

Nachruf von Luigi Casati auf seinen grossen Mentor Jean-Jacques BOLANZ

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<http://www.rebreatherworld.com/rebreather-accidents-incidents/15150-jean-jacques-bolan.html#post155723>

Jean-Jacques entered my life in 1986 after a serendipitous meeting. Essentially, I offered myself as a “Sherpa” after transporting his equipment and that of Patrick Deriaz into the siphons of the Fiumelatte cave.

Jean-Jacques immediately appeared to me to be a charismatic person and, as a diver, I was especially curious to discover his diving techniques. At that moment, I did not speak a foreign language and Beatrice interpreted for me to communicate with him. From those first meetings a lot of water spouted from the source, and many notions, not just about diving, but also about French entered my head, which allowed us to exchange our opinions on a great number of subjects, and his work was fruitful.

Jean-Jacques was strongly engaged in his work as a social educator in Africa, and during the last few years, even though retired, he continued to collaborate on his principal projects in Ethiopia.

Jean-Jacques spoke about Africa as only those who have lived there for many years could. He spoke to me about his colleague there, his alter ego, Bekele Mosisa. I knew Bekele through

Jean-Jacques, his hopes and his wishes, and after exchanging some words with him on the phone, I felt that he also knew me in the same manner, and that he knew so much about me. In fact, Jean-Jacques loved to share his passions with his close friends and to share the different aspects of his activities.

Over the years, while his grand children grew up, I was welcomed in his home first as a diving “apprentice,” then, as time passed, as a true friend.

Then something else developed in our relationship, and I had the feeling that I was welcomed as his spiritual son within our common passion of underwater speleology.

In an interview for a documentary on the Cocol dei Siori source, Jean-Jacques said, “I must confess that I am really grateful to have met a friend like him in my life. All that Luigi does is as if I did it myself...”

Jean-Jacques’ exploration activity lasted more than 30 years, and it developed in all possible directions of exploration — large, deep sources, those with important horizontal developments, “bottom” siphons, multi-siphon immersions, sink-holes, thermal caves — an enormous amount of activities, about 2000 immersions carried out almost always as exploration or, alternatively, dedicated to topography.

The engagement he put into the great explorations was equal to that he put into those less stimulating ones, like topography, all showing professionalism in his passion, as only the Great Ones can and know how to do it.

Jean-Jacques, grand explorer, more than 25 years spent on all the levels of the international panorama, carried out explorations which still today are incredible. Recall the periods during which one was forced to dive the depths while using one sole respiratory mixture—air. He was a pioneer in the use of Trimix mixtures in sport, carrying out the first dive with the mixture in Italy cave, at the source of Gorgazzo, in 1987 and reaching the incredible depth of -108 m. He was able to continuously evolve, from a personal as well as a technological point of view, investing in “zep”, decompression bells, portable hyperbaric boxes, etc...

It always astounded me to see that, at over 60 years of age, Jean-Jacques continued to buy new wetsuits, “zep”, and equipment for deep dives, with as much passion and frenzy as that of a young man who has his whole life ahead of him.

When he asked me to get some equipment for him and I was late, even if I succeeded in justifying myself, he filled my inbox with gently upbraiding e-mails. Often when we met, we then resolved our small controversies at the table in front with good food and excellent bottles of wine, because Jean-Jacques was a jovial fellow with great taste. In each place that we visited on our expeditions, we were forced to stop in the capitals of fine cuisine.

In 2003, at the age of 63, Jean-Jacques started to use a SCR. After approximately 200 hours of use, attracted by the performances of the CCR, he decided to acquire one of them. In 2004: the big jump.

The use of these rebreathers, which are much lighter to manage when compared with traditional open circuits, made it possible for Jean-Jacques to have a second youth, and he, of course, very quickly found an important role among the few users of this type of apparatus on difficult dives.

During these last ten years, he and I had lived in perfect symbiosis, tackling life's tests in the same way: politics, freedom, or more simply buying the same products, the same equipment, spending much of our time together, planning new explorations, making new contacts in other countries, etc. Finally, after changing his old truck, Jean-Jacques also bought himself a tent to put on the roof of his car, similar to mine, finding it so pleasant that when he came to see me, he would no longer sleep in his small room, but in his elevated alcove.

Dear Jean-Jacques, we found ourselves in **Corinth on Sunday, October 28**, and I brought you replacement accumulators for your lamps, all new ones because you had problems with those used until then. We exchanged a few words very quickly because my ferry to Crete could not wait.

Together, we looked at decompression for your diving because the -140 meters done a few days earlier were not enough. You wanted to dive as deep as possible in Lili, the cave that had called to you these last 10 years, the cave that, because of bad atmospheric conditions, you had not been able to explore before, but also the cave where I did not want to return to explore after, a few years before, under particular hydrous conditions, we had been almost sucked in this darkness which, however, attracts us.

After we went out to the bar, while quickly returning to our cars, I said to you - "Pay attention! You will be very deep ". The same words you repeated to me before each dive. Your pipe-cleaner fell from your pocket onto the ground, and as usual, I collected it and it returned it to you with a smile. Once in the car, I saw that we forgot to change the time, and it wasn't as late as I thought. We could have spent another hour together, but we almost started the car and this time was one of those rare times where we did not go to the edge of a source together.

We greeted each other with a few words, with our understanding glances filled with promises, with a reciprocal smile, which I could not have known to be the last.

Monday the 29th, I received a call from Vassili at 18:00 hours, who told me that you were late to exit: **Even before he went down to check, I knew that we would not see each other again.**

The ferry to come back to Peloponese has already left, so I had to wait 24 hours to return, to come to find you. Fortunately, our Greek friends have had a humanity that was missing when Massimiliano left.

I found you on October 31st where you slept, at -93 meters, ascending from a dive at -152 meters.

I cried in the water from seeing you like that, abandoned in the depths of a sleep without return. I understood that you probably went quickly from CO2 intoxication, something that at the present time we can try to prevent, but that we are not able to overcome when it occurs.

I am alone, you are not there, you will not advise me anymore, you will not say "Be careful" to me anymore, we will not exchange more intense glances, but I know that life was not a burden, neither did you live it in a superficial way, you lived it intensely, giving a direction to your life as well as to mine.

I will see you in the darkness of the caves, in the galleries, and with the passion that you transmitted to me, I will continue to traverse them.

You will always be with me, My Friend.

Luigi Casati