Overcoming challenges while diving

Well, I nearly lost my life twice. One was a near drowning experience when three friends and I went diving in rough seas at Dwejra in Gozo, and the other was during a night-dive in the Galapagos.

Both were due to me being silly or not taking the necessary precautions. Back then I was certainly younger and more naive — you always think it won't happen to you or if it does, that you can get away with it. Luckily, I didn't pay the ultimate price.

HYPERVENTILATING WATER: ALMOST DROWNING IN ROUGH SEAS

Two of my friends and I decided to go for a dive at the inland sea in Dwejra, Gozo. It was the craziest thing we could do: the waves were breaking through that narrow passage, hitting the ceiling, but we had dived there the week before and we thought we'll be fine.

When we eventually came to the rocks it was already way beyond what we imaged. The water was coming into the narrow passage through which we had to pass and then coming out at such an intense speed, it was basically sucking us in.

It all happened very fast. I remember I couldn't see beyond my hand. I was being pushed from one side to the other. About 10 minutes later we managed to make it through the tunnel and into the blue and, when we got there, we realised what a terrible idea it all was.

"The more you know before your dive, the easier it is to factor in the possibility of what could go wrong."

I was leading the other two guys and we immediately decided we needed to head back. I stopped to wait for them so we would surface together but unlucky for me, a wave broke, literally, all over me, yanking me into the other side of the inland sea, ripping off my mask and regulator. My tank was wedged into a crack and I was hyperventilating water. Thankfully I didn't hit my head, but I saw my whole childhood flash before me and it was then I realised: "I'm drowning, I'm dying"

Instinctively, I reached for my regulator which was dangling at the side of my suit and started trying to breathe again. I then managed to get out from where I got stuck and started to surface. I then made it to hospital where I was treated. Looking back I was really lucky I had the necessary experience and reacted the way I did.

It's easier to know what one can expect when diving in familiar territory. If I'm diving in a completely new environment, then I will take other precautions, even asking basic questions to ensure I'm completely aware of sea and weather conditions.

ADVICE TO DIVERS

The more you know before your dive, the easier it is to factor in the possibility of what could go wrong.

My advice to divers is: 1. Know yourself. 2. Know your equipment. 3. Know your territory. Take all the

necessary precautions and never, ever think you are about to ask a stupid question. When in doubt, speak. It’s better to go in for a dive feeling assured than feeling helpless in a crisis situation. Don’t take anything for granted.

Read about Kurt Arrigo’s experience in the Galapagos.