

The Ocean Swimmer and the Man in the Gray Suit

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(It has been over 40 years since the release of *Jaws*. This is what the ocean swimmer thinks about on every swim since then...)

I want to go for an ocean swim today.

The ritual begins...

I ride my bicycle a few blocks to check the surf.
It's about noon; the sun is high above us.

The current is moving north at a good clip; every little bit will help.
The chop is light; this will help with visibility in the water.
The temperature is about 65; I will wear my shortie swim gear.

I ride my bicycle back home to get my gear.
Maybe I will swim two to three miles today.

I get the gear: thin bathing shorts; blue short-sleeve top; blue and white short-sleeve bottoms; webbed gloves; the light yellow swim fins; goggles; blue bathing cap. "I know people will see me in the water."
Wash the goggles with toothpaste. "I want to see clearly in the water."

I ride my bicycle back to the beach. (No thought of him at this point.)

I walk through the crowd who is lounging and sun bathing.
"What is this guy going to do?" they are thinking.

I see people I know. They know what I am going to do.

They don't say it, but I know they are thinking about the man in the gray suit. It is his house.

"Be careful," they say.

I stand at the water's edge, and I put my bathing cap on.
I signal to the life guards that I am swimming north.

"Go for it," they say.

I slowly move by those in the water.

"What is this guy going to do?" they are thinking.

I move beyond the breakers. I put my swim fins on. I fasten my webbed gloves. I spit into my goggles; wash them off in the sea. I get every drop of water out. I look straight up at the sun and place the goggles over my eyes. I take a deep breath. I am ready to go...

I lunge forward north and put my face in the water.

Strokes one, two, three, four, five, six, seven; turn my face toward the shore
for air.

Strokes one, two, three, four, five, six, seven; turn my face toward the open sea
for air.

All I can hear is "blupp, blupp, blupp, blupp, blupp; (breath in); blupp, blupp,
blupp, blupp, blupp; (breath in); blupp, blupp, blupp, blupp, blupp; (breath in)."

I can see people on the shore. There is nothing to see when turning to the open sea; sometimes it is just the chop; sometimes it is the swell of a wave.

I can see little at the bottom of the ocean.

I don't want to really see anything.

I don't want to see any shadows.

I don't want to bump into anything.

After a few blocks into the swim the first thoughts come about the man in the gray suit.

"This is his house. This is his house," I think to myself.

"Think about something else; anything else," I tell myself.

I come up to a beach full of swimmers.

“There is safety in numbers, “I think to myself.

I come up to a beach full of surfers.

“They must be more appealing to him,” I think to myself. “What a horrible thought.”

I go several blocks with no one around and no one to see on the shore.

“Does this make me more vulnerable? Surely he knows no one is watching me. This is his house.”

I come upon several fishermen. Their lines are cast out into the ocean.

“Will their lines be above me or below me?
Will their bait attract the man in the gray suit?”

I hit their lines as I swim by.

“Sorry.”

I can see people on the shore when I look west.

“Surely they would yell if they saw something.”

All I can hear is “blupp, blupp, blupp, blupp, blupp; (breath in); blupp, blupp,
blupp, blupp, blupp; (breath in); blupp, blupp, blupp, blupp, blupp; (breath in).”

I don’t want to really see anything

I don’t want to see any shadows.

I see a shadow on the bottom;
It is just a sea gull flying above.

I hear a tinted sound.

This is a boat going by.

“This is his house,” I think to myself.

I am nearing the end of my swim.

My focus is on the exit.

At the end, I turn toward the waves and ride a wave to shore.

I get up and take off my cap, gloves, and fins.

People look at me.

“What is this guy doing?” they think.

I walk back and sometimes jog along the shore, from two miles out.
People along the shore sometimes ask:

“How was the swim?”

“Great,” I say.

“But aren’t you worried about...” [the man in the gray suit]?

“I try not to think about him,” I say.

The fishermen are most curious.

“Did you see anything today?”

I tell them:

“I don’t want to really see anything

I don’t want to see any shadows.

I don’t want to bump into anything.

I just want to swim the ocean.”

Today I swam two miles in the ocean.

I did not encounter the man in the gray suit.

“Thank God!”



Stephen F. Gambescia can be seen swimming in the ocean between Island Beach State Park and Seaside Heights, New Jersey--and hopefully nothing seen following him....