

# ***soul surfer***

**A True Story of Faith, Family, and  
Fighting to Get Back on the Board**

***Bethany  
Hamilton***

***With Sheryl Berk and Rick Bundschuh***



POCKET  
BOOKS



BOOKS

MTV BOOKS

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY



BOOKS

POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.  
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 2004 by Bethany Hamilton

Originally published in hardcover in 2004 by MTV Books/Pocket Books

MTV Music Television and all related titles, logos, and characters are trademarks of MTV Networks, a division of Viacom International Inc.

All photos courtesy of Noah Hamilton and the Hamilton family.

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce  
this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever.  
For information address Pocket Books, 1230 Avenue  
of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

ISBN-13: 978-1-4165-0346-0

ISBN-10: 1-4165-0346-3

This MTV Books/Pocket Books trade paperback edition June 2006

50 49 48 47 46 45 44 43 42 41

POCKET and colophon are registered trademarks of  
Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America

For information regarding special discounts for bulk purchases,  
please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-800-456-6798  
or [business@simonandschuster.com](mailto:business@simonandschuster.com)

*Dedicated to  
Jesus Christ, my family  
and the Blanchard family.*



# *acknowledgments*



**M**y family and I would like to acknowledge and thank all the people that have helped and supported me through this difficult and challenging period in my life. I am grateful for every single person God has put in my life and I thank Him for each and every one of you. Another book could be written just to thank all the people who have sent their love and support. I have been blessed and I know this is to help me grow and be strong so I can be a blessing to others. I want to acknowledge and thank God for his unconditional love that He has for everyone and for the wonderful friends and family He has given me.



Holt, Cydney, Byron, Alana, and Dorian Blanchard; Roy, Tiffany, Chantilly, and Dutch Hofstetter; Andy, Jill, Alex, Travis, and Koa Smith; Sheryl Berk and her beautiful daughter Carrie; Louise Burke, Liate Stehlik, Hillary Schupf, Lauren McKenna and the team at Pocket Books; Jacob Hoye and the team at MTV Books; Eric Kusky, Ken Raasch and the team at Creative Brands Group; World Vision Foundation; Al Burton, Rob Heddon, and the Hollywood Scene; Emily Just and the ABC family; The Inside Edition Team; Pastor Steve and Trish Thompson; Troy and Malia Gall; Sarah Hill, Wayne Cordeiro and New Hope Christian Fellowship, Oahu; North Shore Community Church Members; Rick Bundschuh and Kauai Christian Fellowship; Delta Breeze Church; Everyone involved in the Friends of Bethany Hamilton fundraiser; Charlie, Felicia Cowden and Hanalei Surf Co. Staff; Kauai lifeguards; Bill, Ronda, Laird, and Lyon Hamilton; Phil, Daniel, Andy, and Bruce Irons; Nelson Togioka; Ralph Young; Chris and Evelyn Cook; Steve Jepson; Kim



and Dave Dornbuch; Don and Barbara Toftee; Edwin Nakakura; Rick, Amy, Marvin and family; Patrice Pendaruis; Karen Mendoza; Becky and Baumgartner family; Schneider family; Coach Dick Oliver; Lani Yukimura and all the staff at the Wilcox Hospital that helped me; Dr. Dave Rovinsky; Dr. Ken Pierce; Dr. Richard Davis; Dr. Patrick Turley; Dr. Kai Swaggart; Dennis Fujimoto; Mike Coots; Joey Barca; Tim, Drema, Nate, Noelle Carroll; Steve and Nancy Cranston; Bobby and Miko Parker; Ben Aipa; Butch and Cammie Irving; Mike Latronic; Betty Depolito; Rabbit Kekai; Russell Lewis; Mike Neal and family; Chris Moore; Grandpa Jack; Grandma Dot; Debbie and Wayne Choate; Karin Lynch and family; Devon Geis and family; Craig and Tonci Hoshide; Monk and Cathy Monroe; Mike and Terry Perkins; all of the Hamilton family; all of the Gazsi family; John and Patty Crown and family; Shannon Kay; Rick and Jane Rosaler; Kathy and Denny; Rork Peca; Joey Buran; Kathy Koerner; Joe Thompson; Jeff Denholm; Ellen Henderson; LeeAnn Sanders;



