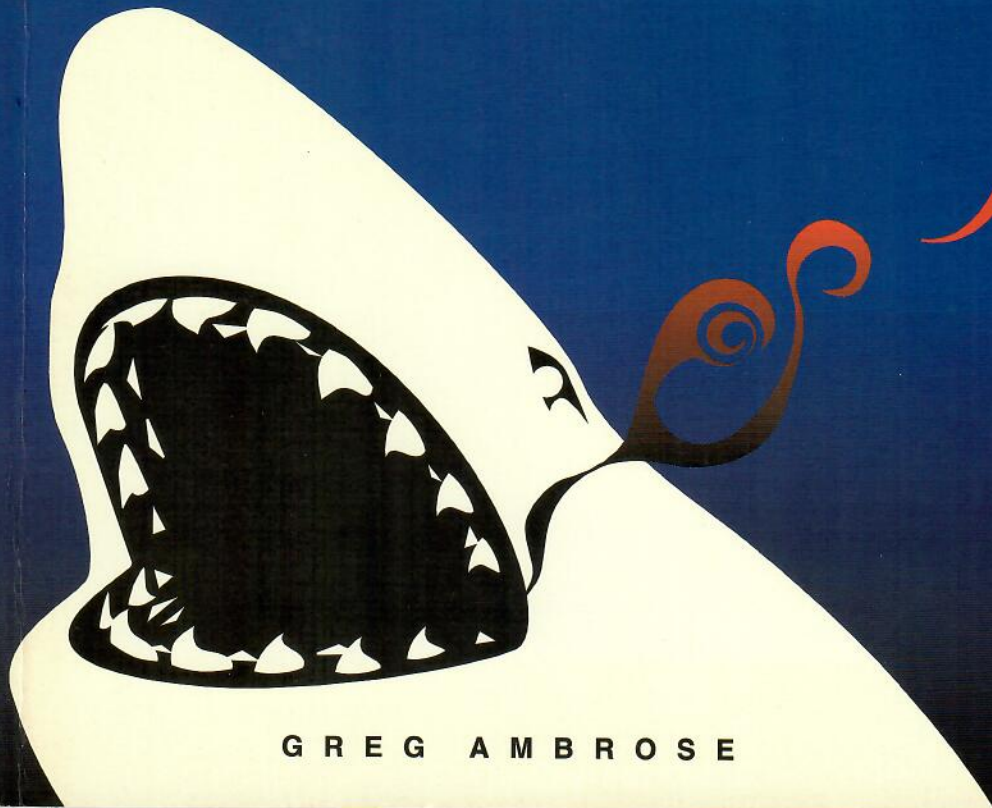


SHARK BITES

TRUE TALES OF SURVIVAL



GREG AMBROSE



The Dive Master's Blunder

The divers immediately had a bad feeling when they saw the bloody fish drifting out of the dive master's bait bag.

It looked as though they were headed for disaster, and all they had wanted was a nice, simple dive to admire all the exotic ocean life in the water surrounding the Society Islands.

And no one was looking forward to the refreshing dive more than photographer Kathryn Bender. Her work had gone much better than she ever could have expected, and Kathryn was ready for a break. Traveling with the crews of the ancient Polynesian voyaging canoes *Hawai'iloa* and *Hökūle'a* was exhausting, but Kathryn was satisfied that she had captured a true glimpse of the arduous but joyful life aboard those traditional vessels.

She believed that her editors at the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* would be pleased with her photographs, and that the readers would feel they were traveling aboard the canoes among the Society Islands.

Most of the crew members of the two Hawai'i canoes had quickly fallen under the seductive spell of the South Pacific

islands, which were exactly as the sailors had imagined Hawai'i must have been decades ago, before the modern world intruded so rudely.

The stars shone with cold clarity that burned holes in the dark tropical night. When the moon finally rose, it was full and fertile, whispering suggestions to young lovers. Some crew members paired off with beautiful Tahitian girls and lived out their fantasies.

By day, the turquoise waves beckoned from the outer reefs, and other crew members responded to the call, shouting with joy as they caught wave after wave and disappeared deep in the tube, only to emerge laughing.

Still other Hawai'i crewmen explored the island's beguiling lagoons and jagged emerald mountain peaks, or proudly showed off their impressive pair of ancient canoes to appreciative islanders.

But Kathryn was too tired to be seduced by the tropical romance of Tahiti; the beautiful scenery was wasted on her. All she could think about was her work, and the toughest part of the trip lay ahead.

Traditional voyaging canoes and their crews from across Polynesia had gathered in the Society Islands to perform ancient rites of forgiveness to end a curse that sundered the Polynesian nations six hundred years ago and kept them from visiting Polynesia's most sacred temple: Taputapuatea.

