

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming

**CASE:** [GSAF 2006.11.11](#)

**DATE:** Saturday November 11, 2006

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean at Kama'ole Beach Park II in Kihei, Maui, Hawaii, USA.

**NAME:** Kyle Gruen

**DESCRIPTION:** He is a 29-year-old male from British Columbia, Canada, a former lifeguard, and an experienced surfer. He is Operations Manager at the British Columbia Institute of Technology. Kyle and his twin brother, Jeff, arrived on Maui Friday, and Kyle was scheduled to be the best man in his college buddy's wedding on Sunday in Wailea. He was wearing swim goggles at the time of the incident.



*Kyle Gruen*

## **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** At 12h54, Maui recorded scattered clouds and visibility of 10 miles. The air temperature was 84°F [28.9°C], dew point 69.1°F [20.6°C], humidity 61%, sea level pressure 30.01 inches [1016.3 hPa], and wind direction was NE at 14.8 km/h.

**MOON PHASE:** Waning Gibbous, 62% of the Moon's visible disk was illuminated. Last Quarter Moon, November 12, 2006.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The water was clear. Archie Kalepa, county ocean safety operations supervisor said, "it's a beautiful, clear day" with calm seas.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Shortly after the incident, a Maui Fire Department helicopter spotted a large shark off Cove Park near Kalama. Kalepa reported that the beaches were crowded and water safety officers and Department of Land & Natural Resources agents were having trouble keeping people out of the water because weather and sea conditions were good.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 30 or 40 feet (12 metres)

**DEPTH OF WATER:** 20 feet

**TIME:** 12h30

**NARRATIVE:** Kyle Gruen was on a work-out swim and had been in the water for about 10 minutes when he stopped at an outcrop of volcanic rock to watch the colorful tropical fish. "I had my head down in the water, looking at fish," he said. "I just felt something hit me from the side, and then felt it clamp down with a lot of force on my left thigh and hand." In Vancouver, Kyle had undergone lifeguard training that included learning a technique to break free of panicked swimmers who are in danger of drowning their rescuers by pulling them under the surface of the water. The maneuver involves twisting away and pushing the swimmer off with your feet and Kyle used the technique to break free of the shark. "When I twisted away, I had my face in the water, and I saw [the shark]." As his left leg came free of the shark's mouth, Kyle saw the shark 'turn its whole body.' He said, "The last thing I saw was its tail going away."

County and state aquatics officials followed usual protocol and closed the stretch of shoreline where the incident occurred, from Keawakapu to Kalama Beach Park. The beaches remained closed until noon on Sunday, while water safety officers continued to patrol the waters for sharks.

**INJURY:** Kyle sustained a deep gouge just above his left knee on the lateral thigh which measured 38 cm in length and 15 cm in width and extended to a few centimeters from the groin, as well as five large puncture wounds (teeth impressions of the shark). A deep laceration to the dorsal surface of his left hand severed two tendons, resulting in limited movement of two fingers.

**FIRST AID:** Kyle managed to make it to shallow water on his own and hauled himself out on a rock ledge a few metres from the beach. It was then that he first saw his injuries. "I was in shock, it didn't hurt at all but I was afraid I was going to bleed out," he said. Maui resident Donald Cole was in the shallows when he heard Kyle calling for help and was the first to reach the injured swimmer. "Kyle was yelling 'shark, shark'," said Cole. He waded and swam to where Gruen sat and knew immediately he was badly injured. Cole was soon joined by a nearby kayaker and two other men. Together they carried Kyle to the beach, then up to a lawn chair at Kihei's Kamaole Nalu Resort. Paramedics arrived within minutes. They rendered first aid to the swimmer at the resort and then he was transported by ambulance to Maui Memorial Medical Center.

**TREATMENT:** Kyle was discharged from hospital on Monday (13 November) following a second round of surgery to close the wounds and repair the tendons in his hand, and in time to act as best man at his friends' wedding. "I made it to the wedding, although I didn't last very long at the reception," said Kyle, who noted doctors have told him he can expect a full recovery although he'll have a well-defined scar on his leg from the bite.

**SPECIES:** Not identified. Kyle described the shark as "having a purplish color on the top and grey on the sides and two to three metres in length." "As I was turning to get away I looked at him. It seemed as big as I was and I've since heard it was anything from six to 12 feet in length. I'm sure he was as scared of me as I was of him." He vowed to swim in the ocean again. "It'll take more than a little shark bite to keep me out," he said. "I love the water."



*Kyle says he has been nicknamed "nibbles" by his friends as result of the shark bite.*

**SOURCES:** Christie Wilson, Honolulu Advertiser, Sunday, November 12, 2006, [http://www.honoluluadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061112/NEWS0103/611120333/1005/NEWS](http://www.honoluluadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061112/NEWS0103/611120333/1005/NEWS;);

Canada.com, November 13, 2006, <http://www.canada.com/theprovince/news/story.html?id=442c69b3-33fa-4373-91cf-4ed3776b1af3&k=2018>

Stephen Forgacs, Vancouver Sun, November 15, 2006, <http://www.news-press.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061115/311150034/1075>

**REPORTED BY:** Barry Nicholson & Peter Immerz, SharkProject