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How Do You Tell A Jellyfish You Aren't Interested?

My fears include: Small spaces, clowns, and very large bugs. The ocean has never been included in that list. I am not afraid of the vastness of water that surrounds the little landmasses we live on, and the host of creatures that swim in its dark depths. My sister, on the other hand, hates the ocean. She enjoys standing in the calf deep, tiny waves, but if I try to pull her deeper into water that reaches at least mid-thigh, she puts up a pretty big fight. It’s not water she is afraid of. She will swim in pools, and lakes, and rivers, just not the ocean. I feel as if I have to correct myself. She is not afraid of the ocean, per say, but what lives in the ocean is what scares her.

It’s not sharks. She is not afraid that a huge great white shark is going to clamp its jaws around her leg and drag her into the deep sea, what she is frightened of is a lot smaller. Jellyfish. The cute little jellyfish that wash up on the beach, but have tentacles that can sting someone so bad that they have to spend what was supposed to be an enjoyable beach day sitting in the sand holding their injured leg or arm or side while trying to not think about the pain. I find it funny that this is what she is afraid of, especially because I am not. It would not be funny, except for the fact that she was stung by a jellyfish once at age two, and I have been stung eight times, one time twice in one day. So it is comical that she is the one who refuses to swim in the ocean.

My dad likes to make jokes that jellyfish are just attracted to me. That something in my skin just makes them want to sting me. I find this funny except for right after I’ve been stung, and I’m not in the mood to be laughing at jokes about my pain. Still, I am not afraid to go in the ocean. I guess I think that I’ve been stung enough that one day I will just stop getting stung, but that has yet to happen.

One time, I vividly remember, I convinced my sister to cross the crashing point of the surf, and reach the water where we could just float over the rolling waves. She was still a little frightened, and any time something brushed past her leg, she would yell “WHAT WAS THAT,” and take a few steps back towards the shore and the safe sand. Each time, I would tell her it was nothing and probably just seaweed or a cute little fish.

My sister and I were having a conversation about the pain that comes with jellyfish stings and I was telling her about how it’s not always too painful when you get stung when it happened. Something skimmed my calf, accompanied by the sharp twinge of thousands of tiny barbed stingers injecting me with their venom. I was stung, by a jellyfish, in the middle of a conversation with my sister, who is terribly afraid of jellyfish, about the pain that comes with a jellyfish sting. I would have laughed when it happened, but I had searing pain crawling up my left leg that I was slightly preoccupied with. To add more insult to injury, I was stung on my left leg, while my sister and I were staring out at the ocean, with her standing on my left. For this jellyfish to have stung me, it had to swim all the way around my sister to get to me. I always thought my dad was joking when he said that jellyfish are attracted to me, but I guess what more evidence of the truth of his statement could I get then that?

I yelled when it stung me, and proceeded to hightail it out of the ocean with my sister following close behind. She yelled to me, “What?! What happened?!”

“I JUST GOT STUNG,” I yelled back to her, as I tried to make my way through the surf.

“Are you joking? Gwen, this isn’t funny,” was her reply. But no, I was not joking, and as I continued to tear through the water and onto the jellyfish-free beach, she flew like a bat out of hell to right next to me. I sat down and rubbed sand on my leg, in an attempt to make the pain die down. At this point, I believe my sister was more scared than I was, even though the jellyfish made a direct attack on me, and totally ignored her. Even after this, she is still more scared of the ocean then I am.

I do not know what I did to deserve so many jellyfish stings, but I hope this streak has ended, and the next time I go into the water I will make it out without being in severe pain. I apologize to whichever jellyfish I hurt to make the entire species hate me, please forgive me and maybe not sting me with your tentacles the next time I go into the ocean. Besides, if the sting does not kill me, the joke my dad makes every time I get stung about jellyfish being attracted to me definitely will.