



# He Has No Idea

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A short SCUBA story based on the true adventures of Alec Peirce

It was mid-summer of 1958 and I was 10 years old. As usual I was staying with my Aunt Olga and Uncle Charlie at their cottage in Bowmanville, Ontario. The waters of Lake Ontario in those days was clean and clear and an irresistible lure to a young boy with a wild imagination. Every daylight hour I was on the beach or in the water. The sand dunes in front of the cottage were full of caves, forts and castles with moats, drawbridges and turrets complete with flapping flags. It was idyllic: my own "Never Ending Story", which, of course, as with all of us, did end. But the memories have never left me.

The lake of course was the real attraction – awesome, mysterious and vast.

How big was it? What was on the other side? What were the other lake people like?

And inevitably the question "Would I ever get to see what was beneath the waves?"

An inexpensive mask, snorkel and fins were my constant companions. With them I searched the bottom of the shoreline for treasures of any kind, particularly those that answered some of my questions – clues to the mysteries of the lake. My Uncle Charlie was a great companion. We often walked the beach picking up bits of glass, rocks, bone, brick or other interesting stuff. Uncle Charlie was great at sharing my curiosity and we'd often play that well-known child's game "I Wonder Where This Came From?"

Then Sea Hunt appeared on TV and my life was changed forever. There were the answers to all my questions. Mike Nelson not only saved the day, day after day, but he actually lived in the world that I dreamed about – and in the most wonderful places too. Boy oh boy, the things we enjoyed together! Because Mike Nelson and I were buddies you know! When he got into trouble, I was scared. When he saved someone, I felt proud and when he spoke to the TV audience at the end of each story, he was talking to me. I was going to be a frogman just like Mike. His adventures added a lot to my fun at the cottage. Some of his adventures I re-enacted and we saved the day together many times!!

It was early morning on the day that I first joined Mike Nelson underwater.

Everyone else was still sleeping but I was already down at the beach checking for new lost items that might have washed ashore overnight. Uncle Charlie taught me that trick. I knew the beach and the water in front of the cottage really well and could spot in a minute anything that wasn't there before, anything that was new. Maybe it was that ability, gained from hours of fun in my favorite spot, that made me notice the boat anchored offshore. At first it was nothing of interest - just a boat. I was busy checking the shore and shallow water for treasure. But eventually, as the likelihood of finding treasure dimmed, as time passed but the boat stayed, I took a closer look at it. It wasn't anything special. Just a large



*Alec & his sister on the wonderful sand dunes of Lake Ontario, the very spot that witnessed Alec's first scuba experience*

fishing boat I figured. It didn't have a nice cabin like Mike's boat, the Argonaut. But why was it anchored there, maybe 100 yards from shore, in the same spot for so long. And why couldn't I see anyone on it, no fishermen or anyone moving about? Of course my over-active mind started to wander and I envisioned the boat owners trapped under the boat, washed away or maybe even plotting some evil plan to poison the lake or kidnap one of the cottagers. I decided I'd better keep an eye on it and wondered out loud "What Mike would do?"

After a long time, probably three minutes, I could take the suspense no longer and decided some action was needed. I already knew from Sea Hunt that the thing to do was to quietly get close to the boat and observe from a safe distance before getting too close. Mike and I were of the same mind on this – always check things out before getting involved.

Slipping into my diving gear, mask, fins and snorkel, I quietly entered the water and headed out towards the mystery boat. It was a long ways from shore, certainly farther than I had ever been before and far beyond what my Aunt Olga would permit. The bottom soon disappeared but I kept going. More than once I longingly looked back to the safety of the shoreline as it receded, but maybe I was needed at the boat too.

Again I said, "What would Mike do?" and so I gamely, and quietly, flipped on.

Soon I was close enough to see the boat clearly. There certainly was no sign of life on the boat itself but I thought I could see some action in the water. Good thing I was equipped for underwater action! The water was not too clear close to the boat and, while I tried to stay well away to see what was happening, I was only a few feet away when my heart leaped to my throat. There, not 10' away was a frogman! He must know Mike Nelson! He looked just like him – fins, weight belt, mask and a real scuba tank with big hoses coming around his head and into his mouth. The air bubbles from his breathing bounced off the back of his head and rose up the side of the boat to the surface. I was caught between a mixture of terror and awe! I knew from watching Sea Hunt that frogmen weren't very nice sometimes - except for Mike of course. I kept my distance and tried to stay out of sight yet close enough to not miss anything. My imagination ran away with me again and I was soon calculating how quickly I could fin back to shore if he started after me. I moved away a little bit!

