

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange glow and a shimmering reflection on the water. Waves are breaking in the foreground, and a rocky coastline is visible on the left. The overall scene is serene and beautiful.

Sunset Surfing

David Reynolds

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The town of Cambria and Moonstone Beach are actual places. However, only one shark attack has been [documented off Moonstone Beach](#) since 2000.

Moonstone Beach is within an area known as the Red Triangle that runs west to the Farrallon Islands and north to Bodega Bay past San Francisco. That area has [one of the highest concentrations of great white sharks in the world](#), according to one professional surfer.

Visit the [Monterrey Bay Aquarium](#) website to learn more about aquatic mammals common to those waters.

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Chapter One

Even in the land where the sun bakes, the ground shakes and boats leave wakes, television stations need background graphics for their weather forecasts. Videographer Tim “Tiny” Abella was given that standing assignment when he was hired, and reminded frequently ever since.

“I want a logo shot,” KSRF News Director Brenda Malone ordered in her authoritative no-nonsense voice. “Get me some surfers early for the 5 o’clock broadcast and some at sunset for 11 o’clock, and do it now. Now get your tight, fit butt out of here and get me some tape.”

“Do you have particular spot in mind?” Tim asked nonchalantly, ignoring the comment about his physique.

“No, just so long as I’ve got surfers and scantily-clad sunbathers, anywhere from Cambria north—the more of each, the better—works for me,” Brenda barked. “I know it’s going to be tough finding surfers at a scenic beach on a Monday afternoon while school is in session. That’s why I’m giving you two hours to find the right spot, get some tape and persuade the surfers to stay out there while the five o’clock news starts.”

Brenda stared at the young man who had worked for her for two years now and was rounding into shape. “You’d better hope your instincts are good, because we need to boost our ratings. The local Paso Robles and Cal Poly advertisers are complaining we’re charging too much and not delivering them enough customers.”

“Now get your butt out of here, and bring me an iced latte when you get back,” she yelled as he left. “The people in the video better be steaming hot and the latte ice cold or I’m gonna make your life miserable.”

“What else is new?” Tim muttered on his way out the door.

“I heard that, Tiny,” Brenda shouted as Tim ran down the hall, intent on grabbing his gear and taking off.

“Grumble. When Brenda wants something, whether it’s an iced de-caf latte or shots of a car crash, it’s delivered ‘or else.’ I don’t know how more times I can listen to her sobbing about how I disappoint her, or my eardrums can take being screamed at to grab

my gear and haul my worthless carcass the hell out of her newsroom, right freaking now,” he said, talking to the walls.

Firing up the station’s van, Tim checked to make sure the remote antenna was working correctly. He confirmed the antenna was connecting with the station and the camera in his bag before stomping on the gas and speeding off for Cambria.

The small California coastal tourist town between San Luis Obispo to the south and the scenic beauty of Big Sur and Monterey to the north was a haven for tourists seeking a place slightly off the beaten path. It has tide pools, beaches and an abundance of wildlife, though not a lot of nightlife, making it perfect for people who enjoy quiet, he knew.

“That sucks,” he muttered as he cruised slowly past Moonstone Beach, with a collection of tide pools and sunning sea lions. He only saw oldsters walking along the beach, a low fog bank looming off-shore, and a few sunbathers, none of which were worth a second look. The surfers were either not bothering with that beach or looking for decent waves somewhere else.

Nearing San Simeon, he saw a dusty older Toyota pick-up truck parked near an unmarked trail. Past experience told Tim the trail led to Clancy’s Cove, a beach used only by hard-core surfers.

Clancy’s was not for the faint of heart, nor the beginning board surfer, but if you had the skills, the rides and the waves were awesome, one local legend told him.

The surfing community, of which Tim was not a member, said the beach was nothing but rocks. He heard there were some barely submerged, barnacle encrusted boulders just off-shore that could turn expensive surfboards into fractured flecks of fiberglass foam or rip a surfer open from stem to stern with equal ease.

All the drawbacks that kept most people with half a brain out of Clancy’s also made it perfect for the people who knew what they were doing, namely expert surfers.

