

I Had No Pulse

By Ray Hollowell

On December 31st, 2002, I was out at Pipeline shooting video from the water with my good friends Hugh Gentry and Larry Haynes. Larry and I go back 25 years and always have a laugh when one of us gets blasted by a set wave at Pipe. It's all in good fun, but we obviously cover each other's back because of where we are and the dangers that can occur.

The waves were good with glassy conditions. It was about 6 to 10 feet with the occasional second reef set rolling through and one of the lowest tides of the year making it even more dangerous than normal. A second reef set came rolling in and I was caught in the pit. I tried to swim under the first one, but it was so shallow that it picked me up off the bottom and worked me pretty good. I finally surfaced and managed to get a couple of breaths before the next big wall of whitewater hit me. I knew it was in a really shallow area and I had no space to dive so I took it on the noggin. I was then pile driven head and shoulder first into the reef. The impact knocked me unconscious and from what they say, there were a few more bombs behind the one that cleaned my clock. This is when I literally filled up with saltwater and started doing the deadmans float. I had on a wetsuit so this helped in keeping me visible while floating face down. Hugh had gone in due to cramping and Larry had managed to get under all the set waves. He looked to the inside to see where I was and noticed my orange camera floating without me attached. That's when he realized there was a problem.



Larry spotted me face down on the inside and did his patented water gorilla swim managing to grab and turn me over. I was underwater for several minutes, bloated with saltwater and unconscious. He started swimming me in

and squeezing my stomach as water and foamed oozed from my nose and mouth. Anthony Empting paddled over on his surfboard and helped, as did Remana Vanbastler from Tahiti, Sylvio Mancusi from Brazil, and Hiro from Japan. The lifeguards were working on saving someone else down the beach and saw what was happening. North Shore lifeguard Tau Hannemann sprinted down the beach from the other rescue and jumped in to help get me to shore as did my good friend Hugh Gentry. A full on rescue effort by watermen from around the globe!

They managed to get me to the beach and saw I was really bloated from ingesting massive amounts of seawater and looking very dead and bluish in color. Veteran North Shore lifeguards, Fred Asmus, Mark Dombroski and others pumped more water out of me than any drowning victim they'd ever seen. They thought I was dead, because I had no pulse!! After pumping what seemed like a keg of saltwater out of me, they heard me gurgle and realized I was still alive! Fred and crew gave me oxygen and I came to for a second or two. All I remember is my friend Hugh Gentry yelling in my face, RAY!! RAY!! Then he said my camera was o.k. I responded by asking the question, "Is anybody shooting this?" That's when they realized I wasn't brain dead. Ha Ha.



Honolulu Fire Department engine 11 from Sunset Fire Station and the Kahuku E.M.S. paramedics were on the scene soon after. Paramedics Pat Jones and Michelle Moses escorted me to Wahiawa General via ambulance where they pumped another liter of saltwater out of me. Wahiawa Emergency Room Doctors Jennifer Jose and Shaun Berry treated me in the critical care unit where I spent the first 2 days, a day and a half on a respirator. I spent a total of 9 days in the hospital.

The first 2 days I remember nothing and after coming to I experienced pain like I've never imagined. I had 2 brain contusions, a collarbone broken in 4 places, (three severely), 2 broken ribs, a bruised lung and chemical pneumonia. I managed to recover from the chemical pneumonia, which in most cases is deadly. I'm probably going to have to get surgery on my collarbone, but only time will tell.

The medical staff said if I wasn't wearing a helmet I would have probably died instantly from the blow to my head. They also said I was the worst drowning victim they'd seen that lived to talk about it. Everyone who participated in my rescue including the medical staff said it was a miracle that I lived to talk about this experience. I feel God has given me yet another lease on life and obviously my mission is not over. I sincerely thank my friends, North Shore lifeguards and medical professionals that participated in saving my life that fateful day at Pipe and most of all, God for allowing me to have another chance in the game of life.

The two things I tell people that come up to me asking where to get a water housing and camera, because they want to be a water photographer, #1 I do it for the labor of love and #2 don't quit your day job! Guess I have 3 things to tell them now, WEAR A HELMET!! I'm looking forward to getting back in the water and I'll never think twice about wearing my helmet.

My accident has inspired me to do a documentary about extreme sports photographers and the dangers we face while at work and another program for schools nationwide featuring world renowned extreme sports athletes endorsing the use of helmets. Hopefully this programming will encourage people to wear protective head gear. I guess this is the good coming from a bad situation.

Peace and aloha,

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Video Frame Grabs- Courtesy of Larry Haynes/Fluid Vision Productions and Pete 3RD Stone.