

## Soul Surfing by Kara Holden

While writing the movie *Soul Surfer* (a true story about a teenage surfer, Bethany Hamilton, whose arm was bitten off during a shark attack), I discovered that Bethany went back into the water to try surfing again less than one month after the horrific attack. When I asked her how she could have possibly gotten the courage to go back into the water, especially so soon after the terrifying event, she told me quite simply that she knew if she waited even another day longer, she may never have gone back in again. She told me how some surfers can “psych themselves out” after a gnarly accident thinking about all of the “what ifs” and replaying the terror of the moment until they become paralyzed with fear. And they never surf again.

How often we are faced with just such a thing in our own lives – the waves beckon, but we stand frozen on the shore, wanting assurances of perfect safety before we dive back in. And because safety is never guaranteed, we often never get past dipping a toe in before we turn away, too afraid to try again. When our idea gets shot down at work, we decide it’s easier to just keep our thoughts to ourselves; if a movie we love gets put in turnaround once again, we become jaded and begin to cater to the lowest common denominator so we might not have to feel the sting of failure for something we care too much about; and then there’s always the feeling of disappointment after a broken relationship that keeps us from wanting to put ourselves “out there” again, lest we be rejected. Fear threatens to keep us stuck on the sidelines of our lives.

The great paradox is that vulnerability takes courage . . . you have to be strong to let yourself be soft.

In a way, it wasn’t just Bethany’s body that was maimed in that accident – her heart was broken when that shark took her arm, and in so doing threatened to take away the thing she loved most in the world – surfing. She could have walled up her heart, wrapped it in bubble wrap to make sure she would never risk enduring such a loss again – but instead she decided to leave the wound open and let the saltwater heal it, taking back the waves she loved and refusing to let fear win. Today she is one of the greatest surfers in the world. A champion many times over, and an inspiration to millions.

Risk is not easy, but I think it is much harder in the long run to let loss trap you into living a bland existence, devoid of the joy of triumph, and the glory of love.

Bethany told me that the fear of never surfing again was far greater than the fear of another shark, and so the only thing that made sense was to get back in the water. And the truth is that for me, the fear of not living, of never knowing love, is way worse than the fear of getting hurt from time to time. That is the reason I immediately write a new script after I go out with the pitch that doesn’t sell. The reason I am blessed to be in an amazing marriage after a painful divorce. It is the reason that I will open my arms and my

heart to a new puppy even after the heartbreak of having lost my sweet old dog Alfie.

I don't want to watch my life from the shore, blistering in the heat of loneliness, weighed down by a stonewalled heart. Sure, sometimes a wave of disappointment crushes you, and sometimes you lose pieces of yourself to the sharp teeth of loss – but more often in this great big ocean we call life, you get carried along on the crest of something beautiful, a wave of sheer love. But you can't ride the wave if you never leave the shore. So go ahead, dive in – plant your feet firmly on the board, feel the wind in your hair, the taste of salt and triumph on your lips . . . and know that our souls are meant to surf.