

Chapter 19



Glenn Miller

Conclusion: The Greek Medallion

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

— T. S. Eliot

Most of the time our travels and life experiences are not intellectual or planned. Rather they are full of stumblings and chance encounters. Chance itself can be of great use if one can recognize the opportunity that may accompany it.

I think of this as I remember how I started my career, because for a time I thought I would work for an airline. However, before leaving for San Francisco with my new college degree to take the airlines job, I went to Santa Barbara for a summer vacation.

Here, I wandered down Miramar Beach late one afternoon inspired by the sea and the sound of the waves. Suddenly I heard a startling noise that sounded as if someone were strangling. I looked up toward a group of battered beach houses and saw a dark-haired man who looked a little like a pirate, standing on his porch with a garden hose in his hand.

The noise came again. I walked toward the house to have a look, and when I got closer I saw what was going on: the pirate was filling a dinghy with water. The odd noise came from his pet sea lion, which was lounging in the dinghy. The sea lion, being nosed by the man's springer spaniel, was protesting. When sea lions protest, they sound like humans being strangled.

"Hi, I'm Glenn Miller," said the pirate.

I introduced myself; then he invited me onto the balcony to see the sea lion.

Glenn said he was a charterboat captain and that he took scuba divers out to the offshore islands of the Santa Barbara Channel. He told me about his trips,

about diving and finding wrecks off Anacapa and Santa Rosa, about seeing Indian skulls and bones on San Miguel, about going into a huge cave on Santa Cruz, about storms at sea. His photograph album contained the most unusual photographs I had ever seen. One old black and white picture showed him diving around the wreck of the *Golden Horn*, which sank off Santa Rosa in 1892. Another showed Indian bones and grinding bowls on a sandy beach at San Miguel. Another showed him playing the part of a fisherman in a Walt Disney film, *The Not-So-Lonely Lighthouse Keeper*. There was another that showed Glenn in his scuba equipment, diving next to a huge, sealife-encrusted paddlewheeler. He explained that the wreck was the *Winfield Scott*, a Pacific Mail steamship that had smashed into Anacapa Island and sunk in 1853.

Without my knowing it, my educated perspective on life was being slowly eroded. I had been sitting in a classroom for four years with my books, and here was someone who was diving around sunken ships. I felt a sudden longing—inexplicable and indefinable. The world opened wide and I knew that I wanted to see it, experience it as fast as possible.

Glenn invited me to go to sea with him the next day. He was going to Anacapa Island, taking a group to the *Winfield Scott*.

I was down at the boat early the next morning. Glenn was already there, and so was his springer spaniel, Mac. We headed out of the Santa Barbara harbor in his 65-foot boat, *Emerald*, and set off in the direction of Anacapa.

Anacapa marks the eastern entrance of the Santa Barbara channel and is actually a chain of three small rocks connected by shallow reefs. The whole chain is about five miles long and averages only a quarter mile wide. The jagged cliffs and razor sharp rocks plunge from as high as 550 feet, with a network of caves carved by the ocean at the base of the cliffs. The *Winfield Scott* was just one of the many ships that had gone to pieces on Anacapa.

As Glenn pulled the *Emerald* into the spot where he wanted to anchor, everyone aboard began climbing into wetsuits, fins, masks, regulators, tanks and weightbelts, then leaped over the side. I borrowed a mask and snorkel and jumped over to watch. From my floating position on the surface I could see divers swimming below me—down, down until they were out of sight. Only their bubbles kept coming up. It seemed so awesome to me that people were actually breathing down there deep and out of sight.

After a while I got out of the water and climbed on top of the wheelhouse, sat and looked at the island, at everything. Seabirds flew everywhere. Western gulls dipped and soared. Pelicans roosted on the rocks. It was the end of summer and fall was in the air. As I looked at the island I felt change close at hand, an expectant feeling that often comes with September around the corner.

As the divers climbed aboard the *Emerald*, they talked about the *Winfield Scott* and its giant paddlewheel. They brought up brass pikes, copper nails, pieces of copper sheeting.

The very next day Glenn was taking another group out to Santa Cruz Island, the island west of Anacapa. He invited me again. It took me less than a second to accept his invitation.

This time Glenn asked if I wanted to try diving for myself. I was elated, thrilled that he had asked. He gave me the equipment and also my instructions. "Don't hold your breath," he said. "If you do, you're dead. Just breathe normally and swim around and you'll have a good time."

