

Jennifer Stock: You're listening to Ocean Currents, a podcast brought to you by NOAA's Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary. This radio program was originally broadcast on KWMR in Point Reyes Station, California. Thanks for listening!

(Musical Intro)

Jennifer Stock: Welcome to another addition of Ocean Currents, I'm your host, Jennifer Stock, and I bring this show to you the first Monday of every month on KWMR, a show where we dive into the blue part of our planet, the ocean. And on this show we talk with scientists, educators, explorers, policy makers, ocean enthusiasts, all uncovering the mysterious and vital part of our planet, the blue ocean.

I bring this show to you monthly on KWMR from Cordell Bank's National Marine Sanctuary, one of four national marine sanctuaries in California, all working to protect unique and biologically diverse ecosystems. Ocean Currents is the first Monday of every month, from 1-2.

I am thrilled to be here today, it's still Sharktober in California, and white sharks are around. We often talk about how lucky we are here in California, to enjoy the many benefits of living around incredibly productive marine ecosystem. From the microscopic phytoplankton, to the gelatinous wonders that wash up on our beach, a wide diversity of invertebrates, algae, seabirds and mammals, this region thrives in all dimensions. But like every ecosystem, there are predators, and our top predator, besides us humans, the white shark is present in the ecosystem this time of year. Sometimes, humans venture into their ocean world, and sometimes mistakes happen, and our guest today had a very up-close and personal interaction with a white shark.

Whenever I play the game, Two Truths and a Lie, I can usually stump folks on the bit about being bit by a shark, indeed I was, but it was a little horn shark, only eight inches long, a very small and harmless shark. While my guest today could win with the same truth, in his history he survived a much more serious bite.

Jonathan Kathrein is a survivor of a shark attack at Stinson Beach. But it hasn't polarized his character, he's known as a leader, a public speaker, a father, son, brother, educator, and ocean lover,

but still, he has an experience that very few have had, he's been bitten by a white shark. It had a huge influence on Jonathan's trajectory, and he's written book, spoken publicly, and done outreach about the importance of sharks in the ocean ecosystem, and created the non-profit, Future Leaders for Peace, to influence children on peaceful communication and goal setting, and he is a graduate of UC Berkeley.

So Jonathan, I'd love to welcome you to KWMR, you're live on the air.

Jonathan Kathrein: Good morning, Jennifer, thank you.

Jennifer Stock: You've probably told this story a million times, but can you take us back to 1998? Talk about the day that really changed your life, what happened when you were out at the beach?

Jonathan Kathrein: Well I think this story is especially relevant for the listeners of KWMR, I grew up in San Rafael, California, out in Lucas Valley, and I moved from Chisago when I was six with my family. So, thought I grew up in Marin county, my family did not have a lot of past experience with the Marin county coastline, with the California coastline, and we were pretty unaware of the presence of sharks, and we were definitely unaware of the presence of sharks during this time of year; August, September, October...just the fall really, when sharks come closer to shore.

So I was sixteen and about to be a junior in high school. The day before school started, I was trying to rally a group of friends together to go out to Stinson beach to go out and boogie board. I hadn't really learned how to surf yet, and I wanted to, and I was started into boogie board. I was sixteen, so I had my driver's license, and had the freedom to get away from my parents, and go explore a bit on my own. Poking around I found that most of my friends had school, it was the day before my junior year started, so kind of foreshadowing this I got the sense that the beach was going to be pretty empty. Um, the weather wasn't great, it was a little overcast. But I did finally find a friend who went to Saint Ignatius with me, I commuted from San Rafael to San Francisco for High School, and we decided we'd meet and go out to the beach, and I had a boogie board and a wet suit, he didn't have a wet suit, so we stopped along the way and tried to rent a wet suit, and he wasn't

able to rent one, he wasn't old enough, and quite frankly without a credit card or something he wasn't able to rent a wet suit.

