

Ocean delights: lice, sharks

By Barry Densa correspondent

June 11, 2003

When "Jaws" with its throbbing, threatening, anxiety-ridden music score and its bloody visuals chomped its way into the American psyche, I was living in California.

I saw the movie on a sunny afternoon, and I remember at its conclusion exiting the theater at a paranoid pace, jumping into my car and quickly locking all the doors and windows. I also remember repeatedly checking my rear-view mirror while driving home to determine if anything with a dorsal fin was gaining on me.

It is to that afternoon, and movie, that I attribute my "neurotic nervousness" about the deep, dark, blue ocean. And it's therefore not surprising that "water sports" for me is usually limited to a healthy scrubbing in a well-lit shower.

Nonetheless, I have spent most of my adult life living in "beach communities" in California, Hawaii and now Jupiter. I like the beach lifestyle; it's carefree, natural and romantic, untamed and timeless. I just don't go in the water that much.

But I have a daughter who's part fish. She loves the beach and has no fear of the ocean.

So what is a father to do, other than sit at the water's edge and worry? Yet, I'm philosophical. We should be just as at home within and upon the sea as we are on land.

But having said that, let's get back to reality. What's up with all the sea lice? Every time my daughter, Kaiya, goes in the water she gets attacked!

We tried a much-hyped product that's supposed to be the sea lice equivalent of mosquito repellent. Well, rather than repelling the lice, it appears to attract them. As in, come on boys, dinner's on!

Now let's talk about sea glass. Kaiya loves to collect pretty shells and sea glass. Well, sea glass was once (and still is) broken glass. Broken glass means broken bottles on the beach, where I, Kaiya, and everyone else can step on them. I don't like that, nor do I like broken glass on the sidewalk, in the parks or anywhere else.

And now, finally let's talk about another favorite bugaboo: sharks. As I see it, there are two kinds of people when it

comes to sharks. There are those (count me as president pro tem) who are deathly afraid of becoming a buffet lunch for a "great white." And there are those who are not oblivious to the possibility of appearing on a shark's a la carte dinner menu, but are just not all that bothered by it. This group includes, but is not limited to, surfers, divers, children and the insane.

How's this for a pseudo fact (in other words, I can't remember where I heard or read it): everyone who regularly swims in the ocean has, at one time or another, been within fifteen feet of a shark.

Kaiya, out of the water – now!

And despite professional, expert, naturalist, and behaviorist commentaries stating that sharks are not our enemy – sharks still bite, chomp, rip and swallow.

So adding all this up, there are clear and present dangers at the seashore. So, I repeat, what's a neurotic, obsessed, paranoid father to do? OK, I'll answer that. Be brave, prudent, loving, giving and wise.

No small task, indeed, under any circumstances.