

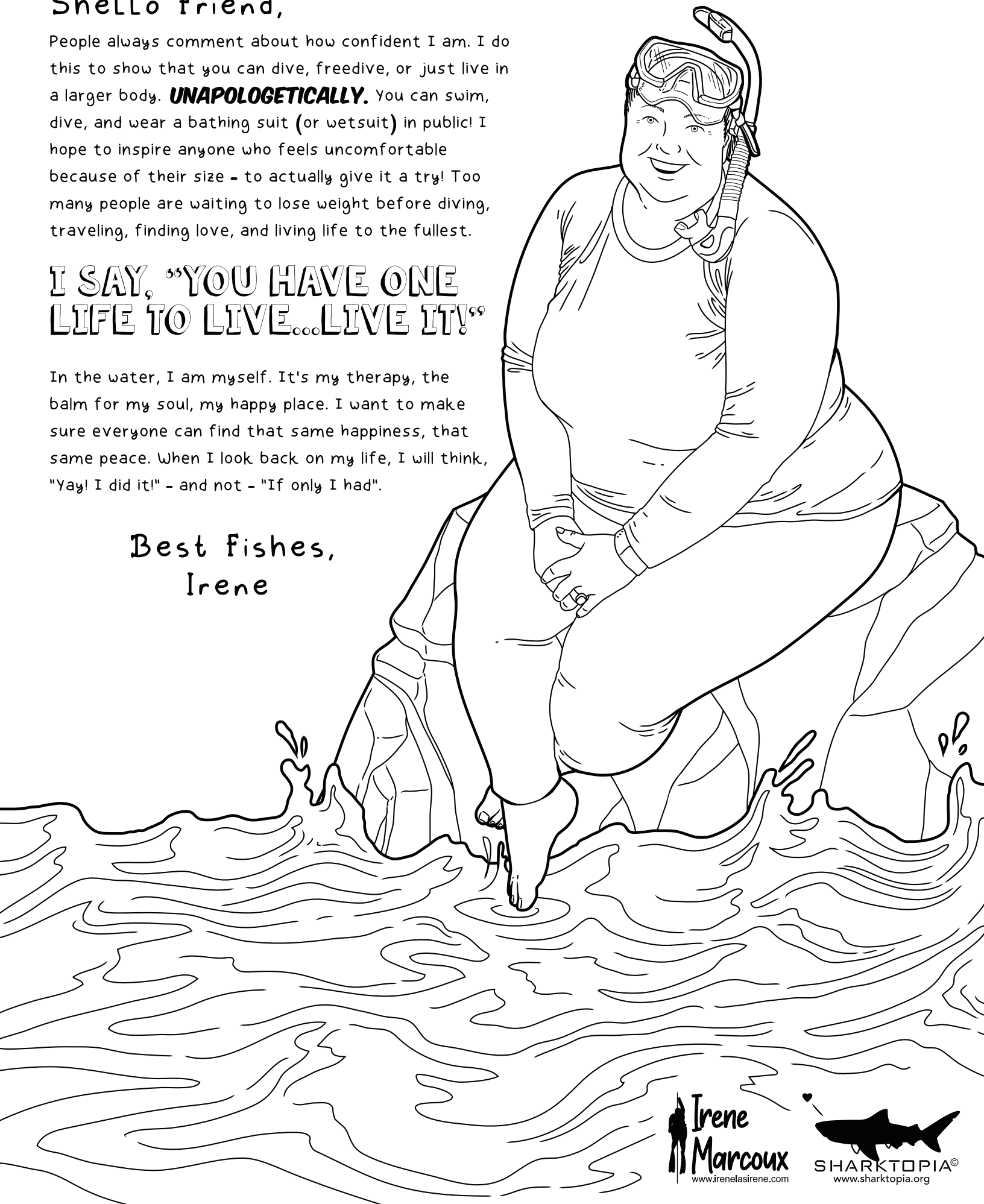
SheLlo friend,

People always comment about how confident I am. I do this to show that you can dive, freedive, or just live in a larger body. **UNAPOLOGETICALLY.** You can swim, dive, and wear a bathing suit (or wetsuit) in public! I hope to inspire anyone who feels uncomfortable because of their size - to actually give it a try! Too many people are waiting to lose weight before diving, traveling, finding love, and living life to the fullest.

I SAY, "YOU HAVE ONE LIFE TO LIVE...LIVE IT!"

