



ACTIVITY: Diving for sea shells

CASE: [GSAF 1994.04.03](#)

DATE: Sunday April 3, 1994

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Atlantic Ocean off 74th Street, Miami Beach, Miami-Dade County, Florida, USA.

NAME: Raul Tozo

DESCRIPTION: He is a 71-year-old Cuban male.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, April 2, 1994

SEA CONDITIONS: "The tide was up, the bottom was agitated and it was dark down there," said Tozo.

ENVIRONMENT: The incident took on the seafloor in a trough that was seaward of a sandbar.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 100 feet

DEPTH OF WATER: 12 feet

TIME: 15h00

NARRATIVE: Raul Tozo swam out alone to diver for sea shells for his four-year-old grandson. With the boy and other family members waiting on the beach, Tozo took a breath, plunged his mask under the surface and headed for the silent bottom. "I was groping for the shells in the sand. Then something hit me from behind. It smashed me amazingly hard, as if a car had hit me," he said. "For a few moments I became disoriented." Tozo said he felt something rake over the top of his back. "Then all I saw was a black blur as it passed me. It was tremendously fast. As quickly as it came it was gone."

Tozo, who dives regularly and rows an eight-foot boat offshore, said he is sure it was a shark. "I've seen barracuda, I've seen swordfish, I've had dolphins leap in front of the boat," he said. "I've been in the water all my life. This was a shark." Tozo kept his cool. "I never panic in the water," he said. Instead, he swam calmly to shore.

INJURY: "It was about an inch deep and looked like someone had taken a razor and cut him," said Tozo's daughter-in-law, Marisol Tozo. Sam Gruber, a professor from the University of Miami Department of Marine Biology and Fisheries, said the open wound at the back of Tozo's left shoulder could well have been caused by a fin or some other part of the shark's body hitting Tozo. "The shark apparently didn't bite him," said Gruber. "his was a bump or a hit. Sharks are prone to do that."

TREATMENT: Tozo was treated on shore, and later at North Shore Medical Center, where 17 stitches were needed to close the laceration.

SPECIES: Not identified. Dr. Gruber said the sharks are currently in a southward migration, toward Florida Bay, for mating. Large numbers were sighted off Palm Beach County a month ago, and they were due here just about this time. "But there are always sharks around Miami Beach," he said. A group of fishermen proved that Monday night. They caught a nine-foot hammerhead shark off the South Pointe Park pier.

SOURCES: John Lantigua, The Miami Herald, April 5, 1994, page 1B; Ocala Star-Banner, April 6, 1994, page 9

Miami diver injured in brush with shark

By John Lantigua
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

MIAMI — On shore, people were screaming in panic at the top of their lungs, but Raul Tozo, 71, couldn't hear a thing.

It was about 3 p.m. Sunday. A Cuban exile with a lifetime of experience in the water, Tozo had swum alone about 100 feet off Miami Beach to dive for sea shells for his 4-year-old grandson.

With the boy and other family members waiting on the beach, Tozo took a breath, plunged his mask under the surface and headed for the silent bottom.

He was in a trough on the other side of a sandbar, about 12 feet under, when it happened — suddenly and without a sound.

"The tide was up, the bottom was agitated and it was dark down there," he said of the sea off 74th Street. "I was groping for the shells in the sand. . . . Then something hit me from behind."

Tozo's eyes opened wide as he recounted the next frightening moments.

"It smashed me amazingly hard, as if a car had hit me," he said. "For a few moments I became disoriented."

Tozo said he felt something rake over the top of his back. "Then all I saw was a black blur as it passed me. It was tremendously fast." As quickly as it came, it was gone.

Tozo, who dives regularly and rows an 8-foot boat offshore, said he is sure it was a shark.

"I've seen barracuda, I've seen swordfish, I've had dolphins leap in front of the boat," he said. "I've been in the water all my life. This was a shark."

It may be the first time in at least 30 years that anyone has had a run-in with a shark off Miami Beach.

Tozo, who had only once before seen a shark in his 12 years of living here, kept his cool. "I never panic in the water," he said.

Experts say the sharks are currently in a southward migration, toward Florida Bay, for mating.

Instead, he swam calmly to shore. He was treated there and later at North Shore Medical Center, where 17 stitches were needed to close his wound.

"It was about an inch deep and looked like someone had taken a razor and cut him," said Tozo's daughter-in-law, Marisol Tozo, 26.

Sam Gruber, a professor from the University of Miami Department of Marine Biology and Fisheries who has studied sharks since 1960, said Tozo's account was credible.

"But I wouldn't call it an attack," he said. "The shark apparently didn't bite him. This was a bump or a hit. Sharks are prone to do that."

Gruber said the open wound at the back of Tozo's left shoulder could well have been caused by a fin or some other part of the shark's body slicing into Tozo.

"Most fish have scales, but sharks have tens of thousands of little microscopic teeth embedded in their skin instead," he said. "That's why if a shark brushes you, it can lay open the skin."

Gruber said the sharks are currently in a southward migration, toward Florida Bay, for mating. Large numbers were sighted off Palm Beach County a month ago, and they were due here just about this time.

"But there are always sharks around Miami Beach," he said.