

A man with a mustache, wearing a black t-shirt and a dark cap, is seated on a boat. He is operating a large, vertical metal device, possibly a shark cage or a large camera rig, with both hands. He is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. In the background, another man wearing a white visor and orange shorts is standing and looking out at the ocean. The boat is blue, and the ocean is visible in the background under a bright sky.

# SOUTH BEACH SHARK CLUB

A FILM BY ROBERT REQUEJO RAMOS

PRODUCED BY PEDRO GOMEZ



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## LOGLINE

In an era where shark fishing has become increasingly taboo, an eccentric group of South Florida fishermen keep their legacy alive by teaching the next generation the art form that accompanied them into manhood while trying to adapt their traditions for modern times.

# SOUTH SHARK

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### DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a child, I didn't read comic books. I grew up flipping through fishing magazines and hobby books about tropical aquariums. My fascination began as a child rummaging through my father's book collection. I was especially attracted to one book in particular, "The Ocean World of Jacques Cousteau". Eventually, my dad started taking me on fishing trips in Biscayne Bay. I received my open water scuba certification just before my teens and by the end of middle school I thought I wanted to become a marine biologist. In high school, though, I began to focus on the arts. I studied film production in college, but still managed to take time off to live a life on and in the water. I worked as a first mate, a boat captain, and for several years as a diver in the Florida Keys where I managed an aquaculture dive site.

One summer night, my Uncle and I decided to drive down to Sunshine Key to go fishing for the weekend. Somewhere between sleeping in the back of the truck and spending long days on the bridge, I began to imagine my Uncle's fisherman tales about "the old days" as a film. My Uncle's stories were heartfelt and visceral, exciting and incredibly cinematic. I found myself thinking that fishermen aren't all that different from filmmakers, both skilled storytellers who exaggerate and romanticize their experiences. I wanted to make a film that felt like a fisherman's tale and would simultaneously serve as a love letter to the old Miami Beach that preceded my time.

My journey as a filmmaker has led me down a path where I feel indebted to tell this story. This is a story about a subculture, the history of what was once a small beach town, and the rights of passage a young man goes through as a fisherman. Now, I want to continue this narrative by broadening my focus to include modern day shark fishing, conservation efforts, and our ever-evolving understanding of sharks. This film aims to be a comprehensive history of shark fishing on Miami Beach while acknowledging the changing times. In no way do we seek to glorify the killing of sharks, we simply want to document the story as it occurred and continues to occur, rich with controversy, excitement, nostalgia, and love for the ocean.



## OVERVIEW

In 1972, along the shores of a rundown Miami Beach, a group of teenage beach bums and local salt rats eagerly sought to define themselves by catching the biggest sharks they could on rod and reel. Inspired by fishermen's folklore, the rigorous nature of the craft, and the leadership of the most flamboyant and passionate angler on the beach, Rene de Dios, the South Beach Shark Club was born.

Today, the once modest retirement town of Miami Beach finds itself transformed into a metropolitan tourist Mecca. The long-standing 1st street pier was demolished in '84 and the current pier is marked with a laundry list of prohibited activity including "no shark fishing". Despite the changing times, life long Shark Club members like William Fundora and Shannon Bustamante remain loyal to the sport that ushered them into manhood. They strive to keep their legacy alive by passing down their customs to the next generation of fishermen, all while embracing modern conservation efforts and adhering to strict fishing regulations. These men have jobs and families, yet this primal ritual they were taught in their youth continues to be the focal point of their existence.

Shark fishing requires a different skill set from typical fishing. The process from rigging the line to cutting and presenting the bait are unique to each fisherman. The bait is placed on the back of a surfboard or kayak and paddled offshore. Paddling a large bloody bait into the surf at sunset can be a nerve-racking experience, it's a job usually reserved for the youngest member of the crew.

The film looks at three generations of shark fishermen who represent the foundation of the club, its origins, and its future. A great deal has changed since the old days on South Beach. Today, for instance they won't be killing any sharks. Catch and release is widely practiced and accepted as the norm amongst sharkers (shark fishermen). The club regularly participates in scientific research studies and tags sharks alongside local marine biologists. Their aim is to protect the sport by protecting the sharks that have enthralled these fishermen for decades. The hope is that one day, future club members will be able to fish the same waters as their mentors who preceded them.

