



by Katie Adamson

New Zealand adventure

with Diving for a Cause



"In an instant, the fish that were surrounding me became nervous and darted toward the reef, leaving me alone, hanging off the deep end—naked. Suddenly, a roar like a freight train passed next to me," Terry exclaimed, eyes glowing with excitement.

"In the space of a few seconds, I was once again left alone, hanging in the abyss. Then, just behind me, I caught a glimpse of bright blue, neon bars..."

I was enthralled, as world-renown spearfisherman, Dr. Terry Maas, vividly retold the story of his most recent encounter with a giant, which he experienced during a trip to New Zealand with Diving for a Cause (DFAC). DFAC is a non-profit organization that brings divers together to help impoverished schools, orphanages and communities around the world. Terry has been actively involved from the start.

I knew I wouldn't forget this moment. There I was, sitting at the dinner table on a peaceful, balmy evening in Hawaii, with three of the warmest, most inspiring people I know – Dr. Maas, the man of the hour; Dr. Daryl Wong, known by the diving community for his numerous world records and top of the line spearguns, but known by his friends for his exceptionally kind soul; and Colleen Gallagher, the driven and charming founder of DFAC.

I knew I was in the company of game changers, all of whom had left their mark on the sport in monumental ways and worked insanely hard to do so. Most impressively, all three of my dinner companions were driven by a mutual passion to improve the safety and well being of others.

A lot had happened in the last two years. By inventing the Freedivers

Recovery Vest, Terry released a much-needed safety mechanism onto the market that is sure to reduce the number of blackout related deaths in the diving community.

Simultaneously, Colleen founded DFAC and leads eleven trips a year to various countries across the globe, during which the divers participate in service projects and donate their fish harvests to communities in need.

Daryl too, lives his life with the same sentiment. I often witness him give fish away to poverty-stricken Hawaiians, to personal friends in need, and to kids struggling to catch dinner off the dock in the harbor.

Even though Colleen had experienced the adventure that Terry was recounting first hand, swimming alongside him as he fought the beast, she was hanging on every word and cheerfully supplementing his story as they relived the fight. (Colleen is no stranger to big fish. A couple of years ago, on the commencement trip for DFAC, she shot a 57-kg striped marlin that landed her a women's world record and was given to an orphanage in La Paz, Mexico.)

I joined DFAC on a trip to Mexico, last April, and ever since I have yearned for the next. As Daryl and I listened to Terry tell one of the best fish stories ever told around the Wong dinner table (a number of epic proportions and quality you can't make up), it was easily the next best thing to being there! I wanted to know everything.

"Wait, you're telling me you weren't using any flashers or burley?" I asked Terry in astonishment.

"No, but I was using a deep-throat croaking technique that I perfected hunting for white seabass in the kelp forests of Southern California. It was doing a great job attracting schools of 15-20 kg kingfish, but I was holding out for a frog."

"What's a frog?" I asked.

"Have you ever seen a really big

kingie coming straight at you? They look just like a frog."

"Where were you guys diving? Was there any structure?" I asked, knowing full well at this point how the story ended for the 113-kg striped marlin Terry had shot, landed and donated to the local Maori community.

"It was our second day of diving, and we were on a reef near Mayer Island. I was at the edge of a steep drop-off looking for nervous bait. Koheru (mackerel) have a bright yellow stripe that lights up on their back when a predator is nearby."

"Could you see bait when you made your drop?" I asked.

"Yeah, but they seemed relaxed. I dropped down to 12 meters and leveled off into a mixed school of reef fish. My croaking brought them closer and more began to appear and condense around me. I had a sense that a large kingfish would soon appear," Terry recalled.

I listened intently.

"All at once, a roar like a freight train passed next to me, filling my senses, as thousands of jack mackerel angled straight towards me from the depths."

"The noise and the illusion of so many fish swimming at me and darting close by caused me to feel disoriented and dizzy. It really looked like they were going to run right into me, like I was the least of their concerns."

