



LES ANNAN

#HUMANSOBYACHTING

#humansofyachting – Les Annan

The captain of Axis reflects on the job – and the boss – he holds dear.

By Dominique Afacan | 10 February 2020

“I started scuba diving when I was 12, inspired by Jacques Cousteau, and pretty soon I started working in a dive shop after school. By 18, I’d already got my instructor’s licence and when I was 21, I saw that a dive shop in St Thomas was looking for instructors. At the time I was living in Denver, my roommate was moving out, our car had died and I was cycling six miles to work. I sold everything I had and bought a one-way ticket! I worked at the dive shop in St Thomas for six months then got a lead on a boat in the British Virgin Islands and moved there. I worked my way up and became captain of the largest sailing trimaran in the world at the time. I ended up living there for a decade, but for the last 25 years or so I’ve been based out of Fort Lauderdale.

My current boss [the owner of *Axis*] loves the Bahamas – there’s plenty to explore and the fishing there is awesome. And it’s all about fishing for him – he’s a mad, mad fisherman. We carry two fishing boats on board and he fishes all day, every day, right up until sunset. When the hurricane hit the Bahamas, there was no hesitation – he started with a donation of \$250,000 and said he’d match any others dollar for dollar. His friend then called and offered \$250,000, so he ended up reaching into his pocket for \$500,000. In the end, he raised a million dollars to fund all the supplies we took in. It was amazing to help people that really needed help. There were other yachts that came over as well – one came over to pick up all the stray dogs and a lot of communities and businesses in South Florida jumped in to help too – raising money and doing collections. There was a lot of goodwill and a lot of gratitude.



AXIS DELIVERING HURRICANE RELIEF

We kind of adopted Little Grand Cay, a sleepy little fishing village in the north of the Bahamas with about 300 people living there; the owner knew it would be ignored as it wasn’t the main centre of all the devastation. We carried over new water tanks and a bunch of roofing materials to make the houses dry again. We also hired a bunch of off-duty electricians to go in and rewire everything. All in all, we did six trips – on each one we probably carried about 50 tonnes of deck cargo. On Little Grand, there was no dock, so we had to load everything onto a barge, send it in, and bring it back again. It was a bit slow but we managed it. The owner had no reservations about any of it, he just wanted to make it happen.

Alongside fishing, my boss also loves exploration, so our boat has a submarine and I’ve got my pilot’s licence on that too. I got certified in 20 dives, but some people take longer, it depends on your skillset. Because of all my experience driving big boats and diving, it all came quite naturally to me. I’ve done 160 dives now. The sub goes to 1000 metres with three people for 96 hours. We don’t typically go for that long though, because there’s no toilet! An average dive is probably two or three hours and I go to 300 or 400 metres, into the dark water. It’s a lot of fun. As soon as you go below 30 metres, you’re entering uncharted territory that nobody has seen before.



AXIS DELIVERING HURRICANE RELIEF

You see all kinds of different fish; shrimp, sharks, jellyfish, squid – the submarine lights attract things. And it’s super comfortable. There’s a stereo, air conditioning and seamless communications to the surface. It’s a lot safer than driving down the road, put it that way. I would rather be in the submarine than on the highway in south Florida!

I’d love to go to Galapagos with the submarine one day, that would be neat. It’s remote and a little hard to get to but it is worth it. I have a wife of 20 years and two teenage children and I’ve had them all come along in the submarine at some point; my boss is very family-oriented and lets them come on board. They are the friendliest people you can imagine and so down-to-earth. For him and his wife, it’s all about exploring the ocean with their kids and grandkids.

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