

# A Stunt Diver's Diary

Szilvia Gogh wears many hats and, for a couple of years now, she has been spending more time on various TV projects and feature films. Starting with the classic AXE “bikini girls” commercial, she has clinched an acting appearance in TV series Flash Forward and provided water safety consultancy on Desperate Housewives. Here, she shares her day-to-day experience and impressions on the set of Piranha.

Text Szilvia Gogh



The crew of Piranha at Lake Havasu, Arizona in June 2009. The platform was used for various scenes (top). I am preparing to descend into a specially built cave system in a futuristic custom-made, full-face rebreather (opposite).

Working on a movie set is completely different from any job I have ever done and comes with a flurry of regulations to abide by: who can touch what (only grips can move lights), who can do water safety for whom (only Screen Actors Guild members can handle water safety for talents), when we should eat (every six hours), when we can start working (12 hours turnaround)... I've been fortunate to work with some of the biggest names in the industry who have all helped me settle into the job with ease.

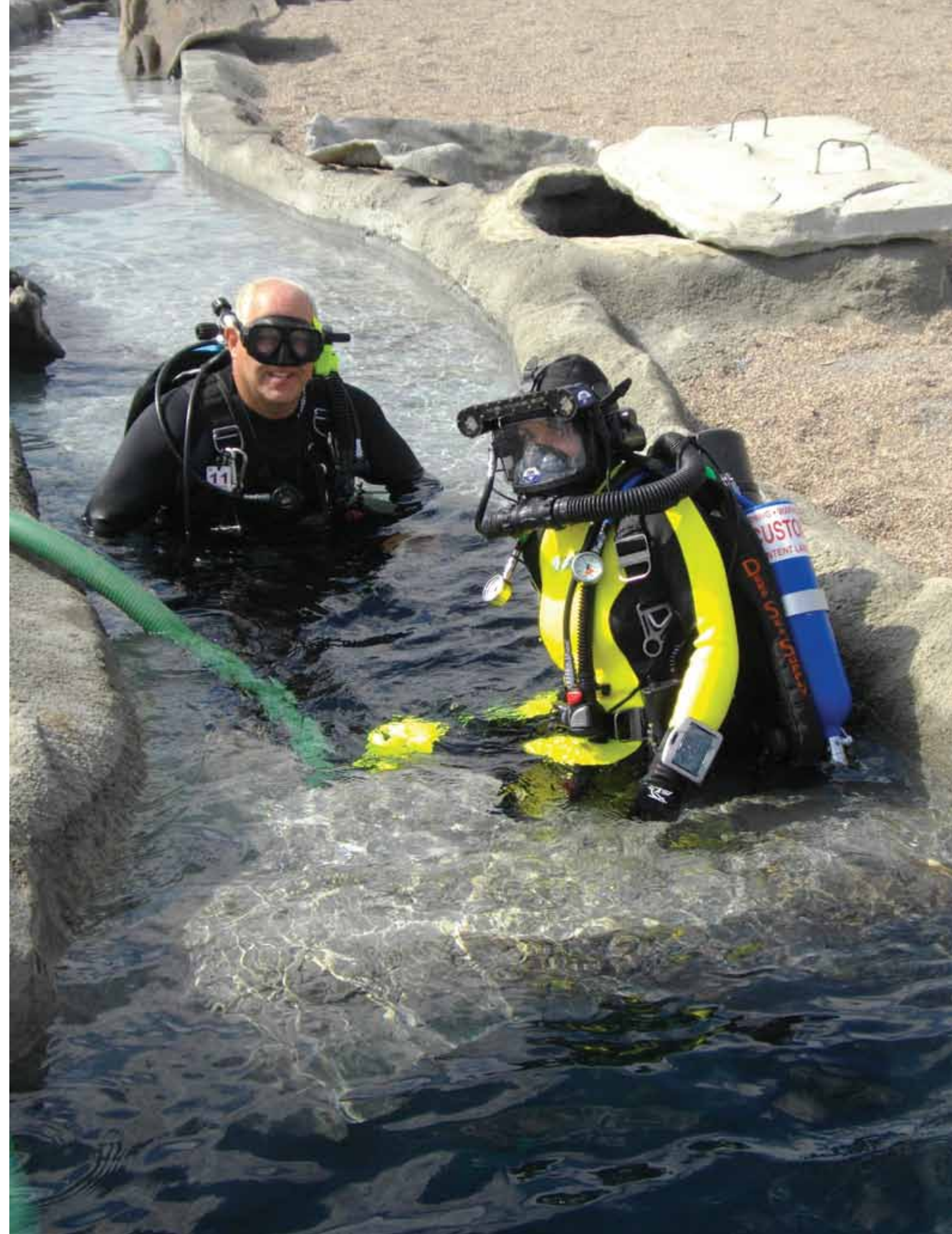
Like scores of other divers, I had wanted to become a stunt diver for quite a while. One day the gods smiled on me as I received an offer to double Dina Meyer for the remake of Piranha.

