

# JUST IN TIME

## by *Diver Z*

***AUTHOR'S NOTE.... For ninety nine percent of the people reading this article, the very idea of diving into the murky waters of New York Harbor, in an area you have never been before, to fix, remove, untangle or cut away a problem can not be comprehended, yet I do this kind of thing every day.***

I am moving carefully ahead, trying to focus into the beam of the light. I squint my eyes to read the pressures gauge just 2 inches in front of me! Darkness is trying to stand up to every one of those 6000 piercing lumens of my lights.

I am trying to move the gauge right in front of my mask, just to read how much air I have in my tank.

As precious seconds are passing by, I try not to worry about how long this simple act is taking.

Pushing these thoughts away, I stay focused and try not losing my composure. I need to stay steady. Sediment particles are speeding by the gauge in the beam of light.

They look like piercing needles moving past my facemask. I'm starting to feel shaky.

Just a few more seconds, and I can get that reading. I'm guessing a minute goes by as I start to feel the cold creeping in. Got it! Few inches away from my face with the right angle, the combination of the glare of my light, I can see the gauge needle. In that split second it seems like the needle is in the middle. Just one more look, to get the number, was it 1000? Let me check again.

My feet slip, my whole body shifts, I am being pressured by the current. Behind the thin glass of my mask, I watch my hand miss the catch and the pressure gauge falls away. I struggle to hold on to something, anything that can stop me from drifting away. I feel a steel structure under my feet. I'm gaining the moment, just before I'm about to tumble. Now I feel a strong pull on my mask. It is the only source of air I have. I stretch my neck in the other direction. This is a problem.

I frantically feel around to catch on something, anything. I grab onto a piece of pipe with one hand.

I'm holding on. The current is not forgiving, my feet barely set against some edge. I my fingers are cold. But I'm able to hold myself.

Ok, now steady again, I begin thinking, how much time has lapsed, what was that number again?

I know for sure my mask is caught on something. Time is of the essence. Despite the pull on the mask, I try to focus.

Following the contours of my mask with my hand I feel where the pull is coming from. I touch the end of my line. Ok let's untangle!

It seems to be wrapped around the light console, which is a rigid part of my mask, it is around that. One deep breathe and very calm as I exhale feels like traveling through time.

Out of my 3 knives, the one on the spring cord attached to my chest seems like the best bet to solve my problem.

Ok, cut the line and head out of here. The thick gloves an 29-degree water are indicators of what is really going on.

Knife is out, cut ready! It's a chain!!! Damn!!! Small linked chain-damn it! I know that even those small links cannot be cut. I'm angry that it can all end with a small link chain!

In the back of my mind, is the most important thought of all, how much airtime, and what's that that number? Now I know I'm cold, I feel it all over. I'm way over my forty-five minute dive. And the clock ticks under the water in a way that no one above will ever understand.

Those numbers are as important as knowing how much air I have left, and how much time has lapsed from my last reading. How long before my masks glass barrier will no longer separate, or, protect me from my surroundings at the same moment I tell myself that this is not the puzzle to solve right now. I'm stuck I know that much! My right hand is still holding on while my feet are somehow braced against something.

Cold has put its heavy metal gloves on me. I don't feel much in my hands; the next stage is when they start to hurt. That means I have another 5 minutes before the pain sets in.

I know I need every piece of dexterity to solve this part of the puzzle. Yes, air is not the priority now, or is it?

My hands are numb and air is getting lower every second. Untangling now. As I work, I have my left hand around my light console as some instinct or feeling my hand does its own thing, directed by a brain that is, and isn't mine. Fingers that could not even hold a cup of tea make the right move.

Chain is off! My impulse overcomes my thinking and I grab my pressure gauge. Tilt it just a bit, watching those air particles, and feeling like an alien behind my thin glass, separated from the cold, dark waters around me. Now I see it! 700 psi! There is a second of relief; I can feel a smirk on my face.

All right, ready to ascend. I positioned myself to come up. I find the lifeline that is attached to the surface boat. This is the time to go; I start pulling myself in.

I pulled over 10 ft. of the line with no tension before realizing that I'm the only one on either end. That means the line was lost on the surface, why? Who knows? Someone screwed up! I never realized that the chain slipped on my back and is resting around my tank valve now. I am stuck again.

Damn! It was comforting with 700 psi! Now I know it is a race against time. Turning around, I feel the direction of the tension. Can I take my gear off, somehow untangle, and hold onto it without losing it? No the current is too strong, I would surely lose it! Not my kind of night in the city. There are piers, boats and plenty of ways to get stuck under the water- and none of them is worse, or better than the other. They can all kill you.

I'm trying to reach behind my head, bad pain in my fingers.

There is sweat on my face, another indicator of my time running out I am sad for a moment, the people I care about flash through my mind.

Once again I feel the small links of the chain on me. I reach over my head behind me, work my shoulders to bring that tank valve closer, moving my fingers to catch the chain, slowly twisting my body. I am calm, it is a slow motion process but worth it! I feel the chain dropping down past my legs.

My feet are braced against something, I'm letting my hand go, not even thinking of checking my pressure reading, not wasting a second. I know what I have to do. Come up!

Sliding backward, I'm traveling by skidding my butt on top of the steel hull until my back hits a spud.

I know where I am now. I am hugging the spud that is holding the barge in place. The current is helping me hold on to the spud; I'm ready to go up.

I unclip my lifeline; I'm cutting off my security to the



boat and putting all my cards on me getting out of the barge.

The wreck doesn't want me below; I'm just a friendly visitor who comes and gives it some attention, today I was preparing the rigging to lift it up. Maybe it knew that its time under the sea was coming to an end.

With my lifeline unclipped my ascent will be fast. No mistakes, no secondary movements. This is a one shot deal. I crawl up, breathing easy, I still know there are obstacles on the way, beams, hoses, lines--and three hundred feet of my so-called life-line swirling somewhere around me.

I bump into one hose the size of a man's arm; brush off another one, carefully hugging the spud as I'm ascending.

I'm planning every move as fast as it can be done, every breath. The last few feet to go, I see a bit of glare, my lights are penetrating further and further. I stick my head out of the water and there are the lights of Manhattan.

I grab one of the floating hoses, my lights shine on everyone on the boat, I know I am almost done. The 600 hundred lumen lights are blinding the crew. I switch it off and the crew helps me on board.

At that point, I'm out of air. Releasing the valve on my mask to allow ambient air in, as well as establishing positive buoyancy on the water, so I don't sink back down to where I just came from. And then, finally, I'm breathing. It is wonderful! Just another day in the life of a diver, or, seven, minutes, but who's counting?

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