Howard and Michele Hall : Oral History Transcription

Name of interviewee(s):

Howard and Michele Hall

Reasons why chosen for an oral history:

Howard and Michele Hall are highly skilled underwater camera operators, who make natural history films for TV and IMAX.

Name of Interviewer:

Bob Sloan

Reasons why Interviewer chosen:

A colleague and friend

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1. First interest in natural history

BS: Please give your full name, including any nicknames, your nationality, current job title or your last job title if retired, and today's date.

MH: Well, that's a test just to remember all of that. My name is Michele Hall, my nationality is American. I am one of the two members of Howard Hall Productions without really a job title, and today is Tuesday, January 30th. Nickname, Howard likes to call me Shorty.

HH: My name is Howard Wesley Hall. I'm a wildlife filmmaker without a job title. We're a very small production company here, we — just including my wife, Michele, and I. I have no nicknames that I can repeat here and today's date is January 30, 2007, which is about the same time as your date.

MH: Yes, I forgot the 2007 part.

BS: Okay. I'll address this question to Howard. Howard, how did you— feel like I should have a British *accent — how did you first become interested in natural history and wildlife?*

HH: Well, I've been interested in wildlife all my life. As a child I enjoyed catching animals and putting them in cages. I raised pigeons when I was kid. I had all kinds of wild animals, wide varieties of snakes. I had hawks, I had owls. I've just enjoyed wildlife for as long as I can remember. So when I went to college I studied zoology. My intention at the time was to go to Scripps Institute of Oceanology and become an oceanographer and marine biologist. But after graduating from college I decided I'd try to find something that allowed me to travel more than a typical marine biologist has an opportunity to do, and wildlife film making presented itself as the way to go.

BS: And Michele, how did you become involved in this?

MH: I think my background couldn't be more different than Howards. I grew up as a city girl and I mean I think I just took wildlife and nature for granted. But after I moved to San Diego in 1973 a couple of years later I decided to take up SCUBA diving, and the first time I went below the surface of the ocean just a whole new world opened up to me, and my life has been drastically different ever since.

BS: Yes, it has. I could ask a bunch of other questions but I'll stick to these.

HH: Well, I probably can elaborate on mine a little bit. Even though I really loved wildlife all my life, it really wasn't until I took a diving class that the direction of my career kind of got started. I learnt to dive when I was 16 when I was still in high school. A couple of years later I became a diving instructor and I started working at a dive shop in the Los Angeles area. Eventually I moved to San Diego to go to college and continued to teach SCUBA diving as a way to pay for my college education. After graduating I began to look for ways to use my interest in wildlife and my skills as a diver to make a living, and that's really how I got started in underwater photography. I started taking photographs of marine life, eventually started writing articles about marine creatures and my diving adventures, and that later, many years later, evolved into making films.

MH: And I guess for me when I took that first SCUBA class and the first time I went diving Howard was my instructor, that's how we met, and as I say a whole new world opened for me and changed my life because I eventually got into wildlife filmmaking. But I just started paying closer attention and gained such an appreciation for wildlife and nature. I remember the first time I went to La Jolla Cove which was where I learnt to dive. First time I went there after making that first SCUBA dive and looking out at the surface of the ocean, and just thinking how privileged I was to know that there was another world that existed down there. I looked around at the people walking around the Cove and thought so many of these people just don't have a sense of what's out there, and I sort of felt a little bit elite that I had the opportunity to see what that was about. I've just spent the last 31, almost 32 years, revelling in that and enjoying exploring the undersea world around the world, and it's opened my eyes to what there is on land, in terms of wildlife and nature to enjoy and explore. Tremendous, tremendous privilege.

BS: Good elaborations. That was a question I felt like I needed to ask anyway.

2. Early influences and career development

BS: So you guys have been a team ever since Howard was your instructor?

MH: Well, we were friends for some time. We met in 1975, May of 1975 was when we met and when I started SCUBA diving, and we were friends for a while. Eventually there was a wedding in August of 1981 and so, yes, the team has progressed from that point.

HH: When we got started, after we were married, Michele was still a registered nurse and she was contributing significantly to our income with her pay as a registered nurse. It wasn't until almost 10 years later that we were — our business had grown to the point where I really needed somebody else to come in and work with me. Prior to that it was strictly a one-man show but in, I guess it was 1990, that I talked Michele into resigning from her registered nurse job and she's been in the business ever since.

BS: Can you recall the first wildlife film series you saw? What was it, when was it, and what impact did it have on you?

HH: I think the first thing that I noticed regarding marine wildlife, which is where my wildlife film career went, was the Cousteau series - The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau. (1) I can remember watching that show religiously every time it came on television and certainly that had a huge influence on the direction that my life took. Ironically there was also a dramatic series that also influenced me and that was the Sea Hunt (2) series. So really it was the combination of The Undersea of World of Jacques Cousteau (1) and Sea Hunt (2) that really got me interested in diving, got me interested in marine wildlife and undersea adventure.

BS: Did you work on some shows in that era also?

HH: Well, the original Jacques Cousteau shows I think were done in the late '50s, early '60s, and I became a certified diver in '66. So I had seen some of those shows before I learnt to dive. Eventually when I started doing underwater camera work, which was in the late '70s, I started doing assignments for a wide variety of wildlife programmes, including The Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom series (3). Eventually I ended up directing 16 episodes of Wild Kingdom (3) from 1977 through the early 1980s.

BS: Okay, nursing.

MH: Nursing. I was nursing and frankly not paying too much attention to the wildlife programming that was on TV until I started having that vested interest.

BS: When did you decide to get involved in wildlife filmmaking and what influenced you in your decision to pursue that career?

HH: When I was in college I got a job working at the Diving Locker here in San Diego as a diving instructor. The person that owned the Diving Locker was a gentleman named Chuck Nicklin and Chuck, in addition to owning the Diving Locker, made a supplementary income as a underwater cameraman and underwater stills photographer. During the period of time that I worked there he became progressively more successful and had less and less time to actually devote to the dive shop. I could see that there was a career there, there was a career in underwater photography. So Chuck really sort of was an inspiration to me and I think it was probably in the mid 1970s that I decided I wanted to at least try making money at it.

So I started taking still photographs and writing articles for magazines, never with the intention that it was going to be a career. My primary goal was to have a good time and enhance my diving by taking photographs, and having something to do underwater. The photographs sold, the magazine articles sold. Eventually I was making a significant income and after about five or six years I was making more money doing underwater photography than I was as a diving instructor, and could no longer afford the time to teach SCUBA diving. At that point, I think it was 1978, I resigned from the diving locker and started doing underwater photography full-time.

BS: I've got what I think is maybe a more natural question to follow.

MH: Go ahead

HH: I'm going to join the two together I think. Well, you've read the question. How did you get your first opportunity to join this industry? I mean do you get a job interview? How does that work?