## Day 1

I had a training day scheduled at the tank. Well, the tank was a man-made lake in the

middle of a rock quarry with cave systems, wall drop-offs and several boats. Based on its size, it could easily have been a real lake. It was amazing, at least to me, how real it looked.

The fact I knew quite a few people around the water was comforting. One of my good friends, who I travelled quite extensively with in the past, Nino Neuboeck, was a camera operator with underwater director of photography Pete Zuccarini (Into the Blue, Pirates of the Caribbean and other water-based movies). He



## Feature Stunt Diving

introduced me to all the right people and looked out for me while we were at Lake Havasu, Arizona, shooting the horror movie.

Tanner Gill and John Rottger (two well-respected stuntmen) designed and custom-made a crazy good-looking dive set for this production. Picture a scuba tank with two smaller side-mounts and the latest full-face mask with double hose regulator. And if that wasn't techy enough, lights were added inside and outside of the mask. This item alone required months of research and trial and error before a final version was approved.

### Day 2

I was so excited that I was up in time for the sunrise. My call time was 6am at the marina. By 7am, we were heading to Sand Beach to shoot my first scene. I was to do a back-roll entry with another stunt person and descend quickly into the dark. I have done about 5,000 entries in my life, yet when ten people (camera operators, water safety personnel, director...) were watching me with expectation, I felt a bit nervous and pressured.

It took me a few takes to get what Pete wanted me to do. The "other stunt guy", Freeze, did a better job than me but, eventually, they were happy with the shot. I was not too happy with myself...

In the afternoon I practised with Freeze in the tank for our cave scene. In that scene, I follow him through the cave and, when I exit and see he is chewed up by piranhas, I freak out and return into the cave, frantically, on my back.

A lifeguard in Malibu, Freeze has been working on movies since Baywatch and helped me learn how to die theatre-style. Great tips also came from Mike Cameron, my safety diver for the whole movie. I was glad to always see him from the corner of my eye. He is the man who engineered groundbreaking camera equipment for movies including The Abyss and Titanic. Between dives, he showed us some breathtaking pictures of his designs.

The actors came down to practise as well. Both Ricardo Chavira (Desperate Housewives) and Dina Meyer (Starship Troopers, Beverly Hills 90210) proved competent divers and quite fun to be around. We watched them dive so we could later swim in the same style.

### Day 3

I was at the tank all day. After days of just hanging out with the water safety team, Alex Daniels (the stunt coordinator who hired me) put Mike and me on water safety duties. We were at the platform (three metres deep) with Mike holding the actors down while I gave them air on a hookah-hose. Then it was camera rolling before they were pulled through the water for the scene.

In the afternoon, we practised dying. "The guys" put ropes around my arms and legs and pulled. I was a bit stiff but figured I would practise more the next day. Being a good diver is just a beginning when working on movies: I had to act and I am not an actor. Jonathon Arthur is a stunt person (doubled most guys on Lost) and an actor, so he gave me great "dying" demonstrations. It was quite a funny picture for the rest of the crew to see us jerking about in our corner.



### Day 4

It was an action-packed day. First, I was practising more dying when Pete asked me to hang upside-down on a jet ski so he could adjust his lighting and the height of the jet ski on a crane before a scene. Later, I got to manage water safety for the shoot as well. I felt happy not to have destroyed anything.

As a stunt double, I was provided with a trailer, but I did not actually spend much time in it as I mostly hung out with the water safety team. I figured this was my opportunity to prove myself and ensure that the stunt guys (I was the only girl on the water safety team) saw my capabilities and my willingness to help. Movie cast and crew form a very small community where everybody knows everybody. I was lucky enough to get a chance to work with some of the best in this industry.

01 Joel Silverstein, local dive supervisor, gets me geared up for a scene. I double Dina Meyer whose character in the movie is Paula.  
02 Seeing double? Ricardo Chavira (on the right) and his stunt double, Kris Freeze (wearing glasses), take on Sam's character.  
03 The visual effects team turn up the blood before a cave scene.  
04 The look is complete once I've donned a torn up wetsuit.



