

ACTIVITY: Spearfishing

CASE: [GSAF 2005.05.16](#)

DATE: Monday May 16, 2005

LOCATION: The incident took place 50 kilometres east of Townsville, Queensland, Australia.

NAME: Ben Edelstein

DESCRIPTION: He is a 43-year-old male, and a former real-estate agent from Austin, Texas. He was halfway through a circumnavigation of the globe¹.

SUPPORT BOAT: The 42-foot yacht, *Tayana*, christened *Gypsy Soul* after a character in a Jimmy Buffett novel.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Waxing Crescent, 38% of the Moon's visible disk was illuminated. Full Moon, May 24, 2005.

DEPTH OF WATER: 40 feet

NARRATIVE: "I shot a snapper. I put the spear gun and fish under a rock and was going to the surface to tell my mates there were no sharks around when a blacktip came at me," said Edelstein. As the two-metre blacktip shark came at him from the front, he swam backwards, kicking at it with his flippers. Edelstein said that as he was dealing with the first shark, another shark came in from behind and bit his hand.

"He hit my hand. He thought it was a fish. He shook it a couple of times and I grabbed his nose with my free hand and pulled it and he let go," he said. "I swam to the surface and hollered 'shark' and one of my mates came and picked me up in a dinghy.:

INJURY: Lacerations to the right hand. Edelstein said his hand was slashed to the bone, but he was fortunate there was no nerve or tendon damage.

FIRST AID / TREATMENT: On board the boat were six backpackers who were touring Australia and had paid Edelstein to take them for a 10-day sail along the coast. One of them had hopped in the dinghy when he heard Edelstein scream and rescued him. On board the sailboat, Edelstein as he sprayed purified water into the wound, soaked it in iodine, screamed bloody murder and downed a couple of tequila shots. Then they weighed anchor and sailed 20 hours to a medical clinic in Townsville, the nearest help, about 40 miles from their anchorage.

TREATMENT: Edelstein sought medical attention at The Doctors when he arrived in Townsville on Tuesday. His injury was repaired during a three hour surgical procedure. Some 75 stitches were needed to repair the wound. Afterwards Edelstein spent a few weeks recuperating at the marina while his hand healed. He wanted to make sure he had enough strength to pull in sails and grab onto lifelines before resuming his trip. Ten months after he was injured, Edelstein reported that he lacks dexterity because some of his fingers are still stiff. "They ache when I make a fist and are somewhat weaker than before. But I'm fine with that. I'm just thankful they are still attached to me."



Ben Edelstein

SPECIES INVOLVED: The incident involved a seven-foot blacktip reef shark

SOURCE: John Anderson, Townsville Bulletin, May 21, 2005

http://townsvillebulletin.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,7034,15355632%255E14787,00.html

NOTES: University of Queensland shark expert Dr Daryl Whitehead said he had never heard of a blacktip reef shark attacking and killing a human being. He said the shark might have thought Mr Edelstein's hand was a fish or that it was simply alarmed and delivered the bite as a warning. "It could have been a strange encounter for the shark. It might have seen something large moving towards it in the water and in defense gave what we call a 'jerk' bite. This is like a warning bite," Dr Whitehead said. "It's not a bite designed to take meat. It's a bite designed to say 'I'm warning you. I want to hurt you, but I want to get away from you quickly'."

He said there had been documented reports of blacktip reef sharks attacking people, but only when they have been startled. "It's when people have just about jumped on them from a boat or something like that," he said. "I can't think of any deaths."

¹Edelstein left the United States in December 2000 when he was 37-years-old. He traversed the Panama Canal from the Caribbean and sailed alone across the Pacific, and returned to Texas in December 2004. He returned to Australia and traveled overland for a couple of months. Then he sailed up the coast to the Whitsunday Islands along the Great Barrier Reef (where he was bitten by the shark), and on to West Timor, Komodo Island and Bali. There, his teenage daughter joined him for three weeks of surfing, shopping and exploring. From Bali, he sailed to Singapore, up the coast of Malaysia, dodged freighters through the Strait of Malacca (one of the world's busiest and most important shipping lanes) and sailed on to Thailand. Feeling homesick, in March 2006, he had the *Gypsy Soul* pulled out of the water in Malaysia for repairs and refurbishing and flew home for a month to see family and friends. In Mid-April 2006, Edelstein returned to Langkawi, on the Thailand/Malaysia border, hopped onboard his boat and set a solo course for the Maldive Islands, 1,500 miles across the Indian Ocean. He plans to sail on to the Seychelles and Madagascar in July, he will sail on to the Seychelles and arrive in Durban, South Africa, by November. After passing the Cape of Good Hope, and a rest in Cape Town, he will sail across the South Atlantic Ocean to South America, cruise along the coast and travel overland for a while. The last leg of his adventure involves island hopping across the Caribbean, and arrive in Texas in July 2007 ... unless he decides to spend an extra year in South America.

SOURCES: Janet Wilson, Austin American Statesman, April 29, 2006

<http://www.statesman.com/search/content/life/stories/travel/04/29sailor.html>