HH: No, there was certainly no job interviews for underwater photographers. Doing underwater work - underwater photography, underwater cinematography - is such an esoteric career that there's no one that hires people specifically for that. There's no courses you can take really to learn how to do it. The niches are few and far between. So, no, I never interviewed for a job. All the work that I've done has been as a freelancer. Very often I've done underwater stills photography assignments for magazines and that sort of thing. When I did start doing underwater film work it was as a camera for hire, and people had either seen my previous film work on a television show or because I had some particular expertise with an environment or an animal, they would hire me to come in and do camera work.

What I mean by that is, for example, we built a shark cage in the mid 1970s so that we could go out and dive with sharks off the California coast and take still photographs of them. When people saw the photographs published they would come to us and say, well, we'd like to shoot some film of blue sharks and mako sharks, can we borrow your cage and I always went with the cage. Eventually people realised that I was probably better qualified to do the actual shooting than the cameraman they brought along. So eventually that footage got out there, people saw it and I started getting jobs as a cameraman.

BS: Thousands of people want your job and yet very few end up with the notoriety that you have. What is it about Howard Hall that has allowed you to reach this spot?

HH: I think that I'm very lucky in that I found something to do that I'm very good at almost instinctively. I think a lot of people may have a talent that's never realised, they never discover what they're really good at. I think in my case I was very lucky that I learned to dive early when I was young. I have a good sense of the three dimensionality of being underwater and I have a real good sense of wildlife, what animals are going to do. I might have had that sense and become an airline pilot and never been able to utilise it. But I think I just found that particular career that I was genetically built for and I think a lot of people never have that opportunity.

MH: If I could add to that to say about Howard. There's also a business sense that he has and an integrity that I think has contributed tremendously to his success. Part of that is doing what's right, keeping your word if you're going to do something. If he says he's going to do something he does it and that's just the way it is, regardless of what he might be missing out else wise. So it's sort of the do unto others as you would have them do unto you. But in the sense that there's just a tremendous amount of integrity and sincerity, and that plays tremendously I think in the business world. Howard doesn't have a business education background in terms of college degree but there's a heart and just do it right, do it the right way, that I think has helped him to go very, very far in his career.

3. Working as a team – Michele joining the business

BS: How does the business change when you became a team? Howard, you did it all at first and then as you've integrated Michele in and formed a new way of working.

HH: People often ask us how difficult it is to work together. They ask us if we have difficulty working together and we really don't. Our talents are very, very different and our responsibilities within our tiny little business are very different. Michele is very good at organisation. She's very good at the detail work. She's very good at record keeping. She's very good at making logistical plans and all the detail that goes with that. I'm not good with details at all. I don't spend any more time on the telephone than is absolutely necessary. I'm good creatively, I'm good with general concepts and so I do a lot of the creative work, a lot of the writing, script writing, concept writing. But once we come up with a basic concept for a production plan, Michele implements that plan and I kind of stay out of her sandbox and she stays out of mine. We obviously have to interface back and forth but we very seldom have conflicts where we're kind of stepping on each other's toes.

MH: We're really fortunate that our talents complement each other rather than conflicting and so, as Howard said, it's a rare occasion that we both want to do something. It's usually, Michele, you answer the phone and, Howard, you write the script. So our talents really do complement each other and it's helped make things work really well.

Of course, some people watching this interview may know about the business card story [laughs]. When I left my nursing career, just 16 years ago last week, Howard came to the going away party that my staff had for me and presented me with a gift of new business cards for joining Howard Hall Productions. He did put a title on there, a job title, and it said 'Boss', so he likes to sometimes joke and say that in Howard Hall Productions I'm the boss. But I always come back and say, well, if I'm the boss he's the president, so there we go.

4. First professional film

BS: What was your first professional wildlife film making assignment?

HH: Ironically my first underwater wildlife film assignment was a prime time NBC Survival Anglia special. The way that worked was that my very good friend, Stan Waterman, was offered a contract to do a film about sharks by Survival Anglia. (4) I was talking to him on the phone one day and he said he had this opportunity but he didn’t know if he was going to be able to do it because he didn’t really think there was anything new to be done on sharks. This is 1978. I said, well, I've shot some footage of blue sharks that you might be interested and the fact is I have shot two rolls of 16mm film of blue sharks, which I did primarily to test a new camera that I'd built. Those were the only two rolls of film I had ever shot.

Stan was a bit surprised when he heard me say I had some footage of blue sharks and he said, “Well, Howard I didn’t know you were an underwater cameraman” and I said “I am Stan”, certainly. Technically I had shot two rolls of film so it wasn’t an entirely a deception. I sent those two rolls of film to Stan. They included some footage of blue sharks that people had not seen before and some of it was pretty interesting. It included some things like people hand feeding sharks and that sort of thing. On the strength of that footage Stan got the contract with Survival Anglia and he hired me as second cameraman, and that’s how I got started. So my first underwater camera job, my first camera job period, was working for Survival Anglia which ended up being an evening prime time special for NBC.

MH: But how did you meet Stan?

HH: I met Stan Waterman during the making of the motion picture The Deep (5). Peter Benchley's novel was made into a film by Peter Guber and it was a spectacular underwater work. I was hired to be a shark wrangler, a shark advisor was my title. I was basically a gopher and also a spear fisherman, and I was involved in the Australian portion of the film where they did all the shark sequences. Included in that group of people were Stan Waterman, Jack McKenney, Al Giddings, Chuck Nicklin, and these were all legendary figures in the mid 1970s and all heroes of mine. So I got to meet these people, I already knew Chuck of course but I got to meet these people for the first time in the airport going to Australia for this film project. I have to say that Stan Waterman and Jack McKenney especially were enormously influential in my career later on.

BS: Michele, what was your first professional film or assignment?

MH: Well, during the years that I was continuing to work as a nurse and Howard was getting involved in his film making career, I very often took my vacation time away from my nursing career to go on location with him. Occasionally he would be on assignment with people who were friends and they were happy to have me come along. I was unpaid help. I would always lend a hand and do what I could. It was a great opportunity for me to learn about the filmmaking industry and to be able to spend time and travel with Howard. So it helped the production to not have to pay me for my work.

One of the first film projects that I remember participating in, in that fashion, was in the Sea of Cortez when we were filming American Sportsman, an episode of American Sportsman (6). The subject of the film was to be the schooling hammerhead sharks on the sea mount, El Bajo. We were there with Stan Waterman and Peter Benchley was there and Stan's son, Gordy Waterman, was a cameraman. It was that August of 1980 that we found the giant Pacific manta rays swimming around El Bajo, and when we found the one that had the fishing line that was caught on its mandible. These have since become photographs that have been widely published in a story widely told. Probably the first time that somebody, if you will, rode on the back of a manta ray which now is very politically incorrect and is not something that I would attempt to do today.

