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'Soul Surfer' Inspires Overcoming Incredible Odds

Just in time for Spring Break, a movie about a shark attack hits theaters.

But, "[Soul Surfer](#)" is not your typical spring break "shark movie."

It's the inspiring story of Bethany Hamilton, the young Christian surfer who lost her arm in a vicious shark attack and how despite tremendous odds, went on to become one of the top women surfers in the world.

The movie features an all-star cast, including Dennis Quaid, Helen Hunt, AnnaSophia Robb (as Bethany) and Carrie Underwood.

The Shark Attack

Twenty-year-old Bethany was only 13-years-old when she lost her arm to a 14-foot tiger shark off the coast of Kauai where she grew up.

It was a day her parents will never forget.

"It was pretty traumatic," Bethany's father Tom Hamilton said. "I didn't really know the condition she was in, but obviously, if she was coming to the hospital, she was still alive. Until I saw her face to face, that's when I realized her arm was gone."

"My main concern was not whether she's going to surf again, but whether she's going to live," Bethany's mother Cheri Hamilton said.

A Praying, Surfing Family

Tom and Cheri Hamilton were avid surfers themselves and spent their younger days on Kauai surfing all day and waiting tables at night.

"We were obsessed with surfing and addicted to it. Our whole lives revolved around surfing," she said.

They found Jesus thanks to another surfing friend who invited them to dinner.

"And it seemed like Jesus was real, he's real, and this is truth," Cheri said. "So, we ended up giving our hearts to the Lord pretty much at the same time."

Tom and Cheri raised their children in the church. Remarkably, before the shark attack, Bethany and her mother had been praying that Bethany would be in the center of God's will, especially with her surfing.

"We prayed that for two weeks, everyday," Cheri said. "So when the shark attack happened, I had peace, I had total peace in God."

Surfing with one Arm

As Bethany healed, she longed to get back on her board. But would she be able to surf with one arm?

How did producers hide Actress AnnaSophia Robb's arm to play Bethany? [Click here to find out.](#)

"There were times when I got frustrated but for me I just love surfing and I was pretty determined," Bethany said. "I think God put that determination in my heart and He knew that I would be able to handle it through Him."

But learning to surf with just one arm was no easy task.

"Oh yes, it's definitely different learning how to surf with one arm," Bethany said. "I knew how to surf, I just had to figure out how to do it with one arm instead of two. So, I just had to use my brain a lot and just adjust and adapt to this new way of living."

"But I figured it out and I am still learning to this day," she added.

Hollywood Knocks

Bethany's story of overcoming incredible odds captured the attention of Hollywood producers.

"I think it's a metaphor for everyone's life," Sean McNamara, who directed the film, said. "You get knocked down, whatever your "shark attack" is or whatever happens to you, you have a shot to get back up!"

"And Bethany shows that not only can you get back up on the board but you can excel at it," he added.

Bethany's story also impressed actor Dennis Quaid, who first learned about Bethany while watching the NBC's "Today Show."

"She was so inspiring and the story so touched me I wound up with tears just streaming down my face at seven in the morning," Quaid said. "And then it just so happened that two days later they offered me the part to play her father. And it was a no-brainer for me. I said, 'Yeah, I'd really like to be a part of this story.'"

Actress AnnaSophia Robb, who learned to surf for the part, said hanging out with Bethany was very inspiring.

"You think, her arm's gone but after spending a couple days with her I just totally forgot that it wasn't there," Robb said.

"It's just, she goes on everything and just lives life totally normally, trying to set a good example and live a godly life," she said. "That's the most inspiring thing about her."

Country singer Carrie Underwood makes her big screen debut as Bethany's youth pastor. In one of the more emotional scenes, Underwood encourages Bethany that something good is going to come out of this tragedy.

And something good has come out of it. Today, Bethany's story is now a major motion picture and she continues to inspire people of all ages with her faith and her belief that all things work together for good to those who love God.

Staying on Top

She also continues to be rated among the top ten professional female surfers in the world.

During a break in the filming, Bethany graciously gave me a few pointers during my first attempt at surfing. The waves were pretty choppy that day but Bethany had no problem popping right up on her board. And then, in my first attempt, I stood up on my surf board for about a second. But what a thrill that one second was!

The Hamilton's say as painful and traumatic as this shark attack was for Bethany, they're believing God has a greater purpose in it. And they're hoping this movie will inspire others going through tough times to trust God and never give up.

"Life's not about having all your limbs or just having everything perfect," Bethany said. "Life's not perfect, but through our imperfections is where we can bring beauty and good stuff out of life and glorify God through with what we overcome."

Click play below to watch the 60-second television promo.

