

A frogman's voyage with Jacques Cousteau

by Patricia Gay

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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 so 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.

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 tribute to Capt. Cousteau, and it became a hit that went gold worldwide.

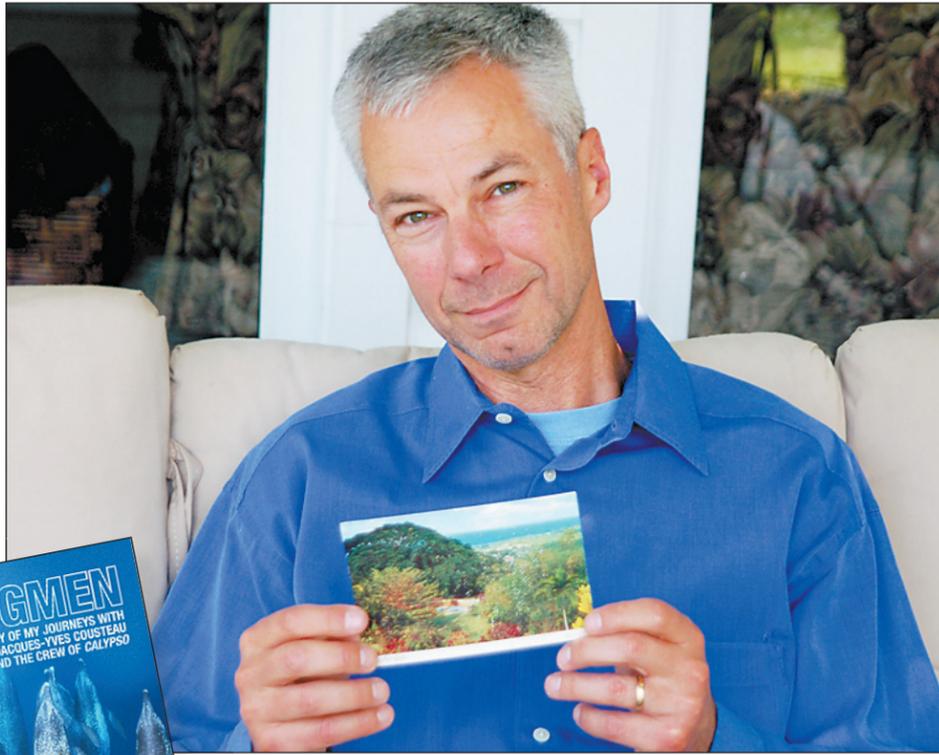
Mr. Hyman's book is a personal account of the expeditions he made with Capt. Cousteau and the crew of the research vessel *Calypso*. His story takes the reader behind the scenes, inside the ship, and under the sea.

Adventures begin

Ironically, Mr. Hyman's experience with Capt. Cousteau began in 1973 on dry land. When Mr. Hyman was 18, he had just graduated from Weston High School, when his father, a business partner of Capt. Cousteau, introduced them to each other.

Mr. Hyman was asked to drive a truck from Los Angeles to the Canadian wilderness to work with two Cree Native Americans to build a cabin for the Cousteau team to winter in while they studied and filmed beavers.

While Mr. Hyman eventually had to leave the wilderness project to attend college at Furman University in Greenville, S.C., he later joined Capt. Cousteau on three ocean



In Richard Hyman's new book, *Frogmen*, he discusses his undersea 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

adventures.

The first journey included diving in warm Florida springs alongside manatees and studying stone crabs off the panhandle.

Months later, Mr. Hyman flew to Mexico's Yucatán, boarded *Calypso*, and camped on an uninhabited island to study lobsters. During this trip, Mr. Hyman wrote an independent study research project on the migration of spiny lobsters.

On the second voyage, Mr. Hyman was one of just a few Americans on the trip, and sailed with the *Calypso* crew along the 180-mile Belize Barrier Reef, filming the spawning of thousands of grouper.

On his final trip, Mr. Hyman was a full-fledged "frogman" — someone trained in scuba diving. He participated in dives on the USS Monitor shipwreck off North Carolina, and discovered skeletons inside wrecks off Martinique.

Mr. Hyman grew especially close to Capt. Cousteau's wife, Simone, who had a commanding presence. Everyone on board referred to her simply as "Madame." While Mr. Hyman has kept numerous souvenirs from his *Calypso* travels, one he particularly treasures is a simple, hand-written postcard Madame Cousteau sent him from a trip she took to Naussau in the Bahamas. "Madame treated me like a son and was very good to me," Mr. Hyman said.

Lasting impressions

Mr. Hyman was exposed to things on the trip that had nothing to do with oceanic

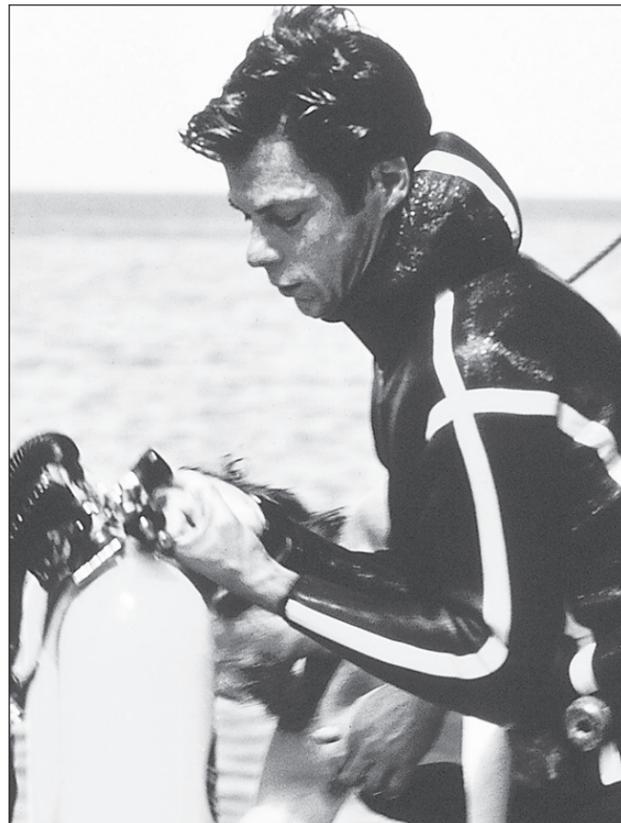
research, but made a long-lasting impression on him.

He met John Denver, who boarded the *Calypso* in Belize to film a special with Capt. 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 Mr. Denver's popular tag line.

On another occasion, Mr. Hyman was diving in

Jacksonville, Fla., with Madame Cousteau onboard, when news broke out that Philippe Cousteau, the couple's second son, died when 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.



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

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.

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 met. 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 made about him," Mr. Hyman said.

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

With that, Mr. Hyman went upstairs and promptly brought down a knitted red cap he had saved from his days on *Calypso*. It was a little small, but he was able to fit it snugly on his head.

Then, as if some pleasant memories had just resurfaced from the ocean depths, Mr. Hyman turned and let out a big smile.

Mr. Hyman will be appearing in the Community Room at the Weston Public Library on Friday, June 10, at 7 p.m. for a reception, discussion and slideshow presentation of his book, *Frogmen, The True Story of My Journeys with Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau and the Crew of Calypso*.

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.