



AUG 31 Posted 8:05pm

Defending Against The Deadly Box Jellyfish

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Every Stroke Hurts. Every Breath Heals.

The Other Shore follows world record holder and legendary swimmer Diana Nyad, 63, as she comes out of a thirty-year retirement to re-attempt an elusive dream: swimming 103 miles non-stop from Cuba to Florida without the use of a shark cage.

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My Team has begged me to leave this Cuba Dream (obsession) behind and search for another 100-plus-mile stretch of ocean to conquer.

After thrashing up against the powerful Gulf Stream and its unpredictable swirling eddies, after constantly encountering violent weather that doesn't seem to be able to forecast, I did take a minute to consider the Maldives, Guam, the Gulf of Thailand.

Alas, it's Cuba. Cuba, for a lifelong history of reasons, is in my heart. As perhaps impossible as this crossing may be, I still have the resolve to give it One More Try.

The modern version of this stretch of ocean is now compounded with the arrival of the Box Jellyfish, their venom the most deadly in all of our oceans. More people have died from Box stings than shark bites since 1950.

The venom instantly penetrates the bloodstream and nervous system so that the heart, lungs

and spinal cord go into paralysis. One is lucky to live through their stings. I've lived through, twice now, but am coming back this time with full armor, having learned the hard way that they are out there every single night....and they are brilliant at finding any inch of animal protein in their range.

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About this capture



Box Jelly (Carybdeid) off Cuba from Florida Straits
Angel Yanagihara

Last year I had body, feet, hands, and even head (pantyhose) covered. Literally the only square inch exposed of my entire body was the lips. We just couldn't design a way to protect the mouth and still breathe while swimming. Yet these animals (who can swim at 4mph, twice my speed, and who have 4 sets of eyes), the oldest body-structure animal on our planet....600 million years old.....are brilliant at finding animals to sting and they indeed found my lips.

On both occasions, I suffered the paralysis, the otherworldly sensation of being burned alive.



The second outing we were fortunate to have the world's expert on these jellies with us. Dr. Angel Yanagihara, research scientist from U of Hawaii, fourteen years now studying the Box, has developed a green gel that greatly mitigates these stings. I was much better off last year, with Angel's expertise behind us.

Angel will once again be on my boat. And her protocols will be invaluable to both me and the Shark Divers, who literally risk their lives in the pitch black ocean with me through the nights, on Shark Safety duty.

But this year I am adding yet an extra step of protections from the potentially fatal stings.

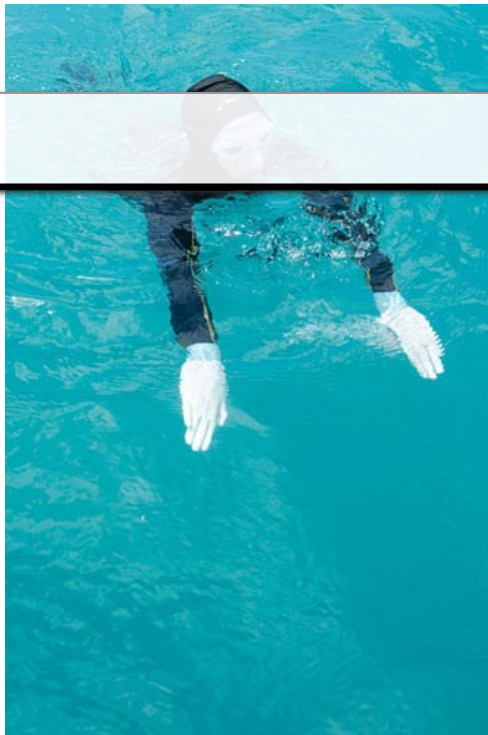
I have collaborated with a prosthetics genius named Stefan Knauss. Stefan worked for a year to develop this silicone mask for me. Many molds, many tries at the mouth area.

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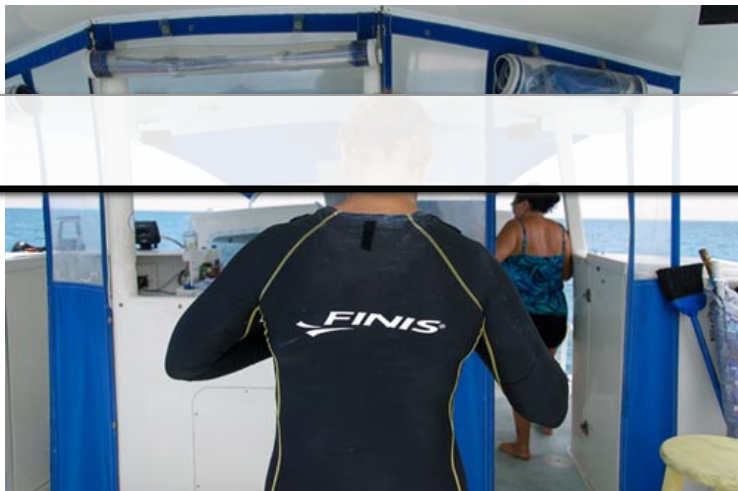
It's done and it's a work of art, thanks to Stefan' ingenuity and persistence.



The mask is tough to swim in. That's a given. I have to press hard to get the mouth up high enough to avoid a lot of salt water intake. And yet still I do take in quite a bit of sea water because of the narrow opening and not being able to judge where the waves are hitting, as I can without it. It slows me down and tires me out.

Nonetheless, I absolutely **MUST** go into each full night (probably three of them on this crossing) with the gratitude that my life is not in danger.

Rules for every sport evolve. I will wear the FINIS suit for body protection, along with FINIS booties (no neoprene, as that flotation aid not allowed in the sport). Latex surgeon gloves to protect the hands.



The mask is the first of its kind used by a swimmer. Far from an aid, it is an undeniable burden but it qualifies as protection from literal life-threatening circumstances.

I actually don't find the extreme hours of the quest as daunting as I once did. Could well take me some 80 hours, not the 60 we used to estimate. But it's the Box jellyfish, their deadly venom, and the nth degree of invention that we've reached to be able to live through them, that keeps me up nights. As grateful as I am to have the mask, I am frankly intimidated, actually scared, to think how burdensome it's going to be to swim in it all these hours.

I wore the entire set of gear in a swarm of hundreds of Box this past June. As difficult as the swimming was, I was not stung once. Those deadly tentacles could not penetrate.

Every sport evolves. Perhaps swimmers in Hawaii, Thailand, Japan, Israel...and right here in Florida....trying to make crossings where the mighty little Box live....will in the future take a cue from this innovation of mine (Stefan's)and also make their way through safely to other shores.



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About this capture

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P.S. Have you signed up for my 7 Day Reboot? Hop in! It's Free!



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