

ACTIVITY: Boogie Boarding

CASE: [GSAF 1998.08.26](#)

DATE: Wednesday August 26, 1998

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean at Stinson Beach, Marin County, California, USA.

37°53,8'N, 122°38.7'W

NAME: Jonathan Kathrein

DESCRIPTION: He was a 16-year-old male. He was wearing a black shortie Spring wetsuit.

SURFBOARD: A one-metre foam board with a plastic orange bottom and a yellow top.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: There was a light fog

MOON PHASE: Waxing Crescent, 18% of the Moon was illuminated.

SEA CONDITIONS: The ocean surface was smooth and flat. Underwater visibility was about a metre.

ENVIRONMENT: The seabed was sandy.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 50 yards offshore from the Stinson Beach lifeguard tower

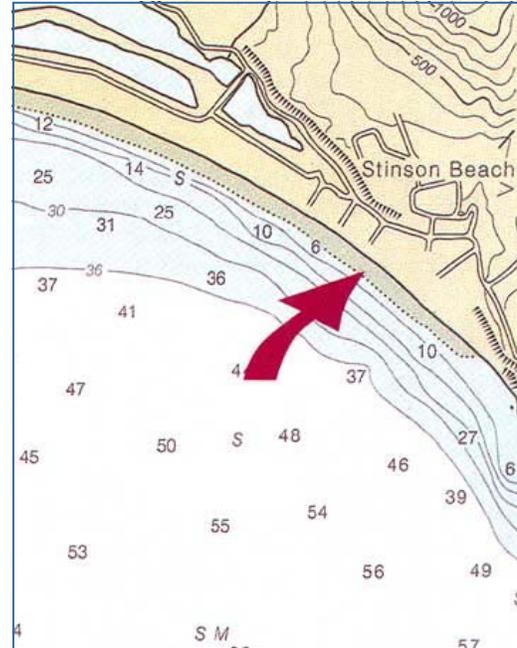
DEPTH OF WATER: Six feet

TIME: 14h16

NARRATIVE: Jonathan Kathrein had been in the water for 30 minutes. He was alone in the water as he paddled south, looking toward the beach with his left side parallel the shore. His right hand brushed against a “very solid but cartilage-like object” He immediately turned and looked to his right, hoping to see a jellyfish or pinniped. The boogie-boarder saw nothing that could have brushed against his hand. He maneuvered his board one-quarter of a turn to his left and began paddling toward the beach. Within 10 seconds of making this turn his hand brushed against something and simultaneously a shark struck from below with tremendous impact.

The shark clamped the boogie-boarder and his foam board in its mouth, pulling both beneath the surface. The shark had struck Kathrein on his right side. His companions on shore heard him yell for help, and turning, saw Kathrein dragged under the water. The boogie-boarder was pulled one to two metres below the surface and could see the outline of a very large shape, which he described as “about three to three and a half feet in diameter from the back to the stomach, with five or six large gills. The gills reached from its bottom near the stomach to within half a foot of its back. Each gill slit was the width of the side of my hand, 0.75 to one inches [2 cm to 2.5 cm], and the skin between the gills as about three inches [7.5 cm] wide.”

The shark was undulating up and down and from side to side during the few seconds the boogie boarder and the shark were in contact. To prevent further injury, Kathrein grabbed



the shark, which was right in front of him. The shark's girth was too large for Kathrein to put his arms around it, so he "grabbed and held on to the outer cartilage of the gills." No sooner had he grabbed the shark's gills than it released its hold on him and swam off.

Kathrein pulled himself onto his board and began paddling and kicking furiously toward shore, in hopes of avoiding any further contact with the shark. It was at this point that Kathrein knew his right leg had been injured seriously, as it would not function. Once he was in water less than a metre deep, a surfer assisted him up the beach.

INJURY: Kathrein sustained two crescent-shaped wounds, consisting of knife-like slices with numerous individual tooth punctures. These wounds extended across his right buttock and thigh to the knee. Several teeth penetrated to the depth of the femur, causing some minor damage to adjoining tissue.