But at the time when this manta ray swam underneath me as I was near the stern of the boat and just hovered there, and I saw this line tangled around its mandible. It was just instinctive for me to settle down on top of it and pull on the line and managed to get the line off, and free the manta ray of this heavy barnacle encrusted line that it was carrying. Howard swam by and saw me, and after I took the line off the ray started swimming around the area with me. Howard was coming back to the boat, ending his dive, and he saw me going off with this ray and he later said he didn’t know what was going to happen and if he would ever see me again.

But that’s a very, very memorable experience and one of the first times that I had the opportunity to go on location with Howard, as part of the film crew.

BS: And nobody got any pictures of that?

MH: No, it's just all in my head. Actually we did get some pictures later. The ray stayed around with us for a few days and we ended up diverting some of the storyline of the programme to include the manta ray, that one and others that came around. But that particular one did come around and swim with us for about three days, and almost all the crew members had the chance to swim with it and be taken for a ride with it. One of Howard's very famous photographs is a picture of Gordy Waterman with the ray, and he did manage to get some other pictures of me as well. But, in fact, that photograph ended up being published in National Geographic magazine with a little bit written by Peter Benchley, and I think maybe the second photograph that Howard had published in Geographic.

HH: Yes

BS: And Howard being the demanding director, he didn’t ask you to go put the line back on the manta ray and do it all again?

MH: No.

HH: Would have been a good idea.

5. Working in remote areas and filming The Coral Triangle

BS: Have you ever worked in an area where the local people were unused to filmmakers?

HH: Well, I can think of two occasions where we worked where the locals were not really used to filmmakers. We did a film called The Coral Triangle (7) which was done in the Philippines and it highlighted the Muro Ami Fishery in the Philippines. At this Fishery they take literally 300 children under 15 years of age and they put them on a 160 foot boat and they use them to herd fish into a net. It was a very interesting process and the kids were, you know, they were poor people, and they'd never seen anything like us or our camera gear.

The other time that people were really not used to seeing cameramen was at Iki Island, Japan, and this was in the early 1980s. Iki became famous for this act of herding dolphins into a bay, netting the bay off and then killing all the dolphins. I went there with Hardy Jones who was a world renowned marine mammal conservationist and we made a film about the dolphin slaughter at Iki, Japan (8). We tried to do it surreptitiously by hiding in the bushes and shooting with long lens but we were discovered by the fishermen, and were herded out onto the beach at knifepoint. I can guarantee you that the hundreds of fishermen that were doing this awful work were not used to having us around and it was an interesting experience.

MH: There was another experience when we were making the IMAX film Coral Reef Adventure for Greg MacGillivray there was a couple scenes that we set up at one of the little islands in Fiji. And we, the team of IMAX filmmakers, sort of invaded this island and we scouted

In 2001, I think it was, we went to Fiji when we were making Coral Reef Adventure (9) for Greg MacGillivray and it was an IMAX film. After scouting at the island a couple of times, the IMAX film crew kind of invaded the island for a few days with all of the equipment and the people, and Jean-Michel Cousteau was with us. Even though we had scouted and talked to the folks and gotten to know some of the locals on this little island, it was very, very isolated. A lot of the people had never left this tiny little place their whole lives. I don’t think they were really prepared for what we showed up with, with all the massive IMAX equipment and lighting and cameras. We asked them to build scaffolding so that Greg could get up there to get a shot looking down on all of us, and we were sort of the talk of the town for quite some time.

It was quite a fun experience to work with the families and the children, and to kind of be part of their lives for a few days, and see how their family infrastructures work. It was an education for us, I think, as well as for them.

BS: When you were doing the Muro Ami project, how did the kids and the people react to the work you were doing?

HH: When we did the Muro Ami film the kids on the boat, the hundreds of kids that were on these 160 foot long fishing boats, reacted with great interest. I mean we and our gear were something entirely new and anything new and novel got their attention. We had hundreds of laughing, smiling kids gathered around us trying to look through the lens of the camera and all of that. At the same time their bosses, the group of men that ran this fishery, were a bit nervous about our intention and certainly our intention was to expose the Muro Ami Fishery as a destructive fishery and something that probably violated international child labour laws.

Indeed, after we made the film, there was a huge international incident where several companies wrote letters of protest to the Philippines government and all of that. So the fishermen themselves didn’t really like us being around very much. They were worried about us and it turned out that we really weren’t good for their fishery. Ironically I think that it was not my intention that the fishery be shut down, which it was temporarily, because for the most part these kids on the boat seemed happy and they seemed healthy. They brought home a significant amount of money that really kept their villages going.

So just to say the child labour issues really justify shutting the fishery down I think were somewhat invalid. I was kind of horrified to see what happened to this fishery after our film was released. People in the United

States and in Canada, in Australia, looked at this village and just were horrified at what these kids were being asked to do. But the alternative, living in abject poverty in these villages without the sources of income that these kids bought in, was worse as far as I was concerned.

BS: It's the difference in culture.

HH: The difference in culture and people don't appreciate that very often.

BS: Yes.

6. Time in the field and best and worst projects

BS: What was the longest period you ever spent in the field? Where is it and what was it like?

HH: Because we do underwater films we don't spend enormous amounts of time in the field. When we are in the field we're on a boat. We live on the boat, we are diving from the boat every day, and I think the longest project we ever did was six weeks. Normally I try to avoid working longer than three weeks because diving is physically tough on you and you get progressively more tired diving every day. After three weeks people get to be pretty used up. You begin to have problems with ear infections and all sorts of things. So three weeks is a typical length of time, four week it's long. The six week job which was for Coral Reef Adventure (9) was the longest we've done and that was too long.

MH: Well, I would counter that by just a little bit. There was a nine week expedition that Howard went on to the Galapagos some years ago, and I was able to join him for about 10 or 12 days of that but then I went home for the rest. As the wife at home I will say that that additional seven weeks, or a total of nine weeks away, was a long time. I think sometimes we don't think or give enough credit to the wives and the families that are left behind, even if it's the typical three or four week assignment that we go on, an assignment expedition for our projects. I always try to be cognitive of the wives and kids that are at home waiting, Usually it's the dads, most of our crew are men, and that can get to be a pretty long time.

BS: Yes, that being said and knowing other filmmakers besides you, it does put a lot of strain on a relationship. I don't know if this is a question or just talking out loud.

HH: Well, I think it is interesting that many of the most successful wildlife film making teams, or husband and wife teams - Dereck and Beverly Joubert, Mark Deeble and Vicky Stone, Des and Jen Bartlett. There's a long list of husband and wife teams that have been especially successful. I think one of the reasons husband and wife teams tend to be successful is because there's a huge demand on your time in the field and it's very tough, especially if you have kids to be away those really long periods.

