

FREE SWIM

a reelblue production

director, producer, cinematographer *jennifer Galvin*

editor *diana Logreira*

story consultant *fernanda Rossi*

original music *terence Bernardo*

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Synopsis >

Free Swim is a documentary film about the paradox of coastal people not knowing how to swim. Taking place on the island of Eleuthera in the Bahamas we follow a group of kids as they overcome their fears, gain confidence and reconnect with their environment by learning to swim in open waters. With fresh memories of a friend drowning and the conflicts of growing tourism, for these kids it's not just about floating, but gaining new skills for their future.

Eleuthera, which means 'freedom' in Greek, is so long and narrow (approximately 110 miles long and on average 2 miles wide) that it's like walking a tightrope between two bodies of water. In close proximity to the US, the tourism industry thrives in the Bahamas, but Eleuthera has experienced a cyclical rise and fall of tourism, which coincided with the crash of pineapple and cattle farming and increased stress on local seafood stocks. With its particularly thin geography, bucolic landscape and stunning water, its culture is rooted in a rural fishing vibe that holds family traditions dear in the face of growing social-environmental conflicts. *Free Swim* uses the topic of learning to swim as a way to explore more complicated aspects of life on Eleuthera, such as influences on community function by the media, drowning, tourism, overfishing, and education. This multifaceted approach is essential to the development of the film's theme of paradox in paradise all the while using swimming as the anchor, literally and metaphorically. The story thread is woven with footage of children learning to swim in their backyard sea. Underwater footage shows the challenges of learning to breathe in a new environment and the powers of discovering a beautiful, new world. We see the Swim to Empower program in action (www.swimtoempower.org). Swim to Empower was founded by two young American women who traveled to South Eleuthera, the most economically challenged part of the island, to teach people of all ages to swim and moreover, to empower locals to teach one another.

The documentary is shot in verite style following kids into the water classroom for swimming lessons and empowerment. The behavioral and emotional dimensions of the swimming students in/out and above/below the water are presented together with elements of community dynamics, the island's natural resources, and socio-economic perspectives. The audience meets many characters including teachers, artists, parents, and fishermen. All of the storylines combined present a portrait of the social, environmental and economic issues on the island and the impact it holds for the world at large. Through the power of learning to swim the story promotes discussion about the swimming gap and ignites broader questions about health and conservation: What might be the unexpected power of learning to swim?

Synopsis (continued)

What is at stake when people are unable to connect with their environment beyond purely using it for utilitarian gain? And, when we come to better understand our environment will we value it, and ourselves, more? For many, swimming translates into a new perspective – a “sink or swim” mixed with a “there’s no place like home” sentiment – bringing a greater sense of freedom with the knowledge that the underwater world exists and can be survived, and even enjoyed.

Recognizing that drowning is a leading cause of death for children globally and that many questions exist about minorities and the swimming gap, *Free Swim* is an empowering film that is relevant for a wide, international audience and will be made available through film festivals, commercial distribution, educational outreach programs, and television. It documents the essence of daily life in a coastal world, avoiding both a romantic vision of island lifestyle and an overly academic approach to environmental and public health topics. While the documentary’s emotional trajectory unfolds in a new island destination for many audience members, the process of learning to swim allows viewers to tap into personal fears and have an experience with the ocean. Learning to swim is a personal thing, which is passed on from adult to child and is at the core of one’s identity and development. The film appeals to swimmers and non-swimmers alike because all humans have a relationship with water, and in particular to adults and children who have memories of vacationing in coastal places. Despite the different, immediate realities of life on Eleuthera, the characters express similar concerns to people living in more developed locations. *Free Swim* engages through the process of discovery, in and out of the water, and aims to inspire viewers to question their own relationships with the world, even in places located far from the ocean.

Director's Statement >

Free Swim grew out of personal adventures and public health work with coastal people around the world. I became aware of a paradox: many people, young and old, who live surrounded by water, do not know how to swim. Having grown up in the U.S. on Long Island, N.Y., I was aware of the questions about minorities and the swimming gap and had wondered why some kids in my neighborhood didn't know how to swim.

