

READING CHALLENGE

The Surfer Who Lost Her Arm

How 13-year-old Bethany Hamilton survived a shark attack and got back on her surfboard

Level	A2 (Elementary)
Age Group	Teens (11-16)
Topic	True Stories
Duration	~15 minutes
Skill	Reading

It was a beautiful morning on 31 October 2003. The sun was rising over the north shore of Kauai, one of the Hawaiian islands. Thirteen-year-old Bethany Hamilton was lying on her surfboard, her left arm hanging in the clear blue water. She was waiting for the next wave. Bethany loved surfing more than anything in the world. She had been surfing since she was a little girl, and she was already one of the best young surfers in Hawaii. Her best friend Alana Blanchard was nearby, along with Alana's father and brother. It was a perfect day for surfing. Then, without any warning, something grabbed Bethany's left arm. She felt a strong pull and a flash of pain. A 4.3-metre tiger shark had bitten off her entire left arm, just below the shoulder. In a few seconds, everything changed.

The Attack

The attack happened so fast that Bethany did not even scream. She later said that she felt pressure and then saw the water around her turn red with blood. The shark took one bite and then disappeared. Bethany stayed calm. She did not panic. She held onto her surfboard with her right arm and started paddling towards the beach. Alana's father, Holt Blanchard, saw the blood in the water and immediately swam to help. He made a tourniquet — a tight bandage — from a surf leash and wrapped it around what was left of Bethany's arm to slow the bleeding. This quick action probably saved her life. Bethany was still conscious when they reached the beach. She was calm and told the people around her, "I just want to go surfing again." An ambulance rushed her to Wilcox Memorial Hospital. By the time she arrived, she had lost over 60 percent of her blood. Doctors worked quickly to save her life. They had to amputate what remained of her left arm. The surgery was successful, and Bethany survived.

A Surfing Family

To understand Bethany's story, you need to know about her family. Bethany was born on 8 February 1990 in Lihue, Kauai, Hawaii. Her parents, Tom and Cheri Hamilton, were both surfers. Her two older brothers, Noah and Timmy, were also surfers. The whole family lived near the beach, and surfing was part of their daily life. Bethany started surfing when she was just five years old. By the age of eight, she entered her first tournament. She was incredibly talented. Before the shark attack, she had already won several junior surfing competitions and had sponsors — companies that paid her to use their products. Everyone in the surfing world knew that Bethany Hamilton was going to be a star. The shark attack could have ended everything. Most people would have given up surfing forever. But Bethany was not most people.

Getting Back on the Board

Bethany left the hospital just one week after the attack. She was weak and in pain, but she was already thinking about surfing. Her family supported her completely. They never told her to stop. They knew that surfing was not just a hobby for Bethany — it was her life. Just 26 days after losing her arm, Bethany got back on her surfboard. Think about that for a moment. Less than a month after a tiger shark bit off her arm, she was back in the ocean — the same ocean where the shark had attacked her. It was not easy. Surfing with one arm is extremely difficult. Balance is one of the most important things in surfing. Normally, surfers use both arms to paddle, to push themselves up on the board, and to stay balanced on the wave.

Bethany had to learn everything again. She had to find new ways to paddle with just one arm. She had to develop a new technique for standing up on the board. She fell many times. But she kept trying. Her **courage** amazed everyone who watched her.

Competing Again

In January 2004, less than three months after the attack, Bethany entered her first competition. It was a major surfing event in Hawaii. Nobody expected her to do well. She was still learning how to surf with one arm. But Bethany surprised everyone. She did not win, but she performed much better than people expected. She showed the world that she was serious about coming back. Over the next few years, Bethany worked incredibly hard. She trained every day. She developed special techniques to **compete** with two-armed surfers. Her father helped her design a special handle for her surfboard that she could grip with her right hand while paddling. Slowly, her results improved. In 2005, she took first place in a national competition. She was back. By 2007, Bethany was good enough to **compete** as a professional surfer. She joined the Association of Surfing Professionals world tour and competed against the best female surfers in the world — surfers with two arms. She did not ask for any special treatment. She wanted to be judged the same as everyone else.

Faith and Family

Bethany has always said that her **faith** in God helped her through the hardest times. The Hamilton family are devout Christians. After the attack, Bethany said she never felt angry or asked "why me?" She believed that God had a plan for her life and that the shark attack was part of that plan. She said her faith gave her strength when the pain was bad and when she felt frustrated about learning to surf again. Her family was also incredibly important. Her parents never pushed her to stop surfing or to be careful. They trusted her. Her brothers surfed with her and helped her practice. Her friend Alana, who was there on the day of the attack, continued surfing with her too. Bethany also received thousands of letters and messages from people around the world. Many of them were from children and teenagers who had lost limbs or faced other challenges. They told Bethany that her story gave them hope. This made Bethany realise that her experience could help others.

