

After Hours

This shark tale begins on Siesta

BY RACHEL BROWN HACKNEY

With its snippet of the iconic John Williams' score from the movie "Jaws," Capt. Bill Goldschmitt's website immediately lets readers know he's not the touchy-feely type when it comes to sharks.

In person, Goldschmitt makes it even plainer that he and the scientists who tout concerns about increasingly endangered shark populations are on the opposite sides of the issue. "They hate me," he says of such researchers and environmentalists. "They absolutely hate me, but that's because I tell the truth."

That truth, he adds, is that sharks are every bit as dangerous as the Great White depicted in "Jaws." As a matter of fact, Goldschmitt doesn't shy away at all from comparisons with the shark-hating character of Sam Quint, played by Robert Shaw in the movie. An old clipping Goldschmitt has saved about a visit he made years ago to Captain Curt's Crab & Oyster Bar on Siesta Key calls him a "Real Life Quint."

And it was Siesta Key where Goldschmitt began his long association with sharks.

When he was 17, in 1967, he ran away from his Pittsburgh home and aimed for the Siesta Public Beach. He had become familiar with the area from family vacations, he says. "My parents loved the white beaches of Siesta Key."

He hung out in the picnic area until a girl took him in, he says. In those days, he points out, Siesta Key had lots of young people indulging in a bohemian lifestyle. However, he is quick to assert,



One of Bill Goldschmitt's early catches.

"Back then I was not a hippie." Referring to his long braided ponytail, he adds, "Don't let the hair fool you. I am 60 years old and I haven't changed."

From his early days on the island, Goldschmitt began gathering the material he eventually would put into a book. His story is due out in March with the title, "Shark Man of Cortez."

His co-author is his wife, a professional writer named Marisa Mangani whom he met in the Village of Cortez, where he had moved years ago.

Between 1967 and 1987, Goldschmitt says on his website, "I captured and killed nearly 10,000 sharks of a dozen species." His first encounter with the beasts is not that far removed from the opening of "Jaws."

Goldschmitt, his girlfriend and his German shepherd, Lucky, were in a 13-foot skiff in the Gulf of Mexico. Goldschmitt and the woman were sharing a romantic interlude (to put it politely for a family newspaper) when the dog jumped into the water, Goldschmitt says. Next thing he knew, a shark was heading for the dog.

"I couldn't yell, 'shark!'" he says, because he didn't want to scare the girl.

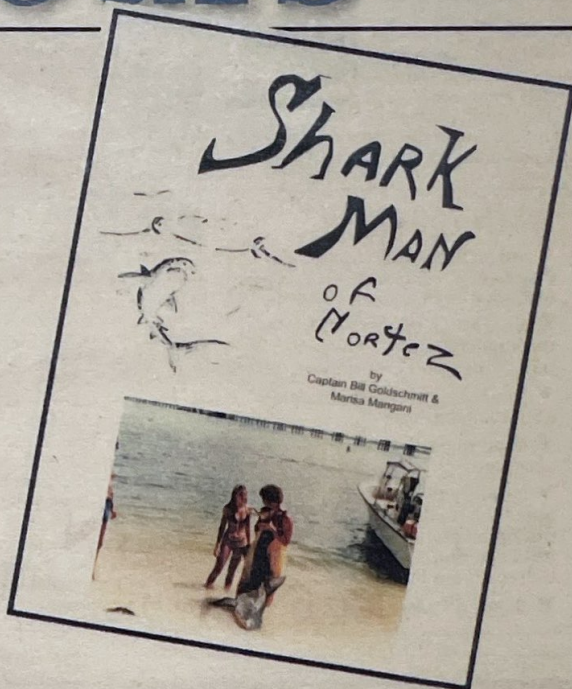
Lucky met with a very bloody death.

In spite of that tragic encounter at sea, Goldschmitt says he wanted to be a fisherman. He started out pulling crab traps, he says, learning what times of the year were best for blue crabs and stone crabs. He also gathered sand dollars to sell for 10 cents apiece.

"I would try to make money any way I could," he says.

Goldschmitt caught his first big shark – a hammerhead – off the groin at Beach Access 3 on Siesta Key. He later brought sharks to world-renowned scientist Dr. Eugenie Clark and Bill Mote of Mote Marine, during the early days when the lab was located on the south end of Siesta. "I would bring sharks up on the deck and the scientists from the lab couldn't identify one shark from another," Goldschmitt says.

After many years of dealing with sharks, Goldschmitt had accumulated so much knowledge about them that he decided to write a book for fish-



The author of "Sharkman of Cortez" with his wife and co-author Marisa Mangani.

ermen.

During the time of the "Jaws" craze, he says, he almost got the book in print. His publisher, however, decided that Goldschmitt needed a co-author to help polish the story. The writer he found at that time, Goldschmitt says, "fashioned himself more a Hemingway" and preferred hanging out in bars to doing any writing or editing.

Ultimately, the book ended up on a shelf in Goldschmitt's closet, where one of his sons found it years later and said, "Dad, this is killer! Why don't you get this published?"

The renewed effort led him to Mangani. "I tried to pick her up," he says, but "she would have none of it."

When he told her he was looking for a writer, they began a professional collaboration. He brought her his manuscript and "within a week's time she was hooked on it."

She wasn't sure fishermen were his market, he adds. Mangani thought the focus should be on him. "So this is what this book is about," he says.

And though he struck out romantically with her at first, he proposed three months later and she accepted.

Skyhorse Publishing, an independent firm in New York City, is scheduled to release "Shark Man of Cortez" in March. In the meantime, Goldschmitt is doing a lot of the advance work himself. He is especially interested in getting out the word on Siesta Key.

"The first part of this book is all about this village," he says. "... The whole thing started here."

▼ For more information on Bill Goldschmitt, Marisa Mangani and the book, "Shark Man of Cortez," visit www.sharkmanofcortez.com.

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