



Baby sitting a sea lion, by Szilvia Gogh: I thought my friend was pulling on my fins to get my attention, but when I turned around I only saw his grin from a distance; looking at a sea lion puppy chewing on my fins.

I can vividly recall that dive one day at spring near Santa Cruz Island, because it was one of those rear trips to the Channel Islands when I did not teach any classes. I woke up when I felt like it and jumped into the Pacific Ocean when I felt like it.

It was the first dive of the weekend and I was on a hunt for scallops. Well, people might think that it is not quite a hunt when one is looking for stuff that does not move; but believe me, it is.

I developed a technique over the years that proved very effective. We work in a team with my dive buddy, who also serves as my divemaster when I teach. We dive down to the bottom of the wall next to each other, far away from everybody else's bubbles and servile every possible hiding spot, looking for that orange smile.

Once my buddy finds one, gives me the hand signal to get ready. Instead of breaking the whole shell off the rocks and drag tons of extra weight with us, we use a much more eco friendly method. I glide trough the water and sneak up on the open shell, get my cake icing knife ready, and just before the scallop realizes what happens and closes the opening, I slide my flexible knife in.

With a slick wrist move I cut the mussels off the protecting shell on the bottom side. Now, I can open the scallop and do the same thing on the top. Once freed, I spoon the pretty meat out on the side and clean the guts before handing it over to my

buddy, who puts it in his bag. He often puts one in his mouth too. (If you have never tried eating a scallop while underwater, do it!)

Using this hunting method will get you avoid people calling you a "reef wrecker" when boarding the boat with juicy scallops; and it also save you the aggravation of cleaning it aboard. I can not take credit for the idea however, because I copied it too, from one salty diver, many years ago on one of the Truth boats.

Going back to the sea lion... We were in our pumped up state, looking for tasty sushi candidates.

Minutes after jumping in, not too far from the anchor line, we swam in the big blue, heading to the wall when the curious sea lion puppy decided to approach us and investigate my fin.



When I turned around, he lifted his eyes to meet mine. We stared at each other for a few seconds before he carried on with the chewing. A minute passed and my fins did not hold his attention any longer, he looked at me like a kid would to a parent. "Entertain me, play with me," he said without words.

How could anybody say no to that? I chose "Simon says" in lack of a better idea. I made a summersault at mid-water and the sea lion copied me. Than I span 360 degrees around myself, he copied me again. A few turns later I started to get dizzy and bored, so opted for some swim.

I imitated a dolphin and swum as streamline as possible with a bulky hunch on my back and a dangling snorkel on my mask. We swam face to face, in the same rhythm for a while and covered quite a distance.

Almost forgot about the scallops; but when I looked at my dive buddy, the human one, everything came back. I swam to him and the sea lion followed me. He stuck with us for the whole dive and curiously investigated our every move.

When it was time to ascend to our safety stop and evidently to exit the water, the grey dotted, fury little body was still right behind me.

Seeing the disappointment in his eyes as I took off my fins at the swim-step of our boat, my buddy asked a crew member to bring the kayak while we rested on the

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surface with the fluffy kid with the smiley face and whiskers.

We paddled around the corner of Santa Cruz Island with a sea lion puppy eagerly chasing behind us. When his mother finally showed up and took him, I was exhausted and ready for a nap. I don't know how parents have so much energy to keep a puppy entertained all day...