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Taking a 'Bite out of Litter' Pacifica volunteers hearts and hands for the Earth

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My Earth Day Story

My first Earth Day was about 1970. I was around 10 or 11 when my mother came outside and handed us kids a gunny sack with the instructions to go pick up litter on our country road, both sides, from our house to the high school. I don't remember which of my siblings and I got to go do this, but for me it was an adventure, something different and I liked it.

The Pacifica Beach Coalition has been working on this year's Earth Day event since shortly after Earth Day 2012. There is a lot of planning that goes into organizing this event and we talk about it all year long. What was good about ED 2012, what could be better? What animal should we honor? Who do we want to perform at the event?

But this, my personal "Take A Bite Out of Litter" story, really begins the Monday before when David McGuire, shark conversationalist and expedition filmmaker, and I as observer, held the first Shark Assembly for one of eight Pacifica schools (Chris Pincetich conducted assemblies to four schools outside of Pacifica). Wow, talk about exciting, seeing 200 to 600 kids' faces light up with excitement at one time because they were learning amazing things about sharks. That is an image I will have with me forever.

Did you know that some sharks are warm-blooded, some are cold-blooded? Some give birth to live offspring, some lay eggs called mermaid purses and cork screws? One shark species hatch the eggs in their body and the first born or strongest eat the remaining nine to 10 before birth? Have you

seen a Cookie Cutter Shark? Or a Goblin Shark? There are more than 500 known species of sharks and they date back 400 million years to an era before the dinosaur. When the Skates and Rays, which are also a class of sharks, are included, the species count increases to over 1,200.

Sharks are a fish, not a mammal like a sea lion. Unlike fish that have a skeleton, sharks are made of cartilage, not bone. This is the same soft tissue our ear and nose are made of. This makes them lighter and faster. They can bend almost in half and turn on a dime to chase prey. This makes them swifter. While humans have five senses, sharks have seven. The usual see, smell, taste, feel, hear but they also have electromagnetic sensors along the sides of their body that can detect the heart beats of other animals over 2 miles away and special glands on their nose that also act as hyper acute sensors.

We learned so many things. Sharks are the stewards of the sea, responsible for maintaining the delicate balance of the many species. They are the garbage men, cleaning up the dead of the sea floor; the apex predators responsible for regulating the population census of all of the species by removing the sick, the weak, the slow and the dying. Every species is stronger because the shark helps them evolve.

When removed from areas of the sea, the balance of fish becomes askew and the system fails. For instance, McGuire told us that the reefs with sharks that he saw were beautiful and filled with diversity; hundreds of fish species thrived on these reefs. And then he swam on reefs that were devoid of fish and the coral was dead. Further study revealed that the reef sharks had been harvested so the next top fish ate the fish that ate the algae off of the coral. So without these algae eating fish, the algae covered the coral and it died and with it the fish depending on it also died.

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As amazing as the Shark Assemblies were, they weren't even the start of what I call the Earth Day "magic." To me, the entire month of April is a season of magic, and I am so happy every day because I get calls from groups and their leaders who want to help. "My team would like to do something for Earth Day, where can we make a difference?" These words are so awesome and they can be heard every day from people who want to help.

After the Shark Assemblies, Earth Day arrived. I woke up and knew that people of all ages were getting ready to meet up and work together; some to pick-up litter, some to remove weeds and yet others to garden somewhere in Pacifica. From the north end at Mussel Rock to the south end Devils Slide area, including every beach and bluff, to the top of Hickey Boulevard back of Vallemar, Sanchez Library and Sun Valley Shopping Center people would be arriving to work in teams or as families or coming alone and joining in to help the earth. Isn't this a beautiful thing? Isn't this special? It is the "magic of Earth Day" and I can never wait to hear the stories of the day.

I started out with the Pedro Point Headlands team. Thirty adults showed up at the Pedro Point Firehouse early. By 8:45 they were eagerly ready to go. With special permission to go onto the old Devil's Slide Highway, these volunteers jumped out of the cars and dug right into the French

Broom Hill while others attacked Pampas Grass near the roadway with chains and trucks. The threat of poison oak didn't deter anyone. Two hours later and one hike out to Devil's Slide, this team returned knowing they had made a difference.

By 10 a.m. I met up with a group of special guests at Linda Mar State Beach. We had a planned tour to see several groups in action. First stop, Linda Mar State Beach with Jim and Ana, site captains here since 1997, and Barbara Redfield and Leslie Guevarra, who organized the record-setting 193 volunteers who checked in here to clean up the entire beach and parking areas from San Pedro Creek to Rockaway bluff. Not a cigarette butt or small plastic bit could be found when they all finished/

On to the Linda Mar Park and Ride where a new team, the Pacifica Tribune staff and friends, worked. What at first looked like a pretty clean spot turned out to have thousands of cigarette butts and over 200 pounds of trash and removed weeds. One person even trimmed the weeds in the parking islands. Yep, magic! That is what this is called/

The Community Center was our next stop and here we found dozens of young daisy, girl and cub scouts working together. The skate park was spotless. Thousands of wrappers, cups, straws and lids had been collected. The parking lot was clean and wonderfully devoid of trash. The kids all had smiles and exuded such pride. Yep, more magic.

From here we couldn't resist driving up and over Roberts Road. The Dig It Landscaping team led by Dave Martinez was already done cleaning the overlook and roadway. They had scoured up and down the hillside and were taking in the view from the top together as a group. They were pretty happy and when we met them they shared their finds with us. Their biggest joy was that they found less debris than any other cleanup and they were done early.

Finally we headed over to Rockaway. between Lovey's Tea Shoppe and Mildred Owen's garden we found Boy Scout Troop 29 and a team from the Chamber of Commerce removing the weeds from the lot. Three truckloads of weeds to be exact. Scout James Burman showed us how to use the weed wrench while dad and others continued pulling weeds.

Around the corner near the parking area to the Quarry, site captains Sandy, Janet, and Larry told us about the cleanup crew at Rockaway Beach. More than 60 people including Cub Scout Pack 9, Good Shepherd Knights of Columbus, and six different Phi Theta Beta chapters from as far away as Nevada teamed up to clean both beaches, the rocks, parking lots and every street in the Rockaway area. Even Niah, Janet's guide dog seemed content and happy. Here we snapped a couple photos and as a group took the Shark Pledge. More magic? Yes, pure magic.

While we didn't get to see this team in action, we learned that up on the Rockaway switchbacks, a team of 40 high school students from Good Shepherd church pulled out two truck loads full of wild mustard. That is a lot of weeds my friends and they went at it with such gusto that everything was cleaned up and gone before we got there. Funny thing about weeding, if you really didn't know about it beforehand you wouldn't even miss them. You actually might not even know they worked so hard here because it looks so natural when the weeds are gone.

After Rockaway we headed back to the Festival site where all of the booths and stage were set up. It felt like a reunion with so many friends and families, and community groups gathering. The excitement and stories and joy radiated throughout the crowd. Little kids, big kids, petting zoo,

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face painting, Matt Jaffe and the Distractions, Celia Mulherios, Drifting Sand, Sardine Family Circus, Mitch Reid, Mike Vasey, PBC Earth Heroes, Don Horsley, Kevin Mullin, City Council Members, cake, food, drinks, sun, fun.

Best of all was the joy of knowing that throughout town, from north to south, east to west, we all took time from our day to celebrate Earth Day with action because this is what we do in Pacifica. We take care of the earth together and this year we learned about the shark, last year about the turtle, and every year we learn just a little more about what we can do to help mother Earth every day! Magic? Yes, pure Earth Day magic. Thank you Pacifica.

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