



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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CHRISTIAN KEMPER

THE FEAR BENEATH



For Samson

» Out of the eater
something to eat,
out of the strong
something sweet. «

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Photo
David „Baz“ Jenkins



INTRODUCTION

I was born in 1973 and I was too young to watch *Jaws* when it was released in 1975. However, we were the first family in our neighborhood to own a VCR, so acquiring movies wasn't a problem for me from that point on. During the early 80s, Bruce Lee movies were my favourites, also *Star Wars* and, of course, *Jaws*!

I had three options for my future life, so I thought: Become a black belt martial artist, a Jedi knight with light saber or become a shark scientist like Matt Hooper. Finding a martial arts academy in my little village was hard to find and somehow, I couldn't find Master Yoda either, so I chose to study sharks! What dinosaurs are to my 6-year-old son today, sharks were for me back then.

As a member of the *Jaws* generation, sharks had inspired a fascination and a frisson of fear inside of me. After the movie, I was afraid to go swim-

ming in our backyard pool. I asked my parents if there really was such a fish. They could not answer. I was obsessed, asking all my friends and acquaintances if they knew of sharks. Eventually I realized that in the early 80s, in general, very little was known about sharks. So, I had no choice but to do my own research.

In the years to come, I collected all the reports and newspaper articles about sharks, bought all the books I could get. Shark attacks fascinated me especially. Out of a fear, it became a passion and I gradually realized that sharks are very different in life than in the movies. However, it was obvious that sharks occasionally demanded a terrible toll from the people who invaded their area. And that they are probably the least understood creatures of the animal kingdom, which only increased my fascination.

Through years of research, I noticed that some beaches were notorious for shark attacks. Some-

times there were several a week; sometimes there were years in between the attacks. I wondered why? What made these places so special? And why did the people on these beaches still go into the water when the danger was so high? I had to find an answer to these questions, and that's how the idea for my first book, *Shark Attacks*, came about.

Why do shark attacks exert such a fascination for me? Because they represent a view - a window - into the world of sharks and their behavior. Understanding why sharks sometimes attack humans makes it possible to reduce the likelihood of such accidents! Many events in the „Global Shark Attack File“ have nothing to do with an attack. They are incidents. Some bites are motivated by territorial defensive behavior, or when the shark generally feels constricted and threatened by humans.

Some attacks are a result of this because the shark simply responds to its predatory senses (i.e., it is irritated by the presence of many fish) and responds to environmental conditions (murky, churning waters). If I wanted to understand sharks better, I had to observe them in their natural environment.

Consequently, I started training as a recreational diver when I turned 18 and traveled to the Red Sea in the next few years, went diving off Jamaica and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

I flew to Indonesia and dived off the islands of Lombok and Bali. Finally, I was drawn to the diving „El Dorado“ in the Maldives, but all I saw were little white tip reef sharks which can be considered anything but dangerous. That was not enough for me. I wanted to see big, potentially dangerous sharks, such as bull or tiger sharks. And of course, the shark that originally sent me on my journey, the great white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*! But Germany is stuck in the middle of Europe and we don't have an ocean surrounding us. Sure, we have the North Sea and

the Baltic Sea, but compared to the mighty Atlantic Ocean, those are just small ponds without (potentially dangerous) sharks!

It was clear to me, if I wanted to study sharks, I would have to go abroad. But I was a shy young man, not willing to leave my family and friends behind - so I buried my dream. Instead, I became a TV journalist and worked for all the major TV stations in Germany. But the stories I covered didn't interest me personally. So, I started writing articles about sharks for scuba diving magazines, and then the book *Shark Attacks*, and a second one, *Strange Pool Friends*. Those are only available in German. After many requests from my English-speaking friends, I thought it's about time to write a book about sharks in English. Thus, this book contains the best of my first two books and the best of my articles.

