

Fred Quilala: a Shark Trapped in a Man's Body

Contributed by Yan Redoble
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The originator of the now infamous 3P dive (infamous in most Cebu dive circles, anyway), Fred has a way of making his dive buddies fall in love – not only with the underwater experience, but with his sense of adventure as well.

Indeed, many have fallen prey to the charm of this fascinating creature, who aptly labels himself “a shark trapped in a man's body.”

In fact, drop his name around the dinner table, and at least one person would have a hilarious anecdote to share.

To date, this dashing diver has collected numerous friends and logged 881 dives in 15 logbooks. Fifteen logbooks? How does one fill fifteen logbooks? When asked to share his most noteworthy logs, however, Fred demurred. His logbooks, he says, contain (er, uhm) personal things that are not all related to diving. Interesting reading though this may make, we have to content ourselves with a rare glimpse of the 3P dive log. more»

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CebuDiver: Your passion and longevity as a diver has reached levels of notoriety. How does that make you feel? What, from your own perspective, sets you apart from other recreational divers in Cebu?

Fred: First of all, I do not consider myself apart or different from the other recreational divers in Cebu. On the contrary, we all share the same bond of affection for the underwater world. Beyond this love of the sea, things may now slightly differ. Diving for me is my refuge, where the sea is a place I go for comfort and solace as it does not ask why. A world where I find peace and balance. Diving has been a silent witness to my triumphs and trials. This in a nutshell is what keeps the fire of diving burning in my blood.

CebuDiver: How long have you been diving? And how many dives have you logged?

Fred: Since November 24, 1996, 881 dives!

CebuDiver: Can you tell us about your diligence for logging dives?

Fred: I treat my Dive Log as a companion in life. It immortalizes the moment and reminds me of events of yore that would normally have been relegated to the dustbins of history. I solely keep it for myself, all 15 of them.

CebuDiver: In your years of diving, what is your most memorable underwater experience?

Fred: This is a difficult question as there were many. I would say it would be in Basterras last March 23, 2005, with dive buddies Cosette, Daisy, David, Amanda, Iker - we swam with the biggest fish in the world. And without my knowing it, Alan dlc was taking pictures of the close encounter of the huge kind.

CebuDiver: What, for you, is the most amazing thing about diving?

Fred: The bond amongst dive buddies. When you entrust your life to a buddy, words escape me to describe the sacred tie that binds. CebuDiver: Do you recall your first dive? What was it like?

Fred: Yep, in Kontiki with Bebot Mercado, my OW instructor and Cristy, my 1st dive buddy (who got me into diving). I had a problem with equalizing upon entry as well as upon exit. Buoyancy, or the lack of it, was so frustrating. With all the exercises being asked of me (e.g. mask clearing, reg retrieval, etc.), I hardly paid attention to the underwater creatures or the submerged crane. CebuDiver: What are the best diving spots in Cebu? Please tell us about your experiences in these places.

Fred: I do not claim to have done nor know all the diving spots in Cebu but my personal preference would be Pescador Island, Monad Shoal, Gato Island and in the Mactan area – Nalusuan Island and Talima to name a few. Pescador Island for the variety (resident whitetip sharks, turtles, snappers, sweet lips, barracudas, frog fishes etc.) it offers as well as this was the place I saw my first hammerhead shark (Feb. 16, 1997 with Kevin and Cristy) and manta (Aug. 24, 1997). Monad Shoal, where the highlights are the thresher sharks in the mornings (saw 3 of them at the same time last Nov. 19, 2000 with Omar, Jun, Edwin) and the mantas in the afternoons (saw 3 big ones last April 14, 2007 with the Aquanuts). Gato Island for its resting or circling whitetip sharks, seasnakes, mating cuttlefish, occasional manta, and numerous macro creatures. Nalusuan Island for the blue dotted stingrays (the real McCoy, Tim), groupers, eagle rays, and some pesky triggerfishes that want to be intimate with you (witnessed by Rusty and DocStan). Talima for its jacks, sweet lips, snappers, barracudas, and eagle rays. CebuDiver: Outside Cebu, what do you consider as the best diving spots in the Philippines?