Shoshana; Bridgeman family; Mock family; Danny Lehman; Bender family ; Bob Sato; Alikai and Titus Kinimaka; Grandma Mary Hamilton; Malemed family; Troy Farnsworth and Randy Alley—Hanger Inc.; Challenged Athletes Foundation; Australian Grand Prix; Steamboat Springs Ski Resort; Barry Zito and the Oakland A's; Chuck Smith and Calvary Chapel; North Shore Christian Church, Oahu; Alana, Carrissa and all the competitors that push me to be a better surfer; my sponsors: Rip Curl—Pod, Adam, Mike, and P.J.; Hanalei Surf Co.; Sticky Bumps—John, Chris and Dahl; Tim Carroll—Surfboards; Surf One—Skateboards Surf Co., Hawaii.

P.S. All my friends—sorry to those who were missed, thank you.



# ***contents***

<b>foreword</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>1. <i>halloween morning</i></b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. <i>roots</i></b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3. <i>a serious competitor</i></b>	<b>33</b>
<b>4. <i>a mostly normal life</i></b>	<b>51</b>
<b>5. <i>attack</i></b>	<b>67</b>
<b>6. <i>dark hours</i></b>	<b>81</b>
<b>7. <i>surgery</i></b>	<b>93</b>
<b>8. <i>the road back</i></b>	<b>101</b>
<b>9. <i>why I do it</i></b>	<b>117</b>
<b>10. <i>keeping the faith</i></b>	<b>131</b>
<b>11. <i>an outpouring of aloha</i></b>	<b>143</b>
<b>12. <i>on being kind of famous</i></b>	<b>155</b>
<b>13. <i>back in the waves</i></b>	<b>173</b>
<b>14. <i>aftermath</i></b>	<b>193</b>
<b>15. <i>part of a plan</i></b>	<b>203</b>
<b>endnote: sweet sixteen</b>	<b>211</b>



# ***foreword***





**T**o be honest, I never wanted to write a book.

It actually took a lot of convincing by my family and friends, because I'm not someone who likes to talk a lot about myself, or thinks I'm any big deal. But they saw something in my story that would be helpful and interesting to others—and they encouraged me to write it down. So here I am. And actually, when I *really* thought about it, it seemed like something that I should do. It would give a bigger picture of my faith, my family, and all those people who have helped get me back into the water again. But I'll tell you one thing: it wasn't easy.

It took a lot of people to help me put my thoughts on paper. First, there was Rick Bund-



schuh, my spiritual advisor and a pastor in the Kauai Christian Fellowship Church. There were certain things I just didn't want to talk about—certainly not to a stranger. So Rick volunteered to do the “translating.” We would sit for hours and just talk, talk, talk. I'd pour my heart out, and he'd patiently listen, putting it all down on paper. Then came our writer, Sheryl Berk, who helped me organize and shape all these thoughts into fifteen chapters (who knew I had 200-plus pages in me?). When you're really close to something, it's hard to see things as they truly were or are. So Sheryl, along with my editor, Lauren McKenna, helped me connect the dots. They asked the toughest questions! Stuff that really made me squirm sometimes, but also, in the end, made me dig a little deeper and really be honest with myself and you. In the end, I'm really proud of what we've written here. I think it's truthful, and I hope it inspires and motivates people to tackle any obstacles in their lives. I hope it helps people find faith in God and in their own strength and ability. I hope it moti-



vates someone going through a tough time right now to keep on fighting until they rise above it. You can and will get through it. I'm living proof that where there's a will, there's a way.

What I don't want is for people to pity me or think of me as a person who has had her life ruined. That's not how I see it. My mom is always saying, "If life hands you lemons, make lemonade." Which is a great outlook on life, if you can actually see beyond the lemons when you're up to your eyeballs in them! My strength came from my relationship with Christ and from the love and encouragement of my family and friends.

In a lot of ways I'm like any fourteen-year-old girl, and in a lot of ways, I'm not. If someone had told me that this is how my life would be, I would have never believed it. It would have seemed too bizarre to be true. Sometimes it still is. I often dream that I have both my arms again, and I wake up expecting the whole shark business to be a nightmare. But it's not. It's my reality now, and I've learned to accept it. I've moved on.



I don't pretend to have all the answers to why bad things happen to good people. But I do know that God knows all those answers, and sometimes He lets you know in this life, and sometimes He asks you to wait so that you can have a face-to-face talk about it. What I do know is that I want to use what happened to me as an opportunity to tell people that God is worthy of our trust, and to show them that you can go on and do wonderful things in spite of terrible events that happen. I don't think it does any good to sit around feeling sorry for yourself. I made myself a promise: I'm not going to wallow or walk around moaning, "Woe is me!"

