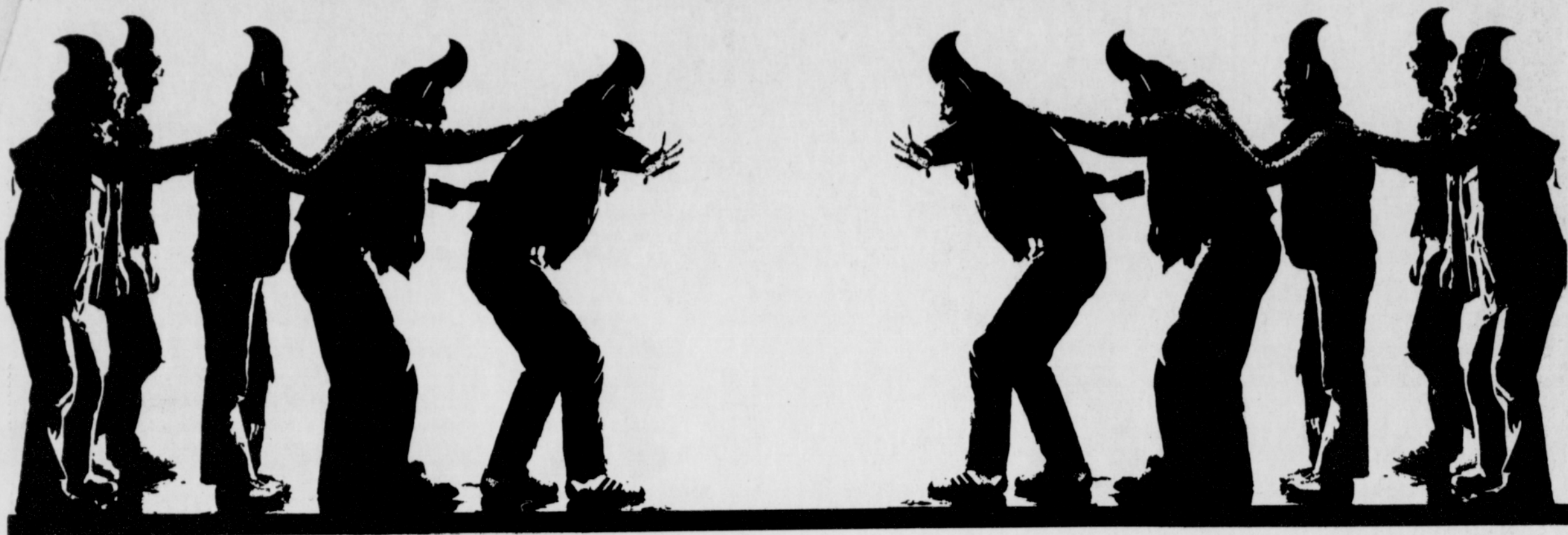




SHARK HUNTERS OF 1990

BY NICODEMUS O'MALLEY

"Who are those guys?" asks Paul Newman as he stares at his pursuers through narrowed, denim blue eyes in the famous Western, "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid."

It might be an appropriate question to ask about the organizers and participants of the much-ballyhooed "Great Shark Hunt" recently held off the shores of Astoria and southern Washington.

You know. The one that boasted of more than one hundred participants. The same one whose organizers mentioned a purse of perhaps \$50,000 or more. The same tournament that drew national media attention when protestors filed a lawsuit seeking an injunction to bar the event.

Well, in the end, three boats — that's right, three boats who paid \$600 each to chase vicious, bloodthirsty sharks — netted a few measly specimens weighing less than the average grade school student.

In fact, the winning entry was a six-foot blue shark slightly over fifty-seven pounds. Ooh, look out for that one if he starts cruising the streets.

A conscientious objector could have wrestled that one to the shore singlehandedly.

But Dave Christensen, who hauled in the beast to capture the grand prize — by the way, nobody's saying how much the award was — tried to dismiss the puny sharks his boat landed.

"We lost (some others) that would have made these look like sardines," he stated after the tournament.

This is your typical, macho shark hunter here, who went on to comment about the negative media coverage and resulting controversy caused by the event.