Fred: Solely based on the places I've been, no question about it, the best dive spot is the Tubbataha Reef Marine Park in the Sulu Sea. Creatures big (whale sharks) and small (nudis, spanish dancers – ask Renzo, Rolland, Marivic) and everything in between (Napoleons, tunas, jacks, etc.) can be found in varying degrees of ease. Being a shark trapped in a man's body, I relish living amongst them. Nowhere have I gone where you can literally be in the midst of a colony of sharks or just simply snorkel above them. Just last month in South Tubbataha – Delsan Wreck side, we (Peter, Paul, Lyndon, and I) crossed paths with a slew of them in varying sizes and shapes. Jacks and surgeons swirling like crazy and passing in review for what seemed an eternity, escorted by the ever graceful sharks swimming placidly in the periphery. Or the sight of a school of bumphead parrot fishes near the Malayan Wreck, will simply take your breath away. Also, as I mentioned earlier, the ultimate high of swimming with the biggest fish in the world. And lest I forget, sunsets to die for, then replaced by stars I never knew existed.

If mantas are your trip, then the Spratleys is the place to go (check out David O's video). I have had the opportunity and luck to witness 7 of them in one flight passing by.

Dimakya Island, Northern Palawan – where you can be intimate with huge turtles, saw 5, (with Fiona) by feeding them, as well as jacks, sting rays and numerous other creatures all within the house reef!

Apo Island. (Coconut Point, Point Q, Rock Point) – fascinating site. Jacks, barracudas, snappers, and a black eyed triggerfish,

Cabilao/Balicasag Island (Bohol) – White tip sharks, Hammerheads if you're lucky, pygmy seahorses, barracudas, napoleons and a sunset to beat. During a Southern Safari last year, I can never forget exiting from a night dive in Balicasag and being greeted by a canopy of blinking stars which reminded me of a gumamela formation (ask JJ and JoyGuev) that resulted to a lively discussion of the constellations Orion and Polaris.. CebuDiver: Given a chance to dive anywhere, where would you go? What would you bring?

Fred: Cocos Island, Costa Rica should be a dream diving haven. Realistically, Palau, Sipadan, or Maldives would be doable. What would I bring? My dive buddies of course. CebuDiver: In some circles, your diving adventures and misadventures have reached mythic proportions. What's the real score?

Fred: MY misadventures – aplenty! Entry without weights (witnessed by Scuba World's John Melendres), without fins (witnessed by dive instructor Mike Lazaro), going under with snorkel in mouth instead of reg (luckily no one noticed), pointing to a shark which turned out to be a coral (with Cristina, Gus), observing sea shells by the sea shore (with Fara, Kevin, Joy DG, Eric), slight navigational error (Barbi and Amanda), stingray that never was (by Tim), anaconda exit (by Cosette and Sol), chumming with human blood for the threshers (with Sten and Tanya), thrilla with a triggerfish (with Agnes, Mike A.), memories of an algae infested mask (with Ana, Paulo). CebuDiver: "I dive; therefore I am" – What is your interpretation of this statement?

Fred: I am who I am now because I dive. CebuDiver: Pretend I'm a non-diver. What am I missing?

Fred: You do not miss anything that you are not aware of. You will not miss something that was never yours. More of an opportunity lost. CebuDiver: Pretend I'm a new diver. What is the first thing I should know about becoming a skilled diver? Fred: Dive within your level of competence and expertise. I also hope you are into diving for the right reasons. Obviously, you should be properly trained (as in any sport, for that matter) and nothing beats practice (dive), practice (dive), and still more practice (dives). Presence of mind before (assembling and checking gears etc.), during (conscious of depth, air, conditions, currents etc.), and after (no strenuous physical activity, fly time) dives. Bottom line – dive safe, dive another day! Remember, diving recklessly (not to be confused with diving aggressively) not only puts your life unnecessarily on

the line, but worse, your dive buddies as well. CebuDiver: Can you tell us the story and origin of the 3P dive?

Fred: In my log book, I used to measure the length of a dive or how cold it was by the number of times I pee during the dive. Thus a 3P dive for me was usually a 60 minute dive under normal temperature. It was only in 1998 when on my first trip to Tubbataha, Gus, a good dive buddy, without authorization read my entries and announced to the world its contents with the now infamous 3P dive terminology.