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Guest Blog: Pulmonary Specialist Dr. Gerald Markovitz

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Photograph by Christi Barli

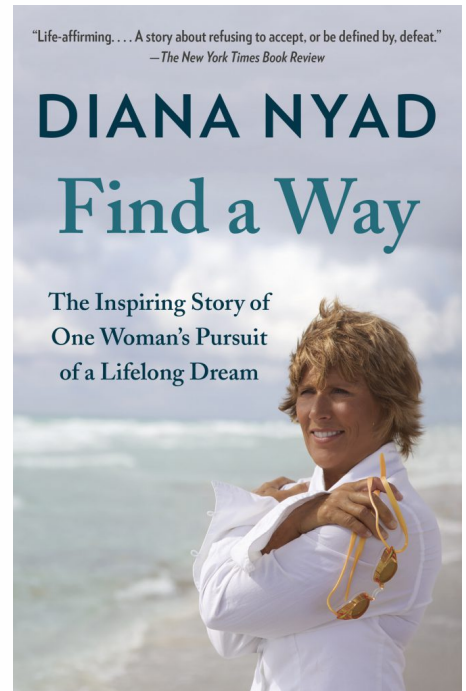
The wide-ranging excitement of discovery and learning drives the heartbeat of the Cuba Xtreme Dream expedition. In literally hundreds of areas, the education curve has been dynamic and stimulating.

It is no wonder that teachers use my adventure as backdrop for their curricula. From oceanography to meteorology to the human potential, the fields of study are provocative.

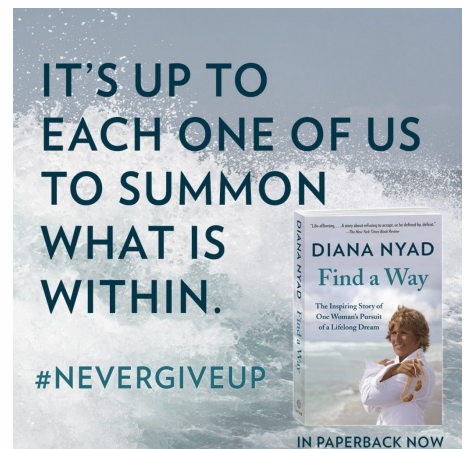


Jellyfish have forever been a challenge in trying to swim in the Florida Straits, between Cuba and Florida. But back in my day, when I first tried the swim, 1978, the Portuguese Man of War was the most dangerous species in those waters. They are not pleasant, to understate it. One can experience loss of breath, nausea, and extreme pain with a Man of War sting. But, to my knowledge, nobody has ever died from one of their nasty stings.

In just the past couple of years, the most venomous animal in all the world's oceans, the Box Jellyfish, have migrated up from Southern Oceans of Australia to the Caribbean, to Israel, to Thailand, to Japan and other oceans, including the Florida Straits.



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Photograph by Catherine Opie

*People have died from the Box sting. Honestly, now that I have
experienced the other-worldly, horrific pain of the Box, I can tell you I*

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wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.

*Dire pulmonary distress is one of the symptoms one feels from a Box
sting.*

*Below a Guest Blog by pulmonary specialist Dr. Gerald Markovitz who
has helped me, in and out of the water, with pulmonary issues.....and
who now has learned a great deal about the devastating effects of the
tiny, but deadly, Box Jellyfish.*



Dr. Gerald H. Markovitz, M.D.

Diana came to me in April 2012 to help better control her asthma. Some of her asthma was typical with a history of sinus polyps, cat and other environmental allergies, and aspirin sensitivity. As a pulmonologist, I have taken care of asthma patients for more than 20 years. I have treated many recreational athletes and athletic professionals such as firefighters and lifeguards. Diana presented a unique challenge.

I had never treated an asthma patient who has had a potentially life-threatening asthma attack due to [stings from venomous jelly fish after swimming 41 miles in the open ocean](#). She wanted to try the swim again in the same ocean with the same jelly fish. We had to not only get her asthma under optimal control before the swim but also devise a plan to treat asthma attacks during the swim, either to allow her to continue to swim or to save her life out of the water many miles from land.

In addition to treating patients with a variety of lung conditions in the office, I also practice critical care medicine and hyperbaric oxygen medicine. I treat divers with decompression sickness but this was something different. I needed to learn about the eccentric world of venomous jellyfish and how they cause severe pulmonary distress, even death in humans, including possibly extreme athletes such as Diana.



Dr. Angel Yanagihara

Photograph by Christi Barli

For that I took a crash course in jelly fish venoms and how they affect

the cardiovascular and pulmonary systems from Dr. Angel Yanagihara,

[1 capture](#) Associate Professor of Oceanography at the University of Hawaii.
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About this capture

Diana and I optimized the control of her asthma on dry land. With her local sports medicine physicians I devised emergency contingency treatment plans based on what would be available out in the open ocean. She embarked on her XTREME DREAM swim in August 2012 from Cuba to Florida. Due to adverse weather conditions, ocean currents, and jellyfish stings she had to abort her swim but her asthma was not the reason.

Diana and I continue to work together to keep her asthma under best control in order to allow her to continue pursue her dreams, whether on dry land or in the water.

Gerald H. Markovitz, M.D.

Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

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