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Dentist helps 'Soul Surfer' regain her smile

By Stacie Crozier, ADA News staff

Manhattan Beach, Calif.—When 13-year-old surfer Bethany Hamilton lost her left arm in a shark attack off the North Shore of the Hawaiian island of Kauai on Halloween day 2003, a dentist some 2,600 miles away felt a calling to reach out to the girl—surfer to surfer.



Dentist and surfer: Dr. Patrick Turley rides a wave.

“It struck me when I saw her on a talk show that she was a 13-year-old girl and I was just blown away by what a strong young woman she was,” said Dr. Patrick Turley, a Manhattan Beach, Calif., orthodontist. “I’ve been a surfer all my life. When you’re out there there’s a little part of you that wonders what’s under the water. It strikes a special chord. Every surfer thinks about the possibility of a shark attack, but also that it’s only a one in a million chance.”

Bethany’s story of survival and return to professional surfing has captured the attention and hearts of people around the world. Her story was featured in the 2011 film, “Soul Surfer.” The now 21-year-old surfer, public speaker, author and philanthropist chronicles her life, her faith in God and her busy schedule via her website, www.bethanyhamilton.com. She is the inspiration for the Friends of Bethany Hamilton (www.friendsofbethany.com), a nonprofit charitable organization with a mission to “support shark attack survivors and amputees worldwide and to present inspiring life stories through movies, projects and activities.”

A few months after the attack, Dr. Turley remembers seeing a People magazine spread featuring Bethany and her story of survival, and he immediately noticed her teeth.

“I had a knee jerk reaction when I saw the pictures of her crooked teeth and a little light bulb went on. I thought maybe I could help her.”

Dr. Turley wrote a letter to Bethany’s parents and sent it to the hospital in Kauai where she was treated.



Friends: Dr. Patricia Turley, Bethany and Dr. Patrick Turley pose together for a photo earlier this summer.

“I told them that the world was so taken by Bethany’s story and so many people wanted to help. I also told them I couldn’t help but notice in photos and on television that her teeth were crooked, and that I would love to straighten them. I didn’t think I’d get an answer, but it made me feel good that I offered to help.”

A month later, Dr. Turley got a call from Cheri Hamilton, Bethany’s mom.

“We figured out a way to work it out, even though we were an ocean apart,” said Dr. Turley.

Bethany may have lost her arm in 2003, but she didn’t lose her dream to be a competitive surfer. She was back on a board a month after the attack and placed 5th in a competition in January 2004. Just over a year after the attack she won her first national title at the 2005 National Scholastic Surfing Association National Championships.

Since her competition schedule, speaking engagements and honors frequently bring her to the mainland, Dr. Turley was able to place Bethany's braces in April of 2004 and see her every few months until her orthodontic treatment was complete in February 2007.

"I was blessed by Dr. Turley and his offer of braces," said Bethany. "When I first met him and his family, I immediately felt comfortable in his care. I loved the homey feel of the office—not to mention the surfboard décor! Getting braces not only improved and brightened my smile, it boosted my confidence. Now my smile is my favorite part of me."



Soul Surfer: Post-shark attack, Bethany Hamilton continues to enjoy her passion for surfing as a professional surfer.

Bethany's treatment included use of Ormco Orthodontics products, and the Orange, Calif.-based company is now one of Bethany's