



**NOAA Teacher at Sea
Christopher Harvey
Onboard NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE
June 5 – July 4, 2006**

Date: June 9, 2006

Time: 4:00 PM Hawaii

Location: Somewhere adrift in the Pacific Ocean!

Entry

I actually woke up on time for work today (though my muscles, or lack thereof, were extremely sore)! I dreaded the idea of stacking again today, though yesterday I thought I would volunteer my services as a stacker for the entire trip. Due to the tremendous amount of physical labor in the sun, I thought that working as a stacker would be great for me to get back in shape (what shape that is, is yet to be determined!) and give me a chance for a good tan. As it turns out, one must first know what shape they would like to be, before they can pursue getting back into it. For example: Homer Simpson would prefer to be in the shape of a beer, so he practices by drinking beer. Presently, I am in the shape of a Dunlap. That is, my belly is so big it “dun lapped” over the rest of me!

I stacked again today, though we were much more efficient as an entire ship. The bridge (control part of the ship) seemed to get us to our strings of traps in a timely manner, and our trap-hauling assembly line was wonderfully efficient. We finished our strings of eight early enough to have a full hour for lunch (yesterday it was only about 20 minutes), and our twenties were out of the water by 1:30. We continued on and re-set the traps in their new locations and were completely finished swabbing the deck by 3:30. All in a days work!

Some highlights of the day were: feeding the sharks again (or course! I don't know if that will ever get old!), throwing a small white-tipped shark out of a trap and into the water where the larger Galapagos sharks consumed it in a matter of seconds (yes, sad but incredibly fascinating to watch. Sharks seem to me to be a nearly perfect species--aside from the fact that they eat dead animals, have a brain about the size of a walnut, and do not have opposable thumbs! They are incredibly agile and flexible--being made of cartilage and not bone--very swift, strong, and efficient in their use of energy. Plus they look very sleek, unless they are trying to bite your arm off, in which case I am assuming they look extremely frightening!), catching a decent number of lobster, crab, eel, and other such marine life that is fun to see up close, and not having to work with Ameer.

The Pacific has been eerily calm these last few days. Today we had some gentle swells, but nothing I couldn't handle. My “sea legs” seemed to have turned into “S legs,” because when I try to walk a straight line with the ship rocking, my line looks more like a curved “S”! We have been dancing around Necker Island, never staying further away than eyesight. She stills looks like a Dragon at times, and a Sperm Whale at others. But she is company in this voyage.

I had some incredibly insightful thoughts while meditating earlier this morning. Thoughts come much clearer when you are surrounded by such beautiful scenery. One of my favorite things these days, besides trying to count the different shades of blue between the open sea and sky, is looking off in the distance where the clouds meet the sky. In places they seem to gently “bubble” up out of the sea. Joe says that this is where the world ends. I asked him if we could go there, but he says that it is an insurance liability thing with NOAA. I asked if I could take a life raft and check it out myself, since I enjoy life on the edge. He said “No!” I’d still like to know if it’s the end of the world or not. Whatever it is, it is one of the many things that I am noticing at sea that I have never noticed about the world before. Strange, this recent talk of perspective--my entire journey is from a different perspective. I am growing so much every day.

I have come across two ideas that I hope to expound upon over the coming weeks. The first is the human condition, and how hard it is to diagnose, treat, and remedy the human body, mind, and soul. Lots of people are making lots of money off of books and videos and CD ROMs that promise to do just that. However, I have good reason --via the scientific method and the perspective of science I am gaining out here--to argue against such media.

The second is the human element in science. Science is our way of understanding the world around us. Ever since someone had a question about something natural--from astronomy to gravity to cells to atomic particles--someone else has come up with a process of answering that question through science. That is why I love science so much. I have so many questions about the world around me; I know that science is the only way to learn how to answer my questions. But science is no living creature. It is no solid set of information, or database with solutions to every riddle. Humans have invented “science” as a process through which we ask questions, design controlled experiments, collect data, and interpret that data. There is a whole lot of room for error there. Especially since the first word in that sentence is “humans.” (I hope that I do not offend anyone by saying that humans, whether by nature or by nurture or by neither, have a tragic flaw instilled in their perspective that tends to cause error of some degree in nearly everything. Call it “Original Sin,” “human nature,” or what have you- the one thing we are great at doing is screwing something up.) I don’t mean to sound pessimistic; just realistic. And again, I will return to this idea later.

On the drama side of things, some tension has been created between Eric, a student at the university, and myself. He wanted to help us set traps yesterday afternoon and I asked him to leave the deck so I could finish the job. I didn’t mean to offend him by asking him to leave. It is just that I worked hard from the beginning of the job, and I wanted to see the project through to the end. I am terrible with finishing things well. So I am continually trying to practice this when I can. It is kind of ironic, but we were partners today in the stacking job. I don’t think he said 10 words to me all day. But we seemed to get along all right, and the work was done well. I am not the kind of guy to go and ask him if I offended him. And he is not the kind of guy to tell me if I did. So as long as this lack of communication between us does not create any future problems, it will be all right

for each of us to remain the type of people that we are. Otherwise I will come forward and address the issue. Everyone is working far too well together for conflict.