In the case of doing underwater films it's not quite as bad because our durations tend to be shorter, tend to be two or three, four week trips. But a lot of the filmmakers that work in Africa and with terrestrial subjects will set up a camp and stay for a year, or sometimes two years. So husband and wife teams do better and husband and wife teams that are childless probably do better, although in some cases, Mark Deeble and Vicky Stone, they take the kids out in the bush and they're tutored out there, and they make it work.

BS: Yes, and when those kids get older they're the luckiest kids in the world.

MH: Yes. Well, it's interesting Mark and Vicky, as Howard has alluded to, have often set up camp where they hire a tutor to come in and it's just the family lifestyle. The kids sometimes have a tough time when they get back to England and go back to regular school, and they tell stories about living in the bush and hippos coming through the camp at night, and their classmates don't believe them. So it's another side to the whole story. I feel very fortunate that we've found this niche where we can work together and travel together, and I'm just very fortunate.

BS: Lets see — of all the work you've done so far, which projects have given you the most pride or the most pleasure?

HH: Well, I think two projects really, maybe three projects, stand out for me. My very first film, the first film that I made myself was a film called Seasons in the Sea. That was a film made for the PBS series Nature (21) and for the BBC. It was made over a two and a half year period on a budget of $135,000, and it was about the California kelp forest and the animals that lived there. Arguably it was the first underwater wildlife behaviour film and I think because it was the first of that type, it won best of show at Wildscreen and it won the festival choice award at the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival. It really kick started my whole career, so that film is very dear to my heart.

Because of that film I later had the opportunity to make a film called Into the Deep (11) which was an IMAX 3D film, and it was the first underwater IMAX 3D film and it was my first IMAX film of any kind. Again, it was about the marine life off the California coast. At the time that I was offered the project, and it was explained to me that the camera weighted 350lbs which meant that once it was in an underwater housing the whole system had to weigh about 1,800lbs. When I realised that I thought it may not be possible to make this film at all. But the good news was that at the time there was only one place it was going to show and that was at a theatre in Japan.

It turns out that by the time the film was finished two years later, there were 12 theatres in the United States and more of them were being built, and fortunately the film was enormously successful. For many years it was the highest grossing IMAX 3D film ever made and we just rode on the success of that into a whole career of making IMAX films.

To add one more to the list, I think the last IMAX film that we made, IMAX 3D film, was Deep Sea 3D (12) and that film has been more successful than Into the Deep (11), and has been something of a box office sensation. Because the film was so successful I'm very proud of it. It was great fun to make but it's also very successful.

MH: I would agree that the IMAX films, I was obviously tremendously proud of Howard's success with Seasons of the Sea (10) in 1990, going on to make the IMAX films and the 3D IMAX films. The challenge that is involved in dealing with the equipment, of the crew, the locations, has been challenging and also extremely rewarding.

I also have a special place in my heart for a TV series that we did for PBS that was released in 1997 called Secrets of the Ocean Realm (13). That was a big project for us. It was five hours of programming which also versioned as 10 half hours, and we were responsible for all of the production. Howard did all the writing and editing and I was post production supervisor. Just the whole thing.

It's just not the production of that project that is so important to me but the production value. It's played so well, not only for adults but for children, and I still have people come up to me and tell me that they remember the series and how much their children and grandchildren have enjoyed it. So a lot of what we want to do with our film making is to impart knowledge and a love for the sea. The way we do that is through showing the incredibly fascinating and bizarre animal behaviours, and that's what we did with Secrets of the Ocean Realm (13). I think that has had an impact on children growing up and I'm very, very proud of that.

BS: Very good. And conversely — that being said, what has been your lowest moment or biggest disappointment?

HH: Well, I have to say that there hasn't been any really low moments in my career. If I had to pick a time that was especially stressful, it was probably during the making of an IMAX film that Michele produced and I directed called Island of the Sharks (14). The film was made at Cocos Island, Costa Rica, in 1997 and '98. It happens that 1997 and '98 was during the strongest El Nino event in history. We spent I think it was 64 days at Cocos Island diving at high expense, a full crew, a boat that we'd chartered, 64 days Cocos Island I believe it was without seeing a hammerhead shark. The film is called Island of the Sharks (14), it's about sharks. Two months of diving there without seeing any sharks. That was especially stressful.

I mean we were expected to deliver a film that swarms with sharks, clouds of hammerhead sharks going past the lens, I mean that's what sold the whole project, and for two months of diving not even seeing one. During that period of time a lot of the animals, in addition to the sharks, had also left the islands. So the manta rays, the whale sharks, the stingrays, the big schools of fish, they were all gone. So there was very little of anything at Cocos Island to film. The coral reef at Cocos Island bleached white during a couple of week period and then all died.

In retrospect, and at some point toward the end of the production, I realised that this whole thing was not a negative, that it was actually a positive. We were at Cocos Island during this hugely important environmental event and we were capturing what was going on, and how the environment was changing because of that event. It took me several months of shooting to realise that what we were being presented with was not a disaster, we were being presented with an opportunity.

So we kind of changed the theme of the film and we made a film about how El Nino affected this particular island in the middle of the Eastern Pacific. I think it actually made for a much better film. I think part of what has made our relationship work and our career work is looking for the positive things in everything that happens, and looking for the opportunities. It took me a long time to realise that El Nino event was an opportunity rather than a disaster, and there were a lot of sleepless nights. But once I'd made the connection, I realised this is what the film's about, it became a very positive thing.

MH: To expand on that just a little bit. Howard talks about the 64 or 66 days or no sharks. But it wasn't just two months, that was 66 diving days over an eight month period of time. So we first went in the field for that production in January of '97 and it wasn't until, maybe it was January of '98, and it wasn't until the following mid-August that we saw our first shark at Cocos Island for that production.

We had the same cabin on the boat whenever we'd go back on location and, I'm not kidding, there was a worn spot in the carpet where Howard was pacing back and forth, morning and night, what are we going to do, what are we going to do? We thought about aborting the production and trying to come back another year but we really didn't want to do that, and we just persevered and kept trying to film what we could. As Howard said, then we realised what the value of that story really was and goes back, I think, a little bit to what I was saying earlier about one of the things of Howard and his success is looking towards the positive. It ended up not just being a story about the sharks at Cocos Island but the meteorological effect and the impact, and I think it's been an important film.

HH: Another thing that happened during the production that was a big negative was that we had planned to take an ultra light aircraft to Cocos Island to film the aerial scenes of the island. On the day after we shipped the ultra light aircraft in a shipping container to Costa Rica a very good friend, Noel Archambault and another acquaintance, Steve Raisner [William Raisner Jr], were killed in an ultralight accident in the Galapagos while flying an IMAX camera from a fixed wing ultralight, very similar to the ultralight that we were beginning to be using. I was very confident that the design of ultralight we were using and the camera set-up on it, and the kinds of shots we were going to be doing, were perfectly safe. But we had an overwhelming number of people calling us, trying to get us to stop and not use the ultralight and not have aerials in our film which were hugely important to the film. Our executive producers called us and wanted us to stop.