“I’m going to have to body surf this beach some day soon,” Tim told his phone, which he carried with him to record notes. “I’m more of a swimmer and besides, who needs a board when you’ve got good legs and a decent pair of fins?”

The truck made it clear there was at least one surfer out there, maybe more. Tim anticipated getting one person or more silhouetted against the setting sun, or the darkening fog bank if it holds off. With the sun behind anyone on or in the water, getting

details of their appearance was not going to happen, the videographer knew from past experience. Get a good enough action sequence, though, and it would more than make up for the lack of a tanned, buff surfer, he had learned from Brenda's critiques.

Tim checked again to make sure his video camera's antenna worked and the van was receiving a signal, grabbed his high-definition video camera and walked quickly down the trail after parking next to the pick-up truck. At the top of a low cliff overlooking the Pacific, he looked out at the ocean and at first thought he'd struck out. No surfers were in sight.

He looked closer to the shore and saw what he took to be a solitary surfer paddling out. Putting the camera to his shoulder and zooming in, Tim saw the surfer was a woman with blonde hair about halfway down her back wearing a black wetsuit to fight off the chill. He waved but she ignored him.

"She probably does not even notice I'm here," he knew.

Watching the swells coming in before they broke, Tim started recording as the woman on the board turned around and faced the beach. It looked to Tim's practiced eye that she was in that zone just before the ocean swells broke and became breakers.

Only after facing the beach, and glancing up did Tim wave again and see her wave back at him before kick starting her board, kneeling and standing up, riding along the wave's face.

After getting a few seconds of her riding a breaker with what he guessed was about an eight-foot face, Tim took her responding wave as an invitation and walked quickly down the steep dirt, rock and sand path to the cove's narrow, pebble-strewn beach.

She was back out beyond the breakers, scanning the swells by the time Tim had his camera set up, now from beach level rather than twenty feet above it.

Through his electronic viewfinder, Tim saw the woman spot an abnormally large swell coming in from the west. Tim pushed a button and the camera began transmitting its signal to a recorder in the van.

"Brenda, you are getting what you want: a hot looking surfer," Tim said into the camera's microphone. "I'd guess she's about average height but even without seeing her face, you can tell from the way her wetsuit fits that she has a slim figure and dynamite legs. Hopefully she is hot enough for you."

Tim kept recording as she got back into position, judged the wave and began paddling quickly toward shore before launching her board. She stood up, crouched down and shifted her feet and body, leaning from one side to the other as she directed the surfboard down the wave's face and out in front of it.

"Damn, she must really be an expert," Tim said into the microphone, seeing how as she wove her board this way and that past submerged and faintly visible rocks.

Slalom snowboarders move their boards between pole gates that are supposed to represent obstacles, Tim recalled. This surfer was moving her board in a complex pattern based on the rocks mere inches beneath or to one side of her board. These obstacle could cost a lot more pain by zigging when you should have been zagging, assuming the surfers Tim had talked to were to be believed.

Tim captured the entire 10-second ride from watching the waves to the moment the woman hopped off her board and began walking up to him. Only when she came up to him did Tim pull his eye away from his camera and lower it.

"Hi, I'm Tim Abella with KSRF," he announced with an open, friendly smile, wiping his dirty hand on his jeans before presenting it to the woman. "I hope you don't mind but I recorded your ride so we can use it on tonight's weather segment."

Now it was the woman's turn to get a good look at Tim, though the stunned expression on her face made him believe he looked like a six-foot dark green slimy space alien with antenna growing out of his forehead.

Cate looked closer at the bulky camera and saw the station's logo—a silhouette of a surfer riding a wave with a setting sun behind it—and realized the comment he had just made was legit. She also wiped her paw, one covered in sand, on her short wetsuit and extended it. "I'm Cate Young. Pleased to meet you," she said, a strong note of cynicism in her voice

The two shook hands. Tim pulled a reporter's notebook out of his hip pocket and a pen from his shirt and jotted her name down as she watched carefully. "That's Cate with a 'C' not a 'K'," she told Tim pointedly as her eyes watched his pen move across the pad. He crossed out the misspelling and corrected it.