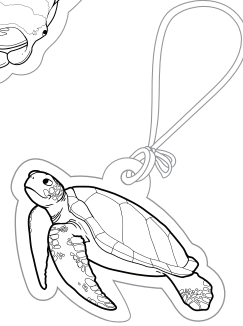
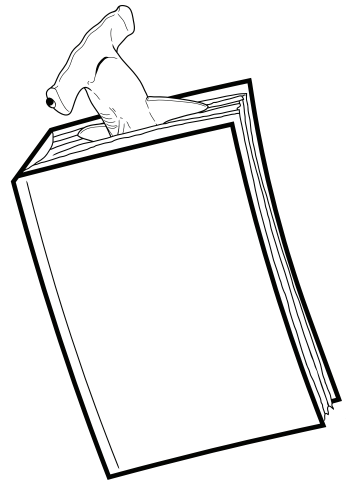
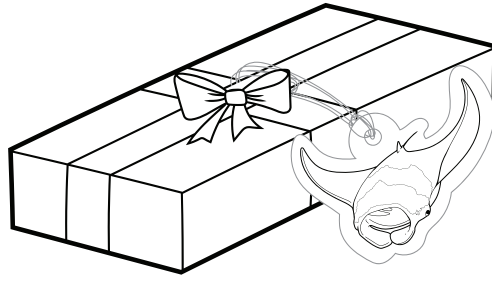
In the water, I am myself. It's my therapy, the balm for my soul, my happy place. I want to make sure everyone can find that same happiness, that same peace. When I look back on my life, I will think, "Yay! I did it!" - and not - "If only I had".