So we got to Stinson in the late morning, with me prepared to go, and he had his boogie board, but we knew he'd be pretty cold pretty quickly. So we got in the water, and it was pretty empty, and there weren't many people around. And it was overcast, and it was chilly, nothing like the week we've had this last week. And after being in the water for about half an hour, Shawn, my friend who was with me, told me that he was cold and he decided that he was going to get out. And that didn't seem at all strange, given the temperature, so he got out of the water, and I was just paddling along. The waves were small, I was happy with that at the time, they were quite small, and so there was a lot of time in between waves, to just sit and wait, and I was looking towards the beach. We were right at the main lifeguard tower because we had planned to meet friends in the area.

I was looking toward the beach, and I was paddling south, so the beach was to my left, and with my right hand I hit something, and with no warning I hit something that was very solid, and it felt like a pile of sand in the water, it had the same feeling as if you stuck your hand into about a foot of water and just touch the bottom, it was solid with a little bit of a funny softness to it, but rough and sandy feeling.

And it confused me, for a second I had to think, "Is this a seal, or a sea lion, or something?" But I knew it was too deep to the bottom. I didn't see a fin, or any ripple or movement in the water. And I decided it wasn't any of the things I was thinking, it wasn't a jellyfish, and I better get out of the water.

My instincts sort of heightened. I got the sense after a few seconds that this was not something I wanted to encounter, and I started paddling hard. The lifeguard told me later that I was yelling for help before I'd even been hit. But within a few seconds a 12-foot great white shark came up on my right side.

So now I'm going in towards the beach, and it's coming again from my right side, from the south. And it ploughed into my right leg. When I say ploughed it really hit hard, it was probably going at least 25 miles an hour, is what most scientists would say.

Jennifer Stock: Wow. That's fast.

Jonathan Kathrein: It bit on, and it was kind of like being hit by a car, and it held on. It shook me, it shook my entire body, it was as much of a whiplash as anything...but I could feel the teeth bite into my leg. In one bite, it bit from my knee up to my hip, and held on, and swam with me under water.

I was comfortable enough under water, I wasn't worried about running out of water, I hadn't been under the water that long, just a few seconds, when I was trying to determine very quickly what to do. I knew that fighting this thing was not going to be successful, there was just no chance I could fight this big thing off of me, so I decided I would just hold on and try and just minimize the damage it was doing. And I tried to put my arms around the sort of stomach of the shark, my right leg is in its mouth, my hip is probably about where its eye is, and my body is dragging towards the tail. And I tried to get my arms around the stomach of the shark, just to hold on...but I couldn't get around enough to hold on.

So I opened my eyes, and I could see these big gill slits right in front of me, and when I saw the gills, I grabbed on like handle-bars, and as soon as I did that the shark let go.

I came up to the surface, grabbed my boogie board, and paddled into shore.

Jennifer Stock: Wow.

Jonathan Kathrein: And from there there was the medical rescue, which was 23 minutes of me laying on the beach, waiting for a helicopter, which really surprised me that it was that long of a response. The paramedics and lifeguards were amazing. I mean everyone showed up. They called a helicopter immediately. The response was really incredible, but it's still... 23 minutes, just laying on the beach until the helicopter gets there. Putting compression on it. Making sure basically that I don't go unconscious, and I didn't until the lifeguards loaded me up onto the helicopter, 400 stitches later and a week in the hospital and I was out...and starting the long, long life long recovery.

I'd say at 4-600 hundred stitches, I stopped counting after 100.

Jennifer Stock: Oh, God. This has been fifteen years and it sounds like you can recall the details like it was yesterday, and I imagine it's not a memory that easily fades. Are there piece of the time that you've forgotten, or is it just vivid in your mind and you can replay it every day?

Jonathan Kathrein: No, I think I've forgotten a lot of it. Like you said, after fifteen years, there are definitely bits that fade sort of the big broad strokes of the story will always be with me, and there are moments like hitting the shark.

The moment I hit the shark, I have a response to hitting anything in the water, even today. And I still swim, and I surf. Um, I'm in the water a lot, and if I hit something in the water it automatically triggers something in me, even if it's something completely normal. Even just a little stick.

So there are things like that that will always stick with me, but for the most part the story has sort of faded over time, and I try hard not to change the story, but it easily could change, because it is more recalling the story at this point, then all the memories.

