

Tuesday, December 12, 1972

# sarasota Journal LOCAL

## Ocean Life Owners Have Unique Attraction In All Their Sharks

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Someone comes to buy tropical fish and leaves with a nurse shark.

"It has happened," said Bill Goldschmitt, one of the youthful owners of Ocean Life on Siesta Key. "The last man said he was going to put it in a bathtub in the backyard."

For \$14 you can take home a two year old, two foot long nurse shark that likes live pin fish, shrimp and minnows. He'll eat frozen fish by second choice. And your pet shark will conform to the dimensions of his tank instead of reaching his potential of 14 feet.

Goldschmitt, 22, his wife Cindy and partner Frank Pannaciulla, 24, are on a first name basis with some of their sharks. In fact he wouldn't part with George who will roll over on his back to have his belly scratched. Four of the nine sharks now in residence at Ocean Life are tame enough to be petted. The sharks aren't really part of the retail business although they stop most of the customers cold. The live sharks are in demand by museums, aquariums and research centers who use them in cancer studies.

"Back in Pittsburgh we had public aquariums. Down here there aren't any," Goldschmitt complained. That's one reason he keeps the sharks and such around for the public to look at up close.

Goldschmitt likes married life and skin diving and he came up with a way of turning his hobby into a livelihood with a wholesale business started more than two years ago. In May the three opened the retail place where seahorses, octopus and tropical fish are the biggest sellers but sharks and loggerhead turtles grab most of the attention.

Isobel, the loggerhead, is another old friend who comes up for a little neck scratching and finger nibbling. Since loggerheads are protected by law, Goldschmitt needed a special permit to keep a few. Earlier this year he was able to nurse along 16 newly hatched loggerheads, get them off to a good start and then turn them loose to propagate their kind.

Both Frank and Bill particularly enjoy collecting the marine life. They head for the Florida Keys with their diving equipment often and trap tropical fish among the rocks. They have come up with most of their baby nurse sharks barehanded in the area around Point of Rocks. They bag sharks up to 14 feet long from a 16-foot outboard. They head a mile or so offshore and drop a 1,000-foot line with about 22 hooks baited with live mullet or jack fish. They leave it overnight and come back the next morning to pull in about a half dozen sharks from which they take the useful parts, jaws, backbone and brains, the latter used in research.

The recent day when the morning fog failed to lift they managed to find one of the two floats on their shark line. A couple of very surprised tourists found the other float, along with attached tiger sharks.

"You should have seen their expressions. We came up right when they pulled the first shark boatside," recalled Goldschmitt.

Although he has a healthy respect for sharks and their eight rows of teeth he doesn't believe any sharks are man-eaters.

"Sharks are not dangerous to divers. Swimmers, maybe. To a shark, swimmers look like injured animals thrashing about and they are used to picking up the dead and dying," he said. "Sharks are dangerous when hooked or molested but I don't think they cruise the beaches looking for you or me. They are just out there looking for fish."

He has found a menagerie of things in tiger shark's stomachs from a large flower pot to somebody's lunch still wrapped in foil. He claims that sharks have been known to swallow rocks for ballast.

One of the smaller marine animals in his tanks can

kill a large shark, according to Goldschmitt. The spiny burrfish, if swallowed by a shark, can puff itself up in the throat of a shark and suffocate it. In the same tank he has a scorpion fish, common to Sarasota Bay and "deadly as a rattlesnake."

Watchdog to the whole place is a loud-voiced spider monkey named Sammy who throws grapes and paper at Isobel, the turtle. Isobel almost got her chance when Sammy's cage was too close and his tail within the turtle's reach.

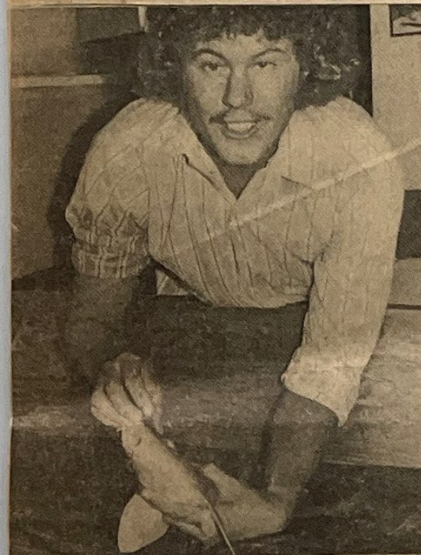
Cindy said that their home is almost as full of fish as the shop. In addition they have an English sheepshead and two parakeets.

"I don't mind. I love animals," she said. Her favorite at the shop is an eel named Stanley. "I talk baby talk to him all day. He's got personality."

Stanley was hiding behind a rock. It was those playful nurse sharks who were showing the personality.



Cindy Goldschmitt With 'Isobel'



Bill And George, The Nurse Shark

—Journal Staff Photos By Dorothy Stockbridge