

Shanelle Dugan 's Reflection for Leg 1

Hi, my name is Shanelle Dugan and I am a nursing student at the University of Southern Maine. Joining the Wise Lab on Odyssey's first leg in 2011 was a very enriching experience and it was an opportunity I'm glad I didn't pass up. During my stay we sailed from Key West to Pensacola, FL, and we saw many of nature's grandest spectacles including whales, dolphins and beautiful sunsets. These details make the voyage seem glamorous, but it was no vacation as there was a definite task at hand and much effort was put toward it during my stay. The payoff, however, was much better than any vacation could deliver as I returned with a refreshed mindset, a strong feeling of accomplishment, and memories that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

The journey started with some kinks as we were unable to sail for a week after I had arrived, but once we hit the sea she showed us what she was about. Within days we had whales, and it wasn't long before we had biopsies. We saw hundreds of dolphins and it was not uncommon for a pod of dolphins to swim up and ride the bow; in fact at one point we had a pod with about 150 dolphins swimming around the boat! It was truly amazing when they rode the bow because if you approached the bow sprit you could hear them whistling, plus you're only feet away from them!

Being awoken abruptly to work is usually never a nice thing, but on the Odyssey I welcomed the moments because they meant that I was able to participate in something awesome. For me, "WHALE!" meant that it was time to strap the camera bag around my shoulder and climb up to the midlevel platform where I would photo document the activity of following whales and collecting biopsies. Those moments were exciting and even the best photos do not serve them justice.

It is a wonderful feeling to be part of something great and that's what this voyage is. People act as though they are making a difference by expressing their opinions on subjects. It wasn't too long ago that I learned, in order to make a difference, I need to do something; and that's what this voyage is. I can run around Portland arguing about BP's mess, I can write a blog or make a YouTube video about how society needs to grow up – or I can jump on a boat and seek solid scientific proof that things are not as well as we like to think they are. It was quite visible that humanities' footprint on the earth is seen everywhere when each day we would pass hundreds of pieces of plastic floating in the water and what's even more devastating was that most of the plastic was not on the surface. Documenting this evidence gives good arguments more of a push; arguments supported by organizations whose interests are not selfish and who will be able to present them to those with the power to make changes. It is very gratifying to be part of that, and I hope that the findings discovered by the Odyssey and her crew are able to make the changes necessary for the survival of our environment and those who share it with us.