, but I corralled it for him. I found one earlier in the night, but a pipe-rack threatened to give, so I put the bird down in a pool of fresh water on the deck. When I came back the bird had flown off. There were dozens of dead ones that had fallen to the deck in the night. Someone lined three up on the silvery edge of the charcoal grill. The colors were magnificent, one a blue so bright that it put

Hawaiian feather work to shame. Another yellow with only a little brown along both wing edges. The third was a vibrant red. All so newly dead that they looked as if only sleeping. Also I finished 'For Whom the Bell Tolls.' Long, but excellent.~

May 20, 2000, aboard the Aquatica—~Today was a good day: saw some huge fish/sharks and fished for 'h hour. Caught a large trigger fish. I had to cut his lip to get the hook. Sorry."

Before Byron worked as a commercial diver with Cal Dive, he worked for five years as a scuba instructor and commercial diver in Hawaii. He made over a thousand dives teaching people scuba. One of his favorite stories from those years was of his relationship with a six foot moray eel named "Granddad." He wrote the story in his journal on December 30, 1999, following an encounter with an eel on December 29 while he was working aboard the Balmoral Sea: "December 29-The high point of today was when a white-mouth moray, about 3 'h feet in length spilled out of a pipe brought up from the bottom. I stopped a co-worker just before he impaled the eel on his knife. Then I slowly pushed the eel with my foot until it slid safely over the side. He was swimming away when last I saw him. I hope this act of kindness toward it will make up a little for the eel-hunting I did in Hawaii when I was still a boy." "December 3~since eels seem to be a recurring topic I guess I will tell my best eel story from days gone by. In a large bay, Maunalua, on the south side of Oahu, there is a dive site known as 'turtle canyons.' I dove there over 1000 times in the 5 or 6 years prior to my time here in the Gulf. From early on I fed a large yellow-margin moray who was there about 90% of the time. The years went by and he grew larger and older warranting the name 'granddad.' He also grew friendlier and often he would brazenly free swim out to me in order to get his handout. This always amazed dive tourists—a 6 foot moray swimming 30 feet from his hole. Well, he was not the only one who grew more brazen with passing time. About two years before I left Hawaii, I began to feed and hold Granddad. I would hold up one stick of fish food at a time. The eel would swim out, snatch it from my hand and return to his hole. I would swim to his hole and give his head and upper body a vigorous rubdown. Then I would gently hold his head and allow the braver among the tourists to touch or stroke his side. One time I messed up the routine. I had run out of fish food when he swam from his hole because I was feeding hundreds of trigger fish that swarmed our dive group. I held out my hands, fingers splayed, to show him there was no more. To his mask less poor vision, it appeared as if I was offering 10 sticks of food. Not to be greedy, he chose one and took a bite before I could pull away. Well the bite only needed three stitches, and the tourists were thrilled to have seen their own version of 'Savage Encounters.'"

2/29/00 - "Leap year falling on the first year of a millennium—this day will not happen again for 1000 years. Out here it is business as usual. Christmas, New Year's, Thanksgiving -- it is all the same as far as the oil held is concerned. Not to me though—inside I try to celebrate and think of each day as special, particularly holidays."

Byron's journal gave him comfort, and it will give comfort to those who loved him. On February 21 of this year, Byron wrote, "The days out here are starting to blend together. I am glad I have this journal so I can look back and tell them apart." It will do the same for his family and friends.

Byron's List

Things worth fighting for

1. The natural environment and man's place as a piece of that

environment, not man's use of it as a commodity.

2. More localized government, decentralize the decision making process for rules governing the individual communities.

3. Diversity in nature.

4. A family with opportunity.

Things to do before dying

1. Write a book that heralds natural diversity and shows the shortsightedness of technology.

2. Return to Palau and Yap for at least three months.

3. Cross Oahu by Ko'olau mountain range.

4. Paddle kayak from Oahu to Moloka'i.

5. Finish Baccalaureate of Science and continue education.

6. Break five hundred foot depth mark.

7. Surf north shore in the winter.

8. Start own business in diving.

9. Ride a motorcycle through all fifty states.

10. Become computer literate.

11. Learn to speak Spanish and Japanese fluently.

12. Summit Mount Rainier.

13. Trans-Pacific crossing by boat.

14. Spear one hundred pound plus pelagic fish.

15. Free dive to depth of one hundred fifty feet.

16. Finish Maui Marathon.