

## Jellyfish conversations

Contributed by ITF Webmaster

Tuesday, July 6, 2010

Last Updated Tuesday, November 30, 2010

On the search for adventure and my shoes.

Every time I visit Florida, I lose my shoes. I don't know why this is, but it happens every time I go. On my first trip to the Seminole State — a high school spring break jaunt — I left a pair of tennis shoes under a bed in a hotel room. On my second stint — a brief layover before my brothers and I left for a cruise — I fell asleep in the airport and awoke to find my shoes stolen, although my laptop, wallet and video camera were untouched. I'm generally a pretty organized guy, yet when it comes to shoes and Florida, I seem to attain a nutty professor level of absent-mindedness. [1] Driven and Determined Thus, I was determined not to lose anything as I dipped down into Gator Nation for a third time. Twenty-eight states into my 48-state road trip, I was having a hard enough time not losing my mind. This was the part of the trip when the novelty of being on the road and doing something grand had subsided and was being replaced by acute boredom and a growing realization that 12,000 miles really is too far for one person to drive alone and retain their sanity. This, coupled by my recent near-breakup with my girlfriend [2] had me desperately searching for anything resembling an "adventure," just to fight the loneliness and keep me from throwing myself in front of oncoming traffic. I settled on Pensacola [3], and rolled into the sleepy town just after dusk. Finding no one around, I decided my "adventure" in Florida would be to sleep right there on the empty beach, something I'd never done before and a far superior alternative to dozing in my sweltering Taurus. Sand-Angels Are Useless Against Evil Jellyfish I slept soundly that night directly on the warm, bleach-white sand, contently dreaming that I'd finally picked the perfect "road trip" thing to do — that is, until I was awoken at 6 a.m. by a four-wheeler roaring by about three feet from my head. Of the many possible risks I assumed when I decided to sleep on a beach, I admit I hadn't anticipated this one. I climbed out of my panicked sand-angel and, adrenalized, figured I'd try to recover the morning with a calming dip in the ocean. I was promptly stung by a jellyfish. At least I think it was a jellyfish [4]. I don't have a particular phobia of malevolent ocean creatures, but there's something deeply disconcerting about something squishy squirming its way up around your inner thigh and then stabbing you. Especially when you're just bouncing innocently up and down in four feet of cloudy water. [5] Whatever it was, it hurt like crazy, and by the time I scrambled out of the water, a nice four-inch blotch had already appeared on the front of my pasty-white thigh. As I raced across the sand, the only things I could think of were a) whether or not jellyfish were poisonous, and b) if so, what was I going to do about it. For some reason the notion that jellyfish poison might be counteracted with urine kept tumbling through my mind, but I couldn't remember if this was for jellyfish or snakebites. [6] I jumped into the Taurus, sopping wet and swelling, and peeled out to find the nearest hospital. I was promptly pulled over by a cop. Of course. The officer took forever to saunter up to my window as I sat there, shirtless, wet and panicked. I should have been worried the cop would approach with his gun drawn, thinking he'd pulled over a half-drowned, naked meth addict. But mostly I was just worried that my leg was going to fall off. Children are our future. Do they know how to cure jellyfish stings? The tall cop leaned down, resting his elbows casually on my open window. "Kind of in a hurry there, aren't ya?" he drawled from under a bushy, brown moustache. Despite the fact that my quad was beginning to inflate like a pink balloon, I decided to argue that I hadn't been speeding. "Sorry, I thought the sign said 30, and I thought I was under. I have this rule about speeding. [7] Also, I've been stung by a jellyfish." The cop did not seem concerned. "It's a school zone, this time of the morning. Limit drops to 20. You didn't see the yellow sign?" "I'm sorry, I must have missed it," I said. My leg was throbbing, as if a small techno rave was forming inside it. "Listen, is there a hospital somewhere around?" "Also, fine, I've doubled in a school zone," the cop continued. "Lots of kids around." He glared at me, accusingly, as if I'd been trying to run kids down on purpose. "I'm sorry, I didn't see any kids. But seriously, is there a LOT of kids around?" the cop persisted, staring at me. "You always drive like that, when there's kids around?" I looked up at him, not sure what answer he was looking for. I wondered if he could smell the combination of fish and fear wafting up from the Taurus. "But I've been stung by a jellyfish! And isn't it summer?" "Summer school. Aren't as many kids as usual," he admitted. "But they're there, alright. Lemme look at your leg." Confounded, I showed him my leg, hesitant to mention that 6:30 a.m. seemed a bit early for summer school. The cop frowned, regarding my puffy limb for a moment. He popped his gum. "It's not too bad. I'll be back." Without another word, the cop went back to his car, and I was left in the Taurus, leg burning, salt beginning to soak into my now-dry skin. Another eternity went by as I waited for the officer to return, presumably with a vial of jellyfish antidote that every Pensacola cop carries in their car. Instead, he came back with a paper. "I'm giving you a warning," he said. "But if I catch you speeding through another school zone, I'm gonna drop the hammer on you." He handed me the paper. "Children are our future." I didn't know what to say. "Um... thanks?" I managed. "But honestly, do I need to go to a hospital, or something? Can you die of a jellyfish sting?" "I told you, it's not bad," said the cop, standing to his full height. "You may not even have been stung by a jellyfish." And he was gone. I started the Taurus and headed west. I called Craig, my cancer-curing doctor friend in St. Louis, and he assured me that no, I was not going to die of a jellyfish sting. [8] After an hour or so my leg stopped throbbing, and the swelling went away. As I entered Mobile and started looking for something interesting to do in Alabama, it occurred to me that I'd gotten my adventure in Florida after all. And, for a few hours at least, I hadn't been the least bit lonely. And that's when I realized I'd left my shoes on the beach, back in Pensacola. "The Jellyfish Cop" is an excerpt from "48 States in 48 Days," a book by

Paul Jury about a road trip he took to all 48 continental states once he graduated college and realized he had no plan.[1] Perhaps it has something to do with partying too much every time I visit Florida. Nah.[2] Who was not enthusiastic about my dodging her for eight weeks.[3] Why Pensacola seemed like a good place for adventure, I don't recall; I guess I'd recently seen the movie "Contact" and thought maybe I'd see Jodie Foster, or some aliens. [4] As a Minnesota boy, being stung by random crap in the ocean was not something I had a lot of experience with.[5] And it's not like I was even attacking their jellyfish nest! Though this vengeful thought would occur to me later.[6] And the idea of laying sideways on the Pensacola sand peeing on myself seemed oddly inappropriate, even for someone who'd just slept on a beach.[7] The rule was: I already had four of them on my record, and if I got one more, the Minnesota DMV had promised to tear up my license, something that seemed quite detrimental to a 48-state road trip. [8] Did I mention it felt like my leg was going to fall off?