



It wasn't
quite
this cold!

LET'S GO DIVING, IT WILL BE FUN!!

Have you ever wondered why the cow jumped over the moon or how the caramel is put into the chocolate bar or why to bring things down to earth, it rains every Victoria Day Week-end and Hall'o'ween? If you can answer these simple questions than you might be able to tell me why a fairly sensible woman who has a high regard for her personal well-being would spend the Holiday Monday scuba-diving in Tobermory in the pouring rain in fairly rough waters.

Oh no, it is far too easy to blame a brain tumour for this; besides she does not have anything physically wrong with this organ and I stress the word physically. She does however have a propensity to agree to some of the more outrageous suggestions by her friends. At least, I think they are friends.

But – they are going scuba diving, yes, there are three others not unlike herself, who are getting up at the ungodly hour of six am for an early start. Who in their right mind gets up that early when they don't have to! Gentle readers, this alone should tell you something.

This lady dutifully arises at the appointed hour, has a shower, humming softly to herself all the while, makes a big thermos of Irish cream coffee, some sandwiches, muffins and places them together with a few apples and a mickey of Scotch (purely for medicinal purposes, you understand) into her backpack, dons her raincoat and cheerfully sets forth out in the pouring rain to meet the others.

They pile all their gear, and for those uninitiated to the sport, this includes a mask and snorkel, fins, wetsuit (or dry suit) weight belt, a buoyancy compensator which is somewhat like a life jacket and inflates with air to help you rise or stay on the surface, and a regulator and tank without which you cannot breathe underwater. A hood, gloves and boots complete the ensemble. Everything but the weight belt and tank are tossed into a duffel bag which is then lugged out to the truck. Some people carry it easily, other people lug it out. A flag is brought along to mark the location of the dive site so that normal people may gaze wonderingly at the mad folly of others.

You must also check in at the Parks ranger station to receive an identity tag. This then helps the authorities to notify your next of kin once they've dragged your body from the swells. It also lets the coastal patrol know that you are a licensed diver, or students with a dive-master and you supposedly know what you are doing, of course if you knew what you were doing would you be there in the first place!

After three hours of hard travelling time, hard that is on the gluteus-maximus, our heroes arrive at their location and check the incoming waves dashing soundly against the sharp, protruding rocks to gauge their best point of entry. This in itself would deter normal people; not so our hearty crew.

Naturally, it begins to rain again, and there is no facility to change into their gear. She and her friends remove socks and shoes and struggle into the farmer johns balancing precariously on one foot and then the other as they slowly pull the suit up over their knees and up their thighs. They quickly pull on their boots to stop the wind from nipping their toes then tear off their shirts and subsequently secure their shoulder straps. Some of them are just singing as the wind whips their bare backs. "Isn't this fun", they joyously chorus, "I can't think of anything I'd rather do - you?"

She next struggles into her jacket, nearly deforming her face pulling the hood over her head. Finally, she is able to see again and tucks the hood nimbly under the collar of her jacket and zips up. Now only her hands are frozen, but they manage to connect the buoyancy compensator and regulator to the tank. With her dive buddy's help, she straps herself in after putting on her weight belt. A weight belt, by the way, helps you descend to the bottom. If you do not have enough weight on you, you merely bob on the surface like a cork, too much and you sink like a stone. It is important that you have the correct weight for your body and that the belt sits comfortably on your hips.

Grabbing the mask and fins with gloved hands they lumber to the shoreline, believe me walking is impossible – you lumber. After spitting in the mask and swishing it through the water to clean the glass, they adjust them on their face and wade out to put on their flippers. Two of the smarter ones place their regulators in their mouths, then holding their mask at the same time and their gauge with the other hand, they jump off the ledge into the cold, dark water.

Not so our heroine. She and her buddy decide to back in off this ledge jutting out a few feet from shore. She watches her friend, a more experienced diver, maneuver herself into position. Just then a big wave washes over her, flops her to her side and then pulls her out as it recedes again. Instead of turning back like any sane person, this lady just says here we go and plunges in just as the next wave has crashed against the rocks. They locate one another, check that each is okay and then explore the bottom, equalizing as they descend (better than blowing out an eardrum) to a depth of 40 feet.

This absolute calm beneath the choppy waves, this incredible feeling of stillness and unity is exactly the reason why they went through and will go through any minor aggravation (normal people might deem it major aggravation). She never even felt the cold water oozing into her suit as she plunged into the lake as she was concentrating so heavily on making a safe entry. It is only a matter of seconds before your body warms the water trapped between your skin and the suit and you are left to delight in the magical world beneath the water.

They surface about 30 minutes later near a private dock where it is relatively calm and decide to get out there rather than risk an unsafe exit from the rocks. Both are out of breath but exhilarated by the dive and laugh easily in the shared adventure as they trudge back to the truck. The fun part though has just begun, for now they must strip off this gear and get dressed again in the chilly air. After much howling and fervent cursing, they are repacked and in a restaurant drinking hot chocolate, not so much for their stomachs as for the warming effect of the cup on their hands and they are as happy as looney-tunes.

Do they then begin the long trek home? No way! They decide they are going to go through all this one more time. They must wait a little while for the nitrogen levels in their blood to subside, and they all pile into the truck again and head for another site. This time, they are going to dive on a wreck.

One thing that she had forgotten from last year, however was the extreme coldness of that wet bathing suit and wet suit against her now dry skin. She had her gear on and ready to go in record time and not without some hearty epithets. Although the water was calmer, it was colder on this side, but the visibility was incredible. They were able to make out the skeletal remains of the wreck and see how it formed inward to a point at the bow. One some dives you weren't even lucky enough to see an outline of the planks. Again, the feeling of security and beauty overwhelmed her.

They stumbled up the shore after and peeled off their suits as quickly as possible and into dry clothes. This, my friends, is where the mickey of scotch came in handy. Not enough to impair driving but providing a nice burn down the throat to settle warmly inside giving everyone the feeling of comfort and joy. Yes, to answer that simple question at the beginning of this tale - this was a great way to spend a Victoria Day Monday!

The End