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# Surf Lung One

BY FREDERICK SARGENT

GROWING UP, I always wondered what it would be like to have “cool parents.” I knew with a certainty that my own parents were not cool. For one thing, they were maybe 15 years older than my friends’ parents. They were married late in the game, and my father was over 40 when I was born. My mother was very welcoming to my friends—always ready with a congo bar and refreshments. But my father subscribed to the old adage “Children are to

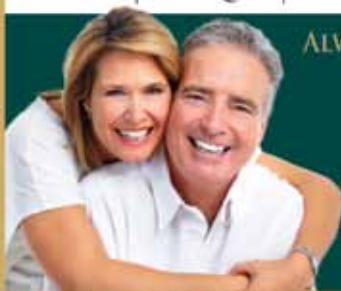
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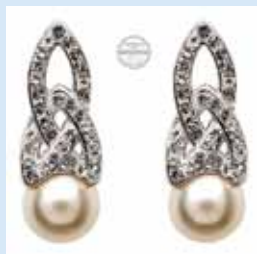
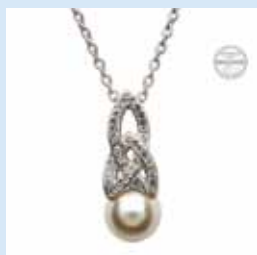


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## FICTION

be seen and not heard." He was busy all the time "puttering around the yard" and barely acknowledged my friends, and if he did notice them, it was probably because they were doing something wrong. I remember him calling the neighbors one time because their kids were playing the stereo out the windows so the whole neighborhood could hear. I walked around in shame after that phone call. But what could I do?

My friend Danny, on the other hand, definitely had cool parents. Richard and Celia Johnson were in their mid-30s when I first met Danny in Academy Park. Unlike my father, Richard actually liked his kids and would often be outside throwing the baseball or football. He must have been a BMOC in high school and college because he was tall, handsome, and athletic. Celia was also tall and a beautiful woman, and the kindest person in the neighborhood to the kids. Maybe because of their location, their house was "Grand Central Station." It was always "We'll meet at the Johnson's and then figure out what to do."

Another notch in their belt was a birthday present that Danny received one year—a U.S. Diver Surf Lung One scuba toy. It was a plastic toy replica of a Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau Aqua-Lung, but in reality, it was a snorkel that looked like a scuba tank. You put on the two-hose mouthpiece from the simulated regulator, and you could breathe from a hole at the back that allowed surface air to enter. You could actually strap this baby on your back and go into the water. The buoyancy from the hollow plastic tank would keep you at the surface, allowing you to paddle around with a mask on and view the underwater world. Should you somehow submerge with this thing, a ball valve shut off the hole so you couldn't breathe or take on water. It was the coolest present a kid could receive, having grown up first with Lloyd Bridges and *Sea Hunt* and then Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau and his *National Geographic* specials.

Standing next to the garage by the pathway leading to the vacant lot, I double checked my gear. The Surf Lung One was strapped securely on my back, and I placed the big oval mask on my face, being careful not to breathe and fog up the lens. Confident that I was "ready to get wet," I turned

and headed down the path into the alder-cloaked empty lot. While the day was sunny and hot, it was a cooler and darker world in the green underworld. I descended slowly down the path, taking in the world that stretched out before me from behind my oval blinders. Alder branches brushed by me as I went deeper and deeper. I reached my maximum depth when I found the collapsed foundation. The lot had originally been cleared for a house build, the foundation hole dug, and the concrete foundation poured. But it progressed no further, and the alders reclaimed the lot, and the foundation walls collapsed into the center. This became our play world, and here at its lowest point I was exploring the concrete slabs for an octopus or maybe a killer whale. Finding no danger here, I continued my dive along the alder-lined pathway, then cut to my left and headed up to a shallower depth. The whole time I was on the lookout for a bad guy sporting a dive knife or maybe a spear gun. Ahead of me was the bright light of Greentree Lane and the surface. Checking my imaginary air gauge, I figured I must be getting low, so I retraced my steps back to the foundation under the cover of the alders. Just a short distance from the garage, I felt my air run out, so I hit the emergency lever to access the final 300 pounds of air and scrambled the final steps up to the Johnsons' garage. Danny was there to greet me after my successful dive.

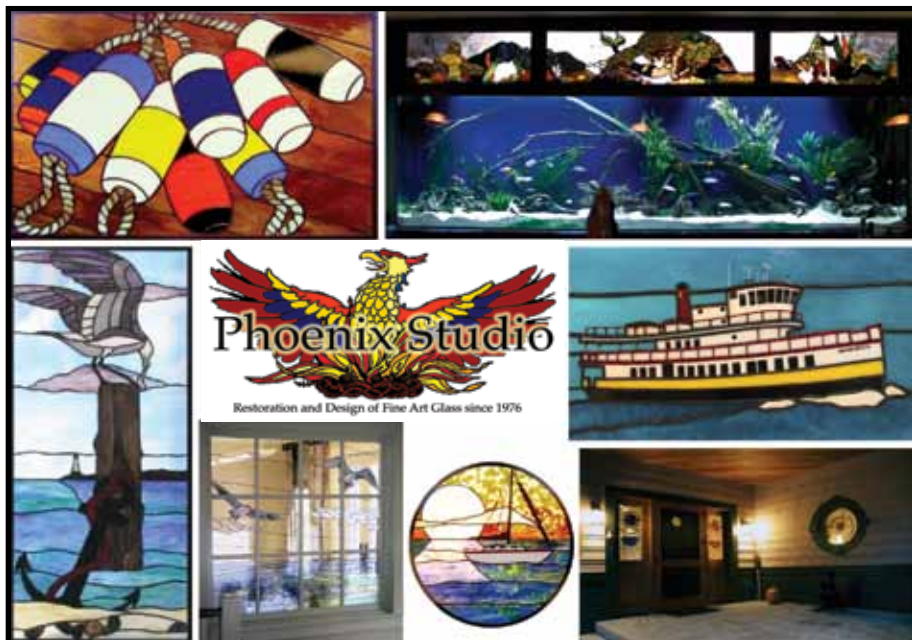
The magic of the undersea world eluded me until my fortieth birthday, when I received a present better than the Aqua Lung One-diving lessons enabling me to become a certified scuba diver. Recently, I was diving in Aruba at the Finger Reef dive site. Donning a 3mm full-body wetsuit with tank, weights, buoyancy compensator, regulator, fins, mask, and snorkel, I stepped off the back of the Dive Aruba boat and entered the underwater world of the Caribbean Sea. Descending to twenty feet in the eighty-degree water, I'm in a world I only dreamed of in that vacant lot. It's like diving in a crystal-clear fish tank. Joining the other divers we slowly descend along this reef, watching the corals change from brain to stag horn and finally black coral which looks eerily like white pine trees. I am amazed on this day as I was diving the vacant lot with Danny's Aqua Lung One. It's another world. ■

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