



Sharkman's glory days

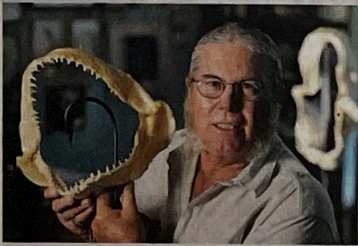
Catching and killing sharks used to make a man a macho hero. Times have changed. **Floridian, IE**

St. Petersburg Times



FEARLESS PREDATOR

That describes hammerheads, tigers and bulls, but also a crusty fisherman who hunted them for a living — and who says modern reality bites.



Bill Goldschmitt holds a set of jaws and one of the hooks he fished with during years of sea, drugs and commercial shark fishing chronicled in his book, *Sharkman of Cortez*. At top, Goldschmitt poses with the day's catch in an old photo.



More on Capt. Bill

To watch video of Capt. Bill Goldschmitt, go to tampabay.com/features.

SARASOTA

Bill Goldschmitt, who calls himself the Sharkman, might be the last of his kind. As a young man he hauled thrashing sharks to his boat, butchered them on the beach and was considered a macho hero by the gathering crowds. Then one day the world changed. The Sharkman was a pariah, a cold-blooded killer with a confused sense of manhood. Modern Florida happened. That's



JEFF KLIRNSBERG
Real Florida

how he sees it. Modern Floridians, brainwashed by bleeding-heart liberals, vegan schoolteachers and lily-livered scientists, developed a crush on gape-jawed animals with soulless black eyes and an appetite for human flesh. They thought sharks were cuddly toys that deserved protection from brutes like Goldschmitt. They put him out of business. • "The environmentalists look at a shark like it's Bambi!" he roars. "Bambi with teeth. These things kill. These things kill." • The only good shark? • Want to guess? • See SHARKMAN SE



Capt. Bill with a large tiger shark he caught off Longboat Pass in 1978, before all the federal and state rules protecting sharks. A fisherman is still allowed to catch certain species, just not enough, in Capt. Bill's opinion, to make a living at it.

» SHARKMAN continued from IE

Recounting the years of living dangerously

Old shark fishermen never die. They just get angrier and angrier as the world changes.

Capt. Bill, who is 59, vented some of his in a book. It is called *Sharkman of Cortez*. He and his third wife, Marisa Mangani, wrote and published it themselves. It's an R-rated tale of sea, drugs and lots of dead sharks. Some of it takes place in the little Manatee County fishing village of Cortez, where Capt. Bill sometimes sold his catch, but most of the story happens on the beaches, in the bars and in the waters off Sarasota.

Cortez may not book him for her show. Capt. Bill's conversation is saltier than a can of anchovies. If a movie were to be made of his life, Steven Spielberg would need to resurrect Robert Shaw and slap him around to make him mad enough to play Capt. Bill. Like Quint in *Jaws*, Capt. Bill enjoys a little misanthropy. He even wears a sweaty old ball cap and spectacular muttonchops à la Quint. The chip on his shoulder is actually a volcano about to blow.

Like Quint, Capt. Bill always tried to leave the bluegills and tommycods in the pond for the softies. He liked fishing for tiger sharks and bull sharks and a giant hammerhead known as "Old Hitler."

And now it's over. All kinds of federal and state regulations protecting sharks are on the books. Oh, legally a fisherman is allowed to catch certain species. Just not enough, in his opinion, to make a living at it. So he doesn't bother. When he wakes in the morning, he adjusts his ponytail, climbs into the Ford and drives to work hour.

"Don't let the hair fool you," he tells people. "I ain't no environmentalist fruiterake. I'm just a long-haired redneck."

These days he earns his paycheck mowing grass. He'd rather be on the water, tending his lines and hooks, waiting for the mysterious pull, thrilling to the tug of war between man and beast. He'd drag the monster toward the boat, play out line when it surged, then drag it ever closer. He'd curse — the f-word is more comfortable on his lips than a smile — while dispatching the monster with a shotgun blast to the head. Then maybe he'd haul it to a beach full of tourists, or the chamber of commerce office, or to the nearest college-boy marine biologist who says there are no sharks around anymore.

Capt. Bill is a throwback to a time when every coastal community in the country had someone who was praised for removing man-eating sharks from the sea.

In Long Island it was Frank Mundus, the model for Quint, famed for killing great whites. In South Florida, Herb Goodman got more press than the governor for his shark-slaying exploits. In Manatee County, Frank Cavendish enjoyed drinking Manhattans, joshing tourists and catching enormous sharks from the old pier at Anna Maria. An eccentric named Ron Swint, afraid he would be dragged into Tampa Bay, tied himself to the Sunshine Skyway bridge when angling for Old Hitler, the biggest and baddest hammerhead everybody and nobody had ever seen.

Frank Mundus? Dead. Herb Goodman? Rest in peace. Frank Cavendish? You missed the funeral. Ron Swint? Gone but not forgotten.

