

Making Waves is our honor roll for residents of Southwest Florida's island coast who, in their everyday lives, make the community special. —by Karen Nelson



🐚 The Shell Seeker

Part-time Sanibel resident Joyce Matthys wanted to share her love of shell collecting with her grandchildren, so she began carrying her camcorder to the beach. Eight years later, she had produced a polished video called “Mollusks in Action” that is now part of the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum’s orientation program. Her footage of shell life is extraordinary, capturing everything from a leaping olive to mating whelks.

Filming in the tidal pools around Sanibel, she heads out at least an hour before low tide. It takes patience; for about eight seconds of usable footage of swimming scallops, she kept the camera running for an hour. “They don’t move on command,” she notes wryly.

“There’s a lot of stuff you see once and never again,” she says. “You’re in the right place at the right time.” A friend spotted a hermit crab in a lightning whelk; there was also a sea anemone in the shell. Matthys put the shell into some still water and filmed the sea anemone opening up.

“I get my nose down,” she explains.

“I’m either lying on the sand or on my hands and knees with my you-know-what in the air.”

She either works with a tripod or carries a hunk of wood that she places between the camera and the sand. “I get as close to the animal as I can and balance on the two-by-four,” she says. But though she takes these kinds of precautions, she still has damaged a number of cameras. Sometimes it’s instant death as the waterline creeps up across the lens in an “oh my goodness” moment.

Essentials are carried in a backpack and fanny pack: extra batteries, film and videotape, the two-by-four, plus Glad Press’n Seal, which she wraps around her camera to keep it free of sand (it also sometimes helps keep the water out). She also hooks two bags to her fanny pack belt: one for shells (of course!) and one for trash.

She edits the footage in iMovie on her

Mac. It’s a tedious process. “For every two minutes that you use, it takes six hours to get to where you want,” she says.

A retired X-ray technician, Matthys has always been a camera bug. Her second video is being incorporated into an educational program at the Shell Museum, and she’s about to begin editing her third.

Most shellers see only the beautiful shells that are cast up on the beach after the animal has died. Joyce Matthys provides a rare and fascinating look at the animals that create those shells. You’ll never look at shells the same way again.

To watch clips from Matthys’s “Mollusks in Action” video, which is available for purchase at the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum gift shop, visit http://shellmuseum.org/education/mollusks_video.cfm.



Joyce Matthys gets up close and personal with the live shells on Sanibel’s beaches; a video she’s made of her experiences can be seen at the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum.

TOP PHOTO BY BRIAN STROMLUND; BOTTOM PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOYCE MATTHYS