

Watercolors

by

Ken Bondy

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to my grandchildren, in the order of their appearance:

*Cameron Dirk Bondy
Logan Andrew Dunn
Ryan Ernst Bondy
Elizabeth Kathryn Bondy
Megan Elizabeth Dunn
Sean Kenneth Tierney-Bondy*



Left to right, Ryan, Sean, Logan, Megan, Elizabeth, Cameron

*“As I once became part of them,
all these creatures of the sea are now a part of me,
in my mind,
in my soul,
in my dreams.”*

*Christopher Newbert
“In A Sea of Dreams”
1994*

It can't be said any better

preface

I fly fairly often on commercial airliners between my home in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area. On the southbound trip, usually in the late afternoon, I like to sit on the starboard side of the plane in the window seat, my face pressed to the Plexiglas, watching the California coast slide by below me. On those flights my senses overflow, because my life seems to be inextricably woven and bound to that beautiful band of California coastline, and for a short time the land, the ocean, and my memories blend together and become one.

First comes the lovely crescent shape of Monterey Bay and the green cypress-covered peninsula. Nestled in the center of the peninsula is the city of Monterey, and the little stretch of beach called Cannery Row. In spite of all its commercialism now, I am still haunted there by the ghosts of John Steinbeck and Doc Ricketts, big heroes from my adolescence. Steinbeck was the first to really open my eyes and mind to the beauty of words and the great art of storytelling.

Even from twenty thousand feet I can recognize my favorite Monterey dive sites. Whaler's Cove on Point Lobos is easy to spot. I have spent many delightful hours there underwater watching a parade of colorful California marine life pass by me and my camera. Occasionally I think I can see the white buildings of Monterey Peninsula Hospital just south of the city, tucked among the pines and the cypress, where I said goodbye to my beloved adopted father Bud Enochs.

My life has been so full. I've had a satisfying and rewarding 45-year career as a structural engineer. Talk about fringe benefits—that career has also allowed me the means and the time to spend two thousand hours flying small airplanes and another two thousand hours underwater on scuba—how many people have seen the views of our world that I have? Best of all I have four fantastic children, three with my genes and the fourth, hopefully, with some of my influence. I have six beautiful grandkids, and now know why people say that grandchildren are the best thing that can happen to a person. I've been married for thirty years to a wonderful woman who traded having more than one child for a life with me. Amazing, Pam. You probably made the wrong decision, but I am and will be eternally grateful that you made it.

My eldest daughter's name is Coleen, and I mention her often throughout this book. That is because she is my best dive buddy. She has dived with me in all the places described on these pages. She appears in many of the photographs. She was right beside me when I made many of the other photographs, like the next one of the elephant seal. When I first became a certified diver my wife Pam had already been certified for several years. Pam accompanied me on several trips in my first few years as a certified diver, but it soon became apparent (particularly after she bought me my first underwater camera) that I liked diving and underwater photography a LOT better than she did, and she opted to stop diving. But she was wonderful about allowing me the freedom to pursue this thing that was beginning to be an obsession with me. With her blessing I did several trips by myself, but found that it was lonely. The miraculous things you see underwater are so much better if shared with someone you care for. So after Pam decided to hang up her fins, so to speak, and I found traveling alone on dive trips to be unsatisfying, I approached Coleen, who was an undergraduate student at UCLA at the time, with what I thought was a pretty good deal. Get certified, I told her, and I will take you diving with me all over the world. She got certified, and I took her diving with me all over the world. The amazing things we have seen

together underwater have created a bond between us that will last for both our lifetimes. It's like an unspoken secret we will always share.

*But I digress. Now Monterey is behind us and we are abeam what must be the most beautiful stretch of coastline in the world, the one along California Highway 1 between Monterey and Morro Bay. Robert Louis Stevenson described this coast as the "...most beautiful meeting of land and sea in the world," hard to argue that. You can't really tell just how spectacular it is from up here. From my airliner view the green coastal hills just **become** ocean, and you don't see the detail in the dramatic cliffs and canyons and magnificent, desolate beaches that form this coast. Down there on a few of those isolated beaches great herds of northern elephant seals are making their comeback from near extinction. I've clambered down the rocky cliffs with Coleen and we have seen them up close, looked into their big mysterious black eyes and tried to imagine what bizarre and wondrous things they see when they dive down to feed, a **mile** below the surface of the ocean.*



Northern elephant seal

In real life, as I mentioned, I'm a structural engineer, and several of the old Highway 1 concrete arch bridges make me proud of my ancient profession and profoundly in awe of the men and women who designed and built these strikingly beautiful structures, before I was born. Rather than detracting from the natural scenery these bridges enhance their surroundings in an odd and emotional way, and they look like they have been there forever.



Old concrete arch bridge on California Highway 1

South of Big Sur, the coastal terrain flattens and becomes greener as the airplane levels off at 35,000 feet and what is called the Central Coast lies below. I spot Hearst Castle almost directly below me in the low hills of San Simeon, and then, just ahead to the right, is Morro Rock, the huge granite monolith guarding the entrance to Morro Bay and perhaps the most recognizable feature on the California coast, maybe on the entire Pacific coast.



Morro Rock, entrance to Morro Bay

Seeing “the rock” triggers a sensory overload of emotions. What a connection I have with this part of California—how much of my life was influenced by the places below me. Three of my kids, all except my youngest daughter Lisa, went to college here (Lisa followed in her dad’s footsteps and went to UCLA.) The two oldest, Dirk and Coleen, graduated from Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, the youngest, Jesse, went to Cuesta College just to the north. Coleen not only went to school here, but here she lived, worked as a newspaper reporter, was married, and later suffered great pain. But I know she still has much love for the Central Coast.

All of Morro Bay is visible in the warm afternoon light. I get a little nostalgic as I think of all the dives I have done down there, all the amazing critters I have seen under its cold waters. Now I can see the two old wooden T-piers which serve the bay. The one right next to the 3 power plant stacks is called the North T-Pier, or the “Coast Guard Pier” because of the small military base there. Coleen introduced me to this dive site about 20 years ago when she was living in Morro Bay. Since then I have spent perhaps a hundred hours directly under that pier, thirty feet underwater, rooting around in its bottom junk and finding and photographing some of the most beautiful and unlikely animals imaginable. It is one of the world’s greatest dives, and yet few know it even exists. My photographic journey starts there in Morro Bay, and continues to four other magical places that I think are the best dive destinations in the world.

“The numbers of living creatures of all orders, whose existence intimately depends on kelp, is wonderful. A great volume might be written describing the inhabitants of one of these beds of seaweed”

Charles Darwin, 1834

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