Capt. Bill is still around. So is Old Hitler, if you believe the legends. "I had him once," Capt. Bill says. But everything went wrong, as they do in the good fishing stories. Old Hitler was just too big — at least 18 feet long. The



MAURICE RIVENBARK | Times
Sharkman of Cortez, written by Bill Goldschmitt and his wife, recalls the high life in the village of Cortez and in and off Sarasota.

Bill Goldschmitt will sign copies of *Sharkman of Cortez* at 3 p.m. Saturday at Haslam's Bookstore, 2025 Central Ave., St. Petersburg.

wind roared and lightning flashed. Capt. Bill howled at the elements. The hook straightened. Old Hitler sank below the waves.

Capt. Bill was born in Pittsburgh. He fell in love with sharks during a family vacation, when he visited Miami's most famous tourist attraction, the Seagrarium. When he turned 16, he dropped out of high school and fled to southwest Florida to catch sharks.

He caught crabs, mullet and tropical fish. He caught a sexually transmitted disease. It was a bad day when he had to confess this to his new girlfriend, already freaked out after watching a hammerhead shark kill Capt. Bill's German shepherd.

He caught sharks for the tanks at Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota and Marineland near St. Augustine. He sold shark meat on the docks of Cortez. He caught a 14-foot tiger shark. He caught hammerheads and bulls and browns and lemons and blacktips. He sold their teeth and jaws to underserving tourists.

The movie version of *Jaws* came out in 1975. There was a national shark-catching frenzy that lasted a decade, followed by the inevitable backlash against shark fishing. There were scientific studies suggesting that sharks were "overfished" and needed to be "conserved."

People who meet Capt. Bill are sometimes asked whether they are "close conservationists." Commercial fishermen like Capt. Bill believe there are no shark shortages and no reasons to conserve.

Coping with his rage, Capt. Bill drank too much, smoked pot and dropped acid. He got in fights, busted somebody's head with a baseball bat, got arrested. Wife No. 1 left him. He left Wife No. 2, the mother of his three kids.

He traded rock music for country. Decided he hated hippies and country clubbers who lacked callouses on their hands, intellectuals, homosexuals, marine biologists, government experts. He gave up commercial shark fishing. He met Marisa at a bar in Cortez. Somehow they clicked. They have been married four years. She is a successful designer of commercial kitchens in Sarasota. They live in her beautiful house. They spent their

honeymoon in the Keys, where she caught a 4-foot blacktip shark, which now hangs from the living room wall looking a little puny.

The den serves as the trophy room. Jaws from giant tiger sharks hang among 70 or so photographs of Capt. Bill posing with sharks on the beach and in boats. Photo albums bursting with more pictures of sharks and shark jaws and admiring tourists are stacked on the floor.

If it hadn't been for the do-gooders and college boy biologists and government regulators, he'd be adding to his trophy collection.

"It's depressing when it's so obvious that there are plenty of sharks left and nobody will listen to you."

He's wrong. People listen. They just don't trust the evidence offered by Capt. Bill and some other commercial shark fishermen.

"The population of the two cornerstones of traditional commercial shark fishing have been down for a long time," says marine biologist George Burgess of the University of Florida. "Sandbar sharks are down 70 percent. The dusky is down 90 percent. Unfortunately, there are people who have a distorted view of reality based on the narrow breadth of their own observations in a small geographical area. But when you take in the thousands of observations and evidence from all of the world, it's a slam dunk. Not even close. Sharks are in trouble."

Capt. Bill keeps files on shark attacks. When somebody is bitten, he says, "I told you this would happen."

There are too many sharks out there. Bathers are appetizers.

"But the so-called experts are going to tell you otherwise."

In fact, the experts say the number of shark attacks generally fluctuate according to the number of swimmers in the water. That's why Florida and not Australia or South Africa, with their healthy population of great whites, leads the world in shark attacks. Thirty-eight Floridians were attacked in 2001, which *Time* magazine called "Summer of the Shark." Nobody died, but there were a number of bad ones, including the attack on 8-year-old Jessie Arbogast, who lost his arm to a bull shark in the Panhandle.

In 2010 there have been three Florida attacks, including one fatality when a windsurfer died from blood loss in east-central Florida. Biologists blamed a bull shark.

Capt. Bill doesn't swim in the gulf. He says too many hungry sharks swim along the shore. Besides, he'd rather catch them.

On the next full moon, visit Bean Point, in Manatee County, at the tip of Anna Maria Island. In the moonlight you might see the silhouette of a pony-tailed man on the beach. You may see his fishing rods stuck in the sand. Talk to him and he'll bend your ear and curse like what's-his-name on the *Jaws* movie. While he talks, his eyes will always be on his fishing rods.

He won't be fishing commercially, of course. He will be fishing for fun, for blacktip sharks, still a legal species. He will be fishing for tomorrow night's dinner. He will be fishing, perhaps, for a kind of revenge.

If something swims off with his bait he will know what to do.

Jeff Klirnsberg can be reached at klirnk@spain.com or (727) 893-8727.