

FILMMAKER'S SCREEN IS THE DEEP, BLUE KIND

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The creator of ``Return to the Sea,' a public television show, has had an interest in the ocean since he was a teenager.

Bill Lovin's fan mail tells him he's on the right track.

Take the recent letter Lovin received from a 12-year-old in Minnesota. While she lives nowhere near the ocean, she's already decided her goal in life is to become an ``oceanologist,' the girl wrote. ``The more I learn, the more fascinated I am,' her letter said.

Lovin is the creator of the UNC Television series ``Return to the Sea.' The 13-part series, first broadcast in 1990, is being rerun this season on WUNC-TV, and four to six new episodes are planned for next fall.

Lovin said he hopes his work helps viewers appreciate the marine environment.

``I'm trying to produce intelligent shows that don't over dramatize and sensationalize,' he said. ``On my first ocean dive as a teenager, I remember thinking, 'I'm scared. There's sharks all out here.' Shows like 'Shark Terror' you still see on TV don't help dispel those old myths.

‘‘I don't think of filmmaking as a vocational career,’ Lovin, 42, said. ‘‘You need to know the technical aspects, but film-making is still basically a pursuit of ideas.’

Lovin runs his own production company, Marine Grafics, from his Apex basement choked with diving, camera and editing equipment. He is as enthusiastic in person as he is as narrator on the series, now seen on 185 television stations across the country.

Jim Bramlett, a WUNC employee and co-producer of the series, has known Lovin since they were students in radio, television and motion pictures at UNC-Chapel Hill.

‘‘He's literally one of the premier underwater filmmakers in the world,’ Bramlett said. ‘‘He has one of the best underwater film libraries anywhere.’

Many of Lovin's films have focused close to home. Working with UNC-Wilmington researchers, he recently filmed the proposed Mobil Oil drill site in 3,000 feet of water off Cape Hatteras. He was among the first underwater filmmakers to explore shipwrecks off North Carolina's Outer Banks.

But his work has taken him around the world, from the Caribbean islands to Truk atoll in the Western Pacific.

His wife, Jovita, often travels with him and serves as underwater model for many of his productions.

For all his preparation, Lovin readily admits dumb luck sometimes plays a large role in his work.

“The bottom line is, you have to spend a lot of time in the water and have to be in the right place at the right time,” he said. “But it's so exciting and so fulfilling to be out there shooting. You never know what you're going to see.”

Lovin's career evolved from two boyhood passions: movies and scuba diving. He is a native of Red Springs, where his father owned an interest in the local movie theater.

He became fascinated with scuba diving after his first dive in a nearby freshwater lake at age 15.