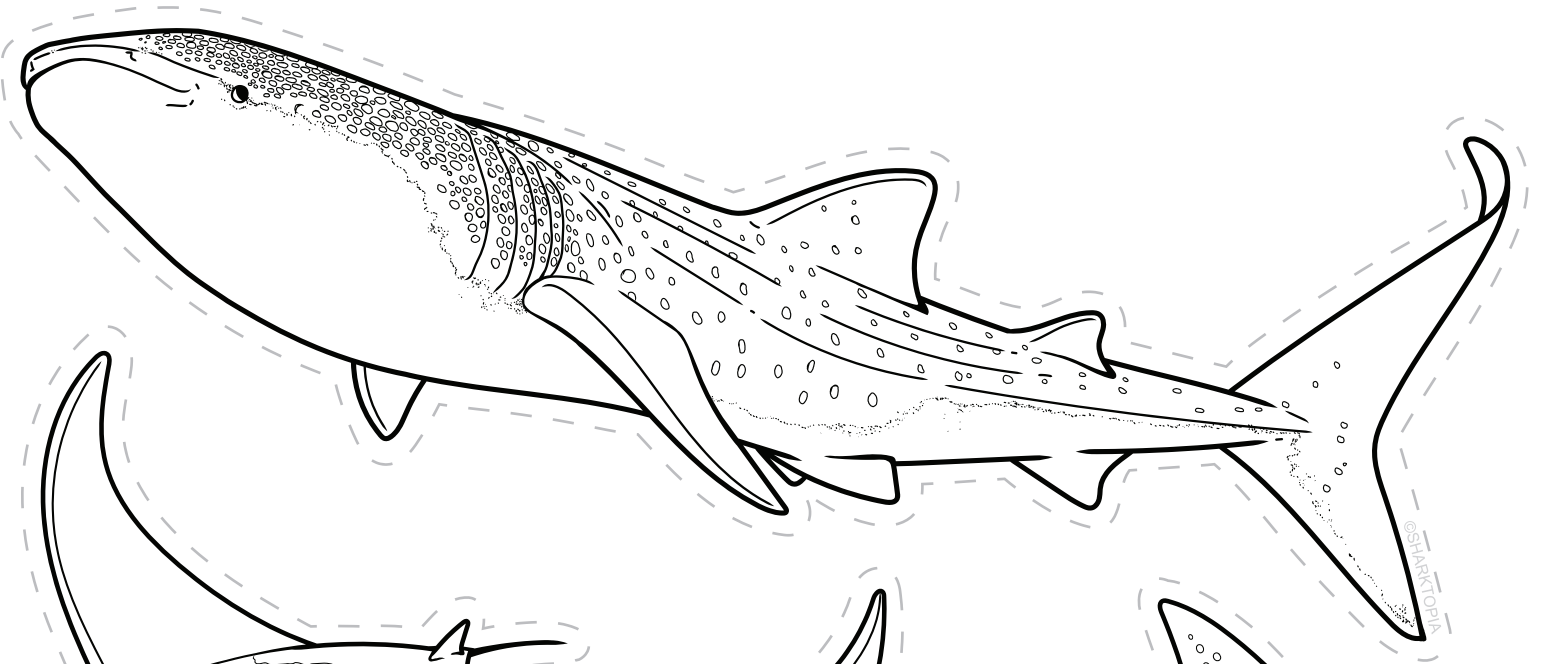
Best fishes,
Irene



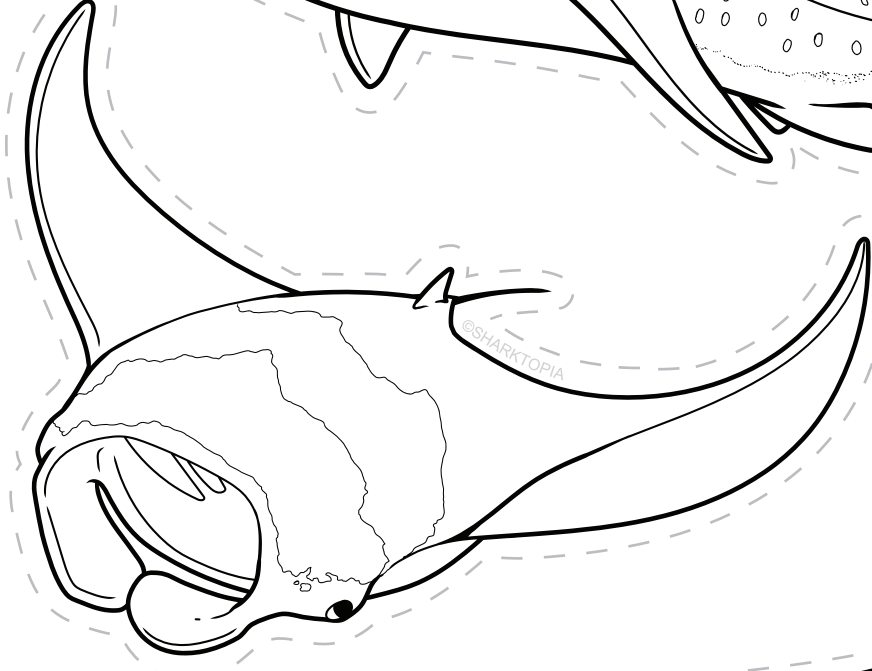
LET'S GET CREATIVE!

Irene and her friends are available to color and cut-out! You can use them to create your own scene (or story), make some neat bookmarks, FINtastic gift tags, fun ornaments, stickers (just use glue or tape), decor, etc!

