

Discovery Channel's annual *Shark Week* fin fest is highlighted by a dramatic story of life from death.



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Underwater cinematographer Al Giddings strikes a pose (top); two of Al's friends: a basking shark (above) and a great white shark (bottom right).

The 1954 Japanese film, *Godzilla: King of the Monsters*, is an extrapolation of the horrors of nuclear war. The main theme is the negative long-term effect of nuclear radiation on life: in *Godzilla's* case, genetic mutation.

Imagine, then, the surprise of underwater cinematographer Al Giddings when he discovered that, in at least one case, nuclear radiation paved the way for an abundance of healthy, normal marine life. This is precisely what he found while doing preliminary research for the two-hour special **Live From a Shark Cage**, premiering August 8 as the kick-off for Discovery Channel's **Shark Week** this year.

In the live show, a first for *Shark Week*, Giddings and his team will dive into the depths of Bikini Atoll to study oceanic white-tip sharks and one of the world's largest populations of the territorial grey reef shark.

What's ironic about this is that Bikini Atoll, which is part of the Marshall Islands in the Pacific Ocean, was the site of extensive atomic and hydrogen bomb

testing by the United States during the 1940s and 1950s. As a result, the natives were relocated, leaving Bikini Atoll deserted for over fifty years.

How has life thrived in an area that had played host to such destruction? "There is nothing like the great seas to saturate and thin out and cleanse any kind of toxin," Giddings explains. "Buffeting the outer perimeter of the Bikini Atoll is open ocean, and fresh, crystal blue, healthy water has been flushing this lagoon some 700 times plus every year for fifty years. So the water these sharks are living in is very clean and beautiful."

Adding to this scene are the warships that lie on the lagoon floor as testaments to both World War II and the nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll. "We're going to tag and track some of these grey reef sharks day and night to see if they indeed travel back and forth to the natural coral reef—which is a long way away—or if they really have turned the wrecks into a new, personal reef habitat," Giddings enthuses. "I'm very jazzed about this, because it combines shipwrecks and sharks together and will make for some amazing visual images.

"Of course, what happened there was a curse...but has turned into somewhat of a blessing. Because of the radiation, people have been forced to leave the waters alone. Fifty years of isolation, insulation and no commercial fishing has created something really wonderful and beautiful. I can't wait to get back there."

The dichotomy of Bikini Atoll provides Giddings with cause for reflection. "Who could have imagined that a cataclysmic event like the nuclear detonations would devastate Bikini, but that Bikini would emerge just half a century later as one of the most pristine envi-

ronments left in the Pacific? That just blows me away."

Other *Shark Week* premieres include **The Secret Life of Sharks** (August 9), which focuses on shark biology and behavior; **Big Tooth** (August 10), which deals with the prehistoric giant white shark known as Megalodon; **Sharks of the Deep Blue** (August 11), which concentrates on oceanic white-tip sharks and bull sharks; and **Journey to Shark Island** (August 13), which explores the coasts of Baja California and Baja Mexico in search of elusive great white sharks.

Shark Week encore specials include **Prehistoric Sharks** (August 12), which uses fossils to create profiles of sharks which are believed to have existed before dinosaurs; and **Hammerheads: Nomads of the Sea** (August 14), which examines the vagrant predators known for their bizarre hammer-shaped snouts.

Shark Week shows its teeth August 8-14 on Discovery Channel.

—Raj Manoharan



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