"Within seconds, everything was silent and still. I extended my Wong gun in the direction the bait had come from, desperately hoping to line up on the predator that had frightened them so badly."

"I was patiently waiting for a kingie to materialize out of the deep blue water, but nothing appeared."

"Suddenly, just behind me, I caught a glimpse of the glaring, electric blue bars of a marlin that was swimming between me and the reef."

"How did you swing around without

spooking the marlin?" I asked.

"I didn't! I dragged my gun over my shoulder and fired behind me, aiming for center mass. I saw my shaft fully penetrate the large striped marlin and then get bent 90-degrees the moment the marlin ungulate its muscular tail."

"Instantly, my float line went taut, and my gun was ripped from my hand. The gun drifted by me and slowly sank while my float line departed."

"I had a break away system rigged, so I quickly grabbed my gun and resurfaced after the 1:30 dive."

"My floats were disappearing, already 30 m away, with a wake behind them. I threw the gun bands over my left shoulder and began swimming with all my might," said Terry, recalling the first few seconds of what became an hour long fight.

"How did you catch up? Did you think the floats, shaft and fish-of-a-lifetime might be gone for good?" I inquired.

"The thought crossed my mind, but Perrin Franta, a talented photographer who was documenting the trip, saw my floats take off from the boat and rushed into action. The captain drove the boat out in front of the marlin's apparent trajectory, and Perrin boldly grabbed his camera and jumped in."

"Wow, that's pretty pro to bring his camera along in that situation," I laughed.

"No kidding! The moment the bubbles cleared he saw the marlin swimming directly at him. He had to literally dodge the fish and still managed to grab the float as it shot past, hoping to hold on and slow it down long enough for me to catch up," said Terry.

"He hung on for a 30-minute wild ride, camera in hand, before I caught up to him and took over the reins. Relieved from his aquatic rodeo (sure beats 8 seconds), Perrin was able to get incredible footage and photos of



the fight," which was far from over.

"I can't even conceive what it would be like to wrestle a fish that big to the surface, especially after a 30-minute sprint just to catch your floats! Did you use a certain technique?"

Terry explained his method for raising the beast, "I used the handles on my float for leverage and just worked the marlin a few inches at a time. Whenever I gained line, I tied it off to the float to let the fish fight against the resistance to tire itself out."

"When did you feel it start to let up?" I asked Terry.

"After about 30 minutes the marlin began to give up the fight. It was really exciting to see its monstrous outline start to appear from below."

"I borrowed our guide Ray Powell's gun and swam down to administer the final blow. I dragged the majestic striped marlin to the surface, brained it and swam it back to the boat, exhausted but elated."

Terry reflected upon the whole experience, saying "I knew it had died for a worthy cause."

The Maori community creatively and masterfully used every inch of the marlin for food, which was expertly butchered by Ray. The timing couldn't have been better. A local paper mill had just laid off 300 people, and the community was struggling to make

ends meet. The meat was taken to the local smokehouse, where it was smoked, preserved and frozen. The head was poached to loosen the oily, rich meat from within. The carcass was even used to make soup. Working together, the DFAC team had landed a number of quality kingfish throughout the week as well.

In spite of the world-class diving, Colleen and Terry agreed that the highlight of the trip was giving the Maori elders their parting gift: backpacks full of school supplies for the local children and approximately 545 kg of fresh fish fillets and smoked marlin. To show their gratitude and solidify the new bonds that were made between DFAC and the local community, the Maori performed a ceremonial Haka and gave the team hand-made crafts. Colleen and Terry expressed great appreciation for their host Joe Burke and his wife Kura, a Maori herself, who masterfully coordinated both the epic diving and the community service.

Listening to their story, I was reminded of a few truths: First, I am so blessed to have such passionate, accomplished role models to look up to; second, as soon as I can get time off work, a DFAC trip is calling loud and clear; and finally, the only thing that trumps the pleasure of diving is the chance to use it for good.