He also told me that the way I had to get in the water was to stand up at the rail of the boat and roll over head first. Without thinking that he might be kidding, I did it. I was so eager I would have jumped off the wheelhouse roof with all that gear on, if he had told me to.

I will never forget that first dive. Once I got to about 30 feet I saw colors I had never thought possible in the ocean. There were pinks, whites, magentas, reds, purples, greens, oranges, browns, blues. There were fishes, forests of kelp, soft corals, urchins, seals and eels.

I didn't know it that day, but meeting Glenn Miller on the beach in Santa Barbara changed the course of my life. It changed everything. For one thing I never did get to the airlines. The next thing I knew I was diving for sunken treasure in the Caribbean and writing about the undersea world. I met fascinating people who made their living from the sea, including many of the people in this

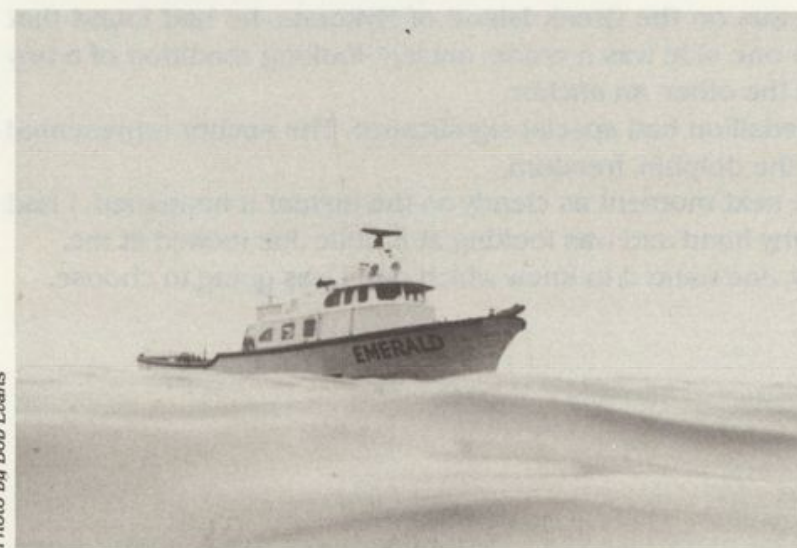


Photo by Bob Evans

The Emerald

book. I found myself on a trail that became an inspiration for everything I do and feel, a road to a world that is rich in beauty, science, philosophy and discovery.

Glenn Miller eventually sold the *Emerald* and built the 85-foot *Coral Sea*. With Dick Anderson, he went to the Bahamas in that boat in 1980, with the idea of making another salvage attempt on the *Maravilla*, the Spanish galleon that sank in 1656 on the Little Bahama Bank. On the way to the Bahamas from Santa Barbara, Glenn, Dick and their crew got stuck in Panama with blown-out generators and were arrested by the Colombian government and held at gunpoint. The crew eventually tried to find the still hidden treasure of the *Maravilla* by hiring a psychic.

That is the way it is with treasure. It makes no difference how many times an outing like this runs aground. People like Glenn will always toss caution to the wind, opt for the adventure and go ahead anyway.

In the moments I am worried about security I think of these things and I know that any worrying I might do will be for naught. Momentary setbacks are not only the accepted hazards of adventure, but should be taken as positive signposts to life itself. In thinking about the choice between the safe and the uncertain, I realize that the richest experiences of life are often the surprises we get when we continue past the setbacks, choosing the uncertain routes over safe and comfortable ones.

It was all summed up for me by Dr. Joe MacInnis, my Canadian friend who first dived underneath the North Pole and who comforted Ed Link at the site of the submarine accident which took the life of Link's son. During one visit, Joe took a medallion from around his neck and pressed it into my hand. He explained that while he was on the Greek Island of Mykonos, he had found that medallion. I saw that on one side was a crude, ancient-looking rendition of a boy riding a dolphin, and on the other, an anchor.

Joe said that the medallion had special significance. The anchor represented security and the boy on the dolphin, freedom.

I can remember the next moment as clearly as the instant it happened. I had the Greek medallion in my hand and was looking at it while Joe looked at me.

Freedom or security. Joe wanted to know which one I was going to choose.