Jennifer Stock: Wow, well we're really lucky to have you still with us, because I know you've really taken this experience and really done some incredible things in terms of really becoming and advocate for shark conservation, as well as becoming an advocate for children, and learning skills for adapting to their adult lives as their education goes on. How did this opportunity really transform your life, and when did you realize that?

Jonathan Kathrein: I think it was pretty obvious immediately, that it was changing my life forever. And I saw that because I had hardly regained my consciousness after surgery when my dad came into the hospital room and said, "There's a television crew outside waiting to interview you." And I thought, "Oh, that's interesting." I was an unknown, quiet, High School kid yesterday, and here's someone to interview me.

And for a period of time I thought that wouldn't last, and I really tried hard to make a positive impact, as much as I could, and as quickly as I could, sharing my story and sharing my perspective on it, which I imagine we'll get into in a minute.

It occurred to me quite quickly that this was going to be a life-changing event and I mean, it has, even if I don't bring it up. With most people it comes up as part of my life. I have a two year old, almost three year old now, and a little baby at home, and my two year old, probably about the time she turned one, one and a half, and was able to talk, she tried to ask what this big mark was on my leg. You know, I was wearing shorts, or changing. And so it's something I really can't escape, even from someone who knows nothing about sharks, she sees the bite on my leg and she knows it's a pretty big deal,

Jennifer Stock: Wow.

Jonathan Kathrein: It's pretty impactful in my life.

Jennifer Stock: Well, we're going to take a quick break in a couple of minutes to help KWMR with some pitching, but before we take that break, how and when through this recovery program, which was physical, as well as I'm sure, extremely emotional, when did you start getting really engaged in terms of the importance of sharks in the ocean? It sounds like coming from Chicago the California ecosystem was quite new to you. Maybe at the time you didn't have quite the awareness that you do now, but when did you get engaged with sharks and the whole role of the fact that they're actually quite threatened in the ocean, and that you were quite the mistake?

Jonathan Kathrein: I realized pretty quickly that I was in the sharks home, and that it's very much like someone coming into your house. Um, I was in the sharks home, and I was sharing its space, and I knew that right away, and so I always had the sense that it hadn't come after me, except that maybe I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, I think there is a lot deeper explanation to why it attacked and I think it probably has most simply to do with just the shark exploring its environment, and curious what I was. But I had the sense right away that I was not going to be going after sharks, and that I'd much rather protect them.

There was an opportunity six months or so after my attack. Someone called me out of the blue, and he was the chairman of a group called Wild Aid, and they do a lot of conservation work, and his name is Greg Miller and he's done a lot of amazing work, and

been involved with the Google Foundation since. I am really lucky to get the change to know him.

But he called me out of the blue and he said, “We’re trying to raise awareness around shark protection, especially around shark finning.” Where they cut the fin off of a live shark, and then throw the live shark back in the water, and then use the fin for something like soup or different medicinal uses.” And he said, “No matter what we say to the public, they’re going to say, ‘what about that poor guy who’s been attacked by a great white shark? Is he going to favor protecting sharks?’ ” And he said, “Well do you favor protecting sharks?” And I said, “Yeah, I do.” And he said, “Well, then we need your help.” And that sort of formed my role in terms of ocean conservation. It’s been my total belief that the shark was not trying to eat me, or it would have, and that I’m in a unique position where I can share something that most other people haven’t experienced, which is just the confidence that sharks are in the ocean and they’re not after people. And that’s sort of been my role every since.

Jennifer Stock: Folks that are listening to the show today, my name is Jennifer Stock, this is Ocean Currents, and my guest on the phone is Jonathan Kathrein. He’s a number of things, he’s an author of a few books and we’ll talk about that on the second half of the show, he’s a survivor of a shark attack, here in Marin county, here in California, and has gone on to do some wonderful things. We’ll talk about that on the second half of our program.

(Musical interlude)

Jennifer Stock: This is Ocean Currents and I’m your host, Jennifer Stock, and on the phone with me still is Jonathan Kathrein. Jonathan, you’re live on the air again.

Jonathan Kathrein: Great, well thanks for having me back.

Jennifer Stock: Thank you so much for sticking with us. And can you tell me, am I pronouncing your name right?

