

Shark Bait

Michelle Cove's Diving Chums

By Scott D. Jones

At first glance, when you see Michelle Cove standing on a dock in Nassau, Bahamas, you might think she was a runway model on vacation from New York, or a college co-ed looking for some fun. But, that vision quickly disappears when you watch this stunning young woman put on her chain metal gloves and diving gear to prepare for her latest shark feeding encounter.

Michelle Cove is rare blend of striking beauty and a willingness to push the envelope by hand feeding Caribbean reef sharks. Her innovative pursuits have helped make shark feeding an available adventure for divers throughout the world.

While Michelle, a native Bahamian, was always drawn to the water, it took a bit of prodding from then future husband Stuart Cove, one of the many dive instructors and divemasters she met during her wild high school years, to get her to try a dive with wild silky sharks in the open ocean.

"Stuart was like a dive god! I stayed close to him, probably too close," says Cove, "because he was always into something fun and different."

One day, Stuart suggested they try to feed some sharks to see what would happen. Since that time, shark feeding has become a multimillion dollar business both for the tourism industry and through movie work requiring shark diving for adventure films. Last year, she served as Denise Richards' stunt double for the climatic underwater scene in the James Bond film, *The World is Not Enough*. Michelle's underwater image has appeared in feature stories and advertisements around the world. As the first woman in the world to regularly feed sharks, Michelle quickly became a sought-after expert on the subject.

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"I'm not afraid of the sharks, but I do respect them," the brunette-beauty explains. "There's a magical quality about being down there with them. Once you've been there and fed them, you understand how misunderstood these creatures are. They aren't the monsters attacking humans the media hypes will tell you they are. They are actually very gentle." To date, she's logged several hundred feeds, arguably the most for any female shark feeder in the world.

Calm and confident, Michelle helped

open the door for a whole new breed of female daredevils. But it didn't happen without a few mishaps. The number one thing she's learned from shark feeding? Simple. "It hurts when they bite."

Recalling a scary incident where one of the sharks mistook her for a piece of grouper, "there was a mix-up with the bait box and one of them started to bite me on top of the head. Once it realized I wasn't food, he spit me out. I got some stitches and a poor haircut, but that was all.

"How often would you find a beautiful girl who was willing to do this stuff. It was magic," Stuart explains. "She's not afraid to feed sharks in a string bikini and actually looks good doing it. Ten years ago, few women were willing to do that. The sport of diving has a lot more glamour today because of Michelle."

Like to swim with the sharks? Call (888) 788-2683 and book one of the Stuart Cove Specialty courses. The courses are held in Nassau in the Bahamas and range from single day to week long adventures. Ask for the Shark Diving Specialty course, its PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) approved.

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