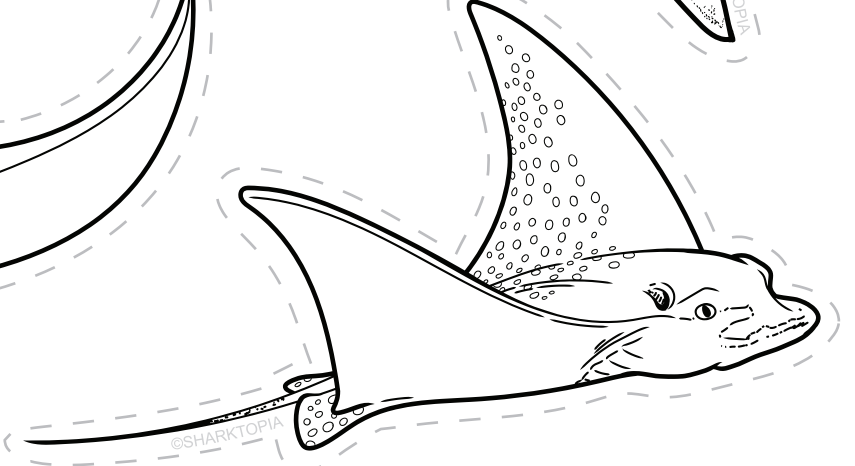




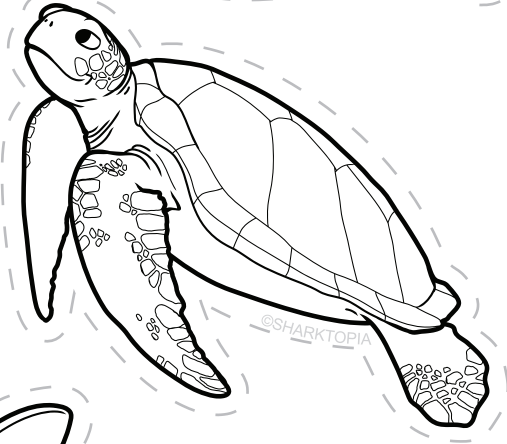
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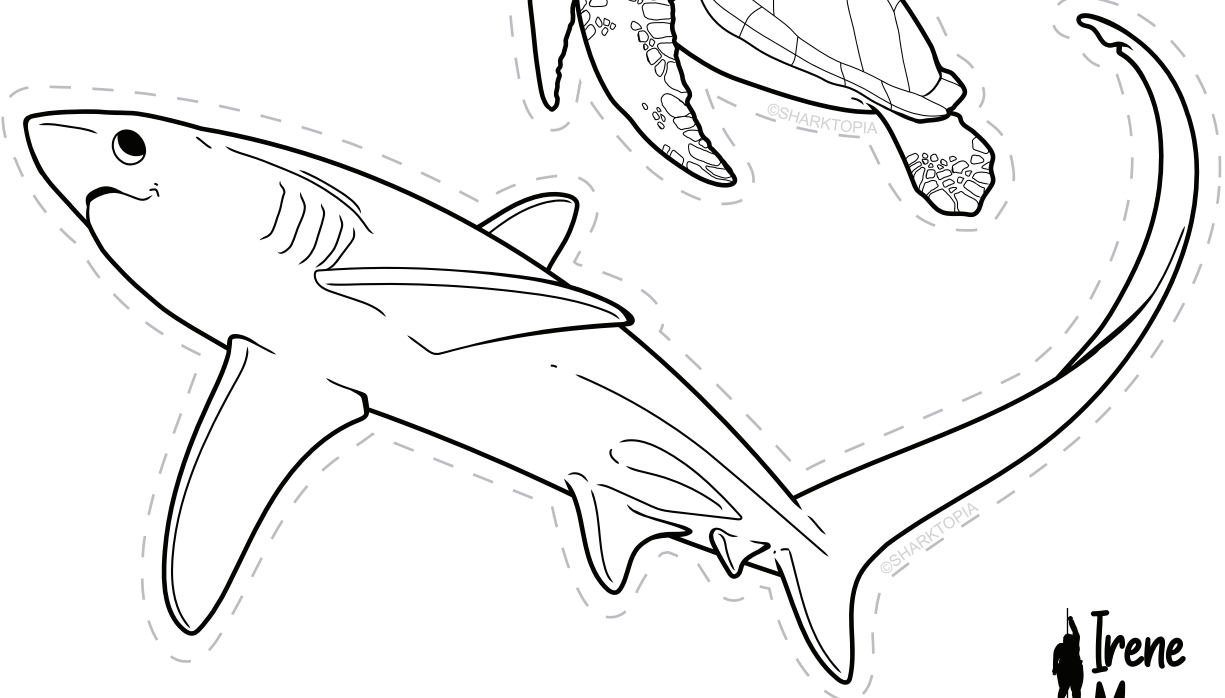
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**YOU ARE
BRAVER THAN
YOU THINK!**

Your body is strong, and is capable
of so many things! Want to try
scuba, freediving or mermaiding?

DO IT!



**YOU ARE
AMAZING!**

(...no matter what others or perhaps your inner voice says)

**NEVER EVER
GIVE UP!**



**YOU HAVE ONLY
ONE LIFE TO LIVE!**

**MERMAIDS DON'T
LOSE SLEEP OVER
THE OPINIONS OF
SHRIMP.**



**If you always do what
you've always done,
you'll always get what
you always got!**

**Let the sea
set you
free!**



Printing Note: These inspirational cards (written by Irene) can be colored, cut-out, and kept in a wallet/purse/pocket, etc. Give a card to anyone who needs it! Cards are 3.5" x 2" with a 1/2" margin. This setup should work with most printers for 'actual size' (sometimes referred to as 'normal printing' or 'do not scale', etc). This note and the logos might get cropped, but that's ok. If you do scale this page when printing, that's fine too!



Q&A WITH IRENE MARCOUX!