Jonathan Kathrein: It’s “Kath-rein”

Jennifer Stock: Kathrein. OK. Thank you for the correction. You know one of the things that I think is so wonderful that you have done after this experience is write. You've written a couple books about the whole experience with sharks, and one of them is a kid's book. Can you tell us a little bit about these two books?

Jonathan Kathrein: Yeah, the first book I wrote is called, "Don't Fear The Shark." And it's funny because I never expected that I'd have my own children that I'd be reading the book to. And just this last weekend my daughter saw the book lying around the house, and she's seen it before, and I've read it to her before, but she saw it and said, "Daddy, I want you to read your book to me." (Both laugh) And it sort of shocked me that she knew that it was the book that I had written. And she's not quite three yet, and it just shows how much even a young kid can tune into something like this, and how valuable telling stories around something like this are. And she definitely could be swayed either way, if I tried to convince her that we should be going out and getting sharks she'd believe that, and if I tell her we need to protect sharks she'd believe that too. She often asks me why I was attacked by a shark, and my usual response is that it was an accident, and that everybody does things that are accidents, and I think that's a nice way of putting it.

Jennifer Stock: Yeah.

Jonathan Kathrein: But the book Don't Fear The Shark is basically the story of a shark, that much like a young child, and it was aimed at the elementary school age group. Much like a young child the shark starts out happy, I think one of the most fun parts of the book, and I've read the story at many schools, and I always ask what they notice about the shark on the cover, and it usually takes a few tries, and they're thinking more deeply about it...then one of them shouts out what they thought was a little too obvious, which is that the shark is smiling. And I say, "Well, do sharks normally smile?" And they say, "No." And I say, "Well we can't tell if sharks are normally smiling or not."

But the story goes on to explore what is generally a happy creature, and again, there is this close metaphor to kids, and humans, that is being intruded upon, and garbage is dumped in the water, and there's damage to the environment, and the world is getting to be sort of a cramped place with people hurting each other, and some of it's on purpose and some of it's on accident, and finally the

shark can't take it any more, and the shark turns and bites the ting that's closest to it, and in this case it was me. And then I examine the idea of, "Well, do we now hate the shark because the shark has bit a person? Or do we look for the reason why that shark bit somebody? Why would that shark do something that we consider to be wrong?" Do we continue this cycle of hate and go out hunting the sharks? Because many people said that to me after the attack, "Let's go hunt sharks, or let's go attack sharks." Well that does a whole lot of destruction to the environment, and probably doesn't catch the shark you were trying to catch in the beginning. But as an alternative I wanted to learn more about sharks, and why sharks attack people, and maybe what we had been doing wrong, that maybe encouraged sharks or encroached on the territory of sharks, and thinking about other reasons for my attack. So the book has sort of a simple meaning and a deeper meaning. And it's gone real well with kids. You know, the younger ones just get the basic story and they like hearing about a shark, and the older ones get the deeper meaning.

Jennifer Stock: That's a fantastic book; I can't wait to check that out. That's a great message for children about how we have an impact on their (sharks) home, and it's something we can change. And the second book, it just came out last year, in 2012.

Jonathan Kathrein: That's the third one; the second one is my mom's memoir. Something about the shark attack is that it has an effect on everyone around me, it's not just me, it really had an effect on my family, on my community. When I came home from the hospital, our neighbors had put a big banner on our house welcoming me home, and sort of celebrating my survival. So the second one focuses more on that, and it's called, "Far From Shore, a Mothers Memoire of a Shark Attack." The third one though is called, "Surviving The Shark." And that's the one you're referring to

Jennifer Stock: Mm-hmm, I bet that was quite process for your mom to write all of that. I can't imagine, just as mom myself, that must have been an incredible journey for her.

Jonathan Kathrein: Yeah, I think it was a very healing process for her, and it started just as a journal entry, where she was just reflecting and writing down things that she knew, as you asked me earlier, "Do I

remember all the details.” We kind of knew right off the bat that we weren’t going to remember everything in a few years.

And so it started as her journal and it sort of expanded into a story for our friends and family just to remember what happened, and then we realized that people were interested in the story, and so she published far from shore.