As long ago as 1991, Rene De Dios, founder of the shark club, was a pioneering voice in favor of conservation efforts in the shark fishing community. Recognizing the decline in shark populations first hand, De Dios came out against killing sharks and argued that fishermen should be tagging and releasing their catches, allowing these populations to rebound. This sentiment has remained a central tenant of the shark club's ideology to this day.

# OVERVIEW



# SOUTH BEACH

William Fundora, president and historian of the South Florida Shark Club, maintains an archive of the club's exploits that doubles as a sort of shark fishing museum. This collection of photographs, articles, and artifacts, many of which are featured in the film, date back to the 1960's. They not only document great moments in shark fishing and the evolution of the sport, but also depict a cultural history of Florida focusing on everything from the Cuban exilio community to the burgeoning surf/skate scene to the development of South Beach. A bulk of his collection was inherited from his friend, mentor, and founder of the South Beach Shark Club, Rene De Dios.

Rene "the shark man" de Dios was a local legend known for his relentless pursuit of world records and monster sharks. Like a real life Captain Quint from Jaws, Rene once battled a great white shark that left his boat overturned and his crew stuck at sea for two days. Even after Rene succumbed to complications with diabetes and an eventual stroke in 2003, his larger than life personality lives on through his many local news appearances and interviews in addition to an abundance of home videos and photographs. De Dios' intensity and passion were contagious, with dozens of young aspiring fishermen flocking to him as a mentor and fueling the growth of the sport.

In the 70's, De Dios' band of long haired bronzed youths would load up the hippie van and head to Long Key bridge with their fishing gear, canned food, and sleeping bags to try their luck at a world record catch. Today, several generations of mentors and protégés pack their pick-up trucks and head to the same stretch of the overseas highway. During the spring spawning and migration, the Florida Keys become extremely active with Great Hammerhead and Tiger sharks. These are prized catches, two of the largest fiercest species of sharks in the South Florida region.

The younger members and "Gino's" (slang for a shark club recruit) are responsible for catching the shark bait and when fishing from the beach, paddling that bait out. Entering the club as a "Gino" is a right of passage that can last a few months to a few years depending on when you prove yourself. Fishing from the Long Key Bridge for days at a time is a test of endurance and skill. These neophytes are learning more than just the elements that migrating fish adhere to. In seeing a Florida Key's sunset and watching the night sky light up with stars one achieves a deeper understanding of man's place in the world. A boy will become a man, finding honor and respect in battling such beasts then humbly releasing them back into the wild. Going toe to toe with 500 pounds of teeth and muscle makes all the hardships endured in shark fishing worth the wait. It's a chance to test their physical limitations, their determination and fighting spirit.







# C H A R A C T E R P R O F I L E S

## CHARACTER PROFILES



### RENE

Rene was the driving force behind the shark fishing scene on the old South Beach pier. Anyone who met or watched Rene in action was enthralled with his charisma and intense passion for shark fishing. Crowds would come to the pier just to watch Rene hook and fight sharks. On any given summer night, there would be 15 rods lined up on the end of the pier with Rene at the center of attention, commanding his followers. He had an uncanny feel for the seasons and what days of the month were going to produce what type and sizes of sharks. When everyone else got tired and left at 1 or 2 am, Rene wouldn't leave until the sun came, sometimes until high noon.

No one could compete with the fierceness with which he practiced his sport, sometimes risking his own life. Rene once jumped into his small paddleboat and fought a shark all night only to lose it when the Coast Guard found him in a half sunken boat offshore and forced him to cut the line. The shark fever took its final grips on Rene in 2003, but not before he passed it along to the many lives he touched. The fever Rene left still runs deep in the veins of those he knew, forming their core and identity as members of the South Beach Shark Club. The modern shark fishermen can still be found camped out on the beaches at night or sitting on the old Flagler overseas highway bridges, waiting for a line to get hit.





### JD HAMMER

Considered the Godfather of the South Florida Shark Club, Hammer is both a skilled shark fisherman with decades of practice and a philanthropist. Jimbo taught the teachers the inexplicable art of shark fishing, one of his students being the storied founder of the South Beach Shark Club, Rene De Dios. Over the years, he's given hundreds of at risk youths an opportunity to escape their troubled home lives and become a part of a community that promotes teamwork, discipline, and respect for nature. At seventy years old he still chooses to spend days at a time camping on a pier or bridge, seeking the thrill of hooking his next shark.



