



She pulled her husband from jaws of shark

Though he outweighs her by 50 pounds, his 'angel' hauled him into boat

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When the shark clamped its jaws on his forearm and wouldn't let go, Luis Hernandez knew it was going to take a miracle for him to escape with his life.

Fortunately for the 48-year-old South Florida man, his wife, who was sitting in their anchored boat, was up to the task. Although she is only 5-foot-2 and 108 pounds, petite Marlene Hernandez somehow managed to haul up the boat's anchor, start the engine, race to her stricken husband and hoist his 160-pound body, mangled, useless arm and all, into their boat.

"She's my angel," Luis told Meredith Vieira Friday from Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, where he is recovering from the injuries he suffered on May 6 during a romantic getaway to the Bahamas. As his wife sat beside him smiling and blushing, he added, "She saved me and I love her so much before and even more now. I'm so happy to have her as a wife. I'm the happiest man on earth right now."

Out of nowhere

Mind you, Luis is no amateur when it comes to the water and sharks. A resident of the coastal Florida town of Deerfield Beach, he's been snorkeling and spearfishing for most of his 48 years.

On the day of the attack, he and his wife had a hankering for seafood, but couldn't find a fish market near where they were staying on their Bahamas vacation. So they went to the docks and rented a boat, snorkeling gear and a speargun.

While Marlene stayed in the boat, Luis patrolled shallow water over a reef and quickly speared a good-sized grouper. A 7-foot bull shark, which locals would later tell them was a known denizen of the reef, apparently smelled the blood and came by to investigate.

Bull sharks are not normally aggressive, but they are often unpredictable, sometimes attacking without warning. Luis took a moment to look at the shark, which was not threatening him at first. When it came close, he poked it with his speargun and it swam away. Not wanting to risk a closer encounter, he started swimming back to the boat, which was about 40 meters away.

That's when the shark returned with ill intent.

"He came out of nowhere and attacked me. I didn't see it coming," Luis told Vieira. "He grabbed my arm. I fought with him for, I'm going to say, about 30 seconds. He was pressing my arm so hard, and I punched him in the face repeatedly and I screamed for help to my wife on the boat. In the end, I opened his jaw with my other hand, and that's when I could get loose."

As he fought, Luis told NBC News, "I was talking to him: 'Don't kill me. Let me live, please.' I said a couple of curse words, too."

To the rescue

Marlene heard her husband yelling for help and saw a commotion in the water, but didn't immediately grasp the situation.

"It took me probably 30 seconds to one minute to realize what was happening," she told Vieira.

But once Marlene realized a shark was attacking her husband, she rushed to the rescue. She still doesn't know where she found the strength to pull Luis, who outweighs her by 50 pounds, from the water, as well as the presence of mind to fashion a tourniquet from a towel to stop the bleeding from his mauled arm.

"I don't know where it came [from]," Marlene told Vieira. "It was something that I can't explain. It just happened, and I just did it and I don't know how."

"It's amazing she had the strength to get me out of the water. I was trying — reaching the boat with my arm all hanging. I said, 'This is it. How am I going to get into the boat?' I don't know how she managed it," Luis said.

But in an earlier interview with NBC News, he offered an explanation: "God came from heaven and gave her strength."

Marlene held her stricken husband in her lap and called for help on a radio as she raced some four miles to shore, and help. Luis was treated in a local clinic before being airlifted to Jackson Memorial, where he has undergone five surgeries and expects to undergo several more as his surgeon, Dr. Roberto Miki, rebuilds his forearm.

Joining the Hernandezes in the hospital interview, Miki told Vieira that the shark only narrowly missed severing an artery in Luis' elbow.

"He was probably about an inch away from losing his arm and losing his life," Miki told Vieira. "An inch more and he probably would not have made it out of the water."

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