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An aquarium biologist’s job encompasses a wide variety of responsibilities: collecting and breeding animals, cleaning exhibits (constantly), feeding animals, working with veterinarians, maintaining life support systems, researching animal’s habitats, designing new exhibits, attending conferences (always learning more), publishing articles, collaborating with scientists, providing tours to VIP’s and much more. This career is enjoyable and interesting; knowing our work enhances ocean conservation and education efforts is truly rewarding. Fernando is responsible for the care of a number of live exhibits and assisting in the supervision of biologists. Aquarium trips have taken him to Monterey, CA, Hawaii, Mexico, the Netherlands, Taiwan as well a number of cities throughout the country for conferences and presentations.

What inspired you to work in your current field?
I’ve loved animals as a child, had aquariums at home since I was 10 and was very inspired by the Jacque Cousteau specials on TV. My experience
volunteering at the old Scripps Aquarium gave me hope and inspiration that I might find a career in the hobby I enjoyed so much.

Please describe the path that led you to where you are now:
During my last two years of high school I had a summer job with the Youth Conservation Corp. They took us on a field trip to the old Scripps Aquarium. I became interested in volunteering and a few weeks later I went back to sign up as a volunteer. During my years at Jr. College and University (biology major) I spent 4 hours per week volunteering in the aquarist’s department. This eventually led to a part-time position (about two months before graduation).

What experiences helped prepare you for your career?
Of course volunteering at the old Scripps Aquarium was very instrumental. My hobbyist experience definitely helped. University courses and especially lab sections of my biology courses helped broaden my knowledge (scientific method, lab techniques, chemistry, biology, oceanography, etc…).

Please share any funny/inspiring stories or favorite things about your career:
a. Jean-Michel Cousteau visited Birch Aquarium and wanted to talk to someone about one of our coral tanks which happened to be one I had designed and put together. I was asked to meet with him in front of the tank. We got to chat, one on one, for about 10 minutes and his comments were very inspiring. He mentioned that this was one of the best live coral exhibits he had seen and that it looked very natural. I was pretty nervous meeting with him and didn’t even think to mention how much his father’s TV specials had an impact on me.

b. Myself, and two researchers from SIO flew down to Mexico to meet with a Saudi Arabian prince. The prince had generously offered the use of one of his yachts to SIO researchers. I was asked to represent the Aquarium. The hope was that we would be able to use his yacht, while it was located in a tropical location, to collect specimens for our exhibits. We flew into Cabo San Lucas, Mexico and quickly boarded a boat that cruised through the night to finally meet the Prince’s yacht just off the coast of Puerto Vallarta. We met in one of his two yachts for a short meeting. The prince was happy to help the Aquarium and even offered to empty the swimming pool on his yacht, so that we could hold our collection of fishes, rocks and corals! He also offered to have his seaplane fly us, and our collection, from the yacht to the closest airport! Although we never had the opportunity to take advantage of this great offer, it was a 4-day experience I’ll never forget.
c. My favorite part of the job is creating a new display. I love researching the animals and their natural habitat, figuring out how the plumbing will work, the lighting needed, and designing the aquascape. It’s a very creative process balanced with lots practical, hands-on work. That combination makes for very stimulating and fulfilling work.

**Do you have advice for middle school and high school students interested in a career in science?**
Read books on marine biology and aquariums. Set up an aquarium at home, take an oceanography or marine biology class. If you live close to a public aquarium think about volunteering (there might be an age requirement). *A Fascination for Fish, Adventures by an Underwater Pioneer* by David C. Powell is a great book to read if you’re interested in the public aquarium field.

**Are there any resources you would recommend for students looking at a career in ocean and earth science, especially at UCSD and SIO?**
Consider volunteering at BAS for work experience and networking opportunities, attend lectures and presentations hosted by UCSD, SIO and the Aquarium on topics related to their interest. SCUBA certification through courses at UCSD or SIO would be very helpful. A great resource, but not local, is the Aquarium Science Program at Oregon Coast Community College.

**Favorite quote?**
“Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray.” Rumi