"What city do you live in?" Tim asked.

Cate saw he was staring at his pad, not at her chest like most other men she had ever been around.

“Why?” Cate replied in a harsh voice.

“My news director Brenda Malone likes to showcase the names and hometowns of people whenever we can,” Tim explained patiently, his eyes now looking directly into hers.

“Locals can relate to other locals and tourists can relate to other tourists, um, I mean other visitors,” he added.

“Well I’m a vet at a small marine research facility between San Simeon and Big Sur,” Cate told him. “I come down here occasionally to catch a few waves, especially,” and she made a point of this, “when I want to be alone.”

“I guess you can use Notleys Landing or Moss Landing as my location since the Monterey Marine Institute office where I work is somewhere in between,” she added after a little bit of thought.

“Thanks,” Tim said, holding out his hand a second time to shake hers.

Cate felt a man’s hand that was slightly calloused, like he did some outdoor work, but one where he wasn’t trying to crush her hand. He managed somehow to find that perfect medium between being too strong and overpowering and weak or wishy-washy.

“Do you mind if I shoot some more video?” Tim asked innocently. “That way my editor can pick what she wants.”

Cate nodded, grabbed her board and began paddling back out into the surf.

“Thank-you,” she heard him yell over the noise of the breaking surf.

Tim began recording, letting his lens zoom in on Cate’s attractive backside as she paddled out into the surf.

She had just barely gotten beyond the breakers when Tim’s cellphone rang. He stopped recording—reluctantly—when he saw it was the station calling.

With one hand on the cellphone, and the other holding the video camera, Tim resumed recording while taking the call.

“We just got a call of some seals and dolphins beaching themselves in Cambria for no apparent reason,” Brenda said, speaking abruptly. “Can you get down there and get some video for our 5 o’clock broadcast?”

“Give me ten minutes and I’ll be on my way,” Tim replied. “There’s a woman surfing who works at the Monterey Marine Institute so I’ll see if she can come along.”

“That would be perfect,” Brenda responded. “Maybe she can give us some clue why this is happening. Is your surfer good looking?” the news director asked, back in marketing mode it seemed to Tim.

“The better looking they are, the higher our ratings go. The higher our ratings go, the more money can charge our advertisers,” Brenda explained at every available opportunity. “Average Joes and Janes only work when there is nothing better, so find the lookers and stick to them.”

“I’d give her at least a seven or an eight, maybe a nine on your rating scale,” Tim replied instantly.

“Well what are you waiting for?” Brenda shouted. “Go get her and head down to Moonstone Beach before all the action stops.”

Tim was wearing his typical work clothes: a pull-over sport shirt, jeans and running shoes, shoes that no longer measured up to his pounding regimen but were still comfortable for walking. The tops at least looked decent even if the soles were hammered, he knew.

“Cate, Cate, Cate,” he yelled at the top of his voice while waving his arms.

He guessed Cate couldn’t hear him being too far away, especially with the wind and the pounding surf knocking his words out of the air. He tried waving at Cate again to get her attention but she didn’t see him, maybe because she was too busy avoiding the sharp rocks nearby as she paddled out.

“Screw it,” Tim said to the sea, sand and salt air. He pulled off his shirt, unzipped his pants, used the toes of one shoe to pop off the other and wearing only his socks and his boxer briefs, dove into the cold Pacific Ocean water.

He swam out as quickly as he could, diving underneath the oncoming waves and kicking rapidly until he surfaced near her board as Cate was beginning to get in position for another ride.

“I just got a call saying some seals are beaching themselves in Cambria,” Tim told her while spitting salt water and treading water with his arms and legs a few feet from her board. “Do you know why they would do that? Do you know anyone who could help?”

Tim’s unexpected voice had startled Cate to the point where she almost fell off her board but she recovered quickly and looked down at the man treading water a few feet away.

Cate looked at Tim again like he was an alien from outer space, looked at the shore and guessed it was about one hundred yards away before staring at him.

“You must be a lot stronger than I thought at first,” Cate said softly.