One other thing you should know: this book really doesn't have an ending yet because I am still learning how to cope every day. I'm not talking about learning how to button my top with one hand. I'm talking about coping with being a celebrity, something I never imagined that I would have to deal with at the age of fourteen. Or coping with people's stares, either because they recognize





me, or because they are not used to seeing a person with one arm running down the beach. Or coping with answering endless questions from the media and seeing my face in newspapers and magazines. I'm also learning to cope with the frustration of knowing that if I had both arms to paddle, I just might have done a little better in a surf contest that I have just been in.

I am excited about some of the opportunities to travel and surf all around the world that have come as a result of my attack and return to surfing. But most of all I am excited about what the future holds. Will I make it to the pro ranks in surfing? Will my lifelong friend and surf buddy, Alana, be paddling next to me in the years to come as she is now and was during the attack? Will I be able to make a difference, in some small way, in people's lives by sharing my story?

What does God have in store for me? I really don't know, but I do know one thing for sure: the adventure has only started.



1

# ***halloween morning***





**I**t came, literally, out of the blue.

I had no warning at all; not even the slightest hint of danger on the horizon. The water was crystal clear and calm; it was more like swimming in a pool, rather than the deep ocean waters in Kauai, Hawaii, where I go almost every morning to surf with my friend Alana Blanchard or the other girls on the Hanalei girls' surf team. The waves were small and inconsistent, and I was just kind of rolling along with them, relaxing on my board with my right hand on the nose of the board and my left arm dangling in the cool water. I remember thinking, "I hope the surf picks up soon . . . ," when suddenly there was a flash of gray.

That's all it took: a split second. I felt a lot of



pressure and a couple of lightning-fast tugs. I couldn't make out any of the details, but I knew that the huge jaws of a fifteen-foot tiger shark covered the top of my board and my left arm. Then I watched in shock as the water around me turned bright red. Somehow, I stayed calm and started to paddle toward the beach. My left arm was gone almost to the armpit, along with a huge, crescent-shaped chunk of my red-white-and-blue surfboard . . .

### ***a morning like any other***

It was still dark, about 5 A.M., when my mom, Cheri, cracked open my bedroom door, peeked inside, and called, "Wanna go surfing?" Before I had a chance to even open my eyes, our shar-pei, Ginger, jumped on my bed with her own wet good morning kiss. It was my usual surfing wakeup call.

I was hoping for a perfect surfing morning. It had poured for the last three days, but I couldn't



hear the sound of the rain plopping on the big elephant-ear plants outside my window. *Yes!* Perhaps the storm had passed, and the warm tropical sunshine would be back today.

I lay there in bed a few minutes more, listening to my mom start her morning ritual: first, she flicks on the living room television and switches to the local island weather channel for the report while she brews a strong cup of coffee. She listens very carefully, not just to the forecast but also to the buoy reports that tell of swell activity. Then she translates all that info into a plan for me: she plots out where the best surf will likely be hitting the island.

I reached over to the nightstand and turned on the lamp switch. My lamp is pretty cool: it has a clear base that I filled with shells. In fact, my whole room is full of shells. I have a blue shell bedspread, shell necklaces, and boxes overflowing with my shell collection. I was once asked what I would grab if my room was on fire. No contest: I have lots of cool knickknacks, and dozens of tro-



phies from winning amateur surf contests, but I am sure the first thing I would grab would be my beautiful sunrise shells. (Their name explains their color.) Sunrise shells are rare and hard to find in one piece, but they are the most stunning shell that any beachcomber can find on Kauai.

I know lots of girls agonize over what outfit to wear to school or on a date. Me? I always obsess over what bathing suit to put on for a surf. I have at least a dozen different choices hanging from knobs on my dresser (ah, the perks of being a surfer who is sponsored by a major clothing company, in my case, Rip Curl). My eye caught something black in my closet: black trousers that I bought at a thrift store just a few days before as part of a Halloween costume. My best friend, Alana, got a pair, too, and we bought funky black shoes to match. We would be the “Mexican Mafia,” a costume idea we just made up because it sounded silly, and we’d go dressed alike to the Halloween party at church and then off around the neighborhood. Then it hit me: today *is* Halloween.