

Bonnie Eyre's in Tune with the Ocean

By Barbara Del Piano



Bonnie Eyre swims with a honu.

Most people have cats or dogs for pets, others have parakeets or canaries; some have a goldfish in a bowl. But not Bonnie Eyre! She has dozens of pets of different varieties with whom she spends a part of every day. . . playing with them, or just observing them.

Bonnie's pet world is under the water in front of the Club where she plunges into the ocean around seven-thirty each and every morning (except on jellyfish days). After a vigorous swim, she dons her snorkel mask and fins and roams the channel seeking out her favorite denizens beneath the sea with whom she has, over time, established a special relationship.

Bonnie's affinity for the water and the creatures that live in it go back to her childhood. She spent her early years in Nuuanu, where, during naptime, she sneaked out of bed and wandered down to Nuuanu Stream to splash in the water. In 1947, soon after Bonnie and her family moved to Diamond Head, she joined the Outrigger.

When only in the seventh grade, she was selected by Coach Bobby Rath to be a member of the Punahou Senior Varsity Swimming Team, and indulged in her favorite sport, not only in the school pool, but in the ocean as well. She also took up paddling on girls' teams coached by Johnny Hollinger and Dad Center.

It was during the Rough Water Swim on Labor Day, nearly 30 years ago, that Bonnie encountered six dolphins as she began the final lap of the race. Hoping to get a free ride on one of them, she joined the group, and while they didn't offer her taxi service, they squeaked and smiled as they headed off toward the horizon.

Over the years, Bonnie's adventures in the ocean have been spectacular, to say the least. Sea creatures many of us have never heard of are her daily companions. Seeing them in their natural habitat, interacting with other species, watching them

develop to maturity, are fascinating. As she plunges into the water on her early morning explorations, Bonnie says she never knows what to expect. Every morning is a new adventure.

Bonnie has been observing a juvenile sailfin tang for over a year, watching it grow from the size of a fifty cent piece to nearly five inches round. All around her the sea creatures cavort, possibly showing off their talents for their favorite admirer.

It's not unusual for her to see a trumpet fish riding along on the back of a honu (turtle). She has observed parrot fish change color; when they're happy, they're blue; when angry, they turn orange and brown. Octopus change from pink and white to brown and black when irritated. When Bonnie got too close to an upset octopus, it released a cloud of black ink, completely engulfing her. Most people would find

it frightening; to her, it was a thrilling experience.

Bonnie once encountered a very rare hawksbill honu sitting on the sand, so named because it has a bill like a hawk, and a serrated design on the back of its shell. On another occasion, a young honu, who had injured its fin, looked her in the eye, liked what it saw, and rested on her arm, using her as a pit stop.

The sea creatures often play games with each other, sometimes, it seems, performing for their favorite audience. Parrot fish and octopus, as well as eels and papio, enjoy swimming with each other. Bonnie likes to seek out an eel that lives in a coral head. If it sees her, it won't come out; if she hides from it, it emerges, swimming along with a papio on either side.

Another interesting fish Bonnie frequently encounters is commonly called the Hawaiian cleaner wrasse because it eats the scales and parasites off other fish. Bonnie calls the area where this takes place the "car wash," as there is usually a long line of fish waiting for the service.

One day, Bonnie was surprised when a brightly colored humuhumu attacked her. Then she realized it was a female protecting her eggs, which Bonnie had accidentally come upon.

Other creatures she has met are oval shrimp, unusual because they swim both backwards and forwards. The young ones, orange and blue, are about four inches long, and swim close to the top of the water; as they mature, they grow to ten inches long and their colors change to tan and yellow, sometimes right in front of her.

It's always a thrill to encounter a trumpet fish, or yellow tang. To her, they are like a painting in motion. She loves to follow along behind them, marveling at their brilliant colors.

Bonnie's underwater escapades have taken her far away from the Outrigger Channel. She has been to Fiji, the Galapagos, Marquesas, Pitcairn, Easter Island, Cook Islands, Rora Tonga, and Tahiti, where, on Bora Bora she witnessed a manta ray per-

Since 1985, Bonnie Eyre has swum more than 10,000 miles in the waters off the Club, the equivalent of swimming to San Francisco and back to Honolulu, twice. She is shown with her Mileage Award from the OCC Swimming Committee in 2013.



Honu



Another friend, a puffer fish.

forming a ballet complete with somersaults which went on for hours.

Every morning is a new adventure and Bonnie wonders, "What will I see today?" She recently acquired a new friend, a rockmover wrasse, so named because it overturns rocks on the ocean floor in search of food. She has seen this fish for seven days in a row so it is likely to become one of her regular play-mates.

At Kona Village, on the Big Island, she encountered whitetip sharks. About five feet long and known for their stocky bodies and long, white-tipped fins, they can be extremely dangerous. But Bonnie hit it off with them and they had a most pleasant swim together, enjoying each other's company.

Time with her underwater pets and her unique relationship with the ocean is a very special part of Bonnie's life; in her own words, she expresses what it means to her.



"My early morning swims in the ocean are a very special time for me and I look forward to them each day. I am very attuned with the ocean in all kinds of weather. Being in the ocean is like a silent world, and then you become one with nature."

"Watching fairy terns and sea birds soaring over the waves, seeing beautiful rainbows arching in the sky, whipping wind, which I love to swim against, rain falling straight down leaving tiny bubbles bouncing on top of the ocean, big white clouds suspended in the sky like cotton candy, and the ocean glistening in the sun like broken glass, or looking angry on dark days."

"I love gliding through or over the waves. One of my favorite things is to give a big kick at the base of a big wave which then leaves me suspended in the air, like a sea gull in motion. I love seeing all types of ocean creatures. What joy it is to swim beside an eagle ray and to get so close I can see its gills in motion; to swim with a seal who slowed down to my pace as we went along together and he kept smiling at me like he had found a new playmate."

"And then there are my honu who I know by the markings on their shells. Some blow bubbles for me. As I make my way towards shore I always say I can't wait for tomorrow to swim all over again. And so I emerge from the ocean after my beautiful swim leaving footprints in the sand."