



About Steve Drogin

Exequiel Ezcurra

On April 15, 2009, some seven months after our submarine expedition to the Sea of Cortés ended, Steve Drogin passed away while at a retreat in a remote part of India. He died peacefully from a heart attack, with his wife Hiro Drogin at his side. He was 69 and, up to that sad day, had always been extremely fit and in excellent health.

Steve prospered in San Diego as a real estate developer, but ever since he got his SCUBA certification in 1958, his real passion became diving, SCUBA photography, and traveling to remote destinations looking for adventure. In 1998 he retired to devote his life to his true love—the exploration of the sea. That is when I first met him.

We met at the Natural History Museum thanks to our mutual friend, the great naturalist Norman Roberts, who introduced us. Soon after, Steve invited me to his home for dinner with Barbara, my wife, and our two children. He had a gift to make friends with people of any age, and very soon he realized that my son Pedro, around nine years at that time, was studying at Lemon Avenue Elementary, exactly the same school where he had completed his elementary education half a century before. From that point onwards the two of them became like old buddies, talking about their school experiences as true classmates. Pedro was quite awestruck by this fascinating adventurer paying so much attention to him. I later learnt that Steve had always had a deep commitment towards education. He had prepared a slide show with his underwater photographs that he often presented in inner-city schools to attract children to research and to the marine environment.

Steve Drogin shooting a photo during a diving expedition to the Philippines.
Photo © Hiro Drogin.

After that first dinner, we continued bumping into each other on myriad occasions: the annual meeting of the North American Nature Photography Association, lectures at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, exhibit openings at the Museum, and many other similar events. As a ritual of friendship and appreciation, I started to send him copies of books I had edited, or reprints of research papers I had published, and he would send me copies of his wonderful photographs. It was a joyous exchange on which I was always the winning part.

And then, the e-mails started. As computer communications developed, Steve rapidly became expert in e-mailing from all over the world, letting you know what he was doing, where he was, what his latest adventure was all about, what amazing sight was driving his exploits. And he would attach wonderful digital photographs to his messages, sharing his discoveries with all his friends around the globe.

He would write his messages using a massive and somewhat uncanny 24-point blue Arial font that was impossible to miss. His texts jumped at you from the computer screen, screaming Steve Drogin all over. The messages were newsy, humorous, informative, and funny. He had the rare gift of writing exactly like he spoke. It was like having him talking next to you.

Enthused with our book project, on January 31 he sent us the draft for the prologue. A month and half later I got his last e-mail. In the customary colossal blue print, it read:

This morning I presented my new HiDef sub film to school kids in Chicago.

A 4th grader asked me... "Why doesn't the US put more money into exploring the ocean similar to what they spend on exploring outer space?"

I gave the best answer I could at the moment.

But, it made me think.

What kind of answer would you guys give to this very informed question?

Many thanks for your help.

Steve

Almost exactly a month later, he had passed away. I do not know if he found a satisfactory answer to his question—I know for certain that I have not. But in many ways he died while searching for these answers, and that is what he wanted to do to the last day of his life. He lived according to his principles, and followed with passion his quest for new horizons and new endeavors, always searching for ways to protect his beloved seas.

Steve was also one of the most generous souls I have ever met. He supported the work of young students at Scripps, in the same spontaneous and bighearted manner he also supported the work of young Mexican nature photographers. His kindness knew no bounds.

His thirst for adventure was unquenchable, always looking for new destinations, for new cultures, new voices, new environments. In one of those wonderful dinners at his house in Pacifica Drive, he told me about his plans to have a deep-water submersible built for his explorations. I could not believe what I was hearing; I did not even know at that time a thing about deep-water submersibles, and could not imagine that a person could individually own one. But with Steve, everything seemed to be that way. He would make bold decisions and follow them to their ultimate consequences. Discovery and awe — that is what his life was all about.

And so, he got the sub.

Last year, Steve gave me a call, telling me that the sub would be coming to the Sea of Cortés and generously offering some of the sub's time for research. The rest is history; a piece of history we owe to Steve Drogin and his immense generosity.





A basket star *Astrocaneum spinosum* extends its branched arms over a sea fan *Muricea* sp. Photo © Lorenzo Rosenzweig.