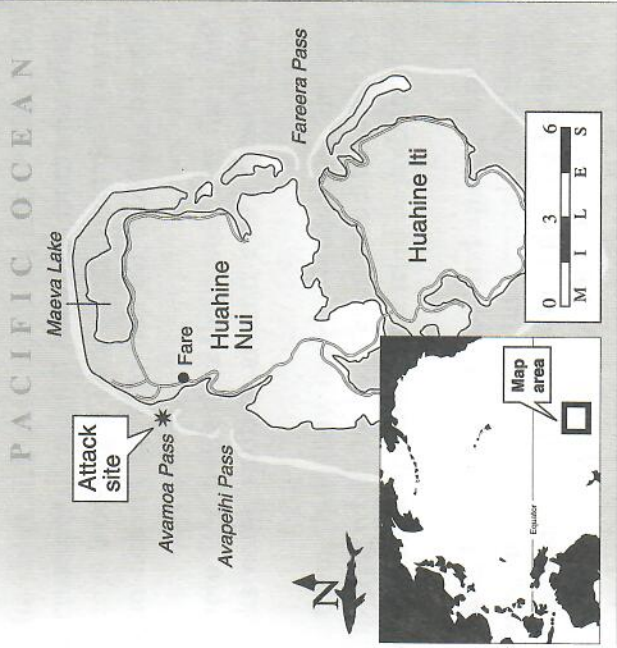
Taputapuatea means "sacrifices from abroad," and before the curse the elite of the Polynesian islands gathered yearly to reaffirm their ties and sacrifice humans and animals to satisfy the fierce Polynesian gods.

The ceremony was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to preserve on film ancient rites, chants, dances and songs performed by Polynesians clad in the traditional costumes of their islands. Kathryn hoped to snap classic images that would reach out to generations of viewers, and she was determined to be at her most sharp for the task.

But now she just wanted to strap on a regulator and tank and sink beneath the warm waters off the charming island of Huahine, soak away her cares and refresh herself for the difficult work ahead.

Kathryn had worked feverishly on Tahiti and Moorea to arrange a dive, but her best efforts were in vain. With increased persuasiveness, she arranged for a dive while the canoes were anchored in Huahine's lagoon, their last stop before the solemn ceremonies across the channel at Taputapuatea on the neighboring island of Raiatea.

But it looked as if even these plans were going sour. Kathryn didn't want to feed any sharks, but the dive master, a cocky young



renchman who had been in the Society Islands only two months, waved away her protests and those of the other divers. He was going to feed the sharks, and they had better well enjoy the show.

Gordon Damon wasn't overly excited about feeding sharks, having done it numerous times on other dives. He also was heading to Aaiatea for the ceremony at Taputapuatea, only he was there for the experience, not for his job. He just wanted an interesting dive to add to the rather lengthy list of exotic dives he had made worldwide.

He also was keen to take the weight off his aching knees. Gordon moves slowly and deliberately, often aided by a cleverly designed walking stick. His knees have been ravaged by years of rugged use, but when he straps on his tanks and descends beneath the waves, he soars.

Kathryn was still steaming over the dive master's arrogant disregard for her wishes as their boat motored away from the pier at the village of Fare, but she was too eager to get in the water to confront him again and risk having him call off the dive.

Her anger turned to exasperation when the diver master began flirting with her. With an ingratiating smile and wink, he handed her the bag of bloody fish heads, insisting in a soothing tone that she be the one to feed the sharks.

When the dive master halted the boat and prepared to descend, the passengers were alarmed to see that they would be diving across the channel from a group of surfers enjoying the clean, hollow waves. They recognized many of the surfers as crew members of the two Hawaiian canoes and wondered if the dive master realized that he would be attracting sharks close to the surfers.

Hawai'iloa crew member Scott Sullivan was especially upset, realizing that they could be putting his friends in danger. Scott wasn't keen to go diving anyway.

As a researcher with Hawai'i-based Sea Engineering Inc., Scott had been on hundreds of interesting and productive dives, and he was in Tahiti for the grand pageantry of the gathering of the ancient anoes.

But he had become protective of Kathryn as she worked to document the event on film, and he couldn't resist when she begged him to fill the last spot in the dive party.

The dive master was in charge now, so they all followed his lead, no matter how reluctant they might be.

The plan was to dive to the bottom of the pass at about sixty to

seventy-five feet and drift with the current while the boat driver followed their bubbles, ready to pick them up when they had finished their leisurely dive.

Kathryn was happy to be in the water at last, and felt all her concerns start to wash away as she savored the crystal-clear water and inspected the interesting coral formations. She recognized some of the coral, fishes and other sea life from her dives in Micronesia, but much was new to her, and she happily admired a marine environment much more exotic than anything she had seen in Hawai'i.

