

ACTIVITY: Wading

CASE: [GSAF 2005.05.27](#)

DATE: Friday May 27, 2005

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Gulf of Mexico at Sand Key Beach in Clearwater, Pinellas County, Florida, USA. 28°N, 82.8°W

NAME: Michelle Smith

BACKGROUND

DEPTH OF WATER: Two feet

TIME: 18h15 or 18h30 (dusk)

NARRATIVE: Friday afternoon, Belinda Heffner, a nurse at Lakeland Regional Medical Center, found out she wasn't needed for her shift. The weather was "heavenly" so she took her two children (Mariah, 10, and Jack, 6) and her sister-in-law Michelle Smith and Smith's children (Mandy, 14, Josh, 11, Cody, 8 and Jack, 6) and went to the beach, arriving there at 15h00. "It was beautiful. We were having an awesome time. The kids, they were great. They were building sandcastles, they were swimming," she said.

Michelle was crouched in the water, getting ready to gather up the children to go home, when she felt something slam into her and thought it was one of her children horseplaying – until it slammed into her a second time, and she felt a jolt of pain.

"I realized I was being bitten. I yelled to Belinda to get all of the kids out of the water," she said. As she waded back to shore, trying to shove the shark off of her, she said the it bit her again and again – six times in all.

INJURY: Her right arm and torso was bitten.

FIRST AID: Her sister-in-law wrapped a towel around her arm, applied pressure, and rushed her off to Morton Plant Hospital in Clearwater.

TREATMENT: At the hospital, Smith's wounds were cleaned, taped and bandaged. Hospital personnel did not stitch the wounds, fearing it would increase the danger of



Michelle Smith

infection. Smith said she was told that sharks carry lots of bacteria in their mouths.

SPECIES: Based upon her wounds, rescue personnel told Smith the shark was only about 18 inches to 36 inches in length.

NOTE: Smith wants people to know a couple of things this incident taught her. First of all, she found out that swimming at dusk can be dangerous; it is when sharks feed. And secondly, after she left the water, she told her children to run up the beach to warn everyone to get out of the water. Many people ignored her children. "If someone warns you to get out of the water, you need to pay attention," Smith said. "It may be a prank, but you can't take that chance. It's not worth the risk."

At 22h30, finally released from the hospital, Smith and Heffner were driving home but missed their exit because of construction and took the U.S. 98 exit instead. As they headed home they saw a man stagger across U.S. 98, into the path of a car. Belinda dashed over to the man and tried to help him, but he was already dead. "We weren't able to leave the scene until midnight," Smith said. "It still hasn't really sunk in. I just can't believe all that would happen in one day. It's surreal."

SOURCE: Dana Wilhoit, The Ledger (Lakeland, FL), May 29, 2005

<http://www.theledger.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050529/NEWS/505290407/1039>