

Spinner shark attacks Florida teen surfer

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Ryan Shapiro, 18, at South Inlet Park in Boca Raton, Florida, Nov. 11, 2014. Ryan was recently bitten by a spinner shark while surfing in nearby Fort Pierce. "I don't ever want to stop surfing because something bad happened to me," he said. Robert Duyos/Sun Sentinel/TNS

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The waves in the Fort Pierce Inlet were picking up Saturday, so Ryan Shapiro and his friends decided to go out on their surfboards.

The 18-year-old paddled out, but suddenly found himself alone. He saw a stingray jump out of the water a few feet from him. Not thinking anything of it, though, he paddled out farther.

That's when he felt it. A 4-foot shark bit into his right arm.

He looked down and could see the bite marks in his skin.

"I knew for sure it was a shark," he said. "I was in complete shock."

Although he has some physical scars from the attack, Shapiro said he refuses to let it keep him off his surfboard forever.

"I don't ever want to stop surfing because something bad happened to me," he said, just three days after he was bitten. Shapiro has been on a board for most of his life, he said, and for the past few years he worked as a surf instructor.

"It's not that this won't affect me, it's going to make me more aware of my surroundings," he said.

Just Another Surfing Day

Right before the attack, he was at the beach with his surfer buddies and his younger sister, Amanda Shapiro, who was taking photos.

Amanda, 14, was pointing her camera out to sea when suddenly she heard screaming and calls for help — something about 911 and an ambulance.

She went to find out what had happened and someone told her that there was a shark attack.

She saw her brother being helped from the water by five or six other surfers. His arm was above his head and people were rushing over with T-shirts, towels and sweaters to make tourniquets to stop the bleeding.

Amanda Shapiro stood over her brother as he lay on the sand shaking and bleeding. She tried to remain calm and started to pray that God would protect him.

"To see my brother — he surfs so much, he's in the water almost every day," she said. "I would never think that something like that would happen."

More Than A Stitch Or Two

Riding to the hospital in the ambulance with her brother, paramedics assured Amanda that he would be OK.

She tried calling their mother, but could not reach her right away.

"When she finally called me I was checking in" to the hospital, Amanda said. "I had to tell her what happened, and it was hard because I didn't want her to freak out."

Their mother, Holly Robillard, immediately got in her car to make the 90-minute drive north to Fort Pierce. Robillard said her daughter described Ryan's injuries as relatively minor, a stitch or two maybe, but in her heart she said she knew it was something much more serious.

Her son has surfed since he was 4 years old, has traveled all over to surf, and was experienced, Robillard said. She started wondering what could have happened, but did not imagine that he was bitten by a shark.

"You don't think this is ever going to happen," she said. "You always say, 'What are the odds?'"

Shark Attacks Are Rare

The chances of a shark attack are extremely low. According to the Florida Museum of Natural History, there are just 50 to 70 shark attacks around the world each year.

Shapiro does not remember much about getting to the hospital, but the moments after the shark attack were crystal clear.

His pain was terrible, he said, and all he could think about was whether he would be able to surf again.

“I didn’t think I was going to die, I was more thinking, ‘Will I ever be able to use my arm again?’” he said.

“I was praying, I remember. I was bleeding and lying on the sand, and I was just praying to God that everything was going to be OK,” he said. “I knew I was going to be OK.”

On Tuesday, Shapiro found himself back on the beach in Boca Raton. He knew he could not stay away for long, but instead of surfing he was sitting in a comfy chair, watching his friends surf and taking video. His cast will come off in about six weeks, and he thinks he will have regained enough strength to get back on his surf board soon after.

“I’m not scared,” he said. “It wasn’t the shark’s fault or anything. I’m just trying to get more people to be aware of the water.”