



It all started with *Doctor No*. Darren Stone watched it as a boy and was enamoured by the scene where James Bond, in full diving gear, tackles a hoard of underwater assassins. Even in later life, with his days filled with the challenge of running a thriving Toni & Guy salon in Oxford, Darren couldn't forget the thrill that scene had given him.

"It was the idea of breathing underwater that really excited me," recalls Darren. During a holiday to Corsica 13 years ago with his wife Debbie, Darren finally got to dive – and he was immediately hooked.

"It took me a while to get over the initial anxiety and take that first breath underwater," he remembers.

But with the James Bond theme playing in his head, he soon overcame his fears and was lost in the wonders of the ocean. "It wasn't like I'd expected," says Darren. "I'd imagined it would be really quiet, but it was very noisy, with bubbles bursting all around me and the sound of fish moving in the coral."

It was two years later, in Jordan, that Darren completed an open water course along with Debbie, which meant he was able to dive in open water to a depth of up to 18m.

Back in the UK he completed an advanced open water course, which entailed completing five dives at Didcot Lake near Windsor and Stony Cove in Leicester.

Following this, every holiday the couple took centred around diving, and Darren's enthusiasm continued to grow. He developed a particular fondness for sharks.

"The common perception is that sharks are dangerous but when you see a tiger shark underwater, all you want to do is swim over to it – they are mind-blowing."

Diving holidays may have come to an end for a while,

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# WATER WORLD

In the second of our features on hairdressers who juggle another career or major passion, Matthew Batham meets Toni & Guy salon owner and diving instructor Darren Stone

now Darren and Debbie have a three-month-old son, but Darren's diving days are far from over.

Eight years ago, after completing several more training stages, Darren decided he would go for a dive master qualification.

Normally a dive master course would take around six months, but Darren completed his with the London School of Diving in just eight weeks. He then offered his services as an assistant diving instructor and spent the summer working with the school, leaving manager Karen Crawford to run the salon.

It wasn't long before the London School of Diving offered Darren the chance to take an instructor's course and, despite initial reservations, his decision to accept is one he has never regretted.

"I always said I would never be an instructor, but I signed up and took the course over a period of several months. It included a trip to Egypt where we were taught presentation skills and, of course, more about diving. It was a fantastic, life-changing experience."

The biggest challenge for Darren was the written element of the course. "I'd always shied away from written study as I'm dyslexic," explains Darren. "But I managed to finish the academic part of the course."

For years now Darren has juggled both diving and hairdressing careers, but believes his passion for diving has helped him cope with the stresses of running a salon.

"Diving allows me to break away from being a boss and forget about daily life. It means I return to the salon relaxed and happy – which is good for everyone." HJ