As soon as the first few fat, happy grey reef sharks appeared, her fury at the dive master rekindled.

Grey reef sharks, *Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*, usually don't find humans interesting and seldom are much of a threat. But they become keenly interested in humans holding bloody fish. They also become emboldened when a pack gathers to investigate such a scene.

When worked into a feeding frenzy by blood and fresh meat in the water, grey reef sharks can become lethal, ripping and tearing with razor-sharp teeth, twisting their sandpaper-rough bodies harshly enough to scrape a person's skin off.

They are amazingly strong, and their sleek, five-foot-long bodies move with lightning quickness and incredible agility. They will snap at each other and anything else that moves when caught up in the blood lust.

These sharks also are as territorial as a junkyard dog and will defend their patch of reef with greater tenacity than the most determined pit bull terrier, and with more deadly results.

These thoughts flashed quickly through Kathryn's mind as her fear of the sharks battled with her anger at the dive master for control of her emotions.

Kathryn's assignment was going well; she had fabulous photographs to take back to Hawai'i, possibly enough for the newspaper and an exhibition and even a book. But the ceremony at Taputapuatea was critical, and it would be disastrous if she were injured by a shark because of some inconsiderate Frenchman.

At about fifty feet the dive master opened the bag and extracted a fish head, which one of the sharks quickly snatched from his hand. Kathryn backed away from the action, unwilling to be close to the food.

More sharks gathered, until several dozen were milling around, hoping for another handout. One cruised past Kathryn, and she

didn't like it one bit.

"He was looking at my legs and I knew he was thinking 'chicken, chicken, chicken for dinner.' I'm looking at him and he's looking at me, so I nudged between two divers for safety."

Gordon had returned to the boat for another weight, and when he joined the others he noticed that the sharks were increasingly agitated, darting here and there, circling faster and closer around the divers.

Then he saw that the dive master hadn't closed the bag after taking out the first fish head, and blood and fish were floating out. The divers were in the middle of a cloud of chum, and the sharks were coming more and more frenzied.

They were like a pack of dogs wildly chasing after a wounded cat. She finally won the struggle for Kathryn's emotions, and it took all her mental strength to resist the urge to flee to the surface. She had a vivid image of the deranged sharks chasing her all the way to the boat, and winning the race.

As the circle of sharks tightened, Kathryn was certain she was doomed. "They're looking for the kill," she thought as she intently watched the scene. The dive master was busy feeding a five-foot shark when another came up underneath him. Miffed that it didn't eat any fish, the excited shark grabbed hold of the dive master's protected right arm and hung on tight.

Kathryn screamed into her regulator. The dive master's eyes widened in alarm and pain, but he was paralyzed with surprise. Before the shark could begin shaking the diver to tear his arm to pieces, Scott quickly moved to help. He began pounding the shark on the nose, battling the creature until it let go of its prize and rocketed to join the circling sharks.

The shark had gouged some serious chunks out of the dive master's arm, adding fresh blood to the already crimson water. Reluctantly, the dive master signaled the others to head for the boat, silently admitting that his shark-feeding venture was a disaster.

That was all the encouragement Kathryn needed. "I knew we were dinner, and I didn't want to be dinner," she says. The divers fled to the surface much more quickly than they should have, except for Gordon, who was older, stiffer and wiser than the others.

When she reached the surface, Kathryn rocketed into the boat as jet-propelled, then noticed that Gordon wasn't among them. Worried that he might not have realized something was wrong and



s still below in the middle of the frenzied sharks, she briefly considered going in after him.

Suddenly, he surfaced, and she reached over and grabbed him by buoyancy compensator and hauled him into the boat.

Supercharged from the close call, she lifted the others aboard. The dive master was gushing blood from four deep cuts on the top of forearm and a serious two-inch-square gouge off the bottom. Kathryn felt nauseous when she saw shredded meat protruding from wound.