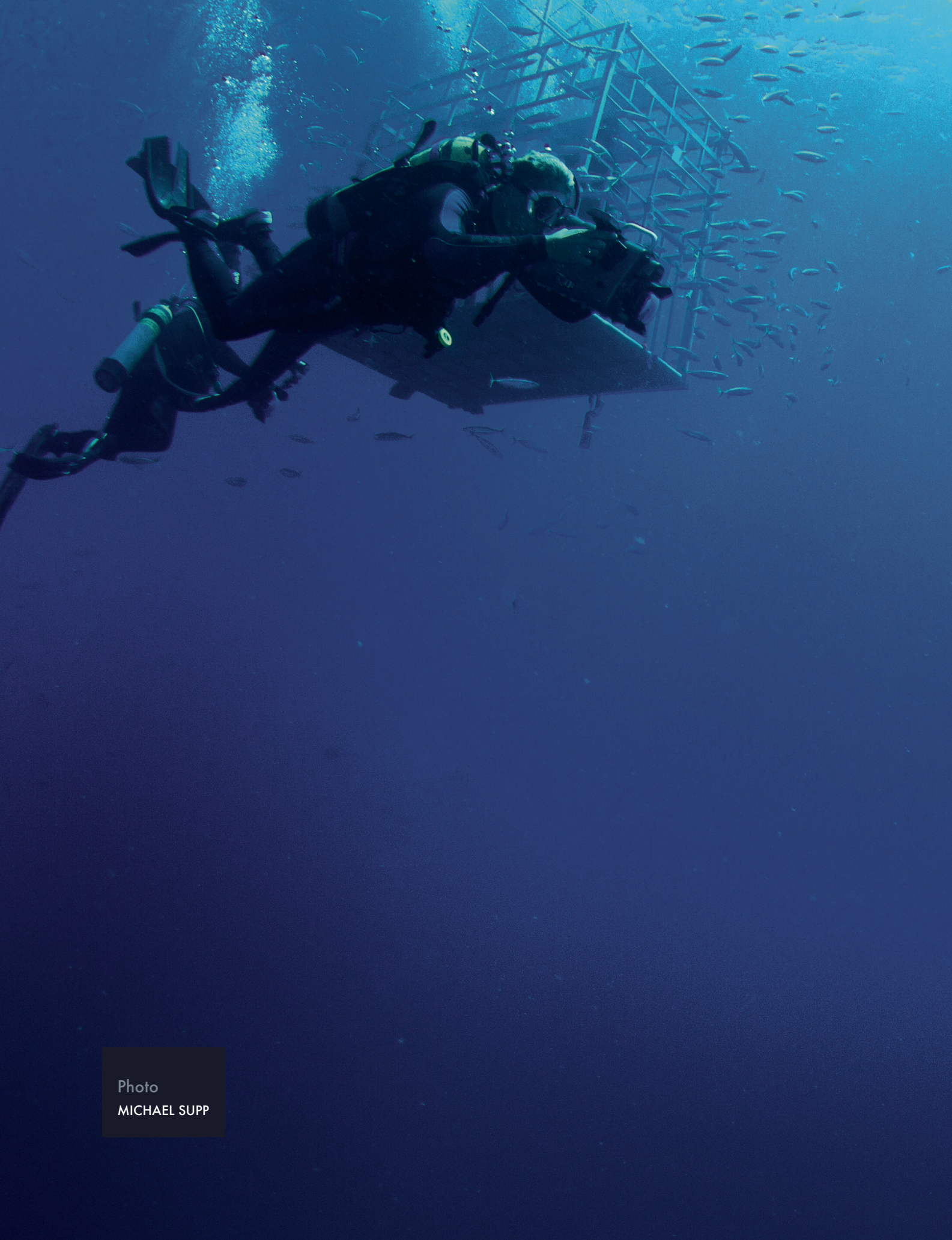


Photo
MICHAEL SUPP





CAUGHT BY THE SPELL OF A MYTH

» The Great White Shark jangles our nerves
With a reputation he hardly deserves
Neither malice nor spite
Will cause him to bite
It's not his fault we look like hors d'oeuvres. «

R. Aiden Martin

Many a mariner has spun uncharitable shark tales replete with references to serial-killer stares, jagged rows of sawlike teeth, and feeding frenzies. Yet even a fisherman decrying how a shark ravaged his catch still on the hook can contemplate the beasts with awe. In *Moby Dick*, 19th-century seafarer Herman Melville described the way sharks scooped perfectly symmetrical globular bites out of sperm whales as „all but miraculous.“ Unless you have seen countless sharks feasting jously on a dead leviathan, Melville wrote,

„then suspend your decision about devil worship.“ Pacific islanders built shrines to shark gods, whom they believed to be guardians of the sea. The deities were said to have saved Hawaiians from calamities such as shipwrecks, and, on occasion, the shark gods took human form to dance with a man or make love to a woman. Sailor lore also speaks of sharks ravaging the dead and dying bodies of humans, apparently even learning which vessels might provide a meal. The beasts are said to have regularly trailed overloaded slave ships en route to the Western Hemisphere so they could catch the lifeless Africans who got tossed overboard. Most modern landlubbers, though, gave little thought to sharks until 1974, when Peter Benchley's best-selling novel *Jaws* - followed the next year by Steven Spielberg's haunting film adaptation - drove panicky swimmers out of the ocean. The sight of a fin slicing through the water's surface, accompanied by one of the creepiest instrumental tracks ever, made a vast swath of the

American public damn near afraid to get into the bathtub, to say nothing of the open sea.

58 years ago, the publisher of the US magazine LIFE warned its readers in the cover story *Look out for sharks* from the danger of shark attacks. Not that the total number would be terrible (because it is very low), but of the cruel attack itself.

» During 1959 sharks made 11 authenticated attacks on human beings in U.S. waters. Three of them were fatal. The number is not enormous, but the victims died deaths of horror – dismembered bite by bite as their executioners struck and turned, struck and turned again. «

LIFE Magazine 11. July 1960

15 years later, a movie managed to spread real fear and terror. From now on, the sea was no longer seen only as a place for leisure and water sports, but as a place where evil lives. This movie was “Jaws”. What many viewers did not know at the time: The film resembles true events. In 1916, a shark on the New Jersey coast attacked five swimmers within twelve days – a man-eater!