The diver hadn't seen me at all. He was completely absorbed in his task – cleaning the bottom of the boat.



*Alec & Diana enjoying the same type of scuba gear he first tried 50 years earlier*



*Returning the favor of that unnamed diver, Alec spreads the joy of scuba*



With a big, stiff brush, he was methodically brushing small sections of the hull. Dirt from the boat had clouded the water so he looked like a ghost diver at times. But he was real. I was getting a little chilly and I was panting into my snorkel – partly from the cold but also from the fear.

I watched. He brushed away on the boat bottom so I watched some more. I wasn't sure if I wanted him to see me or not. Finally, I got control of myself, moved a bit closer until I could see his face. Gosh, he looked OK. Not a kid like me but not too old either. He had short, navy-style hair, sort of blonde or maybe gray and, from what I could see, a pretty normal face. He might even be friendly.

So what to do? This was the most exciting thing that had happened to me in my entire, whole life – all 10 years, and I was having trouble calmly making a decision. I could swim back to shore and tell Uncle Charlie all about it or, wow, I could say hi to the diver and maybe he'd talk to me.

The lure of a real frogman, a possibility of meeting a friend of Mike Nelson, the excitement, not only of meeting him but of telling all my friends about it – it was all too much to resist. More on impulse than good planning, I swam the last few feet until I was close enough to touch him. I screwed up my courage, reached out and pushed hard on his shoulder with my hand!

Many times over the years since that day, I've put myself in that diver's place - all alone on a quiet, early morning, anchored in deep water well off shore and brushing away on the boat bottom. There's no one around, certainly no other divers anywhere in the lake and, suddenly, something from behind strikes my shoulder! 50 years of diving experience and a lot of life later I know what I'd have done! However, if he was scared or startled, he covered it well. He simply shot to the surface beside me, spit out his regulator and hollered "What are you doing out here?!"

Of course, I didn't have any of these thoughts at the time. I managed to bluster out that I was just watching him scuba dive. I think I said that I wanted to be a diver too and the conversation turned to where I was from, how old I was and so on. Then the magic question – he said, "Would you like to

try scuba diving?"

I've no idea what my response was but it was clearly affirmative – Yes! I did want to try it and, before I even realized what was happening, I was underwater with this wonderful frogman, buddy breathing from his regulator and looking around. I'm sure it was only for a few minutes but it didn't matter. I was completely enthralled. It was even more exciting that I'd imagined.

The experience was over in seconds it seemed. I'm sure I thanked the diver over and over and managed to say goodbye before heading back to shore but I don't recall. I don't recall the swim back either. The long swim out is clear in my mind but the swim back doesn't exist in my memory.

I do recall racing across the beach and over the boardwalk to the cottage, yelling in excitement the whole way. I recall the excitement too when I met Uncle Charlie and Aunt Olga who'd heard me yelling and also came running, Auntie Olga still in her bedclothes! I'm sure I related every detail and probably more than a few times over the next several days and then again when my mom and dad showed up to take me home. I also recall watching, every day afterwards, for the boat and the diver to reappear, but it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. That's just as well - it could never be the same a second time.

My life was never the same either. A year later I took a scuba course at the YMCA. My mom drove me 30 miles to the YMCA every Tuesday night for 26 weeks – all winter long. My dream was coming true. And it's never stopped.

Today I often wonder about that diver. I'd love to meet him again and simply tell him what a wonderful thing he did that day for the kid who scared the devil out of him. The dive stores I've opened and the thousands of divers I've trained are all partly a result of his kindness. That diver had a big affect on me and ultimately on the sport of scuba diving and doesn't even know about it. He has no idea what he did for scuba diving that summer day!

You never know the result of your actions. I'm not suggesting that every kid who asks you if you're a "frogman" is a potential life-long diver, but ... you never know. ■