Inspiring the World

In 2004, Bethany wrote a book about her experience called "Soul Surfer: A True Story of Faith, Family, and Fighting to Get Back on the Board." The book became very popular and was translated into many languages. In 2011, her story was made into a Hollywood film called "Soul Surfer," starring AnnaSophia Robb as Bethany. The film showed millions of people around the world how a teenage girl refused to give up after a terrible accident. Bethany became a motivational speaker. She travels around the world giving talks at schools, churches, and events. She tells people that anything is possible if you **determine** to keep going and never give up. She has also started a charity called "Friends of Bethany" that helps young people who have lost limbs. The charity organises surf camps, workshops, and support groups. Bethany personally teaches children who have lost arms or legs how to surf. She shows them that a disability does not have to stop them from doing what they love.

Life Today

Today, Bethany Hamilton is in her thirties. She is still surfing. In fact, she is surfing better than ever. In 2014, she finished third in a professional world tour event in Fiji, beating many of the top-ranked surfers in the world. In 2016, she competed in the World Surf League event in Hawaii and reached the semifinals. She regularly surfs waves that are over six metres tall — waves that many professional surfers with two arms would be scared to try. Bethany married Adam Dirks in 2013, and they have four children together. She surfs with her children and shares videos on social media. Millions of people follow her online. She has also become a successful businesswoman, with her own clothing line and fitness programme. In 2018, a documentary called "Unstoppable" was released, showing Bethany surfing some of the biggest and most dangerous waves in the world while pregnant. The film showed that nothing — not a shark, not losing an arm, not even pregnancy — could stop Bethany Hamilton from doing what she loves.

A Lesson in Courage

Bethany Hamilton's story is more than just a sports story. It is a story about what happens when you refuse to let a terrible event define your life. Many people would have been too scared to go near the ocean again. Many people would have said, "I cannot surf with one arm." But Bethany never said "I cannot." She said "I will." She **inspires** millions of people every day — not just people with disabilities, but anyone who faces a challenge and thinks about giving up. She once said, "Courage does not mean you are not scared. It means you do not let fear stop you." Bethany Hamilton lost her arm to a shark, but she never lost her spirit. She is a true **champion** — not just in surfing, but in life. She **recovered** from something that would have broken most people. And she did it with a smile on her face, a surfboard under her arm, and the ocean ahead of her.

Vocabulary

Term	Definition
shark	a large fish with sharp teeth that lives in the sea
attack	a sudden and violent act against someone or something
surfboard	a long, flat board used for riding on waves in the sea
compete	to try to win against other people in a sport or contest
tournament	a competition with many games or rounds to find the best player or team
recover	to get better after an illness, injury, or bad experience
balance	the ability to stay steady without falling over
inspire	to make someone feel that they want to do something great
determine	to decide strongly that you will do something, no matter how hard it is
champion	a person who has won a competition, especially in sport
blood	the red liquid inside your body that your heart pumps
conscious	awake and able to understand what is happening
faith	strong belief and trust, especially in God or religion
amputate	to cut off a part of the body, usually an arm or leg, in a medical operation
courage	the ability to do something that is difficult or scary; bravery

Comprehension Quiz

1. How old was Bethany Hamilton when the shark attacked her?

- A) 10
- B) 11
- C) 13
- D) 15

2. What type of shark bit Bethany?

- A) Great white shark
- B) Tiger shark
- C) Hammerhead shark
- D) Bull shark

3. How soon after the attack did Bethany get back on her surfboard?

- A) One week
- B) About one month
- C) Six months
- D) One year

4. What did Bethany say helped her stay positive after the attack?

- A) Money from sponsors
- B) Her faith in God and support from her family
- C) Medicine from the hospital
- D) Advice from other surfers

5. What is the name of the film made about Bethany's life?

- A) Shark Girl
- B) Wave Rider
- C) Soul Surfer
- D) Ocean Brave

Answer Key

#	Answer	Question
1	C	How old was Bethany Hamilton when the shark attacked her?
2	B	What type of shark bit Bethany?
3	B	How soon after the attack did Bethany get back on her surfboard?
4	B	What did Bethany say helped her stay positive after the attack?
5	C	What is the name of the film made about Bethany's life?