

Sanibel Island



**ACTIVITY:** Wading

**CASE:** [GSAF 1986.10.04](#)

**DATE:** Saturday October 4, 1986

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Gulf of Mexico at Sanibel Island, Florida, USA.

**NAME:** Luz Helena "Heather" Florez

**DESCRIPTION:** A six-year-old female from Pembroke Pines.

#### **BACKGROUND**

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** Six feet

**DEPTH OF WATER:** Three feet

**TIME:** 18h00

**NARRATIVE:** Ruth Florez and her fiancé, Ray Rhodes, were wading with the child between them when "they stepped on something and felt something cold on their legs." They began walking toward the beach and when Rhodes "felt something" start to pull the girl, and her sister yelled, "It's a shark". Rescuers pulled the shark away from the girl and carried her to shore. The shark did not thrash or make any attempt to remove the girl's leg.

**INJURY:** The patient sustained a crush injury to the right leg from her hip to her knee, avulsing skin and muscles, breaking the femur and severing the sciatic nerve. Fortunately, her femoral artery was not severed. There were also teeth marks in the shin.

## Supermum saves her little girl from giant shark

### Foreign Service

MIAMI: A mother, who saved her seven-year-old daughter from a three-metre shark, said she felt "superhuman strength" when she saw the little girl was in danger.

Ruth Florez grabbed the shark's jaws as it tried to drag Heather away after attacking her in less than a metre of water, within two metres of the shore.

The 25-year-old Miami bank worker said: "God took a mighty hand in all this. I whispered for help and I got it. I said that my little girl must not die this way and then I seemed to get superhuman strength."

The girl's right leg was ripped to the bone in the attack on Florida's West Coast, but doctors hope to save it.

Ruth's fiance, David Ubiles, said Heather was on his back when he "stepped on something that felt like cold mud". "I felt her hands pulling at my neck. Then she sort of snapped away. The water was churning up but her mother moved as though something was telling her what to do."

**FIRST AID:** A doctor on the beach rendered first aid, and a Lee County Emergency Medical Services helicopter transported her to the Lee Memorial Hospital in Fort Myers.

**TREATMENT:** Reconstructive surgery was performed Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children in Tampa. By 1988, the child had undergone 16 surgical procedures and regained 80 to 90 percent return of function in her leg.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The incident involved a five- to eight-foot lemon shark, *Negaprion brevirostris*. A tooth fragment of the shark was recovered from the girl's leg. It was believed that the shark was frightened or accidentally kicked, and responded defensively.

**SOURCES:** C. Call, Orlando Sentinel, October 6, 1986, page B3  
Jay Hamburg, Orlando Sentinel, October 11, 1986, page D1  
Orlando Sentinel, April 20, 1988, page D5  
Guidera KJ, et al. 1991. **A Case Study of the Injury and Treatment Shark Attack.** *Journal of Orthopedic Trauma.* Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 204-208

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