In addition to losing Noel, which was certainly a tough thing, it was very difficult to deal with all the negativity that had to do with the ultralight and our decision to use one.

7. Making equipment and new technical advances

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BS: That brings up another question that I think is important to your story. You don't go to the camera store and buy all the equipment that you need for what you do. Part of your tool kit is a talent that allows you to envision your shot and then create the means with which to get it. Explain that to me.

HH: Well, there is no shop that you can go to and just buy underwater film making equipment, at least not professional quality stuff and certainly not 30 years ago when I was starting out. So we make everything. We'll purchase a motion picture camera, whether it's a video camera or a film camera. We end up building the housings for these systems, the viewfinders. We build the housings for the light meters and the light meters themselves. We build the underwater lights. In the case of IMAX production, we even built our own underwater fluid head tripod. All the housings that we use were designed by us, our crew and myself, Bob Cranston and our machinists that have worked with us in the past.

So we have to build all that stuff and it's not so much that some of the things that may be available commercially are no good. It's just that the kind of film making that I do requires very specific uses of lenses and tripods and lights, and it's just necessary for me to build it the way I need it. So we do a lot of that.

BS: Lets see — try and make this quick. One of the techniques that you have used is the rebreather. So the question might be how are you able to film these behaviours in the natural environment without causing so much disturbance that behaviour doesn't even happen?

HH: One of the tools that we've been using for many years now is a close circuit rebreather. I first started using it along with Bob Cranston when we made a film for the PBS series Nature (21), called Shadows in a Desert Sea (15). The film was also released by the BBC. We were filming in the Sea of Cortez and one of the scenes we wanted to film was the schooling behaviour of hammerhead sharks. In the Sea of Cortez getting into that school of sharks with SCUBA gear on, the exhaust bubbles produced by scuba, was just essentially impossible. So it occurred to me that if we had rebreathers that produced no bubbles, produced no sound, we'd be able to get inside the schools of hammerhead sharks and capture what behaviour was going on in there. Maybe even reveal the reason for the schooling behaviour. So we acquired a couple of rebreathers.

At the time, this was 1988, close circuit mixed gas rebreathers were not available to the civilian population, and in fact the only way you could get one was if you stole it from the US military, that's the only way you could have one. So if you had one you were pretty questionable already. But it just happened that at the time the company that made the rebreathers, the Mark 15 rebreather for the US military, was bidding on a contract to produce the Mark 16 which was the next generation. They had built 30 prototypes, or approximately 30 prototypes for this new design and they did not get the contract.

So when went to Biomarine with the hopes of getting a couple of rebreathers they had just lost their contract with their military. They had 30 prototypes that were not part of the military package, and we were able to lease two of these rebreathers from Biomarine at very high cost. We used those for Shadows in the Desert Sea (15) and a few years later we were able to buy a couple of the 30 prototypes. Now between the guys that work with me we have, I think, five or six of them. They are very highly modified but they're still close circuit rebreathers.

The interesting thing, though, is that we eventually learned that the fact that they produced no bubbles and that they're totally silent is a very appealing idea. But the fact is that it doesn't make a gigantic difference when it comes to filming wildlife underwater. It did with hammerhead sharks and it does with garden eels, it does with some of the animals that are sensitive to sound. But even for those it's a 20% advantage, it's not huge. But the huge advantage is that with a rebreather the amount of time we could stay underwater is essentially unlimited. We can stay on a single dive for 12 hours if we have to and because we're breathing a mixture of gas that optimises our nitrogen absorption, we're able to avoid decompression to a greater extent than somebody diving in an open circuit.

So the increased amount of **bottom time** is the huge advantage to using this piece of gear. The fact that it's bubble free is nice but I would not pack all the stuff up and go to location, and pay the huge price in extra hassle and all the extra boxes, if it was just the lack of bubbles that was the only thing that made a rebreather important.

8. Howard Hall luck and favourite stories

BS: What I want to get at it is Howard's unique ability to innovate and I want to hear from her words, we've heard it all from you. To innovate and combine that with the fact that one of Howard's unique abilities is that he jumps in his water and it's like all the animals — he's like the Pied Piper, that's my description. So, Michele, it takes a combination of talents to create the kind of images that Howard's been able to pull off. What kind of attributes have contributed to that?

MH: I don't know how many times I've heard people say the Howard Hall luck, Howard you have so much luck you never have a black cloud over your head. Why do the good things always happen for you? Well, after years of working together I can tell you that it's not luck. There may be a little tinge of that but its preparedness. Howard has a tremendous ability to look at the whole picture, to think outside the box, to look for simplicity when developing either a game plan, a film plan or developing new equipment, building new equipment. I think that has really played tremendously towards the aura of the Howard Hall success. Well, the success isn't an aura but playing tremendously towards the luck factor. He thinks things through clearly and looks for the simplest way to get the best result.

MH: I don't know if that's really what you were wanting to get at Bob but it's thinking things through and being prepared, that lead to successful outcome in my mind.

BS: In social situations what are some of the favourite stories that you like to tell?

HH: [To Michele] Do you want to go first?

MH: No

HH: I think if I'm going to tell a story and it's funny I'd tell a story about my first work with Stan Waterman. We were on a boat filming sharks and it was at the end of a project, and we had four of these five gallon pickle barrels with lids on them, that were filled with fish guts that we'd been using to attract the sharks. This stuff had been sitting out in the sun for almost two weeks and what was inside those pickle barrels smelled unbelievably bad, and we needed to get rid of it before we went back to port.

So each of us took our turn going to the stern and dumping this over the side over the boat, and the smell I can tell you was just almost more than you could take. Stan Waterman, being the gentleman that he is, took his turn and dumped the stuff over the side. One of the crew members wanted to take a shortcut, decided that instead of going to the stern and dumping it over the side, he would simply pull the lid off and heave it over the side. Unfortunately what happened was he missed the gunnel by about 12 inches and the fish guts hit the gunnel of the boat and ricocheted all over Stan Waterman, who we thought was God at the time. I mean this was everybody's sport diving hero. This was the first we had ever worked with him and my friend had just poured putrefied guts all over Stan. That was a moment of absolute horror for everybody and today makes a good story.

BS: What was Stan's reaction?

HH: I can't tell you specifically what Stan's reaction was but it had to do with the level of intelligence that he has as opposed to my crew member, and he didn't have anything positive to say about that.

MH: Actually that's the same story I was thinking so I don't have another one. I just wasn't sure how to tell it delicately, so good job Howard.

BS: But knowing Stan the Englishman that must have been quite something.

9. The people and animals the Hall's have enjoyed working with

BS: Which people have you been most pleased to meet working in this field?

