

A Shrink Looks at SCUBA



Does Your Dive Buddy Have Nitrogen Narcosis?

According to my poll in 2004, over 80% of scuba divers fail to recognize or remember having any signs or symptoms of nitrogen narcosis (lightheadedness, euphoria, elation, laughter, poor coordination, slowed thinking, poor judgment, or reckless behavior). So, what can you do? Well, you can risk diving stupidly and slowly and clumsily at more than 60 feet (3 ATM). Or, you can dive relatively safely at less than 60 feet all the time. And last but not least, you can dive with a dive buddy who will check on you. Whoa, I knew there had to be a reason for the buddy system. This assumes your dive buddy is less susceptible to nitrogen narcosis or "stupidity of the deep" than you. For starters, remember the "Martini Rule" that states that the symptoms of nitrogen narcosis are similar to being inebriated and that every 50 feet of depth is like having one martini. Therefore, the first thing you want to avoid is a dive buddy who starts out the dive day with a couple of 50 foot alcoholic drinks or who is still hung over from a night of heavy drinking. Just like there is no such thing as having "one for the road" when driving, there is no such thing as having "one for the dive." Antihistamines, anti-seasickness drugs and patches, sleeping pills and some other medications can

multiply the sedative-hypnotic-like effect of nitrogen narcosis, so watch out for those, too. Marijuana also emphasizes the anesthetic-like action of high pressure nitrogen at depth. It is best to avoid it and divers who use it if you want to dive safely. Back in 2000 when I started doing research in scuba diving, a retired internationally renowned diving scientist told me he stopped diving on the West Coast because he no longer felt safe in the water with so many "high" divers. I hope he was exaggerating the extent of the problem. OK, what else do you look for? Last year *Scuba Diving Magazine* published "Top 10 Signs Your Buddy Is Suffering from Nitrogen Narcosis." I think even a board-certified psychiatrist like me could spot these, as long as I don't drown laughing my fool head off, which is a definite possibility if I am at the same depth of cognitive impairment as my dive buddy.

On a more serious note, professional tech diver Bret Gilliam, who made a record dive to 452 feet on air in 1989, developed a simple low tech test for nitrogen narcosis: Every few minutes, hold up a number of fingers to your buddy (say, three fingers). He has to respond with the same number plus one (four fingers). "If you really wanted to screw a guy up," writes Gilliam in his



If you want to kiss a jellyfish, you are narced for sure

book *Deep Diving*, "you gave him all five fingers and then he had to use both hands to come up with a six-finger response." So, if you want to check on your dive buddy's state of nitrogen narcosis, then ask him or her to give you more than one finger. □ *David Colvard.*

David F. Colvard, M.D., is a private psychiatrist and clinical investigator in Raleigh NC, and a divemaster. He hosts www.DivePsych.com which provides evidence-based information for divers on psychological and stress factors in scuba divers.



(*Flotsam & Jetsam Continued from page 11*) brings 11 tropical storms, of which six reach hurricane wind speed of 74 mph (119 kph), including two major hurricanes, NOAA said. The hurricane season typically peaks between August 1 and late October.

► **City Café's 10th Anniversary is underway this week.** So far there has been lots of music, cake cutting, a car show and biker parade, the Triathlon (see page 9), free lunches and there's a lot



Car show at City Wilna Groenboom photo

more to come, all ending with a fireworks show this coming Sunday night. Stop by "The City" and take part. Following the busy week the management is treating the staff to a vacation visit to Valencia, Venezuela.

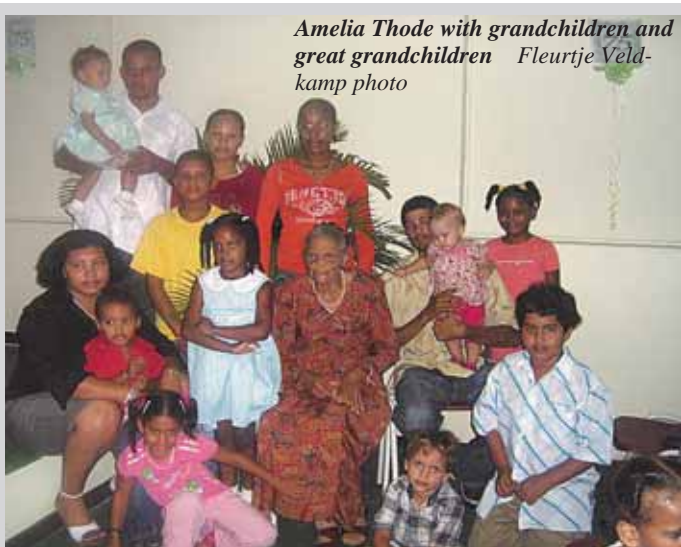


Wind reversals occur when tropical storms pass to the north of Bonaire.

► **Plataforma Rincon has bought a bus to transport the elderly and handicapped with NAf140,000 provided by Dutch-funded USONA.** The Elderly Sector of Plataforma Rincon is responsible and a committee is in charge of the maintenance. The bus is available for all the elderly in Rincon and for wheel chair handicapped. The bus has a chair lift.

Father Socrates Gonesto of the Rincon parish blessed the new bus last week. □ *G.D./L.D./D.R.*

On the 29th of May **Amelia (Meme) Thode celebrated her 75th birthday** at the Protestant church in Rincon. Here is a picture of her surrounded by her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Interestingly, she is younger than the grandfather of her youngest great-grandchild.



Amelia Thode with grandchildren and great grandchildren Fleurtje Veldkamp photo

TOP 10 SIGNS YOUR BUDDY IS SUFFERING FROM NITROGEN NARCOSIS

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- 10) He keeps staring at himself in your mask.
- 9) You find him buddy-breathing with a grouper.
- 8) He pees in his dry suit.
- 7) He doesn't pee in his wetsuit.
- 6) After you surface, he keeps trying to buddy-breathe through your snorkel.
- 5) She keeps giving her octopus to an octopus.
- 4) He pulls off your fin and tries to breathe off your big toe.
- 3) His mask fogs under water, and he spits in it.
- 2) Your mask fogs under water, and he spits in it.
- 1) He looks at you cross-eyed and slurs his bubbles.



These 10 items may be funny but remember: Narcosis can lead to fatalities.