

Soul Surfer Bethany Hamilton Gets Real About How Shark Attack Changed Her Life

Bethany Hamilton captivated the world after losing her arm in a shark attack when she was just 13 years old, then rising up to be a champion surfer. Now 24, she is opening up about her experience and what got her through it.

“I first accepted Christ’s gifts when I was 5 years old,” the surfer told Fox 411. “Even at that young age I remember I was with my best friend and we were just hanging out at our house and we were like, ‘Let’s ask God into our hearts’ and that was kind of the start of it.”

Naturally, when she lost her arm to a 14-foot tiger shark in 2003, her first instinct was to turn to go.

“I remember after I lost my arm, I just had this sense of peace that God was in control and that’s kind of weird for a 13-year-old to be like, ‘Hey, God, you’re in control,’ like I just lost my arm,” she told Fox 411.

The Hawaii native got back on her surfboard less than a month after the devastating attack, during which she lost 60 percent of her blood. She has since competed in world-class surf competitions, inspiring the masses.

Hamilton, who married Christian youth minister Adam Dirks in August, now travels as a motivational speaker, sharing her faith and inspiring girls worldwide.

She has also authored several best-selling books, and her story was turned into a hit movie, *Soul Surfer*, in 2011. Hamilton’s latest book, *Body and Soul*, is meant to encourage young girls to improve their spiritual and physical health.

"When I wrote *Body and Soul* I didn't want to make girls feel uncomfortable with themselves," she explains. "I wanted them to feel loved and encourage to start making healthier choices in their daily life."

She says two ways to improve one's life are with a healthy diet and exercise, and she emphasizes the importance of spiritual health.

"On top of that, I wanted to encourage them in their faith," she says. "And I think God calls us to take care of our bodies and to love and respect our bodies, and I think that can be done through the way that we eat and the way that we move but also in the way we think towards ourselves and how we think towards God."

One way Hamilton respected her body was by saving herself for marriage. She says she's glad she did so, because her relationship with her husband is "beautiful."

"It's such a beautiful thing now being in a relationship with someone as amazing as he is and being able to share life together and share our same faith and encourage and uplift each other and just be an awesome loving team," she says.

The surfer has an important message for all those who are struggling: God loves you unconditionally.

"I think that we all go through different hard times in our lives and challenges and things to overcome and I just know that how I overcame was through Jesus Christ and that has been my stronghold," she notes.

"I think the thing God's taught me is first of all He forgives me when I make a mistake and He calls me to forgive the people around me that make mistakes and hurt me," she says. "In that is just God's gift of amazing love and forgiveness and that's why He died on the cross for our sins, so just know that God loves you and He has this amazing love for you and He just

wants to be a part of it.”