HH: During my career there's probably been three or four people that have been enormously influential. Certainly Chuck Nicklin who I worked with when I was a diving instructor was the inspiration for me getting into underwater film making. But later meeting Stan Waterman and Jack McKenney. Both of those people had a direct affect on my career. Stan taught me a lot about how to deal with people, a professional attitude, an awful lot about how to conduct the business of being an underwater cinematographer. Jack McKenney on the other hand was the best technical underwater cameraman I'd ever met, and I study his technique and how he captured the images that he did, and I think that was enormously important. So I think those are the two guys, Jack McKenney and Stan Waterman, who were certainly most influential in my career.

BS: And Michele?

MH: Well, I would agree. Stan has had a tremendous impact as Howard said, in terms of a business sense and how to treat people, never saying a bad word about another individual. I was very fortunate just after I started diving to have the chance to meet Ron and Valerie Taylor, and Valerie is certainly one of the first women in diving history and filmmaking and still photography. She's just such an excellent photographer, filmmaker and a lady, and I think of her often and look to her a lot for courage and example.

BS: Why do you need courage in this business?

MH: It takes courage to get out of bed every day and face the challenges, it's a business. There's a lot of competition, a lot of people wanting to do what you do. There's so much to learn, it's an ever changing business, and sometimes it's a challenge and thinking how to forge ahead, and it is very much a man's world as a lot of businesses are. So finding the way to pursue what you want to do as a woman in the business and to maintain a grace about it and an intelligence. I'm not sure I always come up with the intelligence side but Valerie just has a way of doing her job well. When I say doing her job, fulfilling her dream and I just admire that tremendously.

BS: Good answer. Besides people, what species are you most pleased to work with or maybe you've encountered?

HH: Well, I like working with small animals. I really enjoy the act of capturing small animal behaviours, small animal behaviourisms like mantis shrimps and molluscs, small fish. But not surprisingly the animals that I think I've had my most exciting experiences with have been whales. There's nothing I can think of that's more sensational than being in the water with any of the great whales. I can think of many times when I've been swimming back to the boat and a 40 or 50 foot animal is following me back to the boat, inches away.

It's just an incredible rush to turn around and see that you're being followed by an animal that's interested in you that's so much larger.

I've photographed many species of whales - humpback whales, right whales, grey whales blue whales - and in almost every case, almost every good shot that I've gotten of whales because the whales were as interested in me as I was in them. Usually it's a process that takes hours where we're diving with the same animal for a long period of time. There's no way that I could swim up and keep up with one of these animals for even moments. So one way to get good footage of them is if they're hanging around on purpose, and I've had a few experiences like that and every one of them has been completely memorable.

MH: I really envy Howard's experiences with those whales and unfortunately I was not in the water or even on location for most of those experiences. So I guess for me it goes back to that manta ray, diving with that manta ray in the Sea of Cortez, being able to do something for that animal. Actually it happened a similar situation at Cocos Island a few years later, where a big manta ray came by and had some fishing line caught on it. Howard was in the water with me at the time and we managed to get the line off. Being able to do something for an animal that was injured by man's hand, if you will, by the fishermen leaving lines in the water or just dropping the lines in the water and the ray swimming past it and getting tangled. To be able to give something back and free the animal of that entanglement just goes very deep to my heart.

10. Discussing other names and projects in the wildlife filmmaking industry

BS: If you weren't you, who else in wildlife film would you like to be and why?

HH: Well, we've made our whole career making films about marine wildlife. Literally all the films that we've done have been underwater films. I do envy some of the other wildlife film makers that have had terrestrial experiences. People like Wolfgang Bayer who's worked so much in the North Pacific with bears, the whole Yellowstone environment. Mark Deeble and Vicky Stone are colleagues of ours and they are very good underwater filmmakers but they also make fantastic terrestrial films. I wouldn't mind knowing what they know how they do and being able to work with African wildlife. Same with Beverly and Dereck Joubert. I envy them their experiences in Africa and their familiarity with those animals.

So I think I wouldn't trade places with any of them but if I found myself in a situation where our roles were reversed, I wouldn't be disappointed to be any one of those people.

MH: I guess I don't spend a lot of time wishing I was someone else. I mean I just try to live in today and what can I do today to make today better and to make tomorrow. But maybe if I had wish to fulfil it would be to see the environment as it was some years ago, before we had lost some of the animals that we have now, not only specific species but the numbers of any given species.

I remember a few years ago I read a book that Hans Hass wrote and he was describing being at Cocos Island in 1950 or 1951 with Lotte Hass, who later became his wife. Talking about the sharks that they saw there and just looking out on the surface and they could see just shark fins. I met Lotte a few years later and I said, Lotte, I've just come back from Cocos Island and I read your book. I read Hans's book about diving there in the early 50s, and she said “you saw lots of tiger sharks” and I said, no, we didn't see any tiger sharks. She said, “you saw lots of tiger sharks” and I thought there's a language barrier here. Maybe she's speaking English and that's not her native tongue, and I later found out that she speaks English very well and she was saying you saw lots of tiger sharks there. She could not believe that we did not see any. So I think that if I could trade places with someone for a moment it would be to see what wildlife offered in the ‘40s, ‘50s, early ‘60s. We've lost so much in our environment that we're just never going to get back.

BS: Yes. I've often thought what would it be like to go diving if you could go back to a pre-man kind of time. Just unreal. Along that note, what types of experiences that other filmmakers have in this industry that you *do not envy?*

MH: Doug Allan going to the Arctic and sitting on an ice flow for weeks at a time. I don't tolerate the cold very well although he has tremendous stories from being up there.

HH: We were incredibly lucky in that the first film that I made was so successful that it was very easy for me to get a contract to make a second film and a third film. That first film, Seasons in the Sea (10), also entered us into the IMAX industry and allowed me to direct the first IMAX underwater 3D film [Into the Deep]. It's been the foundation of my career. There's a lot of other people out there that are enormously talented that never got that first break that set up their careers the way that mine has been set up. I was very lucky to be at the right place at the right time with the right kind of film. In 1990 when Seasons was released I think a lot of people were out there. There are fine directors and cameramen and filmmakers that don't have the money, aren't given the budgets to make a really great film and it was the success of that one film that really set up our career. I'm glad that we had that opportunity and I'm not out making low budget films.

BS: I think except for that last little part about the low budget films we're okay.

Imagining that time where money and travel weren't an issue, what's the wildlife film that you'd most like to make or see made?

HH: Do you have one?

MH: Yes, and that would be an IMAX 3D film in the South Pacific and guess what, that's what we're getting ready to do next. We're actually in pre-production right now. We were calling it Deep Sea-quel (16), another film after Deep Sea 3D (12). That won't be the title but I will be going next year to the Great Barrier Reef and South Australia, and probably Komodo Island and Papua New Guinea, to make another 3D IMAX film and I'm very, very excited about it.

