

Diver tells of his Black Friday bends ordeal

Jo Wiles

(This article is reprinted by kind permission of The Age, Melbourne)

Allan Reynolds was "bent" for the first time at Easter and he did it in text-book style. A bubble in the brain gave the 35-year old professional abalone diver stabbing pains in the joints, a searing headache, tunnel vision and the "chokes". He says it was too dark to see if he went blue in the face, but he did go a bit loco and is still deaf in one ear.

Mr Reynolds was struck by the "bends", or decompression sickness, about 15 minutes after his final dive off Cape Schanck on Friday. It was supposed to be his Good Friday, but after seven hours diving and only 13 bins of abalone, it turned out to be his Friday the Thirteenth. He ended up spending more than two hours in a decompression chamber at Prince Henry's Hospital after steering his Sharkcat across Westernport Bay and then travelling home in a car from Hastings.

A diver for 14 years, he said yesterday he had tried to ignore the first pains of his "bends" which started in his right leg just off Flinders. "When you know it's a little bubble trying to force its way through a joint, you're more worried about that than the pain," Mr Reynolds said. "I suppose you'd call it a stabbing pain. It peaks, then goes, then comes back again. After that, I got this incredible headache - like a top notch bad migraine - and my sight went. It made it terribly difficult to drive the boat with things looking watery."

By the time Mr Reynolds, his wife, Arleen, and brother-in-law John Fenske, had reached Hastings and started back on the road to Melbourne, the "chokes" had set in. "I just couldn't get enough air. All I wanted to do was to get back here, get an ambulance and go to the decompression chamber. I was out of it." He said that he was so disorientated by the bends that he could not remember his friends' names or things he was saying. "You know your mouth runs away without your head in gear. You start shouting and yelling because you're deaf and you keep shouting."

Mr Reynolds, who is still deaf in his right ear, said he believed he had misjudged the depth of his last dive and ascended too quickly. Decompression sickness is caused by gas bubbles which form in the body tissues if a diver rises to the surface without taking proper decompression procedures.

.

(This story was also reported by at least two other papers, these providing the following additional details:

He had been diving in about 21 metres from 10 am till 5 pm, collecting abalone. When he surfaced he complained of pains in his arms and legs, his wife reported, and when the party started back in his boat "he could hardly see and it was difficult to make any sense out of him. When we got home, and on the way to the hospital, he was going hysterical. He was totally deaf and desperately gasping for breath. He was yelling and screaming. I was pretty scared", she said. Dr Gavin Dawson said treatment was at 20 metres depth (gauge) pressure for 75 minutes, then 65 minutes at 10 metres, followed by overnight stay in hospital for observation. He was the 11th bends patient treated at the hospital since the machine was installed 10 years ago.)