

It was my sixty-fifth birthday and my son, Matt, was signing us up for a tour to Kicker Rock off the shore of San Cristobal Island. The tour was the day after tomorrow, and I had to practice my snorkelling.

Yesterday we found Playa Baqueizo, a popular cove for locals to swim and snorkel. I was on the dock trying not to look conspicuous as I clumsily put on my fins. I was treading water, so I was using up energy. We were in salt water, I should have known I had plenty of buoyancy. My mask was fogged up by the time I was ready to snorkel. Matt was quite unaware of my lack of experience until he saw me struggle. He told me to relax and he showed me how to defog my mask by spitting on it.

When I put my face in the water I was amazed at the beauty of the fish.

“A sea turtle over here,” I yelled at Matt.

“OK,” Matt said as he changed his direction to check it out.

Later, we found a boardwalk that led us to a beach with sea lions, crabs and iguanas. We stayed, played and took pictures. We didn't want the day to end but reluctantly followed the people at the beach back to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno to our hotel, the Dolphin House. It was nearing dark and we noticed the sea lions scattered all across the beaches, resting for the night. Baby sea lions were jostling for position beside their mothers.

We had a delicious breakfast of plantains (like banana chips), rice, beans, and chicken in a restaurant by the beach. Fishermen were driving trucks of fresh fish to the local restaurants. We saw tourists lined up on the dock to embark on a trip across to another island.

Matt and I gathered our snorkelling equipment and walked to La Loberia Beach. On the lava trail, iguanas sunned themselves after a hard day's work eating seaweed in the ocean. We took pictures of the seagulls, iguanas and blue-footed boobies on a cliff above the large ocean waves.

After taking what I thought were great pictures of the Frigatebird in a knarled tree on the beach, I decided to go snorkelling in a tiny cove. I was surprised to see colourful fish of all

shapes and sizes. They swam up close to me as if I wasn't there. I heard a tune play in my head as I swam amongst the fish.

"Happy Birthday to me, Happy Birthday to me, Happy Birthday Dear Nancy, Happy Birthday to me," I sang to myself.

The next day, we were the tourists on the dock embarking on a boat off for Kicker Rock and other beaches on the Island. The boat took on the ocean waves as we bumped across to the massive rock. When the boat stopped, Matt and others were busy with the scuba equipment. I listened to the guide as he talked about Hammerhead sharks and Frigatebirds in the area.

Only two of us snorkelled. We jumped into the deep swirling water along with our guide who had an orange buoy with him in case we needed to hold on and take a rest. The waves were large and the current strong. He led us around the island where I saw many kinds of fish including the tang and surgeonfish along the cliffs. We started through the middle of the two rocks. The current there was much too strong to fight against, so we swam out. The guide pointed down, but because I didn't have contact lenses I couldn't decipher the grey hammerheads swimming below. When I looked closer to the surface, I saw a grey wall beside me. I didn't see the outline of the fish, just grey. The guide told me later that it was a hammerhead.

"You just feel for the fish," he said.

I laughed, thinking how stupid I was not to get contacts before I came.

The divers came up and were talking excitedly about the wall of fish and the hammerheads below.

After a nap back at Dolphin House, Matt took me out for my birthday dinner. Matt recommended a fish soup. It was a combination of fresh fish and vegetables with spices that tantalized the taste buds. My birthday was usually special, but this one was amazing, to be with my son in the Galapagos Islands was something I never even dreamed of.