HH: We've been really lucky in that people have come to us and said we would like you to make a film. It's really never been the case that they've come and said we would like you to make a film about such and such. They say we would like you to make a film for us, what do you have in mind? So literally all the films that I've directed and Michele has produced have been films that were our ideas. So when you say where would you like to go and what film would you like to make, we have had the opportunity to do that numerous times and we're getting ready to do it again.

As Michele said, we're going to make an IMAX 3D film in the tropical Pacific and we've picked the locations that we want to go to, to film animals that we're interested in. Our executive producers are just providing the money and saying bring us back a good product. As long as we're able to bring back a good product I think those opportunities will continue to present themselves.

Having said that, I would like to go to Antarctica and make an underwater film in Antarctica. I haven't proposed to do that to anybody because it takes an enormous amount of time, it's physically extraordinary difficult, and I'm not sure that I want to spend the amount of time that is necessary to make a film there just so that I can see it. But if we finish this tropical Pacific 3D film and we're asked to do another it would probably be in Antarctica.

BS: A lot of this sounds like people paying you to go out with your friends and your toys and just do what you like to do?

HH: A lot of times it is people paying us to go out and do exactly what we want to do. But when we're on the boat and we're out diving some place with these big heavy cameras and stuff, we're having as much fun as anybody has doing anything. I mean that's vacation time. We're out with our friends, we're working hard doing spectacular diving. It doesn't get any better than that. The price we pay for that privilege is the one year we will do in pre-production, upstairs behind a computer, doing the research for this film, the proposal writing, the script writing, the budgeting, the logistical planning that goes with it. So we pay a price for the privilege of being able to go out in the field. Like I say it'll be a full year of pre-production before we actually go.

Then once we're done doing the fun part, we're done doing the diving, we'll spend six months in post-production which is usually stressful, a lot of time spent in a dark room, and it's not entirely without fun but it doesn't measure up to being out in the field. So, yes, we get to do wonderful projects and we have a great, great time but there's a lot of work involved.

MH: One of the fun things, as Howard said, is being able to dive with our buddies and most of the crew that we hire are friends, they've become friends. I don't know which came first in some cases but because of the experiences of working together they've become friends. It's a tricky thing picking a crew. We'll go out for two, three, four or five weeks at a time and we're living on a boat. It's a pretty confined environment and, boy, people had better be able to get along well and have congenial and compatible personalities, otherwise it's just not going to work. But we've been very fortunate to put together a crew over the years who work together so well.

Many of the crew members have worked with us for many a year. Bob Cranston has been working with Howard since the late '70s and that certainly is an advantage in the communication and how we work together, how they work together underwater. But it's been a great ride and I'm looking forward to more of it.

11. Watching other people's work

BS: Do you guys watch wildlife films?

HH: Sure, we watch PBS, we watch wildlife films on PBS. We go to the film festivals and review a lot of the films there. We watch IMAX films a lot that are done about wildlife. It's less important now to me to watch wildlife films as it was earlier in my career because I really learned how to make wildlife films by watching other people's work. If people who are watching this want to know how study up on becoming a wildlife filmmaker watch the BBC, watch whatever wildlife filmmakers are doing. It's not rocket science. It's not hard to figure out what they're doing and if you don't know what lens they're using call somebody up and ask them. But the way a film is constructed, how it's edited and how long the scenes are, how the cuts are made, how all that is done is right there on television for anybody to figure out.

BS: Do you ever find yourself watching a wildlife film and actually separating yourself from the film making process? Like, hey, I like this kind of film and I'm actually interested in the content.

HH: That never happens to me really when I'm watching a wildlife film. When I'm watching a wildlife film I'm always seeing it from a filmmaker's point of view. When I watch a feature film I get often lost in the story but as a cameraman it's easy to be awoken from the fantasy when you notice a particularly interesting camera move or a flaw in continuity, or something like that. So I think as a director/cameraman, I'm susceptible to being brought out of the illusion of disbelief or whatever that's called. But that's not a bad thing either. I mean I find it interesting to watch how other people make films and I enjoy evaluating the techniques that they use.

MH: If we think back to the mid '70s when Howard was shooting still photos but not shooting any film yet. I remember sitting and watching TV and watching probably films by the Bartletts and the Jouberts, and Howard would have his little watch, his timer, and he'd be watching these films that have been made on land and saying I could do that, I could do that underwater. The timer was because he'd be timing sequences and timing the shots, and studying and learning, and he kept saying over and over I could do that, I could do that underwater. I got so tired of listening to him say that I finally one night just said I can't stand anymore, just do it, why don't you do it? He wrote a letter to the folks at Nature (21) and ended up getting a contract. So it can be a learning lesson.

BS: What would your favourite all-time wildlife programme or series be and why?

HH: I think there's two series that I'd have to consider my favourites or the most influential ones that I've seen. Certainly the first would be The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau (1). That was hugely influential in selecting the career that I'm in. The other was probably Life on Earth (17) by the BBC. It was the first of their really big budget, fantastic natural history films, at least the first that I saw of that calibre. They've done many since with Blue Planet (18) and Planet Earth (19) and others but Life on Earth, when I saw that series and how well done it was, it was very influential.

MH: I guess I would have said any of the BBC/David Attenborough series. I think the detail that they go into in exploring any given subject is just tremendous and I've learnt so much from it. Their techniques in film making as well as just learning about the subjects and I love Sir David's delivery and the behind the scenes, and seeing him in action and exploring his subjects. I think one of the things that draws me in so much is Sir David's tremendous thirst for knowledge, and he seems to know what the viewer's going to want to know and I think he knows that because he has those questions himself. So he answers those and it's what I want to know as the viewer about whatever the subject is that he's filming and exploring, and I just can't get enough of it.

12. Future of the industry, advice for young filmmakers and environmental issues

BS: How do you see the industry developing in the future?

HH: Well, I think the industry is always changing, it's been changing for as long as I've been it and I was really lucky to start making films at a time when wildlife behavioural films were at their zenith in the United States and in England. Since the mid '90s the industry has kind of turned down toward more adventure programming, presenter based programming, less animal behaviour and more interaction between humans and animals. I don't really like that kind of programming very much. I don't think there is anything wrong with it, I prefer animal behaviour. I see that now coming full circle and today we're beginning to see more of what we call **blue chip** programming, more pure animal behaviour.

In the meantime I've been able to continue whereas a lot of filmmakers have been kind of left out in the cold. I've been able to continue because I went from making blue chip programming for television, and then as that industry turned down I continued to make blue chip programming for IMAX films. So I was very fortunate to be able to make that transition. Now that high definition video is here and people are putting these big plasma screens in their homes, projection systems in their homes, I think we're going to see a resurgence of pure natural history because it's so beautiful to see on a big screen. I see that coming back even today and I think it's going to continue to come back as high definition takes a firmer hold in the marketplace.