05

### Day 5

A long day! We worked from noon to 4am but, because we were busy all day, it went by quickly. Freeze and I descended by a drop-off for a scene. Again, Mike was our safety diver all day and all went well. A minor difficulty was the two-way underwater communication system we used: I couldn't really hear what they wanted me to do through the hood. But once I knew what they wanted, I did well.

### Day 6

Day off! I was going to drive to Sonoma and explore the Vortex sites, but because we worked till 4am, I did not peel myself out of bed before noon. By then, it was hotter than hell and quite late to take off for a four-hour drive. My computer showed 49°C in the shade. I hung by the pool with Nino for a while, but it was just unbearably hot, so I spent the day watching TV between naps in my room.

### Day 7

I got to be part of making a really cool special effect. The scene was one in which one of the actors flips on a jet ski and performs a 360-degree turn. The jet ski was stabilised on a crane and, once again, pulled on a rope by a quad. Mike and I created the exhaust



06

05 On the pilot episode of Flash Forward with Greg Tash (left) and Mike Cameron (right), both in charge of water safety. This is before the scene in which the bus crashes into the lake.  
06 With Keir O'Donnell (middle), who saves me from drowning.

bubbles with two Diver Propulsion Vehicles and purged octopuses. It looked perfect as it all came together.

Later, I was in the water with the safety team for Jessica Szohr (Gossip Girl). It turns out she is Hungarian, just like me. She was friendly and down to earth. I enjoyed interacting with a girl from my favourite TV show although it felt quite surreal.

In the afternoon, the special effects team applied plenty of blood (paint) on my body for my dying scene in the caves. They all said this horror movie had the most blood and gore they have ever worked on.

Director Alexandre Aja is often referred to as the Fellini of horror movies. I have to say he had all the ingredients for a successful movie: girls in bikinis and young hot guys getting eaten by (awesome-looking) piranhas while partying during spring break, all in HD.

My scene became a bit more complicated than initially planned: not only did I have to die in a cave on my back while the piranhas munched on me, I had to lose my gear as well during my final minutes. Good thing I practised! The director's new direction involved me kicking and fighting the sharp-toothed fish while taking off my full-face mask and creating a dramatic look with a cloud of bubbles and blood. I also had to fight the piranhas off my face for a while in the tight cave (holding my breath) and crawl out of the cave with a final effort.

I have to say this sequence was a bit scary, given that the tight cave's two entrances were both blocked with camera operators, I couldn't see anything, my gear was thrown away and I had just one breath. Luckily, John, Tanner, Mike and Alex were all there to ensure I came out in one piece and alive. I did it and I was "wrapped" as it was my last scene.

Working on this movie was one of the greatest challenges I've taken on in a while. It gave me great satisfaction and a feeling of accomplishment. I met some of the industry's leading people. I experienced and learned much. I only hope I did well enough for them to call me again to work with them.

Next stop on my stunt journey? Alaska for the filming of Everybody Loves Whales! Based on a true story about three whales trapped in fishing nets under ice, the movie stars Drew Barrymore whom I will double for all water scenes. I will be the one jumping into icy water with a knife to save the whales. Ah, the stunt life! ♪

The world's youngest female Course Director, Szilvia Gogh has been diving for 20 years and has issued over 1,000 certifications, including to LAPD Underwater Dive Team leaders, fire fighters and sheriffs. Based in Los Angeles, California, she oversees the training and travel departments at Ocean Adventures. In 2008, she started her company, Miss Scuba ([www.miss-scuba.com](http://www.miss-scuba.com)), designed to bring women together from all over the world who share enthusiasm about diving, travel and adventure. Number of dives to date: 5,000

# Exploring and Diving PALAU



## Fish 'n Fins Dive Center

Daily dives to Palau's reefs & WWII Wrecks; **Free NITROX**; Best Dive/Hotel packages; Technical Dive Center. Kayaking, Fishing & Land Tours. Photoshop; Bar & Restaurant. PADI dive center offers all courses. Discounted airfares; Assistance with booking Truk Lagoon and Yap.

**Annual Special Events:** Shark Week, Wrexpedition, Dive & Dine



## Ocean Hunter

Luxurious Liveaboards



Ocean Hunter III - 16 divers  
Ocean Hunter I - 6 divers

All cabins with ensuite bathrooms & A/C. Gourmet healthy food; Nitrox onboard. 5 dives per day; U/W Photography. Technical diving; flexible itinerary.



[www.fishnfins.com](http://www.fishnfins.com)  
[www.oceanhunter.com](http://www.oceanhunter.com)