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Fisheries scientist Daniel Pauly's life is one for the books

Biography dives deep into the story of internationally renowned UBC marine biologist

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Oct 26, 2021 • 6 hours ago • 5 minute read •  [Join the conversation](#)





Dr. Daniel Pauly, a marine biologist and project leader of the Sea Around Us Project at the UBC Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, at UBC is the subject of anew biography by David Grémillet. PHOTO BY MIKE BELL /PNG

UBC professor Daniel Pauly has spent a lifetime travelling the world studying fish stocks and delivering groundbreaking research on overfishing.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

The 75-year-old principal investigator of the Sea Around Us Project at UBC's Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries is the author of five books, 400 peer-review papers and over 1,200 other pieces of writing.

"I express myself this way. This is how I connect with the world," said Pauly when asked about his prolific writing during a recent Zoom interview from a hotel room in Frankfurt, Germany.

The renowned Pauly is the subject of the new biography The Ocean's Whistleblower: The Remarkable Life of Daniel Pauly by David Grémillet.



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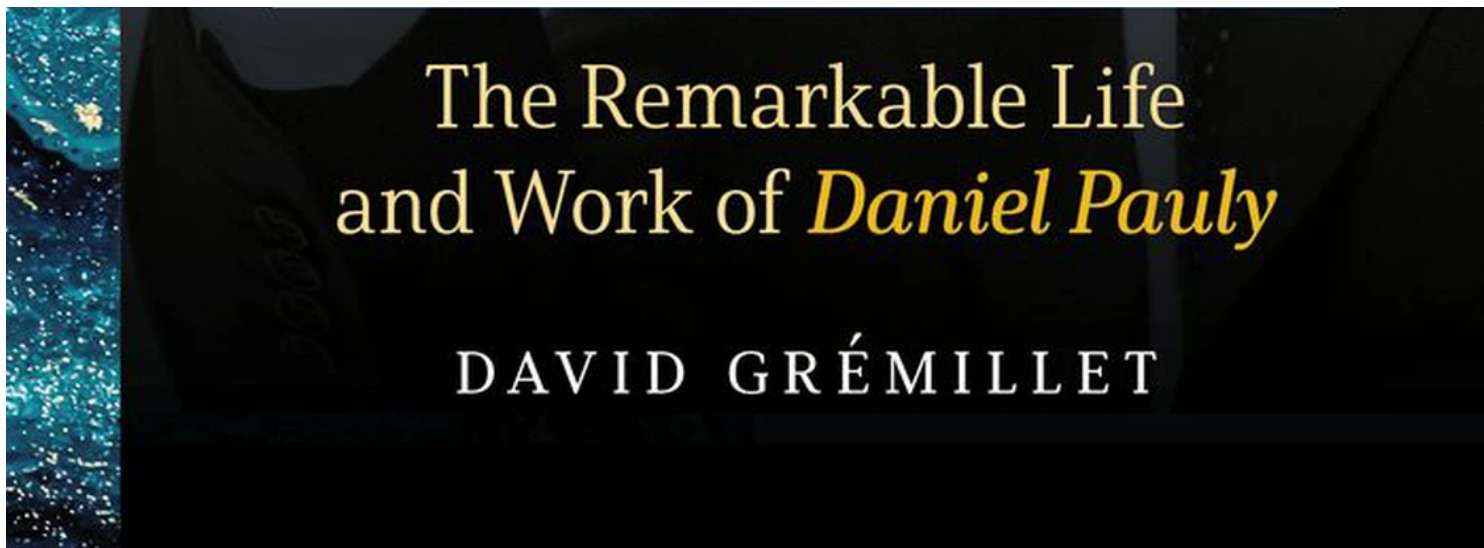
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THE OCEAN'S
WHISTLEBLOWER



As you read the book it becomes clear that the title is far from hyperbole.

We meet Pauly as a toddler in Paris. He is the product of a brief affair between his French mother and a Black American airman at the end of the Second World War.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Pauly was a sickly baby with an exhausted mother who fell prey to what appeared to be a couple of Swiss grifters she met one day on the edge of the Seine. The woman in the pair convinced Pauly's mother to give the couple her two-year-old son to look after for three months while she rested up and got back on her feet.

His mother tried to get him back but gave up eventually and Pauly was left to grow up in Switzerland.