"They have salmon derbies up and down the coast," he said on the dock after the tournament. "What is the problem with somebody going out and trying to catch a big fish?"

Well, Dave, maybe it's the fact that salmon do not attack vacationers in the surf. But big fish like sharks, especially great whites, consider swimmers and surfers potential meals.

Anyway, Dave Christensen took home the grand prize.

We still don't know how much. Rest assured, it probably won't cover his travel expenses.

But the would-be corporate sponsors for next year — it was mentioned some beer company seeking to identify with macho-outdoorsy events like this one — are nowhere to be found.

Even attempts to reach executives at ESPN about future plans to broadcast the event have proved unsuccessful.

Seems a few measly sharks no bigger than a respectable halibut just don't bring in the suds companies and media moguls.

Of course, maybe if a great white would have attacked a small child in the surf near Astoria, maybe then...

But tournament organizer Gene Itzen, gnarled old sea captain that he is, wrote the daily newspaper claiming most of the folks who called him to protest were not too nice on the phone.

Gee, Gene, sorry. We'll all try to be kinder and gentler so as not to hurt your feelings.

As a matter of fact, most of the protestors — bunch of granola-eating hippies that they are — should just try to practice more telephone etiquette.

And Ron Miller, one of the main honchos of the tournament, remains tight-lipped about the event.

What's the matter, Ron? Shark got your tongue?

So, all the chumming, drumming, drinking, boasting, biting, baiting and boating brought in four sharks.

Maybe the organizers — keep in mind nobody wants to talk about the event anymore — should stick to events they can handle. Like shooting deer with high-powered rifles from a thousand yards away. At least deer can't shoot back.

Then, when they bag one of those magnificent creatures, they can get rid of those embarrassing snapshots of themselves posing beside a shark no bigger than a respectable halibut.

Better yet, maybe they can just strap on a Bowie knife, a Smith and Wesson, load up a shotgun and curl up on the back deck with a beer and a Hemingway novel.

So, who are these guys?

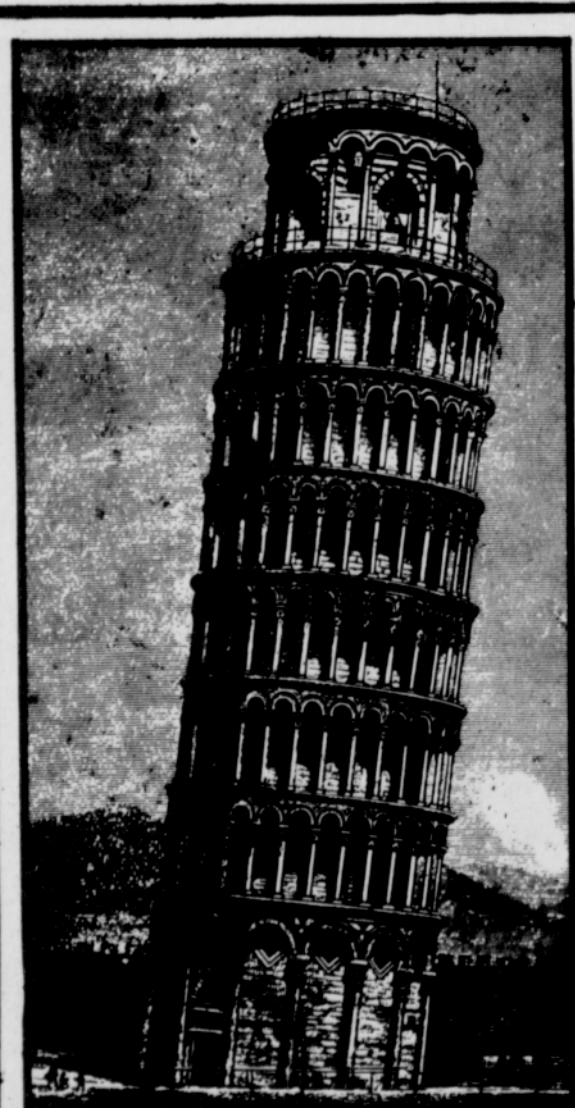
Who cares.

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