Jennifer Stock: Jonathan, how do you think your life would be different today if this had never happened?

Jonathan Kathrein: (Laughs) That’s hard to say. So many things that I’ve done since (then) have had an environmental twist to them, if not environmental, than definitely a community twist.

I really realize in the attack, from the shark experience, just how fragile life is, and that was what caused me to start the non-profit, Future leaders for peace, that’s now called the E3, and operates mostly in inner city type schools throughout the bay area. And I realized how fragile life is, and that we should really make the most out of it every day. And a lot of that comes back to building relationships with people. And proving that those relationships are a major part of our lives.

Jennifer Stock: Do you think you would still have gotten to those goals if you had not had an experience that really made you closely examine them?

Jonathan Kathrein: I think I would have gotten to them differently, I mean they are values I grew up with. Just the importance of family and friends, it’s the same sorts of things I learned in school, but I don’t think I would have gone out to help others learn those values, and I don’t think they’d be such a central part of my life. Just the realization of how my life is so fragile really changed the way that I handled relationships and, and really didn’t want to waste a day. And then of course the secondary aspect is the environmental protection, and as we talked about a little bit before the break, I really see this fortunate position I’ve been put in, but also a position with a lot of responsibility, I can speak about a shark attack, and not many people can. There aren’t many shark attacks a year along the California coast, there’s usually not more than one or two, if that, and most of those people who are attacked survive. But many of the survivors aren’t that interested in talking about the story, and I sort of found this void, where people weren’t hearing from the

shark attack survivors, and the general thought was that tons of people were attacked by sharks.

Jennifer Stock: Right.

Jonathan Kathrein: People often think that there are many, and that the people are killed, which is not the case. So, I sort of found this responsibility to share this information that people generally just didn't have.

Jennifer Stock: Tell us a little bit about your non-profit, E3, Future Leaders for Peace.

Jonathan Kathrein: Well it really started, again, with the idea that you should treat others with kindness and respect, and so I started examining that, and I started going to schools and found that whether rich or poor, everyone is struggling with this pressure and it's the same pressure I write about in my book *Don't Fear The Shark*, the children's book, is that we're filled with stress and we're overwhelmed, and we have so many pressures on us that we don't know what to do and often we lash out against people that we don't have any reason to be angry at, they just happen to be the ones who cross us at the moment when we aren't able to tolerate our stress any longer. And so we often, in society, see this anger towards others, that's not really directed at someone, it's just sort of outward anger. And so I've spent a lot of time working with kids, primarily on thinking through this anger and this stress. And it is something I struggle with every day, I mean having responsibilities, and having a family, there's a lot of pressure, and I have to remind myself that I need to take some time for myself.

A friend and mentor of mine said that we are like a balloon that gets filled and filled with stress, and that if we don't put a little safety valve in that balloon and let that stress leak out, that it pops and it explodes and usually it does damage to somebody. And then it continues as sort of a cycle or a process. So I find myself almost requiring myself to get out and do certain activities like hike surf, run, I've started doing stand up paddling in the bay.

Jennifer Stock: How do kids react to that, because it seems like kids, their stresses are different than adult stresses. So, do you have an example of a child or a student that really took this work and did good with it?

Jonathan Kathrein: You usually see it in smaller ways, I think that having, we've started with bringing young people, high school and college, I'm on the board now and when I was running the program I was bringing mostly UC Berkeley students, that's where I went to school, and so I was bringing UC Berkeley students to different school to work with the kids, and mentor the kids. And there's this nice opportunity for kids to share the stress with somebody they don't know, that's not judging them or involved in the cause of the stress, and really it's small things more than an particular big one.

You often find comfort in sharing when speaking with someone who you don't feel like is judging you, or maybe not actively involved in your life. I mean, it's sort of the basic idea of any therapy, and definitely what played a huge role in my life after my shark attack was just talking to people about it. And so that more than anything, is the opportunity that we've provided kids. And then finding an outlet, so we do a lot of creative storytelling, and digital storytelling now, and we've just encouraged kids generally to do those things. I mean I give the examples in my life, and generally to do those things in life that they love that maybe get lost or buried either because they're embarrassed, or because they don't think that they're as important as they actually are.

