

A Life Underwater

David Doubilet is a well-known underwater photographer, who has had his work published in many books and magazines. He was born in New York and started taking photos underwater at a very young age.

I grew up in New York City, a very strange place to go diving. When I was ten, my uncle took me to the premiere of the movie *The Silent World*. Produced by Jacques Cousteau, the famous underwater photographer, the film was shot in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. I was absolutely mesmerised. Sometimes it happens to you. You see something - a moment, a part of life - that changes the course of your life. I was very lucky because it happened when I was only ten.

After the film, knees trembling, I went up to Jacques Cousteau, who stood straight, tall and aloof, talking to people in the theatre. I sneaked between a forest of legs, looked up at him, pulled his jacket and said: "Oh, Captain Cousteau, I want to swim underwater and take pictures. I want to be an underwater photographer." He looked down and said: "Why not?"

My family spent summers at our house on the New Jersey shore. The sea there is dark and murky and changes all the time. Rough or calm, it is always green. That's where I began diving. I had a simple yellow face mask and green flippers from a company called Frankie the Frog Man. The flippers looked like lily pads. My snorkel was made of hard rubber that hurt my mouth, but I could put my head under and breathe when I swam. I learned to be a good free diver and how to spear fish, too, because that's what you did underwater in those days.

At 12, I learned to scuba dive using a double air tank that was heavier than I was. I became a certified diver at 13. There was a group called the New York Skin Diving Academy. I had to study the physics of diving. In 1956 the sport was barely 12 years old, so I was a young pioneer.

I liked to be underwater for one simple reason: I could escape the rest of the world. I could escape school or parents or lunch if I didn't like it. I was constantly being sought for something I was either late for, or forgot to do, or did not want to do in the first place. Being at the bottom of the pool was like being at the bottom of the ocean – no one could reach me.

My parents never really encouraged me, but they never discouraged me either. Everyone in my family did different things. My father, a doctor, liked to fish; my mother played golf; one sister skied; my other sister ice-skated. Everything I did, I did on my own, and everything was possible. I learned early on that if you want to do something, you go and do it.

There were few books about underwater photography back then. I didn't know as

much as the authors of those books, but I wasn't far behind. Using a rubber bag, I adapted my first camera, a Kodak Brownie Hawkeye, for underwater pictures. The first results were absolutely terrible, but I wasn't discouraged. I was taking pictures of everything: fish, mussels and clams, and people peering down from the surface of a swimming pool. I was shooting bubbles. At 14, I won my first photography contest. At 15, my picture of a diver pulling up an anchor sold to a South American magazine. My school did not offer photography courses like many schools do today. But even if you're a student, you can't say, "I want to make student pictures." You must say, "I want to make real pictures that will tell a story and please me."



Photography depends on light. How does the light look in the morning? What kind of shadow does a glass of juice cast? Einstein called photographers "light monkeys," because they are fooling with, playing with, and constantly moving the light. A photographer must be as aware of light as a perfume-maker is of smells.

Photography comes from the heart. Strangely enough, it's not something you do, but something you use to explore your interests and to translate them into images.

David Doubilet



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1. *I grew up in New York City, a very strange place to go diving.*

What does the writer, David Doubilet, mean by this?

Tick **one**.

New York City was a difficult place to grow up.

People in New York didn't approve of strangers diving there.

It was unusual for people to go diving in New York City.

There was nowhere to practise diving in New York City.

2. Look at the paragraph beginning: *After the film...*

When Jacques Cousteau replied *Why not?* to David's remark about wanting to be an underwater photographer, he was

Tick **one**.

making a joke.

offering encouragement.

expecting David to answer.

trying to make David angry.

3. Look at the paragraph beginning: *I grew up in New York City...*

Find and **copy** a **word** that shows David Doubilet's interest was captured by the film he saw.

4. How can you tell that David Doubilet admires Jacques Cousteau?

Explain fully referring to the text in your answer.

5. Look at the paragraph beginning *My family spent...*

From the description of his equipment, how do we know that he was a child when he first learned to dive?

6. *In 1956 the sport was barely 12 years old, so I was a young pioneer.*

What does the word pioneer mean in this sentence?

7. David Doubilet enjoyed being underwater because he could get away from people or things he had to do.

Find and copy a sentence that shows this.

8. How did David Doubilet change his camera so that he could use it for underwater photography?

9. *A photographer must be as aware of light as a perfume-maker is of smells.*

What does David Doubilet mean by this?

10. Complete the table to show whether you think David Doubilet would **agree** or **disagree** with each statement.

Statement	Agree or disagree
To learn to dive you need the best equipment available.	
Photographers are light monkeys.	
Meeting Jacques Cousteau changed the course of my life.	
It is really important that your parents support your interests.	

11. Draw lines to match the event in David Doubilet's life to the age he was when it happened. One has been done for you.

Event	David's age
won his first photography contest	10
learned to scuba dive	12
became a certified diver	13
sold his first photograph to a magazine	14
went to see <i>The Silent World</i>	15

12. *I learned early on that if you want to do something, you go and do it.*

What does this statement by David Doubilet tell us about his character?