BS: If someone came to you with the desire to go into this industry what advice would you give them?

HH: When people ask me for advice on how to get into the industry and what words of wisdom I might have —

BS: I think we're going to have to wait for this helicopter is it too loud —

Cameraman: lets go

BS: So if someone were to approach you who wanted to join this industry what advice would you give them?

HH: I'm often asked for advice from young filmmakers, how to break into the industry and what words of wisdom I can offer. I think if I was going to give somebody one piece of advice because we could spend hours talking about specific things. But if I was going to give somebody just one bit of advice, I'd say don't do it for the money, do it because you love doing it. Do wildlife film making because you love the experience, you love the process, make making money a secondary goal, a fringe benefit. If your goal is to get into the industry and make a living and make money, it's going to take you so long to get to that point that you'll probably be disappointed and drop out. But if you're passion is spending time with the wildlife and capturing the images of wilderness on videotape or film, if that's your passion and you love it no matter how little you get paid, you may wake up one day and be surprised to find that you're making a living at it and you have a career. That's how it happened for me.

BS: It makes sense to me.

For both of you. You've both been passionate observers of the marine environment for decades and seeing many changes, and been privileged at many different behaviours and things that no one else has been. Over that time you have to have reached different conclusions about things or have some philosophies about that environment. What kind of thoughts or insights have you gained over the years?

HH: People often ask us how much change we've seen in the ocean environment during our careers and it's been enormous. I think that to put it into perspective, it's a good idea to take a look at a website called shiftingbaselines.org (20). The premise of the whole Shifting Baselines movement is that we think our first experience with wilderness is pristine. The first time you make a dive, the first time you go into a rainforest, the first time you go into the desert. What you see are lots of animals, lots of fish, beautiful trees, whatever it is and you think this is a pristine wilderness and it's not.

When I first started diving what I saw was far from a pristine underwater wilderness. I didn't know that at the time and to give you kind of an idea, to make it into a story. When I first started diving the Marisla seamount in the Sea of Cortez, you could go down on a dive and you would see three or four manta rays, sometimes you'd see a whale shark, you would invariably see a school of four or five hundred hammerhead sharks, schools of yellow fin tuna. It was absolutely spectacular. I mean it was a spectacular place.

I remember talking to fishermen that said that, oh yes, when we used to come out here 10, 15 years ago those hammerhead shark fins on the surface as far as you could see. I thought to myself that's silly, that's just nonsense. Yes, there's 400 or 500 hammerhead sharks down here circling the point off the Seamount, how could there ever be any more than that? But they insisted, oh yes, hammerhead shark fins as far as you could see. While today there are no hammerhead sharks on the Marisla Seamount in the Sea of Cortez, they're all gone. There's no manta rays, there's no whale sharks, there are no yellow fin tuna, they're all gone.

What has happened was when I made my first dive that was my baseline, it was spectacular. Now if I go back there the amount of decline is enormous. But a diver that goes out and makes his first dive today, he's going to go down and he's going to see all these creol fish, he's going to see moray eels, he's going to see stingrays, he's going to see tubastrea coral over the bottom. He's going to think to himself how could it ever be more spectacular than this. That's what Shifting Baselines is all about and, yes, we've seen the ocean environment decline dramatically. In fact, it's declining at an accelerating pace.

It's declining so fast that when we begin pre-production on a film, knowing that there are these animals in these locations, by the time we get there a year or a year and a half later they're very often gone. When we made a film called Coral Reef Adventure (9) we went to Fiji because it had the most spectacular coral reefs

I'd ever seen, spectacular hard corals and soft corals. We scouted it and dived it and said this is the place to make Coral Reef Adventure (9). By the time we got there a year later all the hard corals were dead. So, yes, the environment's changing at a dramatic pace and that pace is accelerating.

BS: Kind of hard to follow up after that.

MH: Yes, nothing to add, that's it.

BS: I guess we're done now.

HH: All right then. Let's all go out and have a seafood dinner (joking)

BS: With all of the exposure to all of the knowledge we have now about the decline of the environment and nations trying to get involved in sustainable seas and, reversing all these processes. Do you have any insight as to whether any of it can even make an impact?

HH: I feel like any environmental movement is somewhat disingenuous unless it includes population control. The fundamental problem that we have in the environment is too many people. If you talk about reducing carbon dioxide emissions and you talk about deforestation, if you talk about pollution, all those things. Yes, we should do something about all those things but in an environment where the population is growing all the time, we are not going to solve those problems. Population is the fundamental environmental problem that we have and nobody wants to talk about it. Until you're talking about population the rest of it is just talk.

I'm pretty pessimistic about the direction all these things are taking and until we start talking about reducing the number of people. The environmentalists once said, just a few years ago, that when we reach 6 billion people on this planet that's the carrying capacity of the planet, and all hell is going to break lose. Well, we've passed 6 billion people, we blew right past that and look, the planet didn't implode. But when you get a fatal disease, you get cancer, you don't die from it the day you get it, it's still fatal. You may die a year later. We may die when we get to 7 billion people or 8 billion people but 6 billion people's probably about right. I mean that's probably about how many this planet could handle.

If you look at the rate of deforestation, you look at the rate of pollution, you look at the rate of resource consumption, you look at carbon dioxide emissions, and you say, okay, yes, 30 years from now it might be a little bit warmer and a little bit more crowded. But if you look at it 500 years from now nobody can imagine these rates of decline and look out 500 years and imagine that's anything but catastrophic, and nobody wants to talk about it.

BS: So what you're saying is your ancestors may be making underwater films about pond raised tilapia.

HH: [Laughs] It's going to be tougher for the next generation of wildlife filmmakers, that's for sure. They'll have great digital tools and they'll be making underwater films about jellyfish and anemones.

MH: They may be able to go to Indonesia and film the lost islands of Indonesia that are now seamounts.

HH: Yes, and are going to be underwater.

END

People, Films and Organisations mentioned

Al Giddings

Beverly Joubert
Bob Cranston
Chuck Nicklin
David Attenborough
Dereck Joubert
Des Bartlett
Doug Allan
Gordy Waterman
Greg MacGillivray
Hans Hass
Hardy Jones
Jack McKenny
Jacques Cousteau
Jen Bartlett
Lotte Hass
Mark Deeble
Noel Archambault
Peter Benchley
Peter Guber
Stan Waterman
Victoria Stone
William Raisner Junior

BBC
Howard Hall Productions
Jackson Hole Film Festival
National Geographic
NBC
PBS
Scripps Institute of Oceanography
Survival Anglia
Wildscreen

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Glossary

Bottom time: The time between a diver leaving the surface at the start of a dive and starting the final ascent

Blue-chip: A prestigious style of wildlife documentary which can be described as a depiction of mega-fauna, following a dramatic storyline, using only images of visual splendor, giving a sense of timelessness and with an absence of reference to controversial issues.

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