



Dr. Eugenie Clark bags a Moses sole fish that emits a highly toxic poison.

Marty Snyderman

Researcher takes the bite out of anti-shark arguments

By KAREN FELD

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Fear of sharks surfaced again last month when a California surfer was killed by a great white shark. But Dr. Eugenie Clark, who has been diving throughout the world with sharks for 26 years, insists attacks on humans are rare.

"A car accident on the way to the beach is more likely than a shark attack at the beach," says Clark, who has devoted her life to researching how sharks feed, rest, give birth — and why they attack.

There are only 40 to 50 documented shark attacks throughout the world each year, according to John McAniff, director of the International Shark Attack File at the University of Rhode Island.

"HUMAN FEAR OF sharks stems from ignorance," says former Suncoast resident Clark. She believes that her greatest achievement is helping people better understand sharks and dispelling some myths about the fish. Her work is featured in *The Sharks*, a National Geographic Special airing on WEDU-Ch. 3, Tuesday at 8 p.m.

Clark has dived with sharks more than 40 feet long, has taught them to ring a bell for food, and last year, she rode a 50-foot whale shark weighing 10 tons. She has captured more than 2,000 sharks for study.

The mother of four has never sustained even an injury in the water. She was once attacked by a 12-foot tiger shark, but the accident occurred while she was driving to a lecture: When she had to slam on the brakes, the teeth of a mounted jaw sank into her arm.

Petite (at 5 feet) and vivacious, Clark doesn't look her 59 years. The five-time divorcee lives in Bethesda, Md., a Washington suburb, and when she's not traveling and div-

ing throughout the world, she teaches zoology at the University of Maryland. Recent trips have taken her to the Red Sea, Egypt and Israel. Clark keeps in shape by bike riding or attending exercise classes.

She first became fascinated with fish when, as a 9-year-old, she accompanied her mother on Saturdays to New York City's Battery Park; while her mother sold newspapers, little Eugenie spent the day at the nearby Aquarium. Her interest continued through her years at Hunter College. At the age of 33, she founded and directed the Cape Haze marine laboratory in Sarasota's Siesta Key. From 1955 to 1967, she studied sharks and other fishes, first gaining national prominence through her learning experiments with lemon sharks.

One of Clark's best-known accomplishments is the discovery of the ability of the Moses sole, a foot-long Indian Ocean fish, to secrete a toxin that is a shark repellent, but she views the discovery differently.

"I DON'T THINK you need a shark repellent. It's a psychological crutch." Sharks are so maligned because they have the equipment — those teeth," says Clark. "Until you become an experienced diver, you really do think sharks are dangerous."

She compares the film *Jaws* to a Dracula or a Frankenstein film: "I think *Jaws* ought to be thought of in the same sense as a horror movie. Everybody loves a good horror movie." Clark came face-to-face with the real *Jaws*, a great white shark, in waters off Australia. Clark was submerged inside a steel and mesh cage. "It felt like being in a bumper car at an amusement park as five white sharks crashed into the cage," she recalls. One of them got her attention quickly.

See SHARKS, 6-E



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Dr. Clark, shown in a 1965 photo, examines a set of shark jaws.

Sharks

from 1-E

"First his snout came in. When he opened his mouth, his jaw came in. I could look down his throat. It was exciting more than fearful."

Clark has an engaging story about each fish and each dive, whether it's the dwarf shark (the size of a cigar) that she studied in Japan or the 40-foot whale shark — "four of us could have slid into her mouth together."

Her love for the sea and its creatures is evident in her current project: an effort to conserve her favorite coral reef, Ras Muhammad, a spot at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula in the Red Sea. "Ras Muhammad has the most beautiful coral reefs in the world. The fish are so thick at some points you can't see the water."

CLARK MET not long ago with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, whose son Gamal was a fellow diver. She described Ras Muhammad to the president, who knew it only as a strategic military area. He agreed that they must protect this magnificent coral reef, and promised to declare it a national marine park, under one condition. "What's that?" asked Clark. "You have to protect my son from the man-eating sharks."

But Sadat's assassination came before the reef was declared a national park. Clark is now trying to enlist the cooperation of Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia in declaring her favorite spot in the world off-limits to fishermen, so that both shark and man may benefit.

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