

ACTIVITY: Splashing in the surf

CASE: [GSAF 2002.07.04](#)

DATE: Thursday July 4, 2002

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Atlantic Ocean about half a mile south of Johnnie Mercer's Pier at Wrightsville Beach, a barrier island off the coast of North Carolina, USA. 34.2°N, 77.8°W

NAME: Avery Olearczyk

DESCRIPTION: Avery is a nine-year-old female from Pleasanton, California.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: At 16h53, Wilmington recorded clear skies and visibility of eight miles. The air temperature was 90°F [32.2°C], dew point 73°F [22.8°C], humidity 57%, sea level pressure 29.93 in [1013.5 hPa], and wind direction was SW at 10.4 mph [16.7 km/h].

MOON PHASE: The incident took place the day before the moon entered its Third Quarter.

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was 85°F (estimated). High tide was at 14h49, low tide at 21h09.

ENVIRONMENT: The incident took place between two fishing piers.

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: Three to four feet

TIME: 17h15



NARRATIVE: The Olearczyk family had come to North Carolina for a family reunion. Avery and her sister, Lisa, were playing with their cousins in the water, and her father, Matthew, and her uncle, Tim Miserendino, were standing in the surf keeping an eye on the children.

Avery and her 10-year-old cousin Megan, were a little apart from the others and splashing in the water. "Then I felt the teeth, on one side of my foot." said Avery. "I just whacked and whacked [the shark] and yelled, 'I'm getting bit! Help! Help!'"

When Avery's father heard her scream, he initially thought she stepped on a shell. "Then all of a sudden she was down in the water. She was punching the shark's nose with her right arm, she actually got her hand in his mouth, it was bleeding, too," he said.

"[The shark] bit me three times, then he came from behind and bit the back of my leg. I felt it come behind me," said Avery. "The whole time I was running. I was getting out as fast as I could. Megan turned around and screamed and ran out of the water. Then my dad ran into the water and got me," recalls Avery.

"I pulled her up out of the water and saw the damage and the blood. I threw Avery over my shoulder and started running," said her father. "My dad was screaming, 'Get out of the water! Get out of the water!'... My dad was taking everybody out and so was my Uncle Tim," said Avery.

TREATMENT: An orthopedic surgeon was called in and the girl underwent 90 minutes of emergency surgery. Forty sutures were required to repair the injury and she was in recovery in her room at 22h15. Because of the danger of infection, she was given massive doses of antibiotic. Later, a cast was put on her leg to allow the tendon to heal.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Matthew Olearczyk saw the shark and said: "He came and turned right in front of me, going fast. He was about five feet long. When he turned I saw the two fins down in the water. I think it was a bull shark, and it thought Avery's foot was a fish."

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Clay Creswell, GSAF