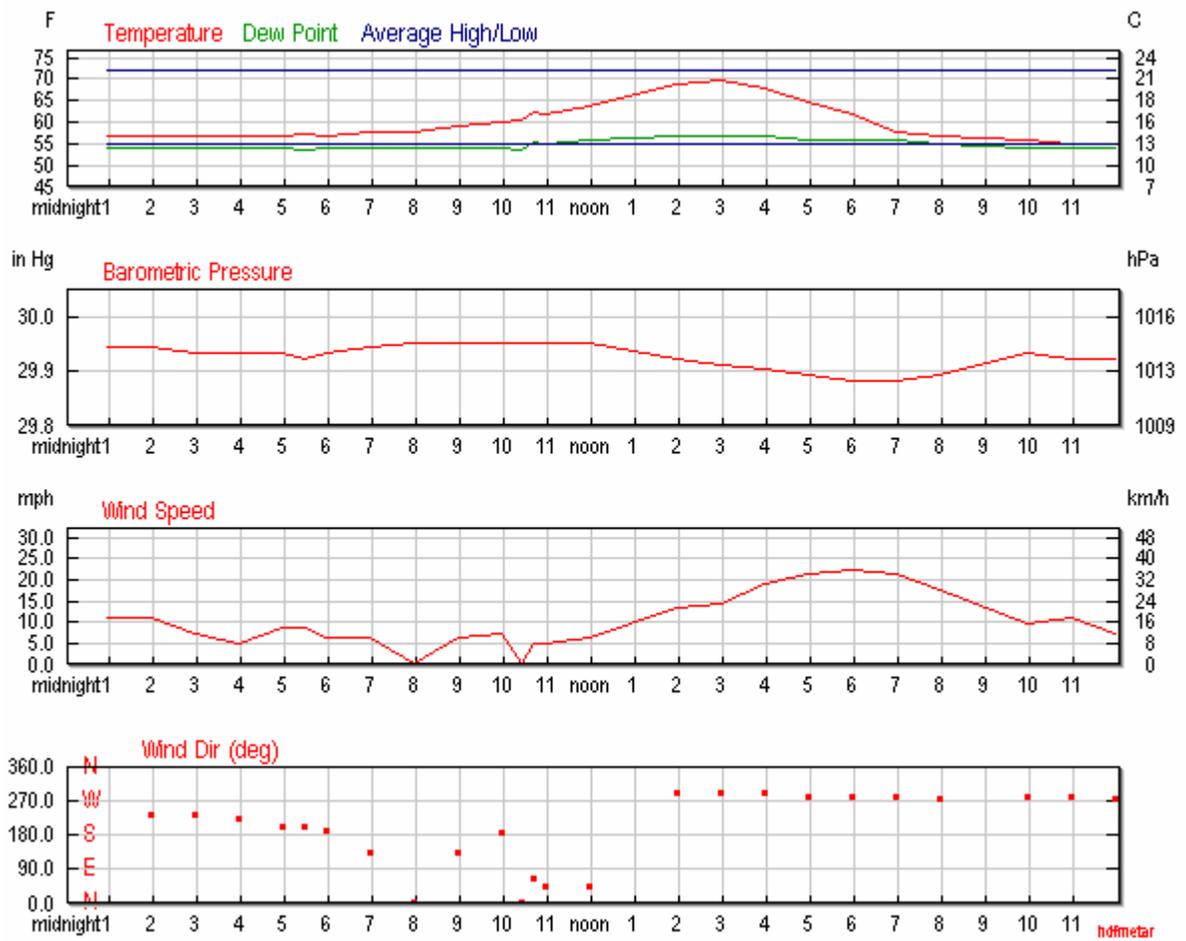
FIRST AID / TREATMENT: Once on shore, Kathrein was transported to John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek. Following seven hours of surgery and numerous sutures, surgeons repaired and stabilized the patient. His injuries left him with a slight physical impairment, the result of muscle tissue and tendon loss.

SPECIES: The description of the shark by Kathrein and witnesses, and the nature of the wounds suggest the incident involved a white shark about five to six metres in length.

NOTE: In 2006, Jonathan Kathrein is using his experience in writing a children's book (see attached article from the Marin Independent Journal).

SOURCES: Ralph Collier (2003), pages 163-164; http://www.marinij.com/marin/ci_4305755

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Ralph Collier



Weather at Stinson Beach on August 26, 1998

Victim turns experience of Stinson shark attack into lesson about life

By Tad Whitaker

Kathrein, a 24-year-old Berkeley resident who grew up in Lucas Valley, will have a children's book published next week that combines his experience in the jaws of a great white shark with his job as the founder of a nonprofit organization specializing in conflict resolution for children. The text, along with a San Rafael friend's illustrations, will be part of his lectures about how to treat people and the environment better. "The book looks at how our actions affect others," he said.

Kathrein's family moved from Illinois to Marin County when he was 6 years old. He attended Dixie Elementary School and Miller Creek Middle School before heading to high school at St. Ignatius College Preparatory in San Francisco. Kathrein said he enjoyed boogie-boarding at Stinson Beach on family trips and, after getting his driver's license, headed out with friends whenever possible. "I started boogie-boarding almost every week," he said.

