

# Friday, April 8 – An Epic 5 Minutes - Mark Martin

The surrounding

Not seeing whales was not good for our so far successful team. It was as if we couldn't understand not being successful at spotting whales. We have forgotten that there are less and less. We had been lucky. Seen a lot. Dr. Wise stepped in with perspective of how glad he was of our progress and how proud he was of everyone. It helped, but we were on a mission, no denying what we had to do, and we didn't have sperm whales, we needed sperm whales. I was a seldom mentioned thing but we knew without sperm whales we would be missing a big part of our mission. The original research expedition to the Gulf of California included sperm whales.

We shared the cameras, a canon D60 and a series of go pros, the Sony 4k was for JP only. The rest of us took pictures in personal cameras of so many islands and mountains, flukes and fins. Ric the blue had an amazing ability to take great shots and videos on his iPhone 5. I really hope we put them together someday, it was an interesting shared photographic experience

The people grew closer and we found out their stories and we connected more with the Sheperds of the sea. We learned about JP's second job, he took people diving with hundreds of whale sharks and rays. How I would love to swim with a whale shark. I had already swam with a Manta in Vieques, a Manta that became the symbol of conservation and education to protect marine creatures. That is what some of this giants have done, inspire, convince, convert silly humans into the natural way. But is it just the t-shirt we want or are we willing to fight and change. I had also broken one of the biggest rules of whale researchers, truth be told it was before I was a researcher or working with either of this organizations. I had swum with a sperm whale in Puerto Rico. A 15-meter bull that was logging off the southern coast of Vieques island. It changed my life, and it was a really stupid move, don't do it. It is illegal, I later found out and it is not recommended even for assisting entangled whales. It is important that we learn to appreciate these wonders of nature without destroying them or jeopardizing them or us. So I was dumb, ignorant. It was incredible, I really felt less as a creature when I saw it underwater. I will not do it again. Dr. Wise and Captain Oona had perceived my tendency to swim with giants and were crystal clear about my options or lack thereof. The joke was that I would have to be tied to the mast or left behind I didn't believe John would do that, I was family.

The Captain would not flinch at enforcing her full authority on her ship, she made it clear, I believed her. She was a great example of how wrong the stereotype of Captain being men was. She was a strong Captain, an inspiration for girls and women around the world and apart from fishing skills a better captain than I.

The coastline continues to look like the Grand Canyon was underwater. I imagined this is how it used to look. But no whales. The quest was not unlike fishing, you had to spot, maneuver, and catch up to swimming things. These were smarter and bigger but swimming things we were trying to find. The empty sea invoked visions of whalers, as much as I hated the idea, I tried to imagine their quest. From the indigenous tribes jumping on whales from small boats and wooden spears to the classic whalers that sailed and then rowed to slaughter legendary beasts. They did not know as much as we do about their livelihood other than they felt they had to. And there were more whales. Today we all know, although some deny it. The Japanese whalers were a topic of conversation on this ship. We respected Se shepherd for getting things done in the anti-whaling campaign. As a rainbow warrior reject, I promised to get people on board with that campaign. We also discussed the possibility of putting together a team and a research expedition to go around the world again in an effort to take this research to a global scale again. So I encourage you to join Sea shepherds' anti-whaling campaigns. We will try to get the World of Whales trip going. Speaking of whales and worlds, I was fortunate to spend some of the idle time listening to Johnny's book from the author himself, it's fantastic in many ways. You will have to wait to buy a copy but I assure you it's worth it. The story of the Wise family I bet comes from John and I'm happy to live in it, also worth it. My story about the ghost you probably will never read. Meant for few.

As we had given up and on our way to our anchorage spot, we bargained for time in different ways with the captain. Our first mate Mike became a reluctant ally. Not willing to feel the wrath of our skipper he helped when he could. We started heading in and pulled the array in. The array had four microphones in a cable that we towed behind the boat to hear whales. It was only deployable on deep water and meant for sperm whales more than anything in this expedition. With it we heard dolphins and other unidentified things but no whales yet. We headed in and "There she blows" Our extremely funny engineer Sean spotted whales and claimed to have been waiting all his life to say that. It was a humpback, close to shore. Almost too close. We saw the chart, looked closely at the water. Mike spotted a reef that was not on the charts, he could see the breaking water. Followed the humpback, running out of sun. Captain wanted to anchor before night rose. We didn't

care. Suddenly, “blue!!!” we were in between a humpback and a Blue whale, choosing which one, we had the humpback timed and sort of figured out, we said humpback they went blue. On the bow we had a moment of frustration, we want that one. We exhaled and concentrated a blue was a blue. Johnny and I held the crossbows but we knew, no chance, no time for the blue and the change in course had taken the humpback out because she wasn’t turning around. We exhaled and looked at each other. Then we saw the reef move, it moved towards the Martin Sheen. I’m from reef country and they never move. Binoculars, Fish? Yes, weird fish, jumping high. “oh my god rays, dozens, hundreds. Thousands? Coming our way. Mobula rays, I had seen them on TV, never this many. Mobulas sort of look like Manta Rays because they are in the same family, they get big and jump high. Jumping out of the water 2 meters, everywhere. Everyone on deck. I started talking to the rays and singing to them until Johnny said turn around. JP had a camera right behind my face. I really hope you never see or hear that video. Then they got to us at least a thousand if you counted all the schools in that bay. When they got close they formed a pattern like an elaborate quilt had been knitted underwater. Were they jumping for love, communication, social or cleaning?, I asked, they never answered. They were fabulous, I looked back at the Captain in the cockpit. She was already nodding her head no, but with a slight smile. I had the crossbow, there were whales. I wasn’t going anywhere. Dolphins started coming around the rays. SO there we were in a sunken Grand Canyon chasing a blue whale with a humpback laughing behind us, surrounded by rays and being inspected by dolphins in a beautiful sunset. A part of us sad at the lack of samples but that part was beaten by this moment that was, in the words of our engineer friend, Epic.

The captain gave us 5 minutes, we took it but only in case of miracles, we were after all now also in the business of miracles. Only those that just happened this time. We anchored and jumped in again to the heavy current cold waters. Afterwards we sat and watched a sunset that seemed to last five hours. Me and Carlos were so enthralled we must have looked strange. Dr. Wise came and commented on how we looked like we were thinking of something. We said we were thinking of perfection. The others joined and agreed. Someone asked “what more could you ask for?” I thought of a certain girl and a certain Malbec that I would ask for. But I didn’t need anything else, right then and there it was, perfect. Then I saw it right above a mountain where the sun had gone to sleep, Mercury, the planet, also landing on the mountain. We called everyone out and me, Mike and Johnny proceeded to tell the crew about celestial navigation, the roman gods that were in the sky and the constellations with a green laser the captain had. We spoke of

different cultures that had looked up in wonder at these same stars we shared tonight. The vegan food put a nice closing on another epic day. There had been a lot and there would be more, I'm sure.

I slept on the sail that night and dreamt of whales, humpback whales

Mark