Jennifer Stock: It's wonderful that you've created an outlet for these students to process these ideas and help work through the stresses of life; it's a really important skill to learn at those ages.

I wanted to ask you one last question based on your books, based on your experiences, and based on the fact that you're still an ocean lover, and you have kids and they're going to want to use the ocean and play too. What will you tell them for water safety, and what recommendations do you have for folks that want to play I the ocean, like surfing, boogie boarding, stuff like that, but knowing that there are potential predators?

Jonathan Kathrein: Well this is a daily issue for us. I take my daughter out to the ocean as much as I can, primarily with her it's into the bay, and primarily its stand up paddling. I think we went twice this last weekend. When the weather is nice, and now she's not even three, and the biggest thing with her is the water safety, around drowning. I am much more concerned about her finding herself in the water and not knowing how to swim than I am about her being attacked by a shark, I mean those things are so remotely, completely drastically

different. I mean the chance of her ever needing to worry about being attacked by a shark is just absolutely remotely tiny. So I talk to her about just never go into the water without telling me, never go into the water with her life jacket on.

But when we go paddling in the bay, we see small sharks, we see four foot sharks swimming along the bottom, mostly along the bottom, people in the bay often don't know that it's so shallow it's just a few feet, and there's a lot of marine life in the bay and none of it bothers you. We see sea lions, and I truly believe that my experience with the great white shark was a rare experience, they don't want to eat people, if they wanted to eat people go to Bolinas, Stinson, or Ocean Beach and Cronkite any nice weekend day and it would be the easiest snack a shark could find and we are not nearly as strong and aggressive a swimmer as a seal or a sea lion would be. So, I really think that my experience was that I hit something that was swimming next to me, and it was curious what I was, and I tell her that. I think that she tries to process that, she says, "Daddy, I don't want you to be attacked by another shark." I just have to talk to her about how it was an accident, and it's unlikely to happen again.

Jennifer Stock: Right.

Jonathan Kathrein: But when you are in the water, have somebody around, don't go by yourself, if you are by yourself, make sure someone knows where you are. I do know other people who have been attacked and often what saves them is that someone was on the beach passing by, or somebody knows where they are. But most people survive shark attacks, they're really not out to get us.

Jennifer Stock: Jonathan, thank you so much for sharing your stories today, is there a website people can tune in to see what you're doing, and see the books that you have?

Jonathan Kathrein: Well there are a few places. If you Google my name, I've got a website, it's www.jonathankathrein.com, that mentions some of my speaking and my books. The books are available on Amazon, Surviving The Shark being the most recent, Far From Shore is my moms, and Don't Fear The Shark is the kid's book. Most of the bookstores in Marin carry one or the other, so it's pretty easy to find.

Jennifer Stock: And that's K-A-T-H-R-E-I-N.

Jonathan Kathrein: That's right, and that's Stinson Beach, and my shark attack was in 1998, so if you have any interest you can find quite a bit online about it.

Jennifer Stock: Jonathan, thanks again for tuning in today with us on Ocean Currents and for KWMR, and I really appreciate you telling your stories and putting a positive spin on a situation for everybody.

Jonathan Kathrein: Thank you, thanks so much for having me.

Jennifer Stock: All right, take care.

Jonathan Kathrein: Bye.

(Interlude music)

Jennifer Stock: Ocean Currents, we are the first Monday of every month, and you can hear all the past episodes online at www.cordellbank.noaa.gov as well as through a podcast in iTunes. And I love hearing from listeners, so if you have a chance and want share what you think of the show or share ideas for future topics, please do email me, Jennifer.stock@noaa.gov and I'd love to hear from my listeners!

(Musical outro)

Jennifer Stock: Thanks for listening to Ocean Currents. This show is brought to you by NOAA's Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary, on West Marin community radio, KWMR. Views expressed by guests you can go to www.cordellbank.noaa.gov to get all the past episodes on this program may or may not be that of the national Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and are meant to be educational in nature. To learn more about Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary go to www.cordellbank.noaa.gov