His mother went on to marry and have seven other children in France.

In Switzerland, Pauly's childhood was Dickensian. He missed a great deal of school in order to work

collecting recyclables and cleaning out the apartments of people who had died alone.

“If there is one habit that I kept from that time it’s that I always feel guilty when I’m not working,” Pauly tells his biographer.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

His youth in Switzerland was a tough one. However he managed to find his way to higher education in Germany and never looked back. The book takes the reader through Pauly’s academic career which first leaned toward agronomy but shifted when he encountered old Nazi’s that were working in the agronomy faculty at the University of Kiel. It was around that time Pauly discovered politics and began his journey towards becoming the self-described lefty troublemaker that he says he is still to this day.

“I don’t think much about my youth,” said Pauly.

Luckily for the reader Grémillet has. An oceanographer and the research director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research Grémillet has known Pauly for years and has always been intrigued by his old friend’s story.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“I wrote this book because it’s such a good story, because everything made sense with this project — the person, the science, the environmental context, the fact that Daniel’s story takes us across essential parts of modern history, from the civil rights movement to current geopolitics,” said Grémillet via email from France. “I felt that this book project was an environmental thriller about a surviving child who changed the world by the sheer power of his intellect, of his words.”





After years of knowing world renowned marine scientist Daniel Pauly writer David Grémillet has delivered the biography *The Ocean's Whistleblower: The Remarkable Life of Daniel Pauly*. PHOTO BY BÉNÉDICTE MARTIN /PNG

At first Pauly, who speaks French, German, English and Spanish, was reticent about the biography project but then he began to see it as another platform in the fight to protect our oceans.

“This was intriguing to have biography where you don’t have to die first,” said Pauly who has two children and a grandchild. “It is not just my story. It is a story about a generation, a cohort of people who were concerned about the world around them.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

A list of Pauly’s and his various cohort’s research accomplishments is a long one. Highlights include things like the establishing of the “shifting baseline syndrome,” theory and the understanding of oxygen and fish growth. A 1998 paper in the journal *Science* titled *Fishing Down the Marine Food Web* was literally a game changer. It outlined how the overfishing of large predatory fish forced the fisheries to rely on small fish until their stock also depleted. That would then leave humans to dine on invertebrate or as Pauly says “jellyfish soup.”

“I hope that (readers) enjoy reading about this adventurous life around the world and ocean science! Beyond an incredible personal story, this book shows how science is made, how Pauly and a few others managed to flag overfishing, and to provide tools to heal the oceans,” said Grémillet.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW



Dr. Daniel Pauly is a marine biologist and principal investigator of the Sea Around Us Project at the UBC Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries. PHOTO BY MIKE BELL /PNG

A current that runs through Pauly's story is the constant fight against corrupt corporate fishing practices.

One remarkable story in the book has whaling nations, in search of support, paying government officials to pass on a lie.

"The Japanese bribed officials from several African countries, including Senegal, to say that whales were eating the fish, which is absolutely impossible because whales go to West Africa to reproduce, and everyone knows they don't eat during that time," Pauly explains in the book.

When asked about this story Pauly sighs, adjust his glasses and explains that fight was a tough one.

"I was down when I came back and I wrote an essay about how disappointing it was because I, along with lots of other people, have worked a lot in West Africa. It is well established that over fishing by the foreign fleet is ruining the place," said Pauly. "To see politicians pretend it was the whales that were eating the fish, when they lie like that they know I know they are lying. It was very disappointing."

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Despite the solid science on overfishing, fish farms and warming waters Pauly says finance still often beats fins.

"There is a simple answer," said Pauly when asked why these worst practices are still going on. "If this were astronomy and we debated about the distance of a certain star they would argue only on scientific ground because there is no commercial interest behind it, but the moment you have a commercial interest people will lie through their teeth."

Today Pauly is still teaching, lecturing and writing. He says he has no plans to retire.

“I catch myself all the time and I’m 75 and I cannot retire. This is the only scar that I can identify,” said Pauly who came to UBC first in 1994. “I become antsy when I don’t do things.”

Forced to reflect on his legacy Pauly explains his skill in science is not the drilling down on a topic but the ability to combine things for a bigger result.

Is he proud of his life, his work?

“That’s a dangerous thing,” said Pauly.

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