A frogman’s voyage with Jacques Cousteau

by Patricia Gay

When Weston native Richard Hyman was 18, he embarked on an extraordinary series of adventures with famed author and researcher Jacques Cousteau.

Capt. Cousteau, as Mr. Hyman called the late French scientist, was also an explorer and filmmaker. His series, The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau, was a fixture on television from 1968 to 1976, and introduced many Americans to life beneath the seas.

Nearly 40 years after his last voyage, Mr. Hyman has transcribed a journal of his experiences in a new book, "Frogmen: The True Story of My Journeys with Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau and the Crew of Calypso."

The book is a labor of love for Mr. Hyman, who felt strongly about getting the story preserved for posterity that he wrote and published the book himself.

"I wanted to pay homage to a man I consider one of the greatest explorers and visionaries of all time," Mr. Hyman said in an interview at his home in Weston. Jacques Cousteau was highly acclaimed for a vast body of work. He was a two-time Academy Award winner, received 40 Emmy nominations and created 100 films. He also invented the aqua lung underwater breathing apparatus.

The late singer John Denver wrote the song "Calypso" as a love letter to Mr. Hyman’s childhood hero, Jacques Cousteau. "I had several conversations with John Denver about my job and what I did. I think he was gathering information for his 'Calypso' song. I thought he was far out," Mr. Hyman said, referring to Denver’s popular tag line.

On another occasion, Mr. Hyman was diving in the Bahamas. "His French accent, and would naturally at jokes that others found awful," Mr. Hyman said.

"I remember his smile and the way he would laugh good naturedly at jokes that others might find amusing," Mr. Hyman said.

After Philippe Cousteau’s death, his widow, Jan Cousteau, and her children moved to Weston. "They were here for several years and their children went to school here before they moved away," Mr. Hyman said. He still remains in touch with two of the Cousteaus’ grandchildren.

Richard Hyman, in his "frogman" scuba gear, was part of Jacques Cousteau’s diving team in the 1970s.

After Cousteau

After his adventures with Jacques Cousteau, Mr. Hyman entered the technology field. He met his wife Margaret in 1987 at a telecommunications company where they were both working, and settled into a home on Old Redding Road, a few miles away from his parents, Janet and Fred Hyman.

The couple has been married for 24 years and have two children, Brent Hyman, 22, and Sarah Hyman, 19. Mr. Hyman has maintained a strong interest over the years in the environment and nature, thanks to the influence of Jacques Cousteau.

"Capt. Cousteau was the hardest working man I ever knew. I learned from him to be diligent and to dedicate your life to something you believe in. He was very concerned about the environment. He wanted us to protect our fragile water planet and said, 'protect what we love,'" Mr. Hyman said.

Although Capt. Cousteau was generally serious, he also had a good sense of humor. "I remember his smile and the way he would laugh good naturedly at jokes that others might find amusing," Mr. Hyman said.

When comedians and talk show hosts imitated Jacques Cousteau they would mock his French accent, and would don knitted red cap, Capt. Cousteau’s trademark. "The culture taught us all to wear those red caps, so we did," Mr. Hyman said.

When Capt. Cousteau was flying his amphibious plane, the "Flying Calypso" crashed off the coast of Portugal during a water landing. "It was a terribly sad time and all the members of the Cousteau family gathered in Jacksonville before heading out to Portugal," Mr. Hyman said.

For more information on Mr. Hyman and Frogmen, visit Mr. Hyman’s Facebook page, facebook/Frogmen. He is also on Twitter @Frogmen. His book is available for purchase on www.amazon.com and on www.createspace.com.

Richard Hyman's new book, "Frogmen," discusses his underwater adventures with Jacques Cousteau. Mr. Hyman is giving a talk about his book at the Weston Public Library on Friday, June 10, at 7 p.m.

— Patricia Gay photo