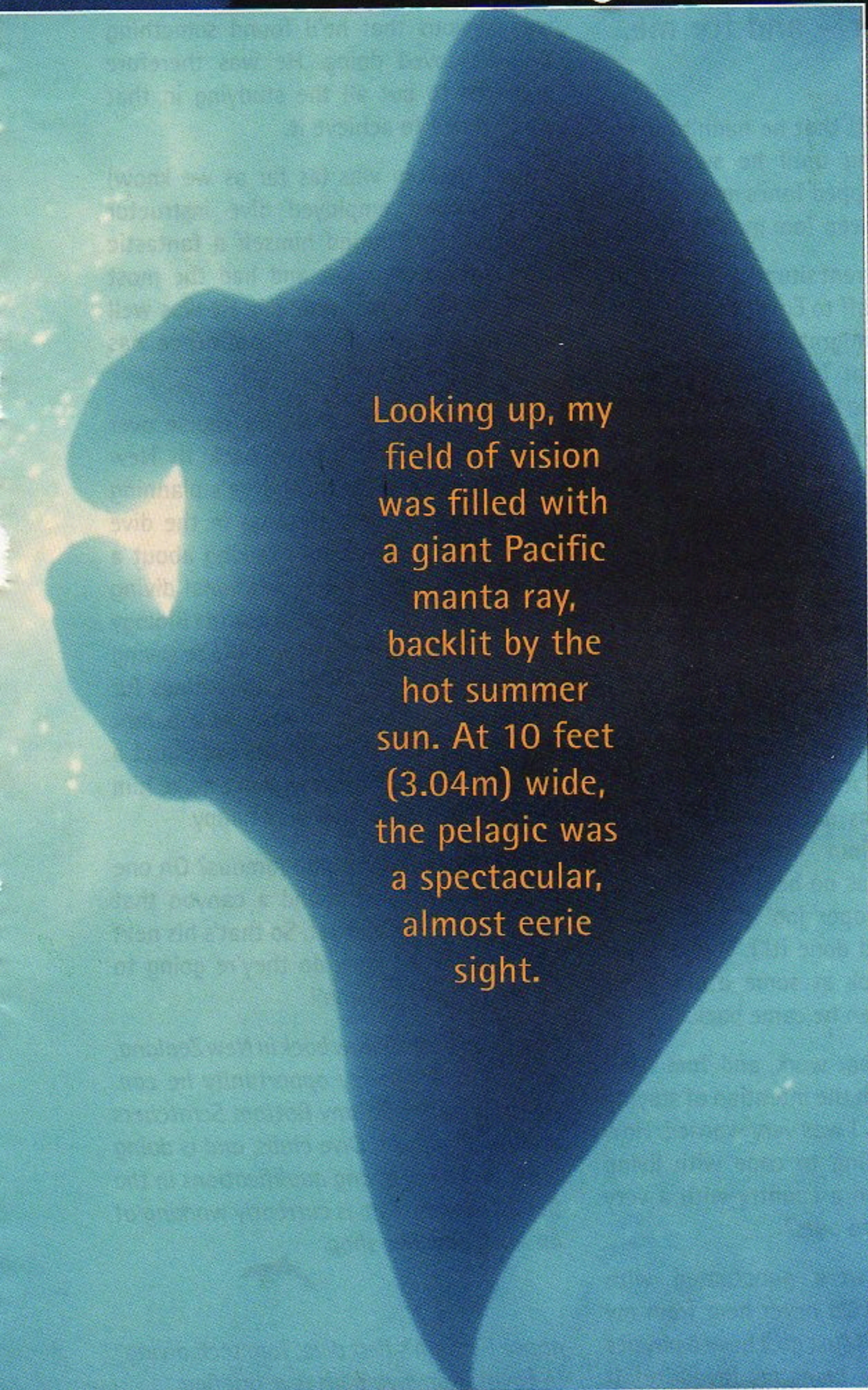


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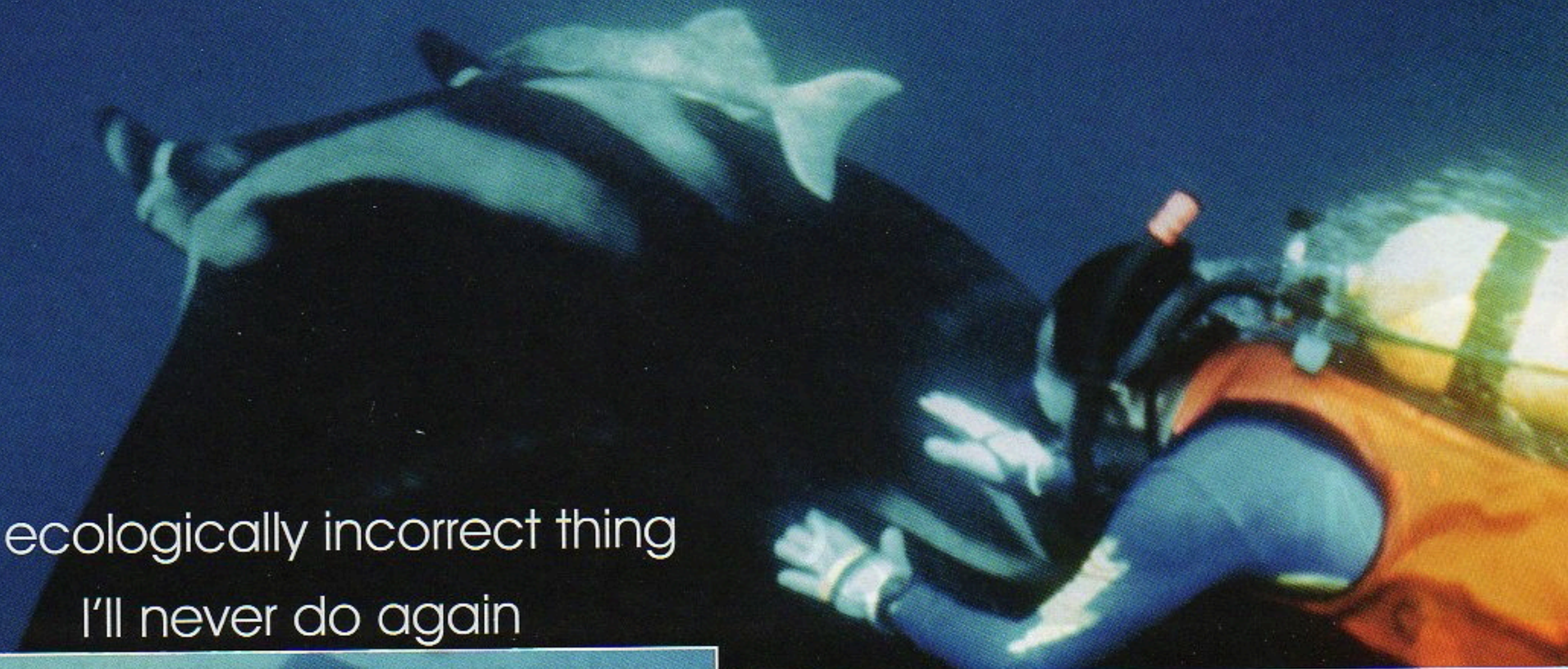
Manta Ray

by Gil Zeimer

an ecologically incorrect thing
I'll never do again



Looking up, my field of vision was filled with a giant Pacific manta ray, backlit by the hot summer sun. At 10 feet (3.04m) wide, the pelagic was a spectacular, almost eerie sight.



About 20 years ago, I was blessed to be in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. While diving at about 40 feet (12.16m) at Isla Partida in the Sea of Cortez, Baja California, Mexico, a shadow fell over me.

Looking up, my field of vision was filled with a giant Pacific manta ray, backlit by the hot summer sun. At 10 feet (3.04m) wide, the pelagic was a spectacular, almost eerie sight. As it flapped its majestic wings and floated by gazing at us from one of its black eyes, four snorkellers from our liveboard boat swam by to take a closer look. It reminded me of the scene in 'Jaws' when everyone and their brother got into their boats to capture the great white shark.

The manta tilted towards us, then flapped its wings a few times and undulated away.

Unfortunately, I'd left my camera on the dive boat, but I followed the manta ray, along with my two dive buddies. Suddenly, it stopped moving away and actually approached us.

Though it's now ecologically, environmentally and politically incorrect to touch such a spectacular species, it wasn't back in 1989.

One at a time, we got a ride around the lagoon. In fact, the manta ray let my dive buddy float above its back, gently grab its shoulders, and took her for a five-minute ride around the lagoon at a depth of about 20 feet (6.08m). When she returned, I took her place. After me, our third buddy was also given a ride.

Though I didn't have my camera, someone did. I have the framed shot on my office wall of me riding the manta ride, with two three-foot-long remoras sticking to its shoulders in front of me.

Today, after 28 years of diving, this scenario remains as the single most exciting sports moment of my life. When I gaze at the photos or think back on the experience, it's almost a dreamlike memory. But it's a memory I'll always cherish.