On Aug. 26, 1998, Kathrein and a buddy headed for Stinson even though his friend didn't have a wet suit. They both got in the water, but his friend went back to the beach after half an hour because of the cold water. Kathrein said he was in about six feet of water, roughly 50 yards offshore from the Stinson Beach lifeguard tower, when he started swimming south against the current. While looking toward the beach, his right hand bonked into something that wasn't quite solid and wasn't soft either, but was definitely rough. Kathrein turned his head for a look but didn't see anything. He continued swimming, but got nervous as his mind eliminated jellyfish and other possibilities based on what he felt. "I turned to head into shore and kind of started to panic when I had a sixth sense something was in the water with me," he said.

Although lifeguards claim Kathrein started screaming seconds before the attack, he doesn't remember doing it. All he recalls is being slammed by a 12-foot shark from below his right side. "I never imagined it would hit so hard," he said. "It was like getting hit by a boat."

The shark pushed Kathrein out of the water, clamped down on his right leg between the knee and hip, pulled him below the surface and began to swim away. Kathrein thought he was being eaten alive. "I didn't know what it was going to do," he said. "I was worried it was going to pull my leg off." As the shark swam with him dangling from its mouth, Kathrein opened his eyes but couldn't see much. He tried to wrap his arms around the shark, but its girth was too big. Then, Kathrein saw the shark's gills and grabbed on. "The shark let go when I grabbed its gills," he said.

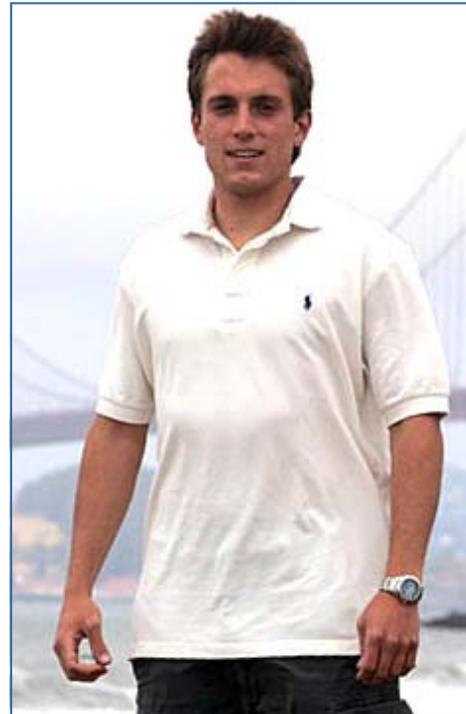
Kathrein immediately swam as hard as he could using his arms and left leg. The swim to the beach was more terrifying than the bite because he knew a shark was in the water - and what it could do. "Now I knew how bad it was," he said. Kathrein made it into knee-deep water and people helped him to the sand. Lifeguards had called a helicopter by then. He said his quadriceps was bitten clean in half and required an immediate seven-hour surgery at John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek.

A trauma center nurse called his mother, Marge Kathrein, to let her know what was going on. "At first I was completely in disbelief," said Marge Kathrein. "It took my breath away." Marge Kathrein said she stood in the family home, utterly amazed at what had happened. She had taken him to that beach as a child, wading into the same waters close to shore. "Even when your child is in an accident, you don't expect it to be a shark attack," she said.

Kathrein spent a week in the hospital and missed the first month of school. But he received a hero's welcome upon his return. "Everyone stood up and started clapping," he said.

Kathrein enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley and graduated with a specialty in conflict resolution. Along the way, he told the shark story hundreds of times and realized he'd probably be telling it for the rest of his life. After founding Future Leaders For Peace, a nonprofit that teaches children how to resolve conflicts without violence, Kathrein realized the shark attack could be a metaphor for his professional life. People had offered their boats so he could hunt down and kill the shark, but he knew that was the wrong thing to do. "It wasn't the shark's fault," he said.

Kathrein called his friend Rob Singler Jr., a 24-year-old artist he'd grown up with, and pitched the idea for the book, titled "*Don't Fear the Shark*." Singler said Kathrein asked him to illustrate a rough story idea of a surfer in the water, a shark attack, reconnecting with family during the recovery, and setting an example by not blaming or killing the shark.



Jonathan Kathrein

Singler, who finished the illustrations in a month, said he enjoyed the work because the project avoids the light, fluffy nature of most children's books. "The basic idea was to get his idea outside the typical children's book box," he said.

Kathrein's mom said it makes her feel good knowing her son's attack will inspire children to create a better world. "I have to really give credit to Jonathan," she said.

http://www.marinij.com/marin/ci_4305755



Today, Jonathan Kathrein heads a nonprofit organization: Future Leaders for Peace. He travels the world talking to children and adults about conflict resolution skills. He has taught in classrooms in California, Hawaii, Great Britain and China. In 2007, "*Don't Fear the Shark*" (BookSurge, 2006), which offers lessons on protecting the environment and living in harmony with nature, won the Jefferson Award.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/06/10/LVG7MQAG9B1.DTL>