

Mean Girls, then there's Mean Sharks.

(it's a pun, you should laugh, they say it's good for your heart)

By: Payton Marshall

In my world, sharks are like girls. Both are shackled by unfortunate mythologies. I should know. I am a girl who loves sharks.

Sharks are thought to be big animals with sharp teeth. Sharks are thought to be dangerous, mistrustful. Sharks, they say, are man eaters.

It doesn't help that movies and news makes them seem dangerous, even blood thirsty. Movies like *Jaws* and *The Meg* created a label for sharks that misrepresents how important sharks are for marine ecosystems.

Girls, likewise, have to swim in an ocean of stereotypes. For girls, it's the fact that men think they are some kind of "dominant species." yet they say we are dangerous creatures. Kings always seem to rule over queens. At the same time, girls are sometimes told that we can't do certain things, like being as good as men when it comes to sports. Meanwhile, we are over here like "Hey, we can do stuff too, ya know!"

It's like people want to keep us swimming in our own little seas. Also because of these stupid things called stereotypes, that, surprise surprise, I HATE.

You know what makes me mad? The US women's national soccer team actually had to fight to get paid at least a little more, yet the pay still isn't equal. With their recent win, they are currently the best soccer team in the world, with back to back World Cup titles and the best forwards in women's soccer history, its *dolphinitely* not fair. (Sorry for the pun, I did do it on *porpoise*).

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When I was in kindergarten, I was told by a group of boys that I couldn't play soccer with my class because I was a girl. So what if I'm a girl? That doesn't mean I can't play sports, right? Those stupid boys. Then a few years later, those same boys were playing basketball. Me and my friend wanted to play but, of

course, we were girls, and they were boys, so they thought they were on the NBA's level.

One boy, let's call him Lil' Billy, leaned his head over to his friend and pretend whispered, "Should we *let* the girls play?"

They picked us last, assuming we were bad because we were girls.

We were the only ones without people trying to block us, so we shot the ball, over and over again. We kept on making it.

"Oh, you are just... lucky," the boys said.

And, wouldn't you know it, we won. We weren't weak or whiny or terrible at physical activities. We were sharks on a court that day. And every day after that.

Here are five misconceptions about sharks:

#1: Most shark attacks come as a form of self-defense or to protect their territory. Shark attacks are actually uncommon. But if there is a shark attack, was this person wearing a wetsuit? Wetsuits look a lot like seals to them.

#2: Once a female shark lays her eggs, there is no one to take care of them. She might even eat one or two of them.

#3: There are 440 species of sharks. With the most common being great white, mako, nurse, tiger, bull, and sand shark.

#4: The shark attacks of 1916 were NOT CAUSED by a Great White shark, as many people think. They were actually a Bull Shark, the only shark known to have the ability to thrive in freshwater.

#5: While shark encounters do happen, they are actually extremely rare despite the extensive media coverage they usually receive. In fact, your chances of being the victim of an unprovoked shark encounter are lower than your chances of being struck by lightning, injured in a hunting accident, or even attacked by a domestic dog. Even though the odds are in your favor, sharks are wild animals that must be respected when encountered. (Note I used the term "shark encounter" instead of "shark attack." That's because usually, the sharks aren't trying to hurt people, they are just curious.)

BONUS FACT: Female sharks can reproduce without the need of a male. Hear that men? We are growing more independent by the minute!

Five things to know about girls:

- 1) Girls have to take self-defense classes so we can put up with disrespectful men and boys who don't know boundaries.
- 2) We do not eat our young, but we are raised by strong, independent mothers who raise strong, independent daughters.
- 3) (Metaphorically) We are put in our own little box, with walls keeping us from doing certain things. We are told not to do stuff because we are girls.
- 4) We carry pepper spray because men can be abusive towards women.
- 5) WE WERE NOT MADE FOR MAGAZINE COVERS. We are humans, and therefore we have a brain, not just a body.

Bonus fact: The shark 'Deep Blue', with a length of over 20 feet was recently seen in Hawaii. One of the videographers held on to her pectoral fin and swam with Deep Blue, without her caring.

Girls, also have inner sharks; we are strong, intuitive and can survive. If there's one person that has an inner shark, it's my little sister. She has aggressiveness, sassiness, and boy does she have a bite! But most of the time, all she wants to do is have a good time. As long as we respect her and her space, you have at least a 99.99% chance of getting out alive.

A few weeks ago, my family and I went ghost crabbing and there were some teenagers, about 16 or 17 and they were night fishing, when they caught a gray sand shark. We all went over to see what was going on. They were trying to get the hook out. One of them said, "I don't want to get bit by this thing, you do it" signaling to his friend.

"Na man. It's a shark." How stupid these people were.

I butted in, "Actually, sand sharks don't have teeth, look" we all peeked inside and sure enough I was right. They still struggled to get the hook out. "When I come back, that better be in the water or I'll be VERY VERY VERY mad at you," I yelled, pointing to the two of them.

I came back around eight minutes later to find the shark I named Doby, (pronounced like dough-bee) lying there in the sand.

"NOOOO! We need to get him back in the water!" I yelled.

I scooped him up and ran into the ocean.

"There you go, Doby."

I let him into the waves, he still wasn't moving. But fish and sharks can actually revive themselves, so hopefully he's still alive. I started crying, I felt bad for the shark. I later wrote on the beach:

The teens killed the sand shark will be found and yelled at. You know who you are. R.I.P. Doby.

That night, I officially decided I would become a fish and game warden. A fish and game warden has the responsibility of helping the wildlife in our ecosystems thrive. Sometimes it can be boring, like going around and checking for a hunting or fishing license. Sometimes it's exciting, like taking care of baby deer, or helping ducklings find their mom. Either way, I want revenge. Sharks are an important part of the ocean ecosystem. They help clean our oceans of dead matter like fish or whales. In fact, they are so important, that if you catch and kill a shark, you can pay a maximum fine of 5,000 dollars in some areas.

No one better tell me that I can do something because I'm a girl, either.

It takes a lot to change someone's mind or perspective. These experiences I've had changed my perspective so much that I went from wanting to become an astronaut to wanting only two things: gender equality; and for sharks, their ecosystem, and people to live in peace.

#girlsharks

Sources:

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About the author

Payton Marshall has a crazy family that is constantly doing something. Her dad is stranded on an island, surrounded by a sea of girls (his daughters!).

She lives with her mom, dad, two younger sisters, a dog named Pickles (female) and an Eastern Painted Turtle named Sunflower (also female). She is almost 13 years old and attends Swann Middle School. She loves to play soccer, and will never get over her love of animals. Her favorite food is sushi, and she has many friends, and is pretty goofy herself.

Payton's favorite pet is Sunflower, (shhhh, don't tell Pickles!). Her favorite color is teal and her favorite animals are manta rays, sharks, and sea turtles. When she is not writing, (which is most of the time) she gets lost in her thoughts, watches TV and will never ever stop doodling.

(Original art by Payton)

