

Is Soul Surfer (2011) Based on a True Story?

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Directed by Sean McNamara, 'Soul Surfer' is a gripping [drama movie](#) that speaks about the power of faith and determination in the face of the biggest adversities. It follows Bethany, a 13-year-old aspiring surfer who lives in Kauai, Hawaii, with her parents and two brothers. During a practice session with her best friend Alana, she loses her left arm in a tragic [shark attack](#). Slowly, she starts losing hope due to her injuries as well as the constant scrutiny by the media.

However, when Bethany has an eye-opening experience during her youth group trip, she refuses to give up on her dream and starts preparing hard to make a comeback in surfing. With its highly motivational narrative that portrays the beauty of resilience, 'Soul Surfer' connects to the audience with its relatable characters. Moreover, it features an authentic depiction of

surfing techniques as well as trauma during recovery. Like us, if you too are wondering whether the movie is inspired by a real person or events, let us find out the answer together? Let's begin!

Is Soul Surfer a True Story?

Yes, 'Soul Surfer' is based on a true story. It is adapted from Bethany Hamilton's autobiography 'Soul Surfer: A True Story of Faith, Family, and Fighting to Get Back on the Board.' Born on February 8, 1990, in Kauai, Hawaii, to Tom and Cheri Hamilton, Bethany grew up with two older brothers, Noah and Timothy. She began surfing at the young age of three, and after commencing competitive surfing, she got her first sponsorship at age ten.



On the morning of October 31, 2003, Bethany went with her friend Alana Blanchard to surf along Tunnels Beach, accompanied by the latter's father Holt and brother Byron. As Bethany spoke to Alana while lying on her surfboard, she was suddenly attacked by what seemed like a 14-foot-long tiger shark. Luckily, she was helped to the shore by the Blanchards, and Holt quickly created a tourniquet out of a surfboard leash to tie up whatever remained of her left arm.

Although Bethany claimed that she didn't feel much pain, she lost 60% of blood on the way to the hospital and suffered a hypovolemic shock. Not just that, she replaced her father in the operating room, who was scheduled to have knee surgery that day at the same hospital. Surprisingly, the shark that attacked her was caught and killed by a family of fishermen just a mile away from where it bit her. After losing her left arm below her shoulder, the talented surfer started a gradual recovery and was determined to get back to her board as soon as possible.

Furthermore, Bethany shared her eagerness to return to the sport in a November 2003 interview and [said](#), "If I don't get back on my board, I'll be in a bad mood forever." Within just 26 days of the accident, she taught herself to surf with one arm and miraculously entered her first competition in January 2004. At first, she adopted a customized board that was longer and thicker, with a handle for her right arm to paddle better.

