



Stunt Diving

Going to great depths for the stars.

TEXT AND PHOTOS SZILVIA GOGH

IF it was easy, everybody could do it. It is not easy; but with hard work and a little luck anybody could do it.

I started diving as soon as I was old enough to get certified. I spent my first few diving years with a dive club that was affiliated with the Hungarian Military; BHG Dive Club. I competed in orienteering diving and logged over 1,000 dives by the time I was old enough to drink. I always knew that I wanted to make a living out of SCUBA, and as soon as I learnt English I became a PADI Instructor. Having logged over 5,000 dives, completing the training in Newport Beach made me to the youngest female Course Director in the world.

Until this point it was all hard work; then came the luck. One day a talent scout stopped by my old dive centre in

search of girls who could swim in the ocean for an upcoming Axe Commercial. Swimming in a bikini is not difficult, but to do it all day long in 10°C water proved more challenging. The day began with 50 girls. By noon most of them were either seasick from waiting on the boat for hours between shoots or had severe hypothermia. By the end of the day only a teenage lifeguard and I remained, and thanks to her connections, we were pulled in under the Taft-Hartley Labour Act and became part of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) pool of stunt-women.

The Taft-Hartley Labor Act gives rights to non-union employees in union jobs, which meant we could both get hired for additional work by the production company. It was a huge deal! Most people wait many years to get a chance like this.



Even though tens of thousands of SAG stunt performers live in Los Angeles, only a handful work regularly. It is a very tight community where people often depend on each other with their lives. Most stunt coordinators hire stunts and water safety people that they know or have worked with before. I got lucky again. Lots of stunt coordinators frequent our dive shop and I taught their kids and friends how to dive. Looking like the actress who needs a double also helps; plus the fact that there aren't many female divers out there with my background.

All of the above landed me the role as Drew Barrymore's double in an ice diving clip in Alaska as well as Dina Meyer's double in the cave diving scenes in *Piranha 3D*. I have been fortunate to work with some of the biggest names in the industry, including Alex Daniels, one of the most respected and busiest stunt coordinators in the business. In fact, he spent many years as David Hasselhoff's stunt double!

When I asked him what it takes to be a good stunt diver, he said it was important to "develop every possible skill. A good stunt man is specialized, yet is well-rounded and has complete skills".

"Your body works better in different environments if it is trained," he added. Most people can't open their eyes and scream underwater without sucking in water through their nose while filming a scene in a trapped car under a bridge. "Practice being underwater without a mask upside down," was Alex's tip for those want to become stunt divers.

My favorite tip is "luck comes to those who stay busy while waiting". All you need to do is to work hard, sharpen your skills, take classes and meet people. Luck will come. **AD**

SCARIEST EXPERIENCE AS A STUNT DIVER

During the filming of *Piranha 3D* in the cave (I was doubling for Dina Mayer), my scene became a bit more complicated than was first planned. I was supposed to die in a cave on my back while the piranhas were munching on me, and I had to lose my gear as well during my final minutes. I also had to fight the piranhas off my face (holding my breath) and crawl out of the cave with my final strength. It was scary knowing 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 one breath. On top of that it dawned on to me that we had no signal to show when I was REALLY out of air, not just acting. Luckily, all went well.

BEST MOMENT AS A STUNT DIVER

I got a chance to double for Drew Barrymore in *Everybody Loves Whales* (to be released in 2012). The scene I loved shooting was when I reached out to touch the baby whale and cut off the net from its fluke to set her free. Drew was there as well and did a lot of work in the water. I was super impressed with her dry suit diving abilities despite the fact that she'd never used one before. We got to talk between takes and it turned out we not only shared a love for travel but our Hungarian heritage as well.

REMEMBER THE NUMBER #1 RULE

I quote Wally Crowder, stunt coordinator for popular TV shows like *Desperate Housewives* and *Dexter*, "Never be late! If your call time is 8am and you are not there by 7.45am, you are late. There are thousands of other stunt men who can do your job."

GET A HEADSTART ON STUNT DIVING

Subscribe to www.stuntcontact.com to see where and when filming happens. Show up at the set with a headshot and resume, hand it to the stunt coordinator and wait for an opportunity to get involved. It can take several years to get a chance but once you are in, you are in!

Filming *Adventures with Miss Scuba* while on a scuba diving, kayaking, hiking, camping expedition in Antarctica (**opposite page**). With Keir O'Donnell in Los Angeles while filming *Flash Forward*. We were trapped in a bus sinking fast underwater. He kicks the windows out and rescues me (**bottom left**). With Jessica Szohr in Arizona while filming *Piranha 3D*. I was a safety diver for her scenes between my shots; a good example of how you get hired again! Make yourself available and help out wherever you can between your scenes! (**bottom right**).