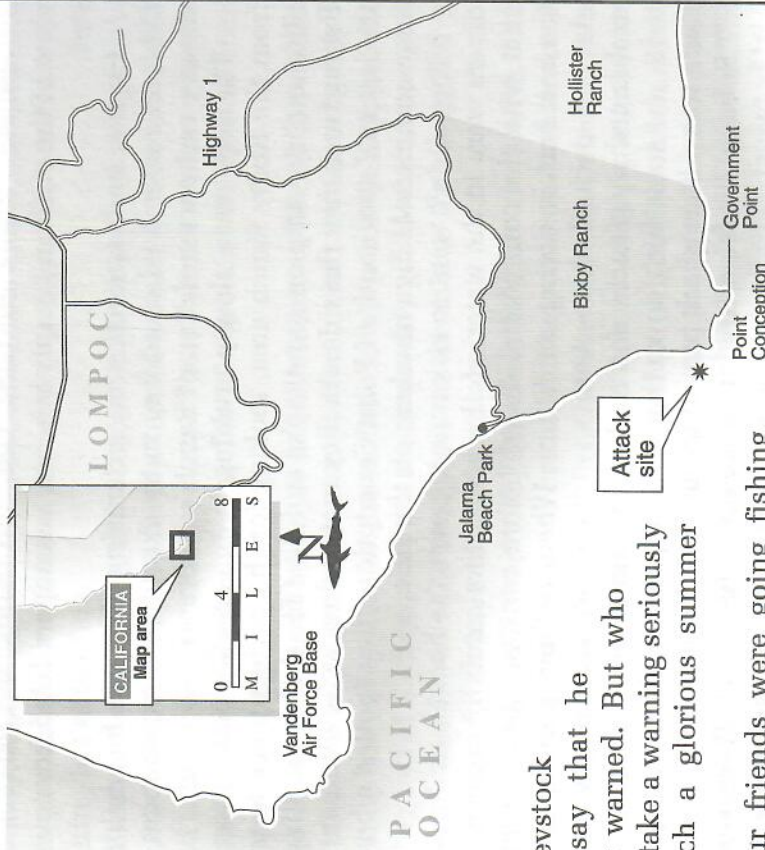
Blood was everywhere—on the boat, on the other divers—and Kathryn started thinking about AIDS. The dive master handed Kathryn a T-shirt to staunch the bleeding, and whether from anger at stubbornness or excitement, she tied it so tightly that his arm turned white from lack of blood circulation.

Scott gently stepped forward and retied the arm more appropriately, and the boat sped for the dock so the injured man could be treated properly at the Fare hospital.

Kathryn was fuming the whole way back, angry to have been treated out of the peaceful, rejuvenating dive she had worked so hard to arrange. The day was beautiful, the water was clear and she had left her cameras behind so she could escape from everything. And they were down only four minutes.

"I was furious," she says. "But you know, when we're all sitting around telling stories of interesting dives, of all the dives I have ever done, this is the one I will talk about. My four-minute dive that was supposed to be so relaxing." ▲

Jaws on Their Minds



Rob Revstock

can't say that he wasn't warned. But who could take a warning seriously on such a glorious summer day?

Four friends were going fishing and diving on a hot, sunny July 23 in 1975, and everything was perfect in the

world. Rob, twenty-three, and two college buddies had allowed Rob's younger brother Scott to come on an adventure offshore of the last privately owned large chunk of wild coastline along the California coast between San Francisco and the Mexican border.

Santa Barbara was to the south, Vandenberg Air Force Base to the north, and the four boys were cruising in a sixteen-foot wooden boat off the Hollister and Bixby ranch lands, reverentially referred to as simply The Ranch by those familiar with its extravagant charms.

Only a fortunate few people had keys to the gates that helped guard the fiercely protected privacy of the ranches, which meant the waves and ocean wildlife weren't easily accessible to the hordes of people who plundered them beyond the ranch boundaries.

"The pressure on his back and legs was intense. It didn't feel as if he was being held by an animal, more as if he was being crushed between two cars. To his horror, he could feel the shark moving side to side in a swimming motion that carried the creature straight out of the water with Rob clamped sideways in its jaws, pushing him back and forth as it wriggled."

Diver Rob Revstock survived this terrifying encounter with a shark, as did the fifteen others whose close encounters with the ocean's most feared predator are told in *Shark Bites: True Tales of Survival*. Anyone who ever goes into the ocean will identify with the horror these men and women felt as they battled sharks in the waters of Hawai'i, the Marshall Islands, Fiji, Tahiti, and California.

But this is more than a book about shark attacks. As terrifying as these stories are, they are also educational—and inspirational. If you've ever asked yourself, "Why do sharks attack people? What would I do if a shark attacked me? If I even saw a shark up close, could I ever go in the water again?" this book provides some answers in the examples of the courageous men and women whose stories are told by surfer, journalist, and author Greg Ambrose.

Greg Ambrose surfs daily in the waters of Hawai'i. As the ocean reporter for the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, author of *Surfer's Guide to Hawaii*, and co-author of *Memories of Duke: The Legend Comes to Life*, he has shared his love of the sea with thousands of readers.



Author Greg Ambrose, far right, rubs a tiger shark's belly to put it in a trancelike state. University of Hawai'i researchers will slice open its abdominal wall to insert a transmitter into the shark's body cavity, then sew the incision closed. Recaptured sharks have shown that the wounds have healed without complication. Photo by Carl Meyer.

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