

A LEAP INTO THE UNKNOWN

As one of Sweden's most experienced underwater cinematographers, Eric Börjeson knows all about taking a leap into the unknown. Even with 30 years of underwater adventure under his belt, he still never knows what each new dive is going to uncover. But for a natural born adventurer like Eric, that's where the fun lies.



Growing up, Eric Börjeson was surrounded by diving cylinders, underwater cameras and exotic objects salvaged from the sea bed. One year, during a family holiday, Eric's father fixed a diving cylinder to Eric's back, placed a diving mask over his head and encouraged the then ten-year-old Eric to wander along the sea bed for as long as he wished. Now, at first, this may sound a little unconventional – dangerous even. But when you consider that Eric's father was the pioneering underwater filmmaker, Bengt Börjeson – a man often referred to as Sweden's answer to Jacques Cousteau – it doesn't sound strange at all. In fact, it all sounds perfectly natural.

THE LIFE AQUATIC

"For me, learning to dive was as natural as learning to ride a bike," says Eric. "When I was a child, a large part of family life revolved around diving. So, for me, it was never a hobby, it was a lifestyle." Eric says it's hard to pinpoint the exact moment he became interested in diving. One thing we can be sure of though, is the role his father played in inspiring Eric to take the plunge and embrace the life aquatic.

"At the beginning of the 1950s, my father founded Sweden's first diving club in Gothenburg. Then, in 1955, armed with his first homemade underwater camera, he set sail in a renovated fishing boat to film the coral reefs of the Red Sea – his team were only the third diving team to do so. Later in his career he filmed the salvage operation that brought the sunken 17th century Swedish warship, the Vasa, to the surface in Stockholm. My father's adventures inspired me and fired my imagination."

When it was time for the teenage Eric to take his first diving lesson, he turned up wearing his father's old gear. The instructor had never seen anyone dive this way before and could only shake his head. You see, as well as wearing his father's somewhat unconventional equipment, Eric had never read any books on diving theory. But when something feels so natural, why would you?

CONTINUING THE FAMILY TRADITION

In 1984, Eric's parents moved to Spain. Eric, however, decided to stay behind in Sweden and continue his father's work. Two years later, he filmed his first underwater scene for a Swedish short film. Altogether, Eric has now shot underwater scenes for more than 200 documentaries, feature films and commercials. But of all the films Eric has made during his 30-year career, there is one that holds a special place in his heart.

"Of all the films I've worked on, the one that means the most to me is 'Oceans,'" says Eric. Oceans is a French documentary made for cinema. It took five years to shoot and featured 52 different locations from around the globe. "The film is a journey taken in the company of the animals in the sea. It was a hugely ambitious project and in order to get close enough to the animals we had to construct new kinds of cameras, cranes and rigs. In fact, almost every scene required us to come up with a new technique for capturing images that had never been used before." The ability to create new, or adapt existing equipment to capture the best shots possible is a talent Eric inherited from his father. And one that was really put to the test during the making of 'Oceans'.

The result of all this hard work and innovative problem solving was a unique film where capturing the feeling of being with the animals was more important



than documenting facts. For a nature documentary, 'Oceans' was an unusually artistic piece of work. It also gave Eric the opportunity to work alongside some of the members of Jacques Cousteau's legendary team. It's no wonder the film meant – and continues to mean – so much to him.

A DEEP RESPONSIBILITY

At 53, Eric has devoted most of his life to exploring the mysteries of the deep. But what is it about underwater life that he finds so fascinating? "There's still so much to explore," he says. "The sea is an endless source of inspiration and curiosity. There's

also something very moving about the silence you experience down there."

The unexplored potential of the sea, and how it can be used for the good of the planet, is something Eric tries to communicate with his films. "The ocean currents and the movement of the waves contain enormous energy resources. I believe it's important that we tell people about the possibilities and explain how much we have to gain if we use this energy in the right way."

Unfortunately, pollution and the effects of global warming are felt just as strongly at sea as they are on dry land – something Eric has witnessed first-hand. "I have seen some heartbreaking sights at sea," says Eric. "Huge floating islands of plastic waste, overfishing of coral reefs, sharks slaughtered for their fins, the sea bed destroyed by trawling and much more. But with a little more information, I believe we can change our habits. We can fish in a more sustainable manner, we can start reducing emissions before it's too late – I think we've only just begun to realise how important the sea actually is to us."

EXPERIENCES THAT LIVE ON

The sea is certainly important to Eric. So, after all the exotic places he has explored, and all he has accomplished, is there a particular location that will live long in his memory? "Without doubt, my favourite place is Adélie Land in Antarctica. Here, the water is crystal clear and filled with enormous icebergs. To dive in and follow the icebergs as they stretch hundreds of metres below the surface is the ultimate experience for an underwater photographer." But Eric doesn't believe that diving should be an exclusive pursuit. In fact, he believes the experiences and adventures he lives for are within everyone's grasp – they just have to know where to look. "You don't have to travel far to be mesmerised by nature or the mysteries of the deep. For me, it's always fun to show people the wonders that exist right in front of them." ■



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