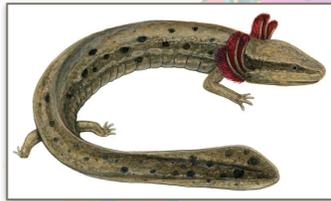


Evolving Can Give You the Shivers

Why are we here? That is the big question, is it not? I've been told by a wise friend that we are here to learn. In other words, life's journey is meant to be one long lesson, where hopefully, we *evolve* over the course of that journey. This story is about looking back in hindsight, reflecting, awakening, and evolving.

My parents took us deep sea fishing off the coast of Miami in 1982. Most people usually fish for typical trophy fish, like the world-famous swordfish, but we were on a quest for sharks! I was 12 years old, and the idea that we might catch one was something of a dream. I grew up on the river's edge, specifically the Thousand Islands River in Boisbriand (L'Île de Mai) and Two Mountains Qc. I spent my summers trolling the edges of the water, searching for and catching anything I could find. One of my most memorable finds was something called a "Mudpuppy" - a species of salamander. I'll never forget turning over an enormous flat rock and uncovering this *alien-looking* creature wiggling around in muddy waters. I captured it and ran into my home to show it to my mom, who always encouraged my curiosity. We had a series of wildlife encyclopedias, and we're able to find it in there to identify it. It was, for me, the most exciting thing I had ever experienced at the ripe old age of 7 years old. I loved the challenge of capturing fish, eels, crawfish, tadpoles, frogs, bullfrogs, snakes, and turtles. It was a hands-on learning experience.

Fast forward a few years, and here we are on our first trip to Florida, and I find myself in the back of a fishing boat with the biggest fishing pole and thickest gauge steel fishing

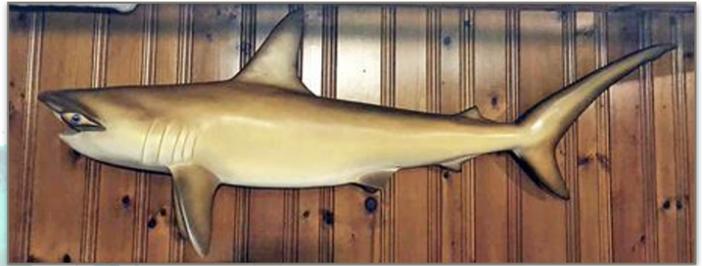


line I'd ever seen. The guides had chummed the waters and placed probably a dozen giant hooks in a piece of bait. Within about a half hour, I get a bite. I strap into the chair and begin an almost 45-minute battle to reel in what I'm hoping will be my biggest trophy ever. After using every ounce of strength and energy I had, it was finally there, right beside the boat. It was a hammerhead, glistening in a beautiful golden brown colour just under the water's surface. It was paralyzing to see it there, so close, yet still unobtainable. The fishing guides asked us, "Do you want to keep it?" You have to decide there and



then because either they cut the line and let it go, or they risk life and limb and begin the process of pulling it out of the water and into the boat. At the same time, my father was reeling in his larger shark, not a hammerhead, but a species known as the Zambezi. It is the "classic" shape of a shark whenever one thinks of them. 1 and 1/2 hours later, we found ourselves in the company of two sharks flopping around in the bottom of the boat as we made our way back to shore. One

year later, we had our mounted sharks delivered and proudly hung them up in our home.



The idea to write this article was actually spawned by my writing colleague, Kari's daughter Shameen who asked about my shark pendant over lunch at the St-Jean Baptiste luncheon. I told her the story of the hammerhead catch and, more importantly, why I was wearing a silver carving of a shark around my neck. I purchased it in support of oceanic preservation. Years later, after seeing the documentary "Sharkwater," I realized what a travesty it was to have pulled such a beautiful and important creature out of the ocean only to have it die and become a prize on my wall. As many of us now know, sharks are endangered. This is mostly due to overfishing for shark fin soup, where the animals are caught, their fins are cut off, and then they are thrown back into the ocean, still alive, only to sink to the bottom and drown. **It is barbaric.** Did you know that 100 million sharks are killed each year? That is an astounding figure. Sharks are apex predators and, as such, are responsible for keeping the equilibrium of the oceans in check. Without them, the oceans die. We die.

When I was 12, catching that shark was my biggest accomplishment. Today it is my biggest regret. If I could go back, I would not even have gotten into the boat, let alone go fishing for sport. But I was 12. I was completely unaware of everything I know now. So I cannot be too hard on myself. I was simply following my father's example. The same goes for deer hunting. Kari wrote a wonderful piece on the Island of Anticosti island where she mentions the White Tail Deer. I've been deer hunting, something I would never do again. I don't have anything against deer hunting; I just don't want to be a hunter anymore. I was never formally asked if I *wanted* to go hunting; it was just assumed I did, and that is where I take issue.

Today, when I think back to the hammerhead catch, it sometimes gives me shivers. Did you know that a group of sharks is known as a "Shiver of sharks"? What a clever name for this animal collective!

So, the point of this article is to call attention not just to sharks and how important their conservation is but, perhaps, more importantly, that we as humans *must continue to learn and evolve* if we stand a chance of saving this planet and ourselves. Before writing this column, I had one specific photo in mind that I hoped to include. However I discovered that it is missing from the album! It was me, holding my shark by its hammerhead; nose to tail, it was exactly as tall as I was.



SONG OF THE MONTH "If a Tree Falls" by Bruce Cockburn

https://bit.ly/shiver_of_sharks

Although it does not mention sharks, this song talks about climate change and the impact humans have on the environment.

Email me at: bionicman@beinginvisible.ca.