

# I Am Woman - See Me Dive

## Aquawoman - 2005

Story and photos by Janice Raber

**H**ummmmm, all together now, *I am woman, see me dive, in the year 2005*, and the tradition continued to the tune of a very successful Aquawoman Dive. Under the auspices of The Long Island Divers Association (LIDA,) this year's group of lovely ladies boarded the beautiful and spacious *Lockness*, a 48-foot Beaux Brothers Craft out of Freeport, New York. Captain John Gorman kept a gleefully watchful eye as the gals toted coolers of food and beverages and seemingly tons of gear on board. The four crew (Kevin Dorman, Gus Bricker, Bill Graham and Billy Gambriel) were most helpful and accommodating from the get-go, carrying the heavier items up the ramp; they appeared to be very happy having won the "secret lottery." Rumor has it that Captain John could have made a fortune just selling spots to the mates for this boat filled with female divers. However he may have arrived at his decision, his choices were a handsome looking lot who certainly did everything in their power to keep the women safe, happy, well fed and entertained.

The two 800hp diesels fired up and we were soon underway toward our destination, the wreck of the *USS San Diego*, an armored cruiser that was sunk 12 miles off Long Island shores. The ship lies upside down in 110 feet

of water but can be reached at 70 feet, making it an excellent wreck for divers with various skill levels. Divers can swim along the outside, observing the marine life and guns that protrude from the sides, or hunt for lobsters. Those with training and ability to do so may dare to penetrate the hull and explore parts of the interior. Gus and Bill were kind enough to take some of the first-time visitors to this shipwreck on personal tours.

Clad in various shades of black and gray with an occasional touch of blue and yellow (and, oh my, did I see pink?!), the ladies suited up. On their backs they expertly carried an assortment of steel and/or aluminum air cylinders. Knives were stylishly strapped to their legs and the latest in dive computers fastened to their wrists. These modern women were adorned up to their neoprene-hooded heads with brass clips holding all those important accoutrements such as lights, catch bags, wreck reels and lift bags.

They pursed their lips around their regulators, smiled and squinted into the sunlight sparkling on the glorious Atlantic Ocean before taking that giant stride into the exciting world awaiting them below the waves.

Each had a story to tell when they surfaced. Esther and Joanie described the antics of a gray eel playing peek-a-boo from his hiding place. Freddie and Andrea played with an immense lobster under the deck of the ship and explored the guns and debris field before ascending on a line tied to their

own lift bag. Randi was successful in bringing up a few lobsters to take home for dinner and Lynne told how she went over to the "dark side" of the wreck and did some penetration. Ronnie impressed us by doing her first Long Island Dive in a wetsuit, no hood, no gloves, in this cold water and without complaint!

After the dives, our ladies shed their bulky dive gear and put on something more "comfortable" for après-dive attire. Look out fellows, here come the bikinis! And that was the end of serious business for the day. The music was blasting, the food was cooking (this year's hit was Freddie Hughes' baked clams,) and the gals created their own version of Marguerita Madness. The crew made a sterling attempt to maintain some kind of decorum while keeping the two – or was it three? – blenders whirring, mak-



Ronnie Gilligan with LIDA Flag and Randi Eisen with lobsters for dinner.

ing sure that no one ever got thirsty. It is a well-known fact that one gets terribly parched when one dives!

The Aquawoman Dive tradition began 24 years ago, when Edith Hoffman, then President of LIDA, sought to prove that there were women who could dive in the predominantly man's sport. It was her goal to create a day that would encourage new female divers to get out on the boats and mix and learn from those with more experience. This



The Lockness.

year's group of 15 divers more than fulfilled her vision and included women with as few as 30 dives under their weight belts, to those who have been diving for 30 years. We were privileged to have on board some members of the Women Divers Hall of Fame, one of whom, Ronnie Gilligan, was written about in Kevin McMurray's book, *The Empress of*



Aquawoman Group.

*Ireland*. Their ages spanned five decades and their varied occupations included a speech pathologist, nurses, an artist, a writer, a drug rep, college professor, a social worker, a bank administrator, and a self-described domestic goddess. Several were returnees from previous years including Joan Hassler who sported a T-shirt from the first ever Aquawoman Dive.

There were comments like, "We all had a good time, eating wonderful food and teasing the crew, and in general laughing so hard it hurt," and, "The Aquawoman Dive will be a priority in my calendar every year!!!" We all took an oath swearing "what happens on the boat stays on the boat" and are planning a book entitled "101 Ways To Enjoy a Marguerita."

Everyone took home Aquawoman shirts, with our new logo designed by the very talented Aaron Hirsh. Randi Eisen, Executive VP of LIDA, printed out group souvenir photographs for all. Clair Rose, distributors of Budweiser kindly donated a supply of Michelob Ultra, T-shirts and can huggers, Chris Skirbe of the Sea Seachers Club contributed water, and sport drinks and Captain John gave each of us a special Lockness shirt in PINK (oh my!) for the occasion.

Captain John, his gracious wife, Pat, and his wonderful crew kept the music going and the drinks flowing, even after the boat docked. LIDA President, Steve Burke, was on hand to greet his returning flock of mermaids, along with a substantial number of spouses and significant others, so the party continued.

LIDA thanks all of our generous benefactors and the *Lockness* for their hospitality. The Aquawoman Dive has become the highlight of the Long Island summer dive season. Keep checking their website for details on our 25th Anniversary.

For information on The Long Island Divers Association visit [www.lidaonline.com](http://www.lidaonline.com) For information on the Lockness visit [www.locknessdiveboat.net](http://www.locknessdiveboat.net) For those who are wondering: no, it is not spelled wrong. The name springs from Captain's John's business which is security alarms and locks.