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The hero in Zelazny's story says, "When I was young I thought that being born a sea creature was the finest choice Nature could make for anyone." And so it was for me. I trace the beginning of my journey to my teenage years: all that time I'd been working on becoming a marine biologist.

I didn't know that the stories I read while at the beach would end up shaping my future. The words I osmosed from those sun-bleached pages would help me score high on standardized tests that admissions committees prized. Working on a Ford Cortina with my dad and programming crude video games would lead me to an engineering school, which would introduce me to my biology professor, who, amused by my constant questions, would nudge me toward graduate school—an option I hadn't considered. It took me a long time to realize that I could make the thing I loved into the thing I did.

Becoming what I wanted to be began on an ocean trail I traversed each day with my dive mask and orange Duck-foot fins. These were my jet pack, my magic carpet, as I flew through an underwater slot canyon that cut into the rocky reef framing the cove. Here lived a moray eel that divers would feed with urchin roe on the half shell (a slimy salty delicacy that my brother and I would later sample on

some saltine crackers). An urchin-lined tunnel ran from one part of the cove to another, and we would dive into it, bracing patiently against the swell at the midpoint before swooping through to the surface on the other side with our pulse pounding in our ears. An octopus became a spirited playmate, especially one that we hauled up on the beach and deposited on my sunbathing sister's back.

The parallel walls of the deep channel in the reef widened at the bottom into overhanging ledges, which trapped air from the roiling whitewater. In these bubbles I noticed some curious limpets—conical snails that I later found to be an unusual air-breathing lineage. Although they normally lived in wave-swept caves above the high-tide mark, this population managed to survive fifteen feet below the surface, with air provided by wave action. This simple observation led to my first real scientific publication, thanks in part to a kindly editor at the journal, who must have recognized my naïveté, and again to my college biology teacher, who took care of the journal's page charges for me. It now occurs to me that he must have paid this out of his own pocket rather than dealing with university bureaucracy, one of his many subtle deeds of generosity that helped me along this course in life.

Sometimes during my summer pilgrimages, the shore was littered with jellyfish, and everyone would speculate how this bloom came to be. Although jellyfish are usually said to be "invading" beaches, it was clear to me which of us was the visitor in the other's environment. To them, I was *Xenohominus haddocki*, a species never before seen by jellykind. On occasions, when the grunion were hovering expectantly offshore or when jellyfish were abundant, I would take off gliding across the face of a wave only to end up with a fish or medusa down the back of my trunks. A lapse of respect for the ocean and its inhabitants would earn the cavalier aquanaut the badge of a scrape, a sting, or a smash against the sand.

These daily observations must have been in the back of my mind when I started the Jellywatch.org project. Every day throughout the world, people observe the ocean. These citizen scientists can help address questions that are beyond the scope of any individual research program, and jellyfish are perfect subject matter: they can't be detected by satellites or automated instruments, yet even children know a jellyfish when they see one. To get an accurate

ANN LOFQUIST

Garrapata, 2011
Oil on Canvas, 8 x 12 in.



courtesy: Winfield Gallery