

I SURVIVED

THE SHARK ATTACKS OF 1916



by **Lauren Tarshis**
illustrated by **Scott Dawson**



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Designed by Tim Hall

CHAPTER 1



JULY 12, 1916
ELM HILLS, NEW JERSEY
IN THE MATAWAN CREEK

A feeling of terror came over ten-year-old Chet Roscow, a chill deep down in his bones. He had been swimming in the Matawan Creek by himself. But he had the idea that someone—or something—was watching him.

And then he saw it—a large gray fin, slicing

through the water like a knife. What was that?
Could it really be . . .

A shark?

That was impossible! Elm Hills was miles and miles from the ocean. How could a shark find its way into this little creek?

There was no way. . . .

But now Chet could see it, coming toward him.

The gigantic shark, bigger than Chet himself. The black eyes staring up through the water.

Killer eyes.

Chet dove toward the shore, pounding through the water, kicking with all his might. His feet touched the bottom. He was running now, looking over his shoulder. The shark was right behind him, its huge jaws wide open, its white dagger teeth gleaming in its bloodred mouth.

CHAPTER 2



NINE DAYS EARLIER . . .

JULY 3, 1916

9:00 A.M.

THE ELM HILLS DINER

The Monday morning breakfast rush at the Elm Hills Diner was finally over.

Chet's feet ached. He was covered in syrup, doughnut crumbs, and bacon grease. His curly red hair was damp with sweat. But he was

surprisingly happy. Uncle Jerry was paying him a fortune to help out at his diner this summer—fifteen cents a day! Chet liked being surrounded by familiar faces and hearing folks calling out his name while he worked. Best of all, he was finally making some friends, his first since he came to live with Uncle Jerry last January. He was staying here for the year, while Mama and Papa were in California on business.

Chet was wiping down the counter when the front door banged open.

He smiled when he saw Dewey, Sid, and Monty rushing toward him. They came in every morning on their way to work at the tile factory. Chet had seen them at school—the loud boys who were always talking about baseball. But he hadn't gotten to know them until this summer.

“Did you hear?” Dewey said, his freckly cheeks red with excitement.

“You won't believe it!” said Monty, whose spectacles were fogged up from the humidity.

“Let me tell him!” said Sid, pushing his friends aside. He was the shortest of the three, and always in charge. “It was a shark!”

And then they all started talking at once.

“A shark attack!”

“It was huge!”

“Bit off a man’s leg!”

“There was blood everywhere!”

“The man is dead!”

“It happened right in Beach Haven!” said Monty.

Beach Haven was about seventy miles south of Elm Hills, right on the Atlantic Ocean. Chet had heard about the fine hotels there, and the people who swam in the ocean in their fancy bathing costumes. But he’d never heard of any shark attacks!

Uncle Jerry appeared from the kitchen, his bright blue eyes shining and his thick dark hair neatly combed back.

The guys always stood a little straighter when

they saw Chet's uncle. He'd been a baseball legend growing up here in Elm Hills. He could have gone pro, but he'd hurt his knee sliding home in a championship game. The team won, and Uncle Jerry could never play again. He still limped a little after a long day of work.

"What's this about a shark?" he said as he passed out cinnamon doughnuts to each of the boys. "You fellas aren't trying to fool us, are you?"

Chet knew the guys loved to pull pranks. On the last day of school, they'd put a frog in Minnie Marston's lunch pail. She was the prettiest girl in school, but she'd been so mad her face turned an ugly shade of purple.

"We're not foolin'!" Monty said, pulling a crumpled piece of newsprint from his trouser pocket. "Look at this!" he said.

He handed it to Chet. It was from the *New Jersey Herald*. The hair on the back of Chet's



neck stood up as he read the story. Uncle Jerry read it over his shoulder.

KILLER SHARK ATTACKS SWIMMER!

JULY 2, 1916

BEACH HAVEN, NEW JERSEY

Charles Vansant, 25, was attacked by a large shark Saturday, July 1, while swimming in chest-deep water. He and his family were vacationing at the luxurious Engleside Hotel.

Mr. Vansant, known by all as a man of exceptional charm and great promise, was swimming with a dog when the attack occurred. The beach was filled with fashionable ladies and gentlemen enjoying the early evening breezes, when panicked shouts suddenly echoed through the air. A large black fin could be seen swimming toward Mr. Vansant. Onlookers screamed warnings. But it was too late. The shark brutally attacked the young man, who

struggled to swim to shore. A lifeguard and two men rushed to his aid and finally managed to free him from the water.

But he died a short time later of his injuries. This is the first fatal shark attack on a human ever recorded on the northeastern shore of the United States.

Uncle Jerry laughed.

Chet stared at him. His uncle was tough. But did he really think a man getting ripped apart by a shark was funny?

“Boys, that article is a hoax,” Uncle Jerry said. “A shark will not attack a human. It’s a proven fact. Haven’t you ever heard of Mr. Hermann Oelrichs?”

None of them had.

“The guy was a millionaire,” Uncle Jerry said. “Owned a big shipping company. One day — let’s see, I think was about twenty-five years ago — this gent was out on his yacht with his rich friends,

not far from New York City. They were out in the ocean, and they sailed right into a big school of sharks. The ladies screamed. But Oelrichs put on his bathing costume and dove into the water, practically right on top of those sharks.”

“Why did he do that?” Sid said.

“To prove that the sharks wouldn’t attack,” Uncle Jerry said. “He made a real commotion, splashing and kicking, even shouting at the sharks. And wouldn’t you know, the sharks swam away. They were scared as rabbits.”

Sid glanced at Chet and smiled.

“And that’s not all!” said Uncle Jerry. “Mr. Oelrichs offered a five-hundred-dollar reward to anyone who could come up with one case of a shark attacking a human on the northeastern coast of the United States.”

“Five hundred bucks!” said Dewey. “That’s crazy!”

“Maybe,” Uncle Jerry said. “But nobody ever collected. Because a shark simply will not attack

a human. That cherry pie over there is more likely to attack you than a shark is.”

They all laughed.

But then a gravelly voice spoke up from the end of the counter.

“You got it wrong. Some sharks are killers.”

It was Captain Wilson, who came into the diner every day for breakfast. A long time ago he had been a whaling ship captain. But now he puttered around the creek in his broken-down motorboat. Usually he had a dazed look in his eyes, like he wasn’t sure where he was.

But now the Captain’s eyes were sharp.

“You’ve seen some sharks, Cap?” Uncle Jerry said, refilling the Captain’s coffee cup.

“Seen one?” the Captain said. “A white shark almost bit me right in two.”

“That so?” Uncle Jerry said, winking at Chet.

“I don’t want to scare you lads,” the Captain said.

“Please, sir!” Monty said. “Nothing scares us.”

“We can take it!” Sid insisted.

Chet realized with a happy jolt that the “we” included him.

Uncle Jerry went back into the kitchen, shaking his head.

“All right then,” the Captain said, looking around the empty diner. “But gather close. And don’t scream too loud. I don’t want to upset the other customers.”