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Raptor await

Orangeville woman attacked by shark in Mexico

Article

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Curtis Rush
Staff Reporters
Amy Dempsey

Witnesses described it as a scene from the movie *Jaws*.

A beach in Cancun, Mexico, packed with tourists, dozens of whom were frolicking in the ocean as others buzzed around on jet skis.

No one suspected danger lurking beneath the waves.

Nicole Ross, a nurse and mother of two from Orangeville, was among them.





The beach at Cancun Caribe Park Royal Grand where the shark attack occurred. It was deserted Tuesday.

COURTESY KELLY ROWAT

The 38-year-old slipped into the water after a game of beach volleyball and minutes later was caught in the jaws of a shark.

On Tuesday night, a friend who travelled to Cancun with Ross told the *Toronto Star* that Ross is awake in hospital, breathing without a ventilator and chatting with friends sitting at her bedside.

“Nicole is doing much, much better today. It’s absolutely amazing what can happen in 24 hours. She’s in high spirits,” said the friend, who refused to give her name because she says the group has been fending off the Mexican media since the attack.

The group is angry about early media reports out of Mexico that said Ross had lost her arm and leg in the attack. But they say the surgeons, hospital staff and everyone else they’ve been in contact with since the accident has been “excellent.”

Ross was travelling with a group of 10 friends who belong to the same fitness class in Orangeville. They were celebrating the 50th birthday of the class instructor.

Ross's father flew to Cancun and was with her in hospital Tuesday night. The family is asking for privacy.

The shark attack happened at about 11:30 a.m. on Monday. Ross had just finished playing beach volleyball with two friends, according to a witness, and then went in the water to cool off.

Suddenly, a shark was spotted in the shallow, waist-deep water, just outside the Caribe Park Royal Grand resort, where the victim was believed to be staying.

A loud whistle sounded and a lifeguard ordered everyone out of the water.

For Ross, it was too late.

A shark bit down on her left leg and when she tried to fight it off, it grabbed her by the left arm.

A lifeguard on a Jet Ski pulled her from the water and took her to shore.

Tourists on the beach at the time said there was a lot of blood in the water.

"I was in the pool and suddenly I heard a scream," said Mara Busuttil, 48, of Asheville, N.C., who saw where the victim had been bitten in the thigh.

Busuttil said she saw security personnel running to assist the woman, but no paramedics arrived until 15 minutes passed, when a doctor with a medical bag attended to her.

Meanwhile, people were taking off their shirts to wrap the wounds while Ross was taken to hospital.

Friends travelling with Ross said she was conscious and giving instructions on how to dress her wounds.

A few minutes later, a piece of the victim's flesh was rescued from the water. Someone asked for ice to pack it in to take it to hospital for possible grafting, according to Busuttil.

Although Ross did not have her arm or leg amputated, Dr. Italo Sampablo, the medical director of Hospiten Cancún, said she lost "a large amount of blood" in the attack, which severed muscles, tendons and nerves to her lower leg, forearm and hand.

After a team of surgeons operated on her, she was transferred to the intensive care unit.



Authorities in Cancun are still searching for the shark, which escaped into open waters after the attack.

Shortly after Ross was pulled from the water, a witness said lifeguards on jet skis raced to try to corner the creature.

“Four lifeguards then jumped on their Sea-Doos and were trying to circle the shark or swarm him or her. It was six feet long and three feet wide. It was massive,” said Kelly Rowat, 44, of Moncton, N.B. who had just begun a week-long vacation with her daughter, Brooklyn, 15, two days earlier.

Guests say there were no shark warnings posted or discussed prior to the attack. Shark attacks are not common in Mexico.

There are reports the shark came close to shore to give birth, and the woman got too close.

The beach was red-flagged all day Tuesday, but not everyone avoided going into the water.

“Some people were still going in. But idiots are idiots,” Busuttill said.

With files from Linda Diebel

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