



# Lorenzo Borella Memorial Award

TROPIMUNDO 

Lorenzo was born on the 13th of October 1989 in Florence. He led a happy childhood with his mother Silvia, his father Gianluca and his younger brother Jacopo, born in 1991.

The brevity of his life, in a way, was compensated by the intensity in which he lived it: sports, friends, studies, scouting, travelling. He had a voracious appetite for experiences, taking inspiration, value and perspective from his activities.

He was characterised by an uncommon vitality and a great curiosity for knowledge, together with a sense of humanity and desire to cultivate deep and profound relationships with others. All those who spent time with him recognised and cherished this quality.

Lorenzo was a believer, but as with religion, he had his own discreet intimacy. He never tried to convince others about his ideas, instead he offered himself up with tolerance, listening to the thoughts and beliefs of others.

From a very young age, Lorenzo enrolled in the scouts, at first as a simple Cub scout, then Boy scout and finally a Rover scout. He left the scouts just a little before embarking on the travel part of his study program. In these years, he consolidated a strong focus, sensitivity and appreciation for nature and in turn environmental conservation. In addition to this, he took on more responsibility with regard to the education of young people and children. He used education and his own wealth of life experience as a stimulus to nourish their young minds, to teach and inspire them into living in harmony within their natural environment; an environment, which allows us to live and which we must protect.



Lorenzo in 1997 on a Santo Domingo beach



Lorenzo in Malaysia on the Chagar Hutang beach with a black tip shark

# Lorenzo and the sea

A separate chapter merits a mention of the sea. In his family, Lorenzo found himself immersed in a real passion for the sea, in all aspects from an early age. Since he was a young boy he would manifest this love in all its forms: as a sailor, a fisherman, a surfer, a canoeist, a water skier, a yachtsman and finally as a skipper with his nautical licence and scuba diving qualifications under his belt. Gradually he began to enjoy, appreciate and discover the sea, finally deciding to study it and join a wider cause contributing to marine conservation by protecting the flora and fauna that populate the sea and that keep it alive.

In summer and in winter he would go sailing with his family. In their boat they would stay together and share those few square meters, getting used to the rhythm and the discipline of the sea - a place far from the city where you can savour the vitalising taste and rawness of life at sea as well as the smell of the salty sea water's energy.

It is probably in these years that he learnt to get to know and appreciate infinite space, the sun, the horizons and the light; the primordial

beauty expressed for millions of years through the days and nights. The colours, life, the freedom and profoundness that nature helps awaken and resurface within ourselves.

Lorenzo grew up, and when he finished reading languages at high school, he had to decide upon what studies to take up at university. By now he was convinced that seven billion people cannot “use” the planet as they once did a one hundred thousand years ago. Now, there were simply too many of us, a state of affairs we can no longer ignore. Technology bestows upon us a huge power, but ethics have not evolved quite at the same pace. Thus we are forced and obliged to take on a responsibility, while once upon a time, when we were unable to modify or change the environment, we were excused or exempt from. Lorenzo wanted to take this responsibility upon himself and when people did not understand this, Lorenzo would grow irritated and deeply upset. In fact this was the only area which would really stir his emotions and upset him, albeit in his delicate and good natured manner.

# Thirsty for experiences

He was then to enrol at the prestigious Facoltà di Biologia dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze, where he obtained his degree in 2014.

He then decided to get to know the world more, to expand his horizons, and gain more life experiences. He then enrolled on an internship, which was to greatly match his desire to study the conservation of marine fauna. He started his expedition in Cambodia, with Projects Abroad, studying seahorses, then in the Fiji islands, again with Projects Abroad, taking on an internship based on sharks. Lorenzo, his long-standing girlfriend, and his friends accompanied him on his travels, not only in Europe but also in Vietnam, Laos and Mongolia. Lorenzo was forever captivated by his wish to broaden his horizons of knowledge and spark human relationships and bonds wherever he went and whomever he met.

It came naturally and only seemed fitting for Lorenzo to be interested in the Erasmus Mundus Masters Course on Tropical Biodiversity and Ecosystems, also called TROPIMUNDO, and he signed up in the hope to be accepted. When this in fact happens, he was thrilled. He set off full of energy, expectation and enthusiasm, determined to give his all. The first period of study was in Brussels, followed by a brief stint in Australia and then to continue on in Malaysia, at the Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), and the finally back to Europe, in Paris. In February of 2016, he returned to Malaysia to refine his final dissertation, a research study on black tip sharks between some islands in the state of Terengganu.

Wherever Lorenzo was he was an enthusiast and full of life. Throughout his journey he did not only study and encounter travel companions, but also made true friends for life, with whom he was to share his passions, ideas and projects.

Passion is the vital energy that enlightened Lorenzo. In photographs taken during his life, you would never even see a hint of someone downcast, sad or angry. Instead you see someone who is beaming; almost always smiling with his warm, open and gleaming contagious smile. That smile which has now captured so many hearts – smiling with his mouth but also his eyes, and through them - his soul. In many photos Lorenzo appears with children from all over the world - on his shoulders, sleeping upon him; trusting him and idolizing. In others, he looks curiously and attentively at an animal, a monument, a plant or a person. Lorenzo transmitted joy and simplicity, passion and feeling, both for the great and little things in life.



