

DISCOVER WONDER

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Educator and artist



Growing up in Australia, it was difficult to avoid our ocean and I never did. The ocean was and is a huge part of me.

It has been almost fifty years since I took my first breath beneath the waters off the coast of Singapore. It was pure magic. I still love that moment, when you first enter the water, just before you take the first breath, you look around and truly discover wonder.

I've dived all over the world: from the chilly, emerald green waters of Canada and Alaska, to the warm, vibrant waters of Australia's Great Barrier Reef, from the magic of Aldabra in the Indian Ocean, to the majesty of Great White Sharks and the bizarre and fragile Leafy Sea Dragons. I've seen many changes in our ocean environment, and I know why our marine sanctuaries are treasured sentinel sites.

I never imagined, after our move to Houston, that such an extraordinary place as the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) existed. Magnificent hard corals cover the substrate and provide homes to multitudes of fish, among them the unique Smooth Golden Trunk fish, found nowhere else except the Flower Garden Banks! My first dive on the Flower Garden Banks was to witness the annual coral spawn. Watching this incredible event at night beneath the dark waters of the Gulf of Mexico was truly miraculous. How do these precious polyps know when conditions are perfect to release their eggs?

As well as experiencing the ocean firsthand, I have the privilege of seeing children discover wonder when they first learn about how corals feed and know when to release their eggs, how each whale shark is unique, where anemone fish live, the majesty of a kelp forest, and so much more.

As a teacher, I specialize in making the marine environment relevant and real to students of all ages in all content areas, especially through the use of art. One way to shorten the distance from mainland Texas to the Flower Garden Banks was to help the

There's an Ocean of Sanctuaries to Discover

Beautiful and awe-inspiring, they are home to miraculous wildlife that soar above and swim below the water's surface. Explore and do your part to help protect these wet and wonderful places.

Discover your story, Discover Wonder.

community have a real stake in the sanctuary. At Ocean Discovery Day, people of all ages loved to paint their replication of a large mural showcasing marine species and habitats.

I believe teaching young students about ocean literacy encourages deep understanding of the ocean environment, as well as creating future explorers. For the past nine years I have served on the FGBNMS Advisory Council in the Education Seat, and I am committed to promoting education and knowledge in order to protect this very special place, and all our national marine sanctuaries.

That commitment has led to many and varied extraordinary educational opportunities. At CHOW 2009 I was presented with Volunteer of the Year and the following year, I volunteered for two weeks with staff from ONMS to help bring the science of ocean conservation and the underwater environment to communities worldwide through the program "If Reefs Could Talk." The broadcasts featured real time science from beneath the Aquarius habitat. We even reached schools in Australia!

My most exciting and wonderful way to engage children, has been my formation of SEEDS (Students Engaging the Environment through Discovery and Science) at my school, where elementary students meet weekly to learn about and discuss the Flower Garden Banks and other ocean topics. The young SEEDS have given presentations to universities and to the FGBNMS Advisory Council. We have truly changed the culture of our school, and as the school theme for this year is "Discover" we continue to do just that as the City of Houston's first NOAA Ocean Guardian School.

Discovering wonder is as simple as standing on the shores of a beach and looking into a tide pool. It can be as difficult as traveling to the depths of Challenger Deep, but it is always important, and always sparks curiosity and the need for more wonder.



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