

'The shark just came and attacked me'

11-21-03

Friday

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Bethany Hamilton, 13, with her sweater on the table in front of her, recalled yesterday how a shark bit off her left arm as she was surfing off Kauai's North Shore on Oct. 31. Her father, Tom Hamilton, sat beside her and listened intently.

Bethany Hamilton recalls losing her left arm in a surprise attack and promises to resume competitive surfing

By Anthony Sommer
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LIHUE >> "Everything has changed," said Bethany Hamilton, who lost her left arm to a shark while surfing on Kauai's North Shore on Oct. 31.

Except for one thing: She said she still plans to be the best female surfer in the world.

Bethany, 13, has been considered a child surfing prodigy for several years. Last year, she finished second in a national tournament in California, competing against girls six and seven

years older than she was. Fellow surfers say she is extremely talented and absolutely fearless.

"I can do it without an arm. You can always take off late," she said yesterday in an interview with the Star-Bulletin. Her father, Tom Hamilton, confirmed that his daughter already

is good at grabbing waves late, a technique considered a bit dangerous but more likely to produce a good ride.

She has already figured out the surfing part of her recovery. She

Please see **Bethany, A10**

a regional office in Hawaii once
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Bethany: Teen takes worldwide publicity in stride

Continued From A1

plans to go back into competition. She said even paddling with only one arm is easy. Her orthopedic surgeon has predicted she will be able to do about 95 percent of what she wants to do.

Talking to Bethany is at once talking to a world-class athlete and a young girl. Talk about surfing and she provides long, thoughtful responses. Talk about her feelings about what happened to her, and her replies are short and spoken rapidly.

Without being asked, Bethany insists on going through what she has entitled "The Story" from beginning to end without interruption, and if it sounds a bit rehearsed, she has already told it to national media reporters in paid interviews.

"I woke up at 5 in the morning. I ate cereal. My mom drove me to Hanalei, but it didn't look so good, it had a small swell," she said.

"I thought I had seen Alana (Blanchard, her best friend) at Tunnels, so I decided to go to Tunnels."

The Hawaiian name for the

office because of its military pres-
her. She remembers being placed on Blanchard's surfboard. Blanchard used a surfboard lanyard as a tourniquet to stop the bleeding.

"First the (Kauai Fire Department's) Humvee showed up. They did three needles, two of them in my legs," she recalled.

She was placed in an ambulance, and she said it was disorienting not being able to see out.

"I asked where we were and they said 'in Hanalei,' and later I asked again and they said 'entering Kapaa,'" Bethany said. "My mom was driving right behind the ambulance, and the cops tried to pull her over, but the guys in the ambulance told them who she was and they let her follow the ambulance."

"He kind of jerked me back and forth a little, and he was gone."

Bethany Hamilton

About her encounter with the shark that took her left arm

Bethany's father already was at the hospital. Ironically, he was about to go undergo knee surgery, but he was moved off the operating table so it could be used for his daughter.

Bethany underwent two operations but spent only five



Chef Paulina Barsotti and Bethany Hamilton took a quiet moment to enjoy

Beach is making, but surfers and divers call it Tunnels because of the many lava tubes in the reef. The surfing spots are outside the reef.

"As soon as I got out, I caught maybe 10 waves, and then I sat out for about a half-hour and then I went back out.

"I was lying on the board, perpendicular to the waves." (She looked at her father to make sure "perpendicular" was the correct word. He nodded.)

"The shark just came and attacked me. He got a hold of it (her left arm). He kind of jerked me back and forth a little, and he was gone. No one else saw him. I said, 'I was attacked by a shark.' Not loud, just the way I just said it."

Holt Blanchard, Alana's father, and his son Brian began towing and pushing Bethany toward shore, which was about a quarter-mile away.

"All I could think of was that I would be losing my sponsors," she said, smiling at the memory because her chief sponsor, RipCurl, has been at her side from the time they learned of the attack.

"And I was very thirsty," she added. Doctors later said she lost about half the blood in her body.

Bethany said she passed out, and when she woke up she was on the beach, covered with towels to keep her warm, and lots of people were looking down at

erations but up days in the hospital. Her positive attitude and superb physical conditioning were credited with her ability to bounce back so quickly.

Since then, she and her family have been deluged with media requests, so much so that they went into seclusion at a borrowed home. They only recently returned to their own house in Princeville.

There is a book contract and a movie deal being negotiated. She is scheduled to fly to Los Angeles to be on the "Tonight Show" with Jay Leno and then to New York for "Late Night" with David Letterman.

Asked how she feels about the worldwide publicity she has received, she said: "It feels like nothing. I just feel normal. I don't feel like a star. I don't think about it too much."

When it was pointed out her picture is on the cover of People Magazine this week, she smiled again: "Well, it wasn't the whole cover. It's just a small picture down in the corner."

Bethany has not been out in public except for going to church.

She indicated she is not entirely comfortable with all the concern people show for her. The hugs sometimes hurt her shoulder, she said.

"I wish I could say to them, 'You don't have to keep asking how I am,'" she said. "I'm fine."



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Bethany realize dreams

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"Bethany is probably the most popular RipCurl athlete in the world right now. She's going to be an inspiration to people who go through great difficulties."

"She trains at a high level. She's strong physically. She's smart. You never have to ask her anything twice. She knows how to compete. All the pros, like Andy Irons (the reigning men's world champion and Kaula resident), have seen her potential," he added.

Bethany, who is homeschooled and has a 3.8 grade-point average, can be just about anything she wants to be. Right now, she wants to be a professional surfer.

Hamilton will take on a new role when Bethany returns to surfing. He will be her coach. Her longtime coach Russell Lewis recently had to return to his native Australia because of a family illness.

Hamilton and his daughter have not surfed together in more than a year because of a knee injury he suffered. He recently had surgery on the knee and was off crutches after two days.

"We're going to start by doing physical therapy together," Hamilton said. "We both need it."



PHOTOS BY DENNIS ODA / DODD&STARBUCKET.COM

Chef Paulina Barsotti and Bethany Hamilton enjoyed a light moment yesterday as Bethany snacked on some food. Below, she took a quiet moment to enjoy the view from the house that her family was using to conduct interviews.

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Hamiltons hope to help Bethany realize dreams

By Anthony Sommer
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LIHUE --> When Tom Hamilton and his 13-year-old daughter, Bethany, set out for Wilcox Memorial Hospital yesterday to have her stitches removed, the one driving the family minivan was Bethany.

Her dad let her drive all the way down the long, winding private drive from the Kilauea house they borrowed to conduct interviews. Once they reached the public road, Tom Hamilton took over. But Bethany looked confident enough that she could have made the whole 40-minute drive to Lihue by herself.

Until Oct. 31, when Bethany lost her left arm in a shark attack, Tom and Cheri Hamilton were the parents of a world-class athlete on the verge of becoming a star. In their minds, and Bethany's, they still are.

"Her dream and our dream was she would become a professional surfer and a world champion. That hasn't changed," Hamilton said.

Hamilton said in an interview yesterday that his daughter will continue to receive support from her main sponsor, RipCurl.

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