



The Bionic Woman

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USA captain, Freedive Champion, Model, Movie star and Baywatch babe; Meghan Heaney-Grier is not your everyday Florida beach beauty. Put simply, she is the superwoman who has blazed a perfectly shaped hole into a sport that she pioneered.

A Freedive Champion for both men and women, this Minnesota born brunette turned a love of the sea into a career that has seen her rub shoulders with both Kiera Nightly in 'Pirates of the Caribbean', and 5 different species of Shark in 'Animal Planet'. **Sport.co.uk** managed to track down this stunning tour de force for a chat on her remarkable career, from Freedive Records to Turkish pantyhosed mermaids.

How in God's name did you get into Freediving?

I grew up in the Florida Keys, surrounded literally by water and took to it quite nicely.

That's an understatement...

I spent everyday in, on, around water; whenever I could get out there I would be out there. Anyway when I was 17 I started hanging out with some fishermen friends and it really opened a new door for me. It was a lot of fun as I would go on lots of trips overnight which was kind of a whole different experience. My parents are sailors so I grew up sailing and whatnot, and we would snorkel, but these guys are out there professionally. I got to play around while they were working for days on end and that's basically how I got into freediving, as we gathered I kind of had a knack for it. On my first try to go deep, I went 87ft and I'm not exactly sure what that is in metres, I would have to work it out on my calculator....

Where did you go from there, did you go professional straight away, how do you make money from Freediving?

Well that's kind of the funny part of the story, at the time the woman's world record was 204ft, and as the 87ft dive was just playing around and having fun whatever, we thought, let's see what I can do. I did 120ft and that was really when we decided lets have a powwow and see what we can come up with.

This was in 1995 and there was no information on freediving so we went to the library to find out about the training and the boundaries of the sport. Anyway we didn't come up with too much in English at all, but we were thinking maybe I could train and go for a World Record, and we were we like, well what's the US record? My step dad said there is no US record you should go for the US record! In 1996 I established the first ever US Freedive Record for both men and women. We kind of helped put it on the map I guess.

From there you went to the World Cup, and you Captained the first ever US Freedive team...

Right.

On the side we gather you have been doing a bit of modelling and double work, even some stunt work?

I started modelling when I was 14 and I was working as a model when I was 17 going to all the casting calls on Miami Beach. When I did my record I was 18 it was good timing with all the media attention, additionally it helped my modelling because I could do a lot of under water stuff, setting me aside from the other 150 casting calls. It set me apart, it was really fun. I started doing commercials, I did a Turkish pantyhose commercial where I was a mermaid, you name it, things started coming out of the wood work.

Did you enjoy being a mermaid?

Oh yes it was sort of my favourite application actually, throwing a tail on and flopping around in the water, what could be more fun right?!

Exactly...

And then on the side, a friend of mine is an underwater cameraman and another one had quite the knack for encountering dangerous animals. I have been an animal fanatic ever since I was a kid; the three of us had a show on Animal Planet working with sharks and alligators. There were a lot of different avenues that were coming together for me in the water. The freedive records in 1996 and 1997 led to many endorsements and different avenues.

So it really sky rocketed for you?

Yes, I don't know what you believe in but all the stars were inline, and during that period the era of the iron woman was emerging in the mainstream. When I was doing my records people were like this is an unusual story, it all worked together with the freediving as very few women were involved with the sport back then. I went on Letterman and did TFI Friday in London, then People Magazine, and Life Magazine, it was all kind of perfect timing. Then in 2002 I started doing stunt diving.

I was living in California working on an exotic animal ranch working with tigers and chimpanzees; I got this phone call at 7.30 at night from my agent who had taken a call from the Caribbean. The fab director Gore Verbinski needed me there the next day; they were shooting his now famous film Pirates of the Caribbean. They need me in a giant gown sinking 30ft.

Oh that was you?

Yeah, so when Kiera Knightly falls from the cliff and hits the water, I'm the person hitting the water and is rescued, it was quite interesting, that is how I got into the stunt diving. A friend of mine had been working on the film and they struggled to get this shot and they were like we need to get Meghan in here, Meghan can do this, she won't panic. I had 6 or 7 layers including a corset, all these crazy clothes; I had about 50lbs of weight so I could sink.

Did you meet Keira Knightly?

Yeah I did. I met her in the hair trailer, she was very nice. We were getting our hair done.

Is she as unbelievably good looking in the flesh?

Oh yes, she is very very beautiful and she is very very nice, unbelievably polite and nice.

When you were on Baywatch did you meet Pamela Anderson?

No I don't think she was on the show at that time, no I met Brook Burns I rescued her from a cave! We are now friends.

Did it mean a lot to you to don the famous red swim suit?

Yeah I got to wear a pink one actually as I was a guest; I wasn't one of the life guards. In the scene in Baywatch the guys were of course too big, and bulky to get in to the cave and save Brooke. So I had to do it...It was pretty wild to be out there on those big yellow boats that they had.

Did they make you run very slowly?

No we didn't have to run in slow motion, we did have to run but the camera did the slow motion bit....

Wow, Right, while you were at school, was free diving an ambition as a teenager?

Like most teenagers I didn't really know what I wanted to do, I knew wanted to do some modelling when I got out of high school, yeah, I just wanted to be a kid for a while I guess...

We have to ask, Are you single?

No, no I'm not, I have a wonderful boyfriend.

Is he a Celebrity?

Well he is a wonderful mountain man here in Colorado; I'm going to the university out here, no he is not in the business!

What does future hold for Meghan?

I'm working on... well I always have irons in the fire; I'm getting a degree in biology and anthropology and looking to host another show. If I have anything do with it I'm sure it will have something to do with the great out doors, animals, nature, the ocean and all that great stuff...if I'm lucky.

One final question, how long can you hold your breath for?

My longest breath hold is 4 minutes 36 seconds.

Bloody hell that is amazing...

Amazing indeed. Modest, intelligent, and supremely talented. If you want to learn more about Meghan you can do so at freediver.com.

Interview Courtesy of Sports International Management Limited. For more information visit <http://www.s-i-m-l.com/>

Photo Courtesy of Michael Neal