

The Shark Dancer - Christina Zenato

I grew up with the notion that no animal is vicious or useless.

Every animal has a role and a vital importance in the chain of nature.

To be with them on a daily basis, to work with them, to be told that I had a gift with them, that's a beautiful feeling.

In the Bahamas they call me the shark dancer. I absolutely love sharks. The fascination with the water, I think started the day I was born.

My mum comes from a family of ?, my dad is very passionate about water. He had these beautiful black and white pictures of his adventures. So I've always wanted to learn how to dive.

Out of respect of my knowledge for sharks and their nature, and the fact that they have two to fifty rows of teeth, I wear protection.

The chain mail has this very important vital role, it allows you to drop the barrier between you and the animals.

They do have a certain level of personality. People would never think that. They may have, you know, better days or worse days, some learn really fast, some learn a little bit slower, almost like us.

The first time I touched a shark, I thought it could not be true. It's like the thing that you always wait for your entire lifetime and you're thinking is this true or not.

When I'm with the sharks, I can tell if something has been disturbing them. The need to be understood, but also the need to be protected.

For each hook I remove, I know I've done something for one of my sharks. I don't expect to save all the sharks in the world, but when I can reach out and take the pain away I will.

For me it's very clear what the shark is trying to tell me. I can tell from the way they react to my hand reaching out. People call it shark hypnosis - it has become a natural feeling between the sharks and myself. And from that touch they tell you - yes or no.

They're eight and a half feet long, they're several hundred pounds, there's no way I can force an animal like that to stay.

Touch is the way I communicate with them. It requires the right shark, the right person, the right moment, it's a huge privilege.