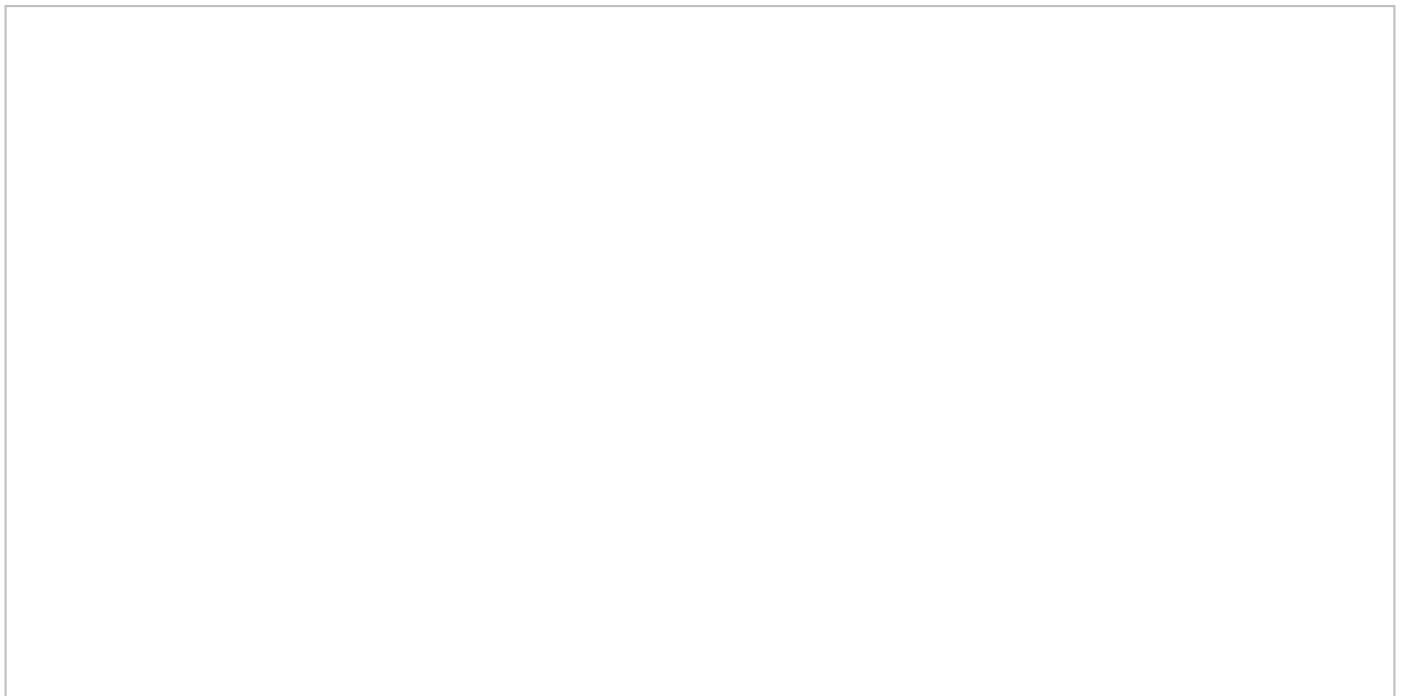


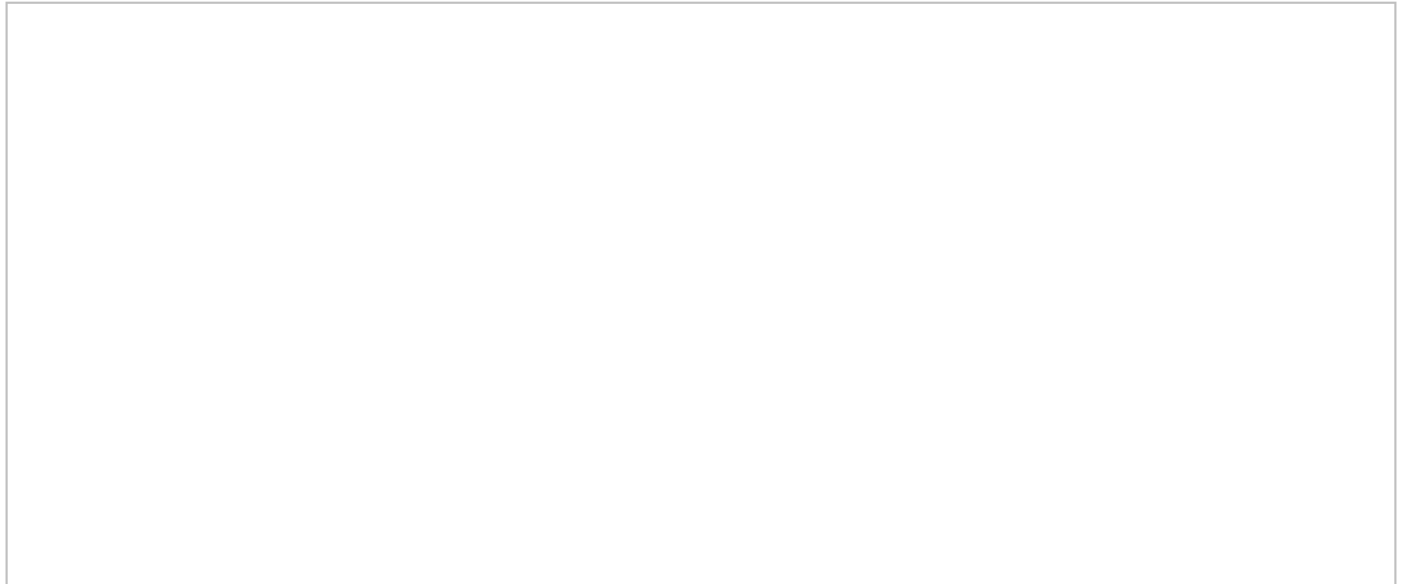
Image Credit: Bethany Hamilton/YouTube

Since then, Bethany has had a prestigious surfing career after turning pro in

2007. She has even been featured in several TV shows and reputed magazines. Not just that, the shark attack survivor has authored several books to inspire readers. Apart from her media activities, Bethany is a part of numerous Christian outreach programs for women and amputees as part of her foundation, Friends of Bethany. When her book was published in 2004, the idea for a biopic started floating around.

After a lot of to and fro, Sean McNamara was announced as the director, but he wished to find more material on Bethany than the book shares. "It's a straight account of what happened," [he stated](#) in a February 2011 interview. McNamara added, "A film needs conflict, so we met Bethany's family and explored her past. I figured there must have been a struggle that wasn't in the book."

In addition, producer David Brookwell shared that they found several areas to cover, such as the impact of the media on the Hamilton family and their faith, as well as Bethany's insecurities about her new appearance. "When the press descended on them, it was almost like a second shark attack...It thrust them into the limelight and changed their lives," he shared. After struggling for years to acquire funding for the movie, it finally went into production around 2010.



Bethany and her family personally selected AnnaSophia Robb to play the lead character in the movie and helped choose a few more key cast members. To maintain authenticity, the actress wore a green sleeve and a prosthetic to match Bethany's arm. In addition, the pro surfer trained her on-screen counterpart for a month to prepare for the role. She even performed the stunts herself for sequences set after the shark attack.

AnnaSophia ensured that she followed Bethany's feedback and desires on how she wished to be portrayed. In an April 2011 interview, Bethany praised the movie's lifelike treatment of events and [stated](#), "I love how in the movie that moment is portrayed very spot on with the way it happened. That was one thing I was nervous about because I didn't want them to make the shark attack into this vicious experience and overly dramatize it."

To further add a realistic element, McNamara preferred filming the actors instead of the stunt people in the water. So, the production hired expert locals to guide the crew members. Apart from Malina, all the other characters in the movie are based on real people. Therefore, the actors worked extremely hard to essay their respective roles accurately. Thus, we can say that besides a few exaggerated elements, 'Soul Surfer' is mostly an

authentic account of Bethany's life. The movie aims to inspire the audience to not give up on their dreams, regardless of any situation.

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