During a fishing session



During a shot telling about the sharks fishing technique

In April 2016, he was in the process of finishing his dissertation and getting ready to line up a number of projects with Lorenza for the summer who he was to be reunited with in June. Above all, he was deciding on how to manage his future projects that would allow him to continue building upon his professional career. On one hand he was to decide between continuing his academic experience with a Ph.D., while on the other, starting up a foundation that he would create with other colleagues from TROPIMUNDO, the purpose of which was to be an entrepreneurial and local innovative bio – conservationist in carrying out research, and furthermore supporting internal governmental bodies and organisations.

“Passion is the vital energy that enlighten us and enlightened Lorenzo”

Unfortunately, on the 17th of April 2016, a few days before the end of his stay (“...there is only one shark left to fish and tag”, he writes), something so beyond belief happened for someone so expert at diving. That afternoon, in the island of Redang, Malaysia, in the bay that overlooks the Chagar Hutang beach, Lorenzo free dives along with a fellow Malaysian colleague (with a breathing apparatus) in order to film a turtle. It is here that the very sea, that he loved so dearly, decides to keep him for herself amongst his dear sharks and turtles, making him breath amid her waves for the last time.



Lorenzo loved life and freedom, nature and people; the experience of studying and the formation that he was undertaking. He also relished in transmitting to others, above all to youngsters and children, his experiences and the values in which he believed and lived by - this being the necessity to respect and protect the beauty of nature.


TROPIMUNDO in remembrance of Lorenzo, has dedicated to his name the prestigious prize of best dissertation of the year. We would like to think that this gesture will transfer to future TROPIMUNDO students the message that, throughout our lives, we can choose who and what to become: to have a strong head on your shoulders and an open face, to be positive, to love and be loved while still doing, studying, working and achieving what we like – and doing it well.

The future is now in your hands, future scientists and adults, and within that future lies the destiny of the world. Smile! Love! Study! Jump on the shoulders of those who have preceded you, and offer your own shoulders to those who will follow you. Live in peace, respect life, that “lent gift” which is inevitably asked back in return. Never sell yourselves. Make the world a better place. You can succeed. Be happy as Lorenzo was, as long as he had breath.

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Lorenzo's life is almost completely encompassed in these last few words he wrote from his house in Chagar Hutang to Lorenza, five days before the accident that took him away from us:



A woman is shown underwater, smiling and looking towards the camera. She has dark hair and is wearing a scuba mask and a tank. Bubbles are rising from her breathing apparatus. The background is a clear blue-green water.

I'm coming to terms with the fact that this will almost certainly be the last time I'm here in Chagar Hutang, and I've got to say the thought that I won't be returning to this place startles me. Counting last year, I've lived here for about a total of four months - it's like my home. The beautiful house on the beach where I imagined I would live and carry out my research when I was younger. The only thing missing is the vegetable garden in the back of the house and a little sailing boat anchored in the bay. And of course you are missing, other than that it would be perfect.

I'm so happy to have had the possibility to live this experience to the full. I'm lucky, very lucky. For so many things: my parents who support me and have always backed me in all my decisions and endeavours, you who are patient even when I disappear for days / weeks at a time, but spur me on and are always curious to know what I'm doing. My friends, even though far, always keeping in contact. I'm so lucky because I am doing what I love and have loved since I was little.

Here it is calm. Let me set the scene: while I'm writing this it's night time, the only sounds I hear come from frogs who live in the swamp behind the little houses, the crickets of the forest around me, a gecko who is singing his song - 'ghe koooo ghe koooo' and a turtle who is digging his nest 30 meters from here; little waves are breaking on the shore. There is nothing else.

Far from traffic, from the confusion and chaos of the frenetic city. Life has a different rhythm here, time has a different weight.

Here I can find time to listen to sounds, to carefully observe what's around me, to listen to time as it passes, empty my mind, and look up to the sky and breath, filling my lungs completely, smell the fragrance of the sea.

I've never told you what it's like under water. It's incredible; there are so many colours and different shapes and forms. The fish come up quite close, especially the herbivores and the planktivores. Whereas the predators like groupers and Carangidae do come close, but in a curious fashion, they keep a 7-8 meters distance! Good for them! It's such a pity that my air runs out after a bit and I that have to return to the surface. If I could, I would stay down there hours to watch what they get up to. With the scuba tanks it's not the same thing, maybe because of the disturbance created by the air bubbles and the sound of the supply nozzle. If you think about it, it's almost impossible to imagine that millions of years ago there was none of this, and that in all this time, every cell and organism evolved and specialised itself in a certain direction. Like I told you, I'm determining the species of fish here in Chagar Hutang. Up until now I have identified 146! And I haven't yet finished! 146 species in such a small bay! It's crazy!

I don't want to bore you. But, I really wish you were here, so you could understand what I'm talking about. I love you so much. Night.