“What was that?” Tim asked, Cate’s words having been knocked down by the stiff afternoon breeze.

“I have some ideas about why they would get up on the sand,” Cate told him, keeping her eyes glued to the incoming swells. “As to who can help, that would be me. I work with seal lions, seals, otters and dolphins every day. Let’s go take a look and see what’s going on. Meet me on the beach,” she yelled, turning to catch the next wave.

Tim looked over his shoulder and saw a steamrolling swell headed his way. He also saw that Cate was in position to get her ride.

He gave a rapid burst of short, powerful, high intensity kicks and shot out ahead of the wave, able to catch it just after it crested. The result was Tim sliding down the wave’s face, his hands acting like hydroplanes, raising his upper body out of the water. His eyes were watching for the obstacles he knew were nearby, ones that could rip him wide open if he hit them just right: rocks. He saw Cate a few feet ahead of him and off to one side.

Cate was equally intent on riding the same wave, her eyes glued to the water in front of her. She was also doing her best to avoid the sharp, rocky dangers lurking just beneath the surface.

Cate made a flick of her board to the left and Tim, a few feet to her right, made the same move, narrowly avoiding a barely submerged boulder, one that at the speed Tim was going, would have seriously injured him.

Almost at the beach, the wave broke and both people walked exhausted to shore.

“That was one heck of a ride,” Tim said to no one in particular as he stood up. He felt cold air on his legs, chest and other areas but thought nothing of it.

Cate’s eyes went wide as she looked at Tim, her eyes going from his face to below his waist. She saw, but Tim didn’t realize, that his shorts had been lost during the ride, giving her a close-up view of his exposed privates. Only after Cate began blushing did Tim realize something was wrong.

He looked down, saw the situation and slapped his hands over his groin.

“Too little, too late,” Cate told him, barely able to control herself from rolling on the rocky beach in laughter. A wide grin was on her bright red face having seen that Tim’s manhood was adequately endowed.

“Ah rats,” Tim replied. “At least I still have my socks.” He looked at his feet and saw only one was still attached. “Make that sock,” he corrected.

“We need to hurry up if we’re going to catch the action down the coast,” he told her, dropping his hands and dressing as quickly as he could, giving Cate a great view of his firm backside. By the time Tim had his shirt, shorts and shoes on, Cate had taken her board and was already hightailing it up the trail.

Tim caught up to her as Cate, still wearing her wetsuit, was sliding her surfboard into the back of her pick-up.

“Where are we going?” she yelled as she slid behind the wheel. Tim was doing the same, his video camera on the seat beside him.

“Moonstone Beach,” he yelled back through an open window. “Follow me.”

The two vehicles headed south on US 1, racing toward Cambria, a scant ten minute drive away.

By the time they arrived and gotten from the parking lot to the beach, there was a small crowd of people gathering to watch the excitement. They kept watching as four seal lions were doing their best to get far away from the water. Two dolphins, one of which was bleeding from a wound in its side, were right behind the seal lions.

A woman was sunbathing about thirty yards away from the crowd down the beach Tim saw. Even from that distance, he could tell that her top was undone and she had her

face in the sand, earbuds in her ears. She was probably blissfully unaware of what was taking place nearby, he guessed.

A young girl—probably her daughter, Tim guessed—frolicked in the shallow surf nearby, splashing playfully in water up to her seated waist while the mother dozed, lost in her music.

Tim and Cate had barely gotten to the beach when Tim spotted the reason why the seals were beaching themselves: two gray dorsal fins, one much taller than the other, breaking the water's surface not far from shore. Tim's eye was glued to his camera, which was recording everything.

He watched the larger Great White Shark as it sped toward to the beached seals and dolphins, plus the crowd of stunned people nearby.

"Shark," Cate screamed at the top of her lungs as she started to race toward the humans crowded around the beached marine mammals. "Get away from the animals," she yelled.

Cate took a few steps, turned around and stood in front of Tim, pounding her fists on his shoulders, jarring his attention away from the camera and pointing at the little girl.

"Do something," Cate yelled.