Even the words “man-eater” are deeply troubling. The term makes millennia of human development null and void and takes us back to our beginnings as pitiful hominids roaming the African steppe, the region where the cradle of humanity stood. They crouched in fire-less caves, always on guard, always in fear that death lurked in the tall grass – or in the water. The idea of being eaten alive violates the dignity of man, undermining the sacred belief that we are “something better” or “the crown of creation,” as we like to call ourselves. The shark tells us with his actions: “I do not care if you’re President of the United States, the Queen of England or just the average Joe, for me you’re not a ‘coronation’, you are the same as a seal or a dolphin – a protein supplier. Honestly, I prefer to chase you, because you are weak and slow.”

Sharks and crocodiles attack people. Among the big cats, leopards are even more feared human hunters than lions, and as the peasants of India and Indonesia know, human flesh is also on the tiger’s menu. Although sharks rarely “eat” people, they are considered to be monsters par excellence – perhaps because the shark is so deeply rooted in collective popular beliefs as no other predator. It is the center of a tradition that goes back to a time long before man began writing down the myths and legends that circulated around the campfire of fishermen. In this sense, the book *Jaws* by Peter Benchley may be considered a saga in which myth and reality merge.

The book reminds of actual occurrences (albeit greatly exaggerated), but reads like an adventure novel. Action and topic make up his success. It does not only give you shivers down your spine, like a good horror story about occultism, it goes far deeper.



Photo
CHRISTIAN KEMPER

The film by Steven Spielberg is even worse. Relentlessly, he lets the shark strike again on the American East Coast. He does not just pick up on the historical events of 1916. He depicts the animal with a lot of aggressiveness, strength and human intelligence. A monster. He penetrates into the subconscious and gets stuck there – because you know that the story is somehow based on facts and not the abstruse fantasies of a fanciful Hollywood director. This shark really lived (although doubtful if only one shark was responsible for all of the attacks). His victims were real, normal people. One suffers a kind of metaphysical shock. Are we actually the crown

of creation when a fish – a fish! – turns us so fast and easy into simple prey? But one should not ask such a question – and certainly not answer it. The idea of being dead doesn't scare us modern people. But the process and way of dying terrifies us. Sharks do not submit to humans – and they do not recognize our alleged superiority. And so, it is hard for us to imagine that we, too, can be part of the food chain (and not at the very top) because we no longer feel as a part of nature. In our over-mapped, overpopulated, over-explored world, it's not often that an animal gives up such mystery. But we do not need to know everything. Some things are in good hands in the fog of secrets and

mystery. I am glad that there are still unresolved questions, because after all they are the ones who stimulate the imagination.

Sharks are beautiful in a scary way and the epitome of all the unknowns that still exist apart from our civilization. In a time when human mastery of our terrestrial realm grants us the illusion that we can control everything from atoms and genes to the destiny of our planet, it is humbling that something as simple as a big fish can put us back in our place. In a 1987 interview with Time magazine, Far Side cartoonist Gary Larson put our situation into irreverent and incisive perspective:

» I think it's wonderful that we live in a world in which there are things that can eat us. It keeps us from getting too cocky. «

Food for thought?

Photo
CHRISTIAN KEMPER







SOMETHING EVIL FROM THE SHALLOWS

„What is a monster? To a mouse, a cat is a monster. We're just used to being the cat.“

Scene from the movie
,Jurassic World'

“Shark!” No other cry for help triggers such an anxiety like the warning of the sinister predator. If you call “Help!” in the city at night, hardly anyone will pay attention. Usually you're waiting in vain for helpers and civil courage. Even the distress call “Fire, Fire!” won't rouse much attention. Most people will just give you a brief look and move on. But if you shout “Shark!” on a crowded beach, all hell will break loose within seconds. Why?

Each year, more people die from dog bites, bee stings or by drowning than from shark attacks. You have a 1 in 3,748,067 annual risk of dying

from a shark attack in your lifetime, according to International Shark Attack File (ISAF) data. Lightning? A 1 in 79,746 risk of death. Cancer? A 1 in 7 chance. Heart disease? That's a 1 in 5 chance. So, what is it about sharks that scares the heebie-jeebies out of us? And what do the latest numbers tell us?

Carcharodon carcharias – the great white shark – has long been demonised as man's great ocean nemesis. An apex predator, all pointy teeth and deadened eyes, it's a favorite literary and filmic villain equally adept at scaring the life out of children and adults alike. This week (April 2018) saw two well documented shark attacks around the world. One on a 25-year-old paddleboarder in Hawaii who suffered significant injuries and is still critical in hospital. The other on a 19-year-old surfer at the famed surf break Cape St Francis in South Africa. Bitten on the knee while surfing near the shoreline, he was obviously unlucky