

Jellyfish

Essays

Natasha Lockhart - www.softpaw.eu

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A trip to the beach usually brings visions of sand, sun, and a blissful vacation experience. Something about the waves crashing on the smooth beach creates a rather care-free environment, where the biggest concern is how high to make the sandcastle. Yet amid this tranquility lurks a silent danger. Not radiation, sharks, or chemical spills, but something far more common: jellyfish. These graceful creatures usually dwell in deeper waters, efficiently stinging their prey into paralysis, and absorbing the meat into their parachute-like bodies. However, incoming tides bring hundreds of these pests to shore, continuously stinging innocent tourists. While these stings aren't usually fatal, some people experience a reaction similar to anaphylactic shock and drown as a result of jellyfish stings.

I hadn't realized the danger presented by jellyfish until a recent beach vacation, where my sister, Jenn, received approximately 500 stings from a single jellyfish. She and I both were boogie-boarding, when a gentleman nearby informed us that his daughter had just been stung by a jellyfish, and warned us that we should watch out for them. I had never realistically been worried about jellyfish on previous beach trips, so I didn't give much thought to the man's statements. However, Jenn and I did move farther up the beach, hoping that this would put us out of harm's way. About ten minutes later, I spotted a single jellyfish floating on the water, and I yelled out to Jenn, telling her to move out of its way. Apparently, there were more jellies than what I saw, and moments later I heard a bloodcurdling scream; Jenn had been stung. I rushed to pull her from the water, carried her to shore, and put hot sand on the wound as instructed by our mom, who had just run down from her sunbathing spot. Luckily, Jenn did not experience much of a reaction to the stings, but her entire knee area was covered in red spots. I suggested that we go to the swimming pool at our hotel to clean the poison out of her leg, since we obviously didn't want to go back into the water. After Jenn had calmed down, she began to tell me what the jellyfish attack was like. She said that the pain was similar to "thousands of [injection] needles or beestings", and the pain was continuous until we got in the pool about 15 minutes later. As far as the jellyfish itself, she described it as feeling "squishy, like a bunch of gummy worms".

Jellyfish don't have to ruin your vacation, as long as you keep a watchful eye and stay out of the ocean after low tide, when the incoming water will bring hordes of fresh jellies to shore. And, as always, be careful of sharks and riptides, since they are usually more dangerous than jellyfish. The ocean is not 100% safe, but as long as you're careful, chances are high that you'll have a great time.

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