



IKUO Nakamura

*My Journey on the Road
Untraveled Has Been
One of Trial and Error*



When he was young, Ikuo Nakamura embarked on a career as an underwater photographer with zero experience in either diving or photography. Today, he is a first-rate specialist who records and reveals to the world previously unseen views. Even after reaching the age of 70, he is still diving and taking pictures, because, according to him, underwater stories never seem to run dry.

Self-taught Photography Entailed a Series of Trials and Errors

The goby thrives in the sludge-covered seabed of Tokyo Bay. Sea angels spread their wings and wander in the sea off Shiretoko Cape in Hokkaido. Columns of rock formed by layer upon layer of algae stand in Hamelin Pool on the west coast of Australia. The undersea worlds captured in Nakamura's photographs are always strikingly new, be they realistic or fantastic. It is scenery normally witnessed only by divers, and these pictures are capturable only at a certain place and time, and by a certain photographer.

Recalling the early years of his career, Nakamura comments, "Many underwater photographers start their career as divers or photographers, so it is rather unusual that someone like me who had no experience in diving or photography decided to do both at the same time."

He was only 19 then, and struggling to figure out what to do with his life. One day, he decided to visit Manazuru (a seaside town in Kanagawa Prefecture) and came across a group of divers who were taking underwater photos. He was not even a good swimmer and had no experience in photography, but it dawned on him, "This is it!" He emptied his small savings account and purchased skin-diving gear and underwater camera equipment.

As expected, it was not an easy start. "A snorkel mouthpiece has two protruding sections, and not knowing which went where, at first I stuck one in my nose." He was convinced, however, that even among thousands of aspiring young photographers, he could differentiate himself if he had a professional edge — the underwater world.

More than twenty years after that "inner nudge" at Manazuru, Nakamura won the prestigious Kimura Ihei Award for his works entitled "Zen Tokyo Wan" (All About Tokyo Bay) and "Kaichu Ganmen Hakurankai" (An Expo of Subsea Faces). Not only in the years up to this

milestone, which he reached when he was 43, but throughout his career, Nakamura never studied photography professionally. That was his policy already before he joined an underwater photographic services company at age 24, during his years there, as well as after he became a freelance photographer at age 31. He has always taught himself and polished his artistry on his own.

Although Nakamura is best known for his underwater photography, he has also produced numerous "on land" works, including journalistic pieces, television and commercial film footage, and movies. The breadth of his technical skills and determination to master his craft are simply amazing.

"I have gotten involved in a variety of things because I love outwitting others by doing the opposite of what they expect of me. I also resented the idea of being defined only as an underwater photographer, so I organized shows and published books themed around things unrelated to the underwater world. I like to remain an unpredictable figure and let people wonder, 'What is Nakamura thinking?' or 'What is he going to do next?' rather than be labeled under one fixed category."

The Reason Why My Dream of Retirement Never Comes True

As his remarks imply, Nakamura has always tackled new challenges, and his success owes much to advancements in technology. For

example, lighting equipment for underwater shooting has made significant progress in recent years, and Nakamura's approach to work changed as a result.

He comments, "Even if you dive on a sunny day, you still need the help of lighting equipment to shoot underwater because color, particularly red, fades. Before, I had power supplied from a ship via cables, but because the cables were 100 meters long, I had to hire electrical experts and large vehicles to carry the equipment. Now, I have a lighting system the size of a 500-ml bottle, and using its battery, I can shoot for one or two hours continuously. It has lightened the workload considerably."

However, the photographic equipment that Nakamura uses weighs at least 20 kg or so. Even with the weight reduced by being underwater it is burdensome, yet Nakamura is still an active photographer.

"During more than 50 years of diving, sea creatures have taught me so many valuable lessons," says Nakamura, "including the smallness of humans, or our arrogance. They helped me realize what we, as creatures who share planet Earth with them, must be doing to conserve the environment, and indeed, there is a great deal to do. I dream about becoming skipper of a fishing boat and enjoying pole-and-line fishing in my retirement in Okinawa, but that will have to wait a little longer," says Nakamura, laughingly.

Ikuo Nakamura

Born in 1945 in Akita Prefecture. In 1964, he began shooting photos underwater without any professional training. After working for a photographic services company, he became a freelance photographer in 1976. In 1988, he was awarded "The Kimura Ihei Photography Award" and in 2007, "The Domon Ken Award." In 2009, he appeared in a popular television program produced by NHK (national television), called "The Professionals." His scope of work encompasses a wide range of genres, including journalistic photography, television programs and movies, and lectures on environmental issues. He has authored "Zen Tokyo Wan" (All About Tokyo Bay), "Kaichu Ganmen Hakurankai" (An Expo of Subsea Faces), "Kaichu 27,000 Jikan No Tabi" (The 27,000 Hour Underwater Journey), "Kyokuya" (Polar Night), and many other books.

