



DREAM CHASERS

These strong-willed women share a passion for scuba diving—and a don't-tell-me-what-I-can't-do attitude

BY PATRICIA WUEST

The fifth annual Women's Dive Day will be celebrated this month in more than 100 countries around the world by thousands of divers. On July 20, dive shops, clubs and groups will host events in what has become the world's biggest underwater block party, a global celebration of scuba divers' shared passion for the ocean.

Though PADI created the fun-filled day to support female participation in the sport, events associated with Women's Dive Day have evolved to transcend gender. Both women and men participate in causes that are mostly inclined toward

conservation and community undertakings, ranging from ocean cleanups to teaching orphaned girls how to dive.

In honor of this year's Women's Dive Day, we profile three female divers: a spunky dive instructor from a remote Pacific island; a free-spirited marine biologist-cum-liveaboard captain; and an intrepid rebreather diver and dive shop owner. They have different backgrounds, challenges and career paths, but it's what they share that unites them: a love for the ocean, a female role model, and, most important, an uncompromising desire to be an example for young

girls to defy anything—and anyone—that gets in the way of achieving their dreams.

// IT TAKES TWO //

EUNA ZIO

Dive Instructor, Dive Munda

HOMETOWN: Munda, Western Province, Solomon Islands

AGE: 29

FIRST CERTIFIED: 2010 [PADI OW]

HIGHEST CERTIFICATION: SSI Open Water Scuba Instructor [2018]

FEMALE DIVER SHE ADMIRES: Belinda Botha.

"She made my dream of becoming a scuba instructor come true. I continue to learn so much from her and be inspired."

"From the moment I met Euna, I knew I had to provide her with the resources to grow and develop so she could empower others," says Belinda Botha,



owner of Dive Munda.

Euna Zio is the second woman certified as a dive instructor in the Solomon Islands; Botha taught the first one too.

Zio's curiosity about scuba was sparked while working at Munda's Agnes Gateway Hotel. One of the activities offered was diving. Though Solomon Islanders consider scuba diving "unsafe and a man's job," Zio earned her open water certification in 2010.

She was blown away by Munda's reefs and marine life. "So many kids think being underwater is boring," she says. "I wanted to show them how much fun it was."

“The Solomon Islands is one of the last wild frontiers left on the planet, and we need leaders and strong females to help protect and preserve.”

The resort's struggling dive operation closed, and Zio had to put her dreams on hold. When Botha reopened Dive Munda in 2016, Zio approached her about becoming a dive guide.

"Belinda worked with me one-on-one and pushed me hard to get my instructor certification," Zio says. After overcoming the challenges of becoming an instructor, Zio cried. They were tears of joy: "I felt so happy and proud that day."

"Euna ignites passion and a love for the ocean that is rare to see," Botha says. "The Solomon Islands is one of the last wild frontiers left on the planet, and we need leaders and strong females to help protect and preserve."

The weight of that responsibility is not lost on Zio. "It is hard in this country for

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a girl to get opportunities because there are so many challenges,” she says. “I do outreach programs and speak with girls about career choices and, most important, about protecting our ocean and reducing plastic,” she says. “Every day I have this gift, the opportunity to be underwater and show guests this amazing country, above and below the water.”

// WOMAN OF STEEL //

JO MIKUTOWICZ

Owner, Divetech, Grand Cayman

HOMETOWN: Cape Cod, Massachusetts

AGE: 37

FIRST CERTIFIED: 1997 (PADI OW)

HIGHEST CERTIFICATION: PADI Course

Director (2008)

FEMALE DIVER SHE ADMIRES: Jill Heinerth.

“She’s never been intimidated by certain parts of the diving industry being a ‘man’s world.’”

As a young girl, Jo Mikutowicz was a figure skater with big dreams.

“I skated just about every day for several years,” she says. “I always wanted to go to the Olympics.”

Life took her in a different direction.



“Being on and in the water was my happy place,” Mikutowicz says. “My dad was a diver, and while on a vacation in Grand Cayman [in 1997], he signed me up for an open water course. I was hooked.”

By 2008, Mikutowicz was a PADI course director, and in 2015, she returned to the island where her scuba career was launched, taking over as owner of Grand Cayman’s Divetech.

Last year, Mikutowicz added another certification to her extensive scuba résumé—deep rebreather—which she accomplished on Bonaire’s *Windjammer*. The three-masted iron-hulled ship lies in current-churned waters off the island’s northwest coast.

“I planned my dive the night before, mentally rehearsing failures and how I would handle each situation,” Mikutowicz recalls. “In the morning, I laid out my assembly checklist and put my rebreather together, double-checking everything.

“As we hit 120 feet, from out of nowhere, the ship’s silhouette suddenly appeared,” Mikutowicz says. As she explored its masts, she checked her computer. “I was at 200 feet and realized I had made it.”

Divetech instructors train all levels of divers, but Mikutowicz, who is also an avid freediver, loves the quiet that rebreather diving offers. “Being in the ocean down deep and in complete silence is probably one of the best places in the world to be.”

And what about the girl who dreamed of becoming an Olympian? Mikutowicz has no regrets. “If I have one message for young girls who dream about exploring the ocean, it’s this: You are capable of achieving anything in diving by setting your mind to it and making it happen.”



COURTESY JO MIKUTOWICZ

// BORN TO BE WILD //

**CHRISTY
WEAVER****Bahamas Aggressor
Liveboard Captain****HOMETOWN:** Wilmington, Delaware**AGE:** 34**FIRST CERTIFIED:** 2006 (PADI OW)**HIGHEST CERTIFICATION:** PADI Master Scuba
Diver Trainer [2011]; SSI Platinum Pro
Instructor [2018]**FEMALE DIVER SHE ADMIRES:** Eugenie Clark.
"Very few women were involved in the field of
marine biology at the time. She was a pioneer."

"I am so lucky to be working outside and exploring everything the Bahamas has to offer," says Christy Weaver, whose favorite quote—"all good things are wild and free" from Henry David Thoreau's essay *Walking*—defines not only her career choice, but her life as well. The quote "also speaks to me in a different way," she says. "Being wild and free means you live your life the way you choose."



By the time Weaver was accepted at the University of Delaware, she knew she wanted to study ocean animals. In 2007, she earned a degree in wildlife conservation and followed that with a master's in marine biology from Australia's James Cook University. "The Great Barrier Reef was my backyard!"

Weaver got certified as an instructor in 2011 and landed a job on a Bahamas liveboard. "The captain I worked with was my mentor and pushed me to get my captain's license," she says. "It started a completely new career path for me."

By 2016, Weaver was captaining for Aggressor Liveboards, first as second



captain on *Turks & Caicos Aggressor* and today as first captain on *Bahamas Aggressor*. "Being a female captain is still a novelty," she says. "It takes resolve and resilience to weather some of what comes my way."

Thoreau also wrote, "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness." That philosophy is at the heart of what drives Weaver.

"I have had so many wonderful moments. My advice [for young girls] is to follow what you love and believe in yourself wholeheartedly," Weaver says. "Not everyone is going to support you, but the people who do are the ones who matter."

COURTESY CHRISTY WEAVER

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