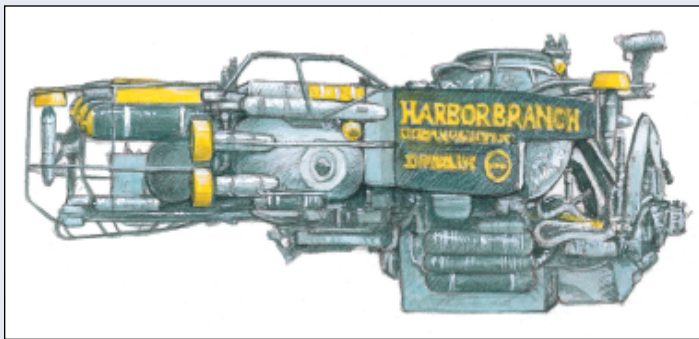
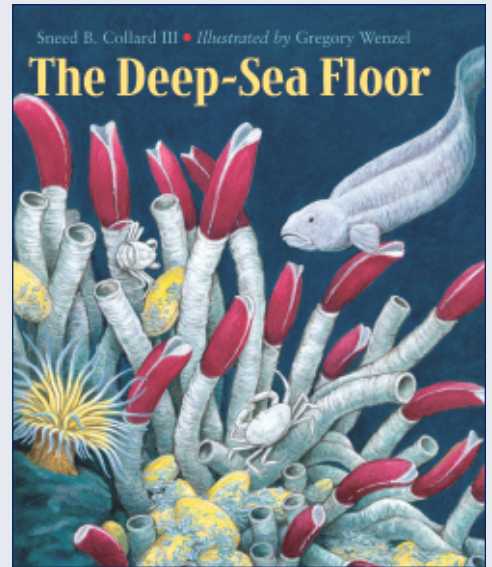


The Making of *The Deep Sea Floor*

“Am I crazy?” I asked myself as the Johnson Sea Link deep sea submarine dove beneath the ocean surface and headed toward the bottom 3,000 feet below. After all, here I was, crammed in a steel compartment no bigger than a broom closet lying on its side. What’s more, a crew member was jammed in there with me, leaving us without enough space to stretch out, let alone sit up straight. Add this to the fact that I was descending toward one of the most hostile environments on earth, and you can see why I might have questioned my sanity at the moment.



Fortunately, within minutes after beginning our dive, excitement and interest replaced whatever fear I might have had. As I looked out the six-inch porthole, I watched the water grow deeper blue as our depth increased. By 400 feet deep, it looked like twilight outside the sub. By 1,000 feet deep, it was almost pitch black. And that’s

when the real fun began. Because once the sub turned on its lights, I started seeing a remarkable assortment of strange critters in this deep ocean world: little stubby squids, a variety of jelly-like animals, and strange fish with huge saberlike teeth and big eyes.

Though I couldn’t identify every species outside the sub, I did recognize the general kinds of animals I saw. There were two reasons for this. One is that I studied marine biology in college. Another is that I had recently finished writing my book *The Deep Sea Floor*.

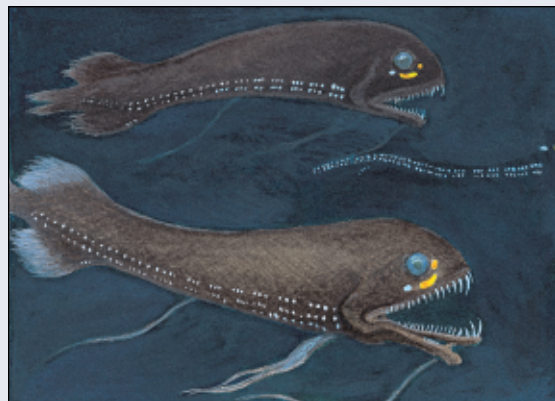
Many people don’t realize that I wrote *The Deep Sea Floor* long before I had a chance to visit the deep sea for myself. Even though I like to visit places before I write about them, I had little hope of ever getting to visit the deep sea. Why? Hiring a deep sea submarine costs about \$20,000 per day and I knew I’d never have that kind of money to throw around. Furthermore, there are only a handful of submarines in the world that are capable of diving all the way to the ocean floor. So, when I began writing *The Deep Sea Floor*, I had to content myself with learning about it from other sources.

And that wasn’t easy.

Even though the deep sea floor covers about 70% of our planet, we still know less about it and its inhabitants than we know about the surface of the moon. Scientists have done a pretty good job mapping the surface of the ocean floor using a technique called *sonar*, but our government spends only a fraction on deep ocean research that it spends on space exploration. That seems pretty silly to me considering we depend on the ocean for food, weather, transportation, oxygen—in short, for our very survival. In any case, only a handful of people have ever visited the ocean floor and written about what’s down there, so I had my job cut out for me writing a book about it.

But I did the best I could. I read several books by scientists and a bunch of articles researchers had written. I also asked questions to my father and stepfather (both marine biologists), and a number of other biological researchers. Slowly, slowly, I began to assemble a picture of what the deep sea floor looks like and what lives there. And then I wrote my book.

In the summer of 2001, however, I got another book contract to write about Dr. Edith Widder, a wonderful scientist who studies *marine bioluminescence*, ocean animals that make their own light. What's more, Dr. Widder uses a deep sea submersible called the Johnson Sea Link to conduct her research far below the ocean surface. I figured I'd research the book by calling Dr. Widder on the phone and asking her questions. In August, 2001, though, she called me up and asked if I'd like to dive in one of the Johnson Sea Link submersibles. You can guess my answer!



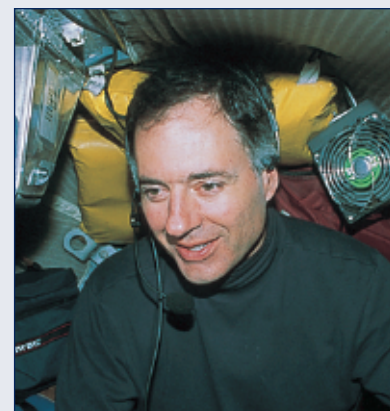
That October, I traveled from my home in Montana to the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in Fort Pierce, Florida. With Dr. Widder and a good-natured group of scientists, students, and crew members, I went on a five-day cruise to the Bahama Islands. I also got to take two dives in the Johnson Sea Link.

I'm not exaggerating when I say it was the trip of a lifetime—even better than going up in the Space Shuttle. I saw many of the animals I'd written about in *The Deep Sea Floor*. I also got to experience what the deep sea is like first-hand. To my delight (and surprise), it was almost exactly how I pictured it. Rather than recount everything I saw, I'll let you read *The Deep Sea Floor* and experience this incredible part of our planet for yourselves.



I do want to share one amazing thing, though. In *The Deep Sea Floor*, I open the book by describing one of my favorite animals I'd read about, a tripod fish. I figured I'd never get to see one for myself. On my very dive in the Johnson Sea Link, however, we descended to 3,000 feet and began cruising just above the soft, mucky sea bottom. I looked out the porthole and there, on the bottom, two tripod fish sat perfectly still, just like I'd written about them. I got so excited I could hardly stand it!

And that's one of the great things about being a writer—and a reader. By learning and writing about this wonderful planet we inhabit, I not only get to learn about thousands of things I'll never get to see or experience in person, sometimes I prepare myself with knowledge that enriches the experiences I do have. Whether you write or read or both, I hope you take full advantage of the same opportunity to broaden your experiences and enrich your lives.



—*Sneed B. Collard, III*