Hi Irene! Thank you so much for diving into Sharktopia with me. "Coffee-loving Ocean Artist" describes me pretty well. How would you describe yourself to our readers?

Mmmm, good question. It's hard to summarize, but here's my attempt: happy fat queer water lover with a side of coffee and travel addiction on a conservation journey to help save the oceans.

You're the first PADI certified Mermaid Instructor Trainer in Canada (and currently the only one). That's FINTastic! Was the certification a lengthy process? Do you think this certification is important for professional and non-professional merfolk? Please describe your experience with the Mermaid training and certification for anyone else who might be interested in diving in!

I was able to become a Mermaid Instructor Trainer with my extensive teaching background and my mermaid experience. I'm a scuba course director, freediving instructor, and I used to be an artistic swimming coach (aka formerly known as synchronized swimming) with international experience. What I love about the PADI Mermaid certification is that it's very much based on freediving and freediving safety protocols, which I think is absolutely necessary for ALL merfolk! Essentially you learn how to save yourself and others, with some added fun mermaiding stuff too, of course!

I love mermaiding as it really blends my freediving passion with the artistry from synchronized swimming! It's so freeing, fun and carefree, and I love how the mermaiding community takes the environment and conservation message to heart.

Do you prefer freediving or scuba diving? Or do you just love them both equally?! What's the best part about being underwater?

I will quote the great Umberto Pelizzari to help me explain: "The scuba diver dives to look around. The freediver dives to look inside."

So I love both! Scuba lets you discover the absolute treasure that is the underwater world. But lately I lean a little more towards freediving, where I can discover and unlock my own potential and strength (physical but mostly mental). The best part of being underwater is the 'silence', being cut off from everyday demands and technology, and just savoring the moment.

The wetsuit I've seen you in most often appears to be a two piece wetsuit. Would you say it's easier to get on than a single-piece wetsuit? Do you have multiple custom-sized wetsuits (for cold water diving vs. warmer Ocean, etc. etc.) I know you've got more info about wetsuit recommendations in a blog post - please feel free to include that link as well.

I love my two piece freediving wetsuit! It was custom made for me and it is the most comfortable wetsuit I have ever owned. I have many wetsuits but so far it is my only custom one. BUT, I am planning on getting a new thicker wetsuit so I can go ice diving and to travel to Iceland to dive the Silfra Rift! (aka where you can touch the European and North American tectonic plates at the same time!!!)

For more info:

GTS blog post: <https://www.girlsthatscuba.com/irene-on-plus-size-in-scuba/>

My own: <https://www.irenelasirene.com/2019/09/29/wetsuits-for-curved-ladies/>



What's your favorite local dive spot in Ontario/Quebec [Canada]?

So hard to choose! There are so many interesting dive spots in Quebec and Ontario, and each is good for different things, depending on what you want to see or work on. For example, I love Flinkote quarry in Thetford Mines, QC, the water is crystal clear tho chilly, and there are a lot of structures that were put in for the enjoyment of scuba divers and freedivers. Centeen Park in Brockville, ON has a cool park of statues that you can find in shallow and warm waters making it perfect for easy training dives, and an even better night dive since all the creatures are out and about! I do have many more spots to discover, and I have yet to dive the Escoumins or Tobermory which are top notch sites. They are local in the sense of geography, but since Canada is such a huge country, they still are about 12hrs away from me by car!

You have several ice and snow covered diving posts. A lot of people might shy away from such a cold dip. Do you need an extra thick wetsuit for those dives? Please describe your experience with 'cold water' diving!

Yes, and I have yet to be able to do any ice diving because I don't have the right gear yet. But I was happy to join my friends to take photos of them last winter, hence the photos you saw. I can still dive in cold waters, it does drop under 10 degrees celsius at depth, but it was unsafe to dive with my current suit where the air temperature was below freezing.

Let's finish this Q&A with some encouragement! What would you say to the people who might want to learn to dive, but they feel frustrated, defeated, and just haven't been able to comfortably try diving yet?

Find an instructor you feel comfortable with. If you feel discomfort or encounter fatphobia or misogyny, go with your gut and leave. You can reach out to divers in your region and ask for recommendations, look on Facebook and/or Instagram, like on Girls that Scuba or Plus Size Scuba Girls. Diving is wonderful, don't let fear stop you from experiencing such bliss! If you can, go with a private course, I find in my experience this takes away a lot of anxiety. You are stronger than you think, you got this!