

Disaster Diva

I think I've had enough disasters," says Deborah Brosnan, whose Sustainable Ecosystems Institute, based along the Willamette River near South Waterfront, helps communities recover environmentally and economically after earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis and all manner of natural calamities.

Brosnan's not exaggerating. She survived air-tank mishaps while diving in men's gear in her native Ireland (it was the only equipment available to the slight, 5'1" Brosnan). She was nearly dynamited during a marine bird study ("I didn't know they were going to blow up the road next to me"). She outran billowing ash and smoke on Montserrat in 1996, and she outswam another of the island's Soufrière Hills eruptions in 1998 while diving along the coral reefs to help move them out of the volcano's destructive path.

Then in 2000, Brosnan walked away from a plane crash in Taipei—a Singapore Airlines 747 disaster that left 82 passengers dead—but not before she had helped pull survivors from the wreckage.

Suddenly leaping tall buildings in a single bound doesn't seem so super.

But Brosnan wasn't deterred. Two months after the December 2004 tsunami hit coastal Southeast Asia, she formed the Tsunami Reef Action Fund and flew to Thailand and Sri Lanka, where she coordinated restoration of reefs that already

Portland's own superheroine

had been damaged before the tsunami by pollution and overfishing.

"It was giving back in a way that I knew how best, which was to go out and help people restore their coral reef ecosystem and still restore their livelihood at the same time," says Brosnan. "That's not as esoteric as it sounds."

Or as simple.

"It's not like, *Oh, look, here's a beer can.* It's like, *Here's a whole bar! We're talking about fridges and TVs and cars.*"

She even found an intact house sitting

on the reef.

After another reef cleanup in Asia this month, she plans to offer her services to help restore the flood-ravaged ecosystem of New Orleans.

"Having to go through a horrific plane crash really helped me deal with people who were going through awful traumas in ways that I don't think I could have done if I hadn't gone through it," says Brosnan. After a pause, she adds, "I wouldn't wish it on anyone, that's for sure." —*Sylvan Goldberg*



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