Seeing what was about to unfold, Tim placed the video camera, which was still running, on the sand.

The sharks looked to be heading toward the easy prey on the beach: the seals and dolphins. The child frolicking in the shallow water, though, was acting like a signpost saying: "Next meal right here."

"The sharks are going for the girl," Cate screamed at the top of her lungs. "Get her out of the water, now."

"Legs, don't fail me now," Tim muttered as he was already running full speed toward her. A glance at the ocean showed it was going to be a tight race to see who made it to the little girl first: him or two hungry sharks.

The little girl didn't see the sharks because her back was to them, Time noticed. Her mother hadn't heard a thing because of whatever she was listening to, he guessed.

As Tim and the larger shark closed in on the girl, Tim saw the shark's upper jaw slowly open, exposing several rows of devilishly sharp teeth to the late afternoon light.

“Go away,” he yelled. “I’m not going to let that kid become your next meal, even if her mom doesn’t have a clue what is happening,” continued to holler as he closed in on the innocent little girl who was looking lovingly at her mother.

Tim barely beat the shark, splashing through the shallow water and lifting the little girl high into the air before he felt an intense, burning pain in his lower left leg. He stumbled and wobbled as his leg start to give out on him, but he managed to take a few more steps toward dry land.

The little girl’s arms were wrapped around Tim’s neck, his right arm under her. Tim raised the girl as high as he could while he felt another searing pain in his leg as he worked to free the girl’s arms from his neck.

His leg suddenly not wanting to work, Tim fell to his knees, turning as he did so. The shark, its jaws wide open, came back for a third taste of Tim, the kid or both, he thought.

The photo-journalist and weekend workout warrior did the first thing that came to mind as the shark got in range: he made a fist with his free left hand and lashed out, connecting with a straight, hard jab into the shark’s nose.

The shark thrashed in the shallow water, doing its best to back out from the intense pain Tim’s punch just delivered. Once it could maneuver, Tim saw the shark speed for the safety of deep water beyond the breakers.

“Take that,” Tim yelled. “Go find a meal that doesn’t fight back.”

Tim began collapsing backward to the dry sand but saw another woman nearby racing toward him.

He threw the little girl with all of his might and the woman—one of the people who he recalled seeing standing around the beached seals and dolphins—snagged her out of the air.

The girl’s horrified mother, who by now was awake and covering her bare chest with her hands, had just turned to see what the commotion was about. Unable or unwilling to move, she continued watching in horror at what unfolded a few yards from where she sat. Her daughter giggled while she flew threw the air after Tim tossed her, only to be snagged neatly by the older woman.

The second woman immediately turned and handed the girl to her mother who held her tightly as tears began streaming down her face.

Tim saw that the girl was safe as he began to fall, his angle leading him toward the shallow water. He saw and heard the sights and sounds around him begin to fade while a part of his mind told him he was going into shock. The older woman and an older man reached Tim just before his face smacked into the water, each one grabbing a shoulder and dragging Tim out of the surf.

The small portion of his mind that was working vaguely wondered why the water near his leg was turning from clear to red, and what that red stuff was that kept pouring out of him as he continued to bleed.

Cate heard sirens sounding in the distance, rapidly increasing in volume as they roared into the parking lot scant seconds after the shark made its close pass. A sheriff's deputy was the first to arrive at the beach. He immediately unholstered his pistol, barrel pointed at the sky as Cate saw him start looking intently for signs the shark was still nearby. People on the beach continued yelling, "Shark! Shark! Watch out for the shark."

Fortunately the beach was empty of surfers and swimmers, though the crowd of bystanders had grown after the first yell of "shark" was heard by people in a restaurant across the road. Most of the walkers were crowded around Cate as she knelt on the sand, tending to the badly wounded dolphin, one she saw was missing one of its main flippers.

Cate was busy giving directions to several other bystanders who ran back and forth from her truck carrying marine mammal medical supplies as she did her best to keep the dolphin alive.

