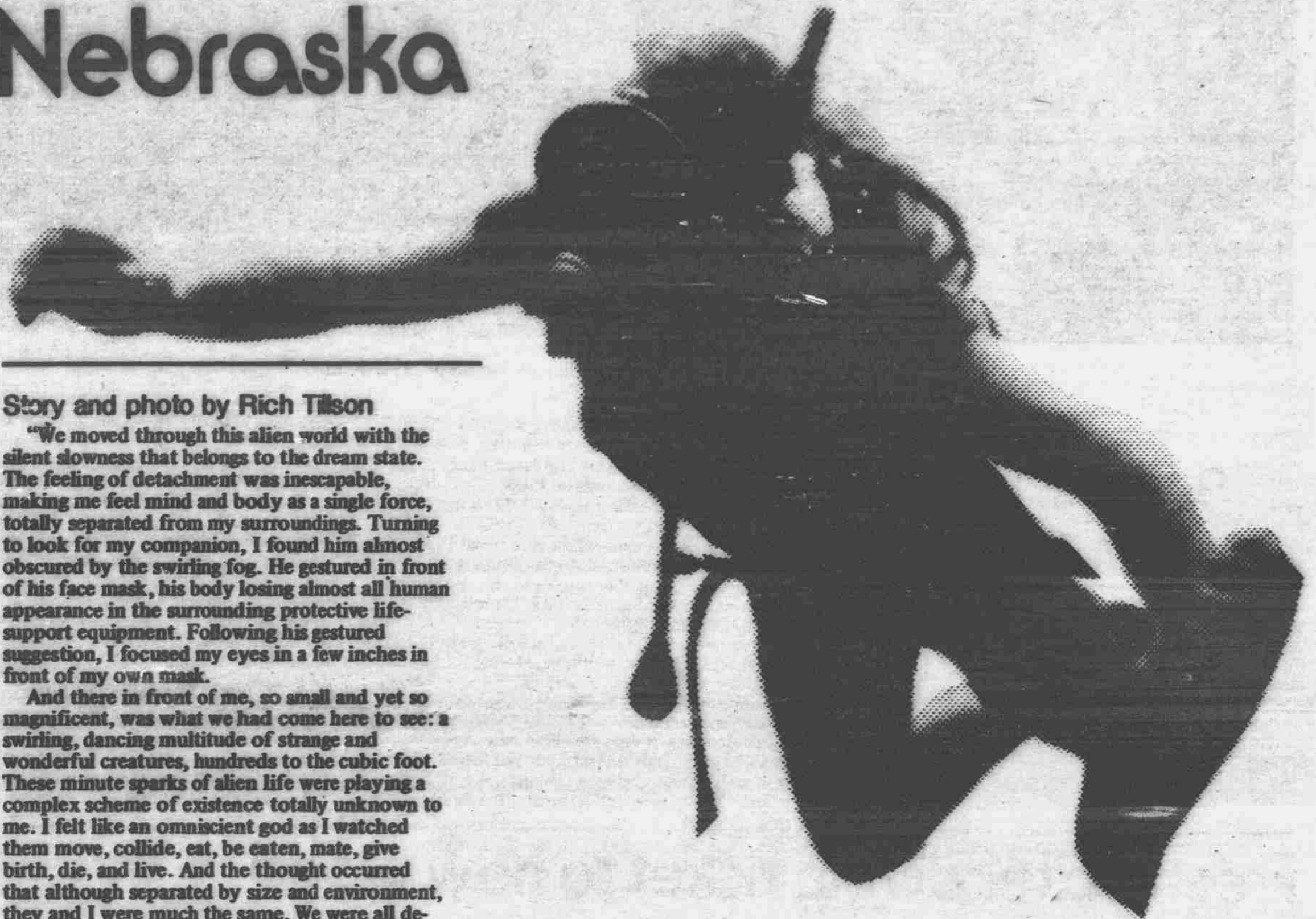


# 3RD DIMENSION

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## Taking the plunge in Nebraska



Story and photo by Rich Tilson

"We moved through this alien world with the silent slowness that belongs to the dream state. The feeling of detachment was inescapable, making me feel mind and body as a single force, totally separated from my surroundings. Turning to look for my companion, I found him almost obscured by the swirling fog. He gestured in front of his face mask, his body losing almost all human appearance in the surrounding protective life-support equipment. Following his gestured suggestion, I focused my eyes in a few inches in front of my own mask.

And there in front of me, so small and yet so magnificent, was what we had come here to see: a swirling, dancing multitude of strange and wonderful creatures, hundreds to the cubic foot. These minute sparks of alien life were playing a complex scheme of existence totally unknown to me. I felt like an omniscient god as I watched them move, collide, eat, be eaten, mate, give birth, die, and live. And the thought occurred that although separated by size and environment, they and I were much the same. We were all detached individuals and yet were solidly linked to the intricate web of life . . ."

A scene from a new Roger Zelazny science fiction novel? A delirium caused by a hallucinogen? No, this was an account of one of the many experiences possible to someone who takes up underwater diving in Nebraska. Yes, Nebraska.

When one thinks of underwater diving, scenes from Jacques Cousteau's television programs usually come to mind, with clear blue tropical water, coral reefs, and rainbow-hued marine organisms. Or perhaps you think of the movie, "Jaws". But the Midwest offers an amazing variety of underwater experiences to freshwater aquanauts.

Freshwater diving differs from most ocean diving in some ways. The visibility of lakes or sunken quarries is usually lower than that found in marine waters. Lakes are usually cold enough to warrant the wearing of a heat-conserving wet or dry suit, while this is unnecessary in warmer marine climates. All diving activities can be done in freshwater, however, and there are some things that are unique to freshwater diving.

Due to the increased popularity of SCUBA (Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus) diving, many organizations have sprung up to promote safer practices in the sport. SCUBA diving instruction is necessary for someone who goes into diving. Courses can be taken through diving shops in the area, or through the instruction organizations themselves. The Professional School of Diving offers courses through Union College, Southeast Technical Community College, Army, R.O.T.C., the city parks and recreation department, the YMCA, and UNL recreation department. The cost is \$55.

The courses run eight weeks, after which there is a "graduation prerequisite" called an open water check-out,

where the learned skills are tested in lakes or other diving spots. This costs an additional \$20. Upon passing, the new diver gets a certification card that allows him to rent or buy equipment and get tanks filled with compressed air.

Diving is an expensive sport. A set of new diving gear including mask, fins, snorkel, wet suit, weight belt, regulator, tank, backpack, and accessories will cost from five hundred dollars on up. The costs can be reduced some by renting, borrowing, or buying used equipment.

The most popular Midwest diving-related activity seems to be spearfishing, which is actually more analogous to hunting than to the rod-and-line fishing most people are familiar with. Other activities include underwater photography, archaeology, wreck diving, submerged ecology, and plain underwater sight seeing.

Tom Tourville, an instructor with the Professional Association of Diving Instruction who works at Bonsall Pool Co. and Scuba Center, 540 N. 48th, is a man obviously excited by the opportunities for diving in Nebraska and the surrounding area. His favorite underwater activity is archaeology, and he is currently writing a book about the history and diving of Lake Okaloosa, Iowa, and similar historical diving areas. An underwater museum lines the walls of the dive shop, filled with arrowheads, pottery, china, anchors, old bottles, buttons, icepicks and saws, and other artifacts collected by Tourville and other divers.

"Midwest diving has really been put down in the past," Tourville said. "I would like to make more people aware of the fantastic local opportunities and adventures in underwater exploration."

Tourville mentioned some of the places one could dive in the area, and what one could find in them:

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