

MY LIFE

Water gives life...

And as far as I can remember, I've always loved the water
My younger sister and I loved to wade in the creek than ran close to our house
We played with the joyful abandon that only happens when you're young

Sometimes mom would let us play in the ditch while she worked on her garden
She'd tell us to be careful, for the water was deeper
I remember minnows swimming around our ankles and legs
And laughing while we tried to catch that big fish that had lingered into our waters

As we got older, we were allowed to swim in the river
At first we had our older siblings to protect us
Then it was just her and I

I felt proud when we were allowed to go out swimming alone
It meant that mom and dad thought we were mature, and they trusted me
It meant that I was capable of protecting my sister and myself

Through our teenage years, many summer days were spent at the river,
We spent countless hours swimming, tubing, and sunbathing
Sharing secrets about boys and talking about everything
It was a magical time and place for me

At sixteen, reality set in about the water that flowed through river
Two bodies were found in the river close to the outer boundaries of the ranch
At once my mind started racing with thoughts no young person should have
Were the "floaties" that had touched us when we swam the small branches off of trees.
Or were they fish... Or even worse... those dead people
The questions lingered in my mind and my magical waters began to lose their sparkle
I couldn't swim in the river anymore

As I turned eighteen I began to swim in the ocean waters called life
I looked back on my life experiences to get me through these waters
Had I learned enough from the creek, ditches, river, and pool to make it...
The ocean was salty and unknown, exciting yet scary.
It was a very confusing time

I knew that the ocean gave life to all types of animals
From the small, colorful clown fish to the large whales
I knew that docile manatees and deadly sharks lived in my ocean
But I did not personally know them

As I got brave and confident, I began to swim out into the waves
I enjoyed being tossed around gently in the small waves
As time passed, I found myself entering deeper waters and yet not being afraid
I was enjoying swimming in groups of different type of sea life

At times, through the clear water I could see colorful fish swimming around me
It brought back pleasant memories of the minnows in our ditch
Occasionally I'd see a great white shark and I'd swim for shallow waters
I'd think about the bodies in the river
But still stayed in the ocean waters
For the ocean had always remained clear for me

The water was always clear and safe for me because
I was young and naïve...
I was full of hope and goodness
I trusted freely and was honest and assumed everyone else was too
I was living in waters that could never turn murky...
Or shall I say, that's what I believed at the time

Living with those ignorant beliefs would cost me my spirit and youth
For a storm was heading in my direction.
The waters were turning murky in front of me and I was not aware
I was too busy swimming with dolphins to see that strange fish swimming among them
Then suddenly I was attacked by a great white

My body had been injured, my spirit shaken
What else could I feel but disbelief, guilt, shame, and disgust...
Towards myself.

It had been my responsibility to take care of myself
To be aware of the great white, to distinguish it from other sea life...
And I hadn't...
It was all my fault

I was spinning in the water, being tossed around, trying to forget the pain
When the great white attacked me
Again...

What was wrong with me...
Why couldn't I fight this shark or swim away...
Again it had been my responsibility to take of myself
And I hadn't

As I struggled to swim to safety, another great white found me
It touched me as it circled around me
I managed to keep this beast from physically hurting me
Yet my soul was tortured...
For I had to swim with it for twelve hours

Why did I have to be around the great whites...
I was confused and began to distrust myself and others
Perhaps all sharks are as dangerous and deadly as the great white
How was I to survive in this ocean that housed ugly and scary sharks

Then it came to me and was clear as day
Of course all sharks are bad and not a one can be trusted
I needed to learn new ways to survive among them

Becoming the aggressive little fish made me feel indestructible and mean
Constantly needing to prove to myself that I was safe as a bad-ass fish
I'd lure sharks into my waters being ever ready to hurt them before they hurt me again
Medicating myself helped the pain and made it easier to swim among the scum

I tired of living in dirty waters of the oceans
Always being wary of all sharks, from small to large, babies to old
And although my eyes were open, I could no longer see as well
I found myself endlessly bobbing around
So I left the ocean

I ended up on the shore staring at the water
I yearned to be in the blue waters of the ocean but was afraid
I saw the beautiful fish and wished I was swimming with them
My fear was now much more powerful than my ability to live in the ocean
I was no longer living...
I was just existing...
And I was miserable.

As I slowly walked around the shores, sadly I found others like me
I wasn't alone after all
It was a very disconcerting fact yet it helped me accept my plight,
Still I wished we could all swim again

We were a group, supporting one another
Each of us hating where we were, and wanting to be in the ocean
Occasionally others would yell at us from the waters inviting us to join them
Trying to explain and convince us that only predator shark was the great white
We'd talk and want to believe them but were scared
We no longer trusted anyone... including ourselves

I hated my existence, I couldn't do it any more
So I waded in to the waters where the others had beckoned me
I listened nervously to them and to myself as we talked
I so much wanted to be like them... alive again

It has been a slow and painful process
I have fought an internal battle with my fears
I am working to regain my confidence and trust in myself
I still want to be in those deep waters but struggle with my thoughts and fear of sharks

I can now wade in the very shallow waters but am very wary of any shark
I so much want to believe that all sharks are not the same
Some are gentle creatures and are not dangerous
Some days I can believe it and on others I cannot
In my heart and mind even the oldest sharks are menacing

I've been told that I will some day be able swim freely again
That I will be more certain of myself...
That I'll trust my ability to distinguish a great white from other types of shark
The thought makes me smile

Then they add that life has no guarantees
That I may one day be in the wrong place at the wrong time
At precisely the time when a great white wants to attack...
That is has nothing to do with me but with the predator great white
They say that I cannot be guaranteed that I will not be hurt again if I swim their ocean

So what the hell...
What am I to do...
Water gives life and without it I will perish
How long can I continue to wade in the very shallow waters
Before I begin to wither away

I wish I could go back to those carefree days of childhood where water was safe
And I knew I was protected
Where my thoughts did not overtake my life
When I could act sensibly without wondering...
Am I using emotional mind, reasonable mind or wise mind...
Is it a tiger or a kitten...
Yet I know I must use these skills if I am to succeed in living

When I think about the skills I have learned,
And about having to relearn how to trust and live again, I get angry
Those damned sharks ruined my life... they controlled me for so long
Now I have to learn how to regain control of my life
It is demeaning and frustrating
It is difficult to change your way of thinking
It is still imbedded in my mind are all sharks are predators...
Even when logic and life tell me that's not true

So what do I do...
How do I learn to relive a normal life...
Will I ever regain full control of my life...
Will I ever be able to swim in the deep ocean again...
I do not know

The only thing I know for certain is that I am going to have to try
Other wise I will die from living in very shallow waters.