Someone else came running back from the restaurant nearby, carrying two empty five-gallon buckets. At Cate's direction, they carefully scooped up seawater and poured it on the seals and the stranded, and bleeding, dolphin. Meanwhile, everyone else was intently watching the waves, looking for any signs of a shark's vertical dorsal fin.

More emergency responders, these being paramedics, were hot on the tail of the deputy. The older woman who had caught the young girl waved to them and two ran down the beach, one carrying a toolbox.

Tim had a vacant, unknowing look on his face. He looked at his leg, a woman nearby saw where he was looking and reared back before slapping Tim on the cheek, hard. The stinging sensation brought Tim back from wherever he was headed, helping him recover from the shock of being badly bitten. With the pain of her slap to his face, he felt the intense pain in his leg, a leg that did not want to support him.

“Take it easy, buddy,” a paramedic told him, looking down at Tim. “You’ll be fine. We just need to get you to the hospital so we can stitch up your leg.”

His partner was on her radio, calling the hospital. “We have a bleeder. He appears to be an adult male, mid-30s maybe early 40s. His lower left leg has been sliced open from near the knee to just above the ankle.”

A quick squirt of rubbing alcohol directly into the raw, open wound caused Tim to scream in pain as his entire leg felt like someone had doused it in gasoline and set it on fire.

Tim’s scream tore Cate’s attention briefly away from the dolphin she was treating. Seeing a body on the sand surrounded by paramedics, the person’s head hidden by the legs of paramedics, she had no idea who had just yelled out in agony.

Being the professional she was, Cate went back to the business of saving the life of her dolphin “patient.” Cate tuned everyone, and everything else, out while she worked feverishly to staunch the bleeding, using the shirt under her wetsuit as a bandage and exposing a sports bra underneath.

A third paramedic arrived near Tim and saw the weeping mother grasping her daughter and holding her tight.

“Mama, mama,” the girl said, not knowing what had happened. “Why are you crying momma?” The girl began crying as well while her mother continued to weep.

The paramedic bent down and asked the mother, a Latina, what was wrong. When there was no response in English, the paramedic repeated the question in Spanish. This time he got a broken response, something about a shark trying to eat her daughter and the gringo—she pointed at Tim—snatching her barely in time.

The paramedic gave the girl a quick exam, saw that everything was fine, and began examining the mother.

Tim's cellphone took this hectic time to start blaring, a loud revving motorcycle ringtone blasting through the chaos on the beach.

A paramedic snatched the phone out of Tim's pants pocket. "Hello? Who's calling?" the man asked.

"Tim?" Brenda said, "Tell me you are at the beach in Cambria. Please tell me you made it in time. We just heard there was a shark attack. Did you get it?"

"I don't know who this is but the person you are calling just had his leg sliced open by what bystanders are saying was a large shark," the paramedic yelled. "We're taking him to the hospital now. Call back and leave a message or meet him at the hospital. But don't expect to hear anything from him for several hours. He's headed straight to surgery."

With that comment, the paramedic shut Tim's phone off.

The first paramedic used pliers to pull two shark's teeth stuck in Tim's bones out and wrapped the leg in a compression bandage before giving a thumb's up sign to her co-workers. Two more paramedics lifted Tim, who was barely conscious, up and placed him on a stretcher.

Cate glanced up and only when the stretcher passed near her, seeing it was Tim being wheeled toward the back of an ambulance. The sight of him broke her concentration and she stopped working on the dolphin to run up to the emergency responders before they could leave.

"What happened to him?" Cate asked, nearly out of breath as she rushed up to a paramedic while they loaded Tim into an ambulance.

"His leg was badly bitten by a large shark," the woman paramedic said, closing the ambulance doors. "We need to get him to the hospital because he's lost a fair amount of blood so step back please."

Only after the ambulance sped away did the deputy notice a large, commercial grade video camera lying on the beach. A red light was on indicating it was recording.

Brenda and Tim later determined he had flipped the auto-record switch when he placed the camera onto the sand. That happened in the split-second before he raced the

sharks to the child. The recorder, slightly cocked to the left, continued to record the action and transmit it to the TV station's van until the deputy found a way to shut it off.