### WILLY FUNDORA

In 1969, as a kid, Fundora started fishing on the South Beach pier with his uncles. This is where he became acquainted with and inspired by De Dios' obsession with shark fishing. While Rene was the founder of the South Beach Shark Club, it was Fundora who served as vice president. He was the main influence in changing the club's name to South Florida Shark Club and would eventually take over after De Dios' death. Fundora took Rene De Dios' movement, which would otherwise be a small band of fisherman on the South Beach pier, and turned it into a nation-wide community.



### SHANNON BUSTAMANTE

Shannon grew up in the heart of South Beach in the late 80's and 90's, a time and place he describes as a jungle where run-down Section 8 housing harbored a variety of characters from drug dealers to career fishermen, gang members to peaceful beach bums. His father, Michael "Seaweed" Bustamante, was widely considered the best spear fisherman in Miami Beach and was close friends with De Dios and Hammer. Some of Bustamante's earliest memories are of watching Rene de Dios locked into battle with sharks. He would go on to become Rene's protégé. De Dios' teachings made Bustamante one of the most formidable talents in the club and an example for younger members to follow to this day.





POTENTIAL INTERVIEWS



DR. PAUL S. GEORGE

Dr. George is a former Professor of History, Miami-Dade College, Wolfson Campus. He currently serves as Historian to History Miami. A native Miamian, Paul George is a graduate of Miami Dade Community College and the University of Miami. He holds a Masters and Ph.D. degree in History from the Florida State University. George is a past-president of the Florida Historical Society and the Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archive. George’s first hand understanding of Miami Beach’s history is unique and vital to setting the scene for an ever-evolving South Beach.



MARK “THE SHARK” QUARTIANO

At age 60, Quartiano is considered the poster boy of big game shark fishing. Since 1965, he has caught and killed thousands of sharks through his charter business. As the Jaws induced hysteria died down, Discovery Channel’s Shark Week brought conservation into American living rooms, and scientists have sounded the alarm about dwindling shark populations, turning the tide against Mark the Shark. These days, he often finds himself at odds with organizations like PETA and the marine biology community while most of his fellow fishermen catch and release their sharks.



DR. SAMUEL GRUBER

Samuel Gruber began studying sharks in 1961, perhaps before any other scientist had done full-time research on a living shark. He founded the Bimini Biological Shark Lab and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and has published over 200 scientific papers. Sam’s relationship with the shark club spanned from the 70’s to the 90’s; he would put on shark fishing tournaments where scientists and fishermen would work hand in hand to obtain specimens for research. He remains one of the foremost experts in the field of shark research.



DR. JOSE CASTRO

José I. Castro is a fisheries biologist with NOAA and a senior scientist at Mote Marine Laboratory. He is a shark specialist who has conducted research on different aspects of shark biology including their reproductive biology and their use of nursery areas, and has published numerous scientific articles and authored the well-known book, The Sharks of North American Waters. Castro enlisted members of the shark club in the 90’s to catch live nurse sharks he would conduct research on.



MATTHEW HARTFIEL

Hartfiel earned his Bachelor’s degree at Coastal Carolina University where he spent most of his time at the beach fishing for black tip and tiger sharks. He is currently pursuing a Master’s degree at Jacksonville University where he is researching the effects of land-based shark fishing by taking blood samples to determine how stressed a shark is after being caught and released. The end goal of his project is to help determine the best handling procedures for multiple species of sharks. Hartfiel believes this will help save shark lives as well as help to preserve the future of recreational land-based shark fishing.

POTENTIAL  
INTERVIEWS





# CREW

## CREW PROFILES



### DIRECTOR

Robert Requejo Ramos is a graduate of Miami-Dade College with a B.A.S. degree in Film, Television, and Digital Production. He previously worked with Corner of the Cave Media as a development associate and production assistant. He has managed a variety of projects from interactive music festival installations to creating documentary films. Most recently, Robert's short documentary Rene De Dios and the South Beach Shark Club premiered at the Miami Film Festival, winning several awards: Miami CinemaSlam Champion, Best Technical Achievement, Best Director, Best Writing, and the Sara Fuller scholarship.



### PRODUCER

Pedro Gomez is a writer, director, and producer based in Miami, FL where he studied film production at the School of Entertainment and Design Technology. His directing credits include short films and public service announcements, most recently Clean Slate (2017). He served as producer for Rene de Dios and the South Beach Shark Club. Pedro has also worked as an editor for Vix Media, while working on local independent productions in varying capacities. His films have shown in local festivals such as the Miami Film Festival and Miami Independent Film Festival.





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