Annalise Povolo

My life has always revolved around the water. As a native Michigander from the beautiful Leelanau Peninsula, I was fortunate to grow up on the shores of Lake Michigan, always surrounded by the water. Every summer throughout my adolescence I worked at the local fishery selling and processing fish straight from Lake Michigan. I was able to experience first-hand how different environmental factors affected the state of the lakes, and therefore gained a consciousness of how those factors impacted those whose livelihoods they relied upon. Being from an area with such natural beauty and gaining an understanding its importance, a respect and desire to protect the environment was engrained from me from the start.

Hence, upon admission to the University of Michigan, electing PitE as my major was the obvious choice. I went through the first couple years of school fully taking advantage of the wide array of classes PitE and LSA offered. I loved the sciences but was also learning a new appreciation for social sciences and their importance in environmental activism. By the end of my sophomore year I had to choose a specialization. I toyed with the idea of something in the environmental social sciences, but at the end of the day the draw to the water was too much for me to ignore. I realized that if I studied something aquatic it would always require that I live near the water. Therefore, I decided to specialize in Fisheries and Aquatics and began my specialization courses the following year.

My first fisheries-related class was Biology of Fishes, guest taught that semester by Jeff Schaeffer of the USGS. His enthusiasm and love for fish was an inspiration, and from there I was hooked. A requirement for the course was that we learn the Latin and common names of all the Michigan fish species. Upon memorizing them, I would occasionally be having conversations with my older brother about fishing, and whenever he mentioned a different fish I would enthusiastically pull out the Latin name, excited to show off my new knowledge. My brother quickly relayed to me that people would get very annoyed of me doing that. Maybe he was right, but I still thought I was pretty cool.

The next semester I was enrolled in Jim Diana's Biology of Fishes class. I arrived the first day and watched as Professor Diana put together an unstrung fishing pole and proceeded to use it as a pointer for his class. I could tell then that I was in the right field. It was during that class that I got my first taste of real field work. We would go on excursions for our class; setting nets through the ice in the middle of the winter, netting fish on an electrofishing barge, observing the effects of hypoxia in lakes covered with snow throughout the winter. I loved the combination of academic with a bit of adventure. I felt a much stronger connection to what I was learning and looked forward to attending Professor Diana's class every week. In fact, he even led me to my first job after college, working for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Charlevoix Fisheries Research Station. I was actually even called for the interview whilst in the Dana Building and sitting on the floor outside the third-floor stairwell was offered the job.

This ended up being the perfect post-undergraduate job. Much of my job consisted of assisting the biologists with their various studies and long-term projects. I gained a vast array of fisheries experience joining on work dealing with things like acoustic telemetry tags in isolated populations of Lake Trout, commercial fish monitoring, electroshocking for mark-and-recapture studies for Salmonids in tributaries of streams, various gear evaluations, and even tagging the ancient and beautiful Lake Sturgeon in the Black River. This job allowed me to employ my fisheries knowledge learned in PitE, but also gave me real life, exciting and practical experience. I had to go out onto boats in rough waves to retrieve nets we'd set the previous day. I had to shovel snow off boat launches to get one last round of acoustic telemetry tracking before the season ended. I had to get up close and personal with Cisco stomachs to extract and count each Spiny Water Flea it had consumed. I had to get dirty. I definitely had to get real smelly. And I loved it.

This job also allowed me to complete my PADI Open Water and Advanced Open Water Diver Courses. A fellow co-worker was a PADI instructor, and we spent the months of September and October slowly working through my course when we both had days off. We did our diving in Lake Charlevoix and it was fascinating to actually be face-to-face with the organisms I had been studying. However, the diving was in very cold water with very low visibility, and I had yet to experience the full experience scuba diving offers.

After working there for a season, my short-term position ended, and I decided to follow my other passion during the winter – travel. I spent that winter meandering through Central America, exploring other cultures, eating delicious foods, meeting incredibly interesting people, and most importantly, was able to do my first saltwater dive in Caye Caulker, Belize. I was very nervous as I hadn't dived in a few months, was diving with someone I'd never dived with before, and was afraid of buddy

separation because I was used to diving in poor visibility. We arrived at our site and began our descent. I will never forget this moment. It was as if I was descending into another dimension. I could see for what seemed for miles and was surrounded by the most beautiful corals and fishes I had ever seen. Being underwater in this environment for the first time was one of the most significant moments of my life.

Fast forwarding, I worked another season with the MDNR Fisheries Research Station and did intriguing and important research, but the colorful, warm, salty waters were calling me. Upon wintertime I returned to Central America, completed my Rescue course in Utila, Honduras, and then went on to teach English in Vietnam. Eventually I made my way to the island of Koh Phangan in the Gulf of Thailand to do a marine biology internship with the Center for Oceanic Research and Education – South East Asia (COREsea) in combination with my divemaster internship. Here I learned the ins and outs of the marine environment. I began to learn how to identify all the working parts of coral reef ecosystems. I got to go diving every day and not only spend time in this fascinating environment, but conduct research identifying coral species, coral predators, reef fish species, algae types, fish behavior, coral bleaching, and much more. I loved learning about and experiencing the aquatic world daily and started being unable to imagine a life without significant amounts of time underwater.

I wanted more. After completing my internship with COREsea and my divemaster, I completed the PADI Instructor Development Course and passed my examinations to become a PADI Open Water Scuba Instructor. I have now been working teaching others how to dive for the past six months and get to share my passion with others. I get to take people out of their comfort zones and into a world that our current bodies are not meant to be in. I get to dive with incredible creatures, like massive schools of barracudas, grouper the size of motorbikes, moray eels, and even, when we're lucky, the biggest fish in the sea, the whale shark. But beyond all of this, my absolute favorite part of being an instructor is being there to see people experience the underwater world for the first time and see them share in the wonder of diving. Even though the job can be difficult and taxing, when I see someone's eyes light up as they take in their new surroundings, it's all worth it.

As much as I love my life working as a dive instructor, I do have plans to move on in the next year or so to pursue higher education in marine biology. It's hard to imagine leaving the island and my life underwater, but I know that my time underwater is far from over. I'm looking into programs in places like South Africa and Australia, where the diving is great, and the sharks don't just eat plankton. As always, the adventure continues.