The deputy looked at the camera in his hands and connected the dots. "KSRF decal on the camera's side plus TV van in the parking lot meant someone here worked for the station," he muttered under his breath.

"Does anyone know who this video camera belongs to?" The deputy yelled, repeating his question several times.

Cate, who was almost finished with the dolphin, kept her eyes on what she was doing. She yelled back, "a guy named Tim from KSRF. He was the guy in the ambulance."

The deputy muttered a profanity and used his radio to call dispatch. "Dispatch, I need to call KSRF right now. One of their photographers was bitten by shark at a Cambria beach."

The dispatcher said something: a profanity of her own followed a second later by the station's phone number she'd gotten online. The deputy asked her to repeat it, and the deputy withdrew his own cellphone from a pocket. He punched in the station's number and identified himself as he searched the van and found Tim's wallet in a front door pocket. Once the deputy said where he was calling from, news director Brenda got on the line.

"What happened?" she asked, before yelling, "everyone, shut up. This is important." It was evident to the deputy from the noise of people talking in the background that the call was on speaker.

"From what I can gather so far, it sounds like your reporter saw a shark about to attack a young girl," the deputy explained. "He beat the shark to the girl, threw her to someone else and was bitten for his effort. He is on his way to the hospital right now."

Brenda was scribbling notes furiously. "Did he get any video of the attack?" she asked hopefully.

The deputy asked how to check and another photojournalist came on the line. She gave the deputy instructions on how to play back the most recent recording.

After fast forwarding through several minutes of a woman surfing, there was a brief pause and jiggling as the camera was turned back on by someone running. The image

blurred for a moment before resuming. The video began showing, at a distance, a shark opening its gaping saw-toothed maw while zooming toward a young girl playing in the water, her back to the shark. From out of the frame a man appeared, swooping down to lift the girl out of the water before the shark could strike the girl, getting the man in the process.

The deputy relayed everything he saw to Brenda.

“Can you get the camera back here fast?” Brenda asked, giving directions to the station. “I’ll leave as soon as another officer arrives,” the deputy replied.

Two more deputies showed up a moment later and began taking names and statements from the witnesses, getting details about what they had seen. Other volunteers on the beach continued to bathe the stranded animals with seawater while still more kept their wary eyes out for a dorsal fin. Seeing the accident scene was in good hands, the first deputy gathered the station’s camera and placed it in the back of his old cruiser and peeled out, heading to the station.

Cate, with the help of four men, was able to load the injured dolphin into the back of her truck.

“Miss, can I get a statement from you?” one of the remaining deputies asked.

“I’ve got a badly injured dolphin here that needs medical attention urgently,” Cate said, her eyes on her patient. “Can it wait?”

“I’ll make it quick,” the deputy said, holding out a digital voice recorder. “Did you see what happened?”

“A man I’d just met at a beach north of here got a call saying seals and dolphins were beaching for no reason,” Cate replied, her eyes on the injured dolphin. She interspersed her response to the deputy with directions to make sure the dolphin was wrapped in wet towels and clothing.

“We raced here and I saw a badly injured dolphin barely make it to shore before an adult female Great White shark made a beeline for a young girl,” and Cate pointed down the beach. “There was a juvenile shark with it, though the juvenile stayed in deeper water.”

“How do you know the shark was a female Great White?” the deputy asked.

“Because I’m Cate Young, DVM. I’m a marine mammal veterinarian working out of a satellite office of the Monterey Marine Institute,” she replied. “Now unless you’re going to arrest me, I need to get moving if this dolphin is going to live.”

Cate, still in her sports bra and bikini bottoms, slid into the driver’s seat of her pick-up as the deputy waved her on. As a courtesy, the deputy got on the radio and gave dispatch the license number of her truck. The deputy asked his fellow officers to make sure she arrived at the institute safely and quickly.

Only after verifying the other deputies had everything under control, and confirming the little girl was fine but her mother was an emotional wreck, did the remaining deputies post signs closing the beach.

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About the Author

David B. Reynolds lives and works in California where many of his stories are set. A former weekly newspaper reporter and editor, he now works as a Certified Technical Writer.

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