Digging through the public health literature it was astonishing to learn that drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death for children globally. Looking closer, in the U.S. about 60% of ethnically diverse children are unable to swim and African-American children drown at three times the rate of Caucasian children. As a doctor with a degree in public health and environmental science, specializing in water and health, the more I learned about the struggling efforts to break this cycle, the more I wanted to give this topic a voice, especially regarding islanders who rely on the ocean directly, every day. With my belongings in storage and my camera equipment on my back, I moved to Eleuthera, an island of the Bahamas, in April 2006. I knew that this location was the ideal setting because Swim to Empower (www.swimtoempower.org) was giving lessons. And, with its particularly narrow geography, bucolic landscape and dramatic blue water, the ocean feels very big on Eleuthera.

I saw *Free Swim* as an immersive, episodic story that peeled away the complicated social, environmental and economic layers connecting swimming, island life, and the world at large. I hoped that future viewers living far from the ocean could relate and question their own relationships with water. While shooting the first summer, I also envisioned locals telling a story through their own eyes so I recruited sixty students for a photography project. Using underwater, disposable cameras the mission for these students, many first-time photographers, was simple: to explore the ocean's impact on their lives. With just a camera and the support of their peers, children had a wide range of opportunities to experience their surroundings directly and in a new way. The result is documented in the book *We, Sea* (see www.reelblue.net). The children's colorful images and personal words portray a vibrant, human sensibility, conveying both the beauty and struggle of coastal communities.

Working on this paired film/book project has strengthened my belief that the disconnection with one's natural environment underscores many of today's global health challenges. Experiences in nature are a key factor for people, especially children, becoming more expressive, attentive, and simply put – healthier. My work strives to reveal a distinctive, yet unifying perspective of humanity and nature, and searches for profound, although perhaps simpler, connections to the complex world in which we live. Some of my most encouraging times have been hearing the long conversations created by the film *Free Swim*. Even in urban America, the story of learning to swim in the Bahamas gets people talking – about much more than expected.

Our Team >

JENNIFER GALVIN, Sc.D., M.P.H. | Director, Producer, Cinematographer

Dr. Galvin - scientist, filmmaker, educator and writer - uses her background in public health and environmental science to inform her work as a filmmaker. Galvin has a Sc.D. in environmental health from the Harvard School of Public Health, a M.P.H. in environmental epidemiology from Yale University, and a B.S. in aquatic biology from Brown University. She has consulted on several media projects, including the World of Water film series at the New England Aquarium and with the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School to create two award winning videos, *Once Upon A Tide* (2008), narrated by Linda Hunt, and *Healthy Ocean, Healthy Humans* (2005), narrated by Meryl Streep. Galvin was selected to the American Film Institute's (AFI) 2004 Catalyst Workshop for science storytelling and screenwriting, and to the 2006 Pan Caribbean Project for Environmental Film and Wildlife Documentaries Residency held at Escuela Internacional de Cine y Television (EICTV), Cuba. Her work in Cuba resulted in *caguayo*, which has screened in the US, Spain and Brasil. In 2006, Galvin founded reelblue, LLC (www.reelblue.net), a media production company specializing in stories about global health and the environment. Her paired book/film project on the island of Eleuthera, Bahamas, resulted in the publishing of *We, Sea*, a book about the ocean's impact on the lives of Bahamian children as told through their own photographs and in their own words; and *Free Swim*, a documentary film about the paradox of coastal people not knowing how to swim. In 2007 she traveled to French Polynesia to begin *Eating the Ocean*, a film exploring the health benefits of eating fish and the impacts of a changing global diet. Galvin is a published author, recently contributing to the book *Oceans and Human Health: Risks and Remedies from the Seas*, and also a Trustee and Selection Committee Member of the Henry David Thoreau Foundation.

DIANA LOGREIRA, M.F.A. | Editor

Logreira is a multilingual editor and filmmaker from Bogotá, Colombia. She studied film and television at the Superior Art Institute in Havana, Cuba, before moving to New York, where she studied with Martin Scorsese and Abbas Kiarostami in a program sponsored by the Tribeca Film Institute. Her recent editorial credits include *Free Swim*, *Soy Andina*, and *Front Runner*. Her independent documentary work deals with immigration, identity and work culture, including her award-winning *A Drop in Oicata*, *Eggs and Hamburgers*, *An Outsider*, and *I'm Still the King*.

Our Team (continued)

FERNANDA ROSSI | Story Consultant

Internationally renowned author and story consultant Fernanda Rossi has doctored over 200 documentaries, scripts, and fundraising trailers including the 2007 Academy Award® nominated *Recycled Life* by Leslie Iwerks. In addition to providing private consultations and lecturing worldwide, she shares her research in trade publications, such as the column *The Docu Doctor's Clinic* published by Documentary Educational Resources (www.der.org). She is the author of the book *Trailer Mechanics: A Guide to Making your Documentary Fundraising Trailer* (www.documentarydoctor.com).

TERENCE BERNARDO, M.Mus. | Composer

Terence Bernardo is a musician and sound designer based in Brooklyn, NY. His music and voice has been heard on WB's "One Tree Hill" as well as in many national advertising campaigns, including those of Hershey's and Jeep. He is a founder of the bands *White Mud Free Way* and *Taxi Taxi*, and is currently mixing *Taxi Taxi's* sophomore full-length album. In addition to his own music, Terence has produced music by artists such as The Defibulators and Lederhosen Lucil. He holds a master's degree from NYU's Music Technology Program and continues to write, produce and perform music in New York.

KAREN CONANT | Graphics

Conant is an artist, graphic designer, and a surfer. She co-founded Everlution Forms (everlutionforms.com) and works from her Rockport, MA studio with a range of supplies, including paper, glass, paint, and wood. Her creativity is fueled by inspiration from the ocean and her passion for the natural world brings new life to the recycled, salvaged, and scavenged materials with which she works. She holds a B.A. in geology from Colorado College and earned a certificate in communication arts from Gibbs College. Her work can be found in galleries around the U.S. and has been covered by the *New York Times*, *Cape Cod Home*, *Cottage Style*, *Niche Magazine*, and *Surf Life for Women*.

Our Team (continued)

KRISTEN GALVIN, M.F.A., M.A. | Post Production Animation

Kristen Galvin is a media artist living and working in New York and Connecticut. She received a M.F.A. in studio art and a M.A. in modern and contemporary art, criticism, and theory from Purchase College. She also holds a B.A. with honors in visual art from Brown University. Kristen has received several academic awards and teaching fellowships. Her work has recently been shown in New York City and Brooklyn at the Annex at White Box Gallery, Supreme Trading, and at the CAA Regional MFA Exhibition.

PHAN VISUTYOTHAPIBAL | Post Production Sound

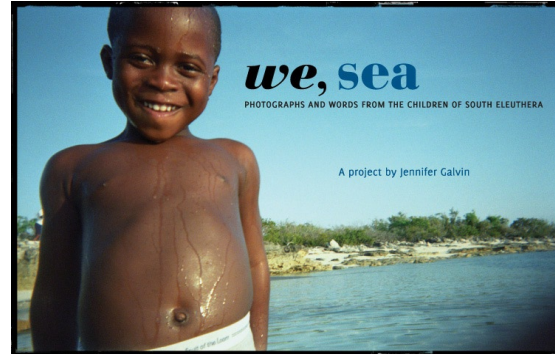
Phan is a sound designer and musician living in Brooklyn, NY. His work has been heard on television, including on shows by National Geographic and PBS, as well as in many advertisements, such as for Jeep, Mercedes and Kia. (<http://www.phanv.com>).

SACHI CUNNINGHAM, M.J. | Advisor

Cunningham - producer, director, journalist and shooter - has worked for The Discovery Channel, FRONTLINE and FRONTLINE/World on stories in Afghanistan, India, China, Japan, Dubai, Puerto Rico, Nepal, and Cambodia. Her work has received numerous awards, including a Webby Award, Student Academy Award and a Student Emmy. Cunningham has a M.J. from the Graduate School of Journalism at UC Berkeley and a B.A. in history from Brown University. Her thesis film *Samurai Surfers* has screened at festivals around the world from Byron Bay to San Francisco. The trailer for her directorial debut *Crutch* was selected as a You Tube and Yahoo "Top of the 9" featured video and was broadcast on *Good Morning America*. The feature length version of *Crutch* is currently in post-production and was funded by grants from the Tylenol Corporation and the Film Arts Foundation. Prior to studying documentary film, Cunningham worked as an assistant to Academy Award winning director, producer and writer Barry Levinson and actress Demi Moore. Cunningham is also an avid surf photographer, whose work has been showcased in the *State of the Beach* report for the Surfrider Foundation as well as in *Surfer's Path*, *Surfer Magazine*, *Surfing*, and *Surf Life for Women*. She currently works as a video journalist with the *Los Angeles Times*.

The Book >

We, Sea captures Eleuthera, an island of the Bahamas, through the eyes of the children who call it home. This book is an exploration of the ocean's impact on their lives, as illustrated by their own photographs and illuminated by their own words.



Working closely with the Deep Creek Middle School and Swim to Empower, 63 students (ages 7-16) agreed to be a part of this project. Using underwater, disposable cameras these students, many of them first-time photographers, documented the novel discovery of their home. In recent years, South Eleuthera has battled economic, educational and environmental hardships, facing high rates of unemployment, strained school systems and stressed ecological resources. Deep Creek Middle School has grown to become a community beacon, supporting people of all ages with access to learning resources, encouraging the use of the environment as a classroom and securing student scholarships for educational opportunities abroad. Coming from seaside communities where many children surprisingly do not know how to swim, they braved the water to learn new and invaluable skills as part of the Swim to Empower program. Swim to Empower inspires environmental stewardship and fosters public health by enabling individuals to feel more confident in their local environment.

Photographs are paired with texts written by the students, including poetry, personal statements or just a single word. The children's colorful images and personal words reveal a community that relies on the marine environment. The blend of visuals with voice tells the story of their daily experience in a coastal world.

Proceeds from *We, Sea* go to the two organizations that tirelessly support the students who participated in this project – Swim to Empower (www.swimtoempower.org) and the Deep Creek Middle School (www.dcmsbahamas.org).

For additional information or to purchase copies of this book, visit www.reelblue.net.

Swim to Empower >

In 2003 Brenna Hughes and Sally Elliot participated in a high school study abroad program on Eleuthera and questioned why many of the locals did not swim. They conducted community surveys and discovered that more than 90% of those interviewed did not know how to swim. As word spread that Brenna and Sally were lifeguards and strong swimmers, lessons organically began with 15 people in Deep Creek and there was increasing interest to learn, especially by the children.

The two young women returned to the U.S. and founded Swim to Empower, a 501(c)(3) organization, to empower individuals in coastal communities by teaching them swimming, first aid, and safety skills. Their mission centers on the belief that people are empowered by feeling safe in their immediate surroundings and that when individuals experience their local marine ecosystems, communities realize the need for stewardship.

Since the summer of 2005, Swim to Empower has taught over 160 people, ages 7 – 56, in communities up and down the island. Swim to Empower is directed by Brenna Hughes and has grown to include 10 volunteer swim instructors.

To learn more or to donate online to Swim to Empower, visit www.swimtoempower.org.

Production Notes >

Free Swim was shot with a Panasonic DVX-100B camera in 24p; an ewa-marine housing was used for underwater footage. About 90 hours of footage was recorded between April 2006 - June 2008 and edited with Final Cut Pro. Many of the songs were graciously donated by legendary Bahamian musicians, including the Lassie Doh Boys, Eric Minns, Ronnie Butler, and King Eric.

Shooting Format: MiniDV (NTSC)

Preview Format: DVD (Region 0, NTSC)

Exhibition Format: HDCAM, Beta-SP, DigiBeta, MiniDV (NTSC)

Picture: Color

Sound: Stereo

Sound Mix: Dolby Digital

Aspect ratio: 1.33 (4x3 video)

Length: 00:50:41

Language: English

Forms: Documentary, Feature

Genres: Independent, Environmental, Culture, Educational

Contact >

For general questions and inquiries regarding screenings, distribution, or speaking engagements, please contact:

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Credits >

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kristen Galvin

post production sound
phan Visutyothonpibal

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Stills >

Eleuthera from above.



Catch of the day.



Swim to Empower recruits for lessons.



Learning to float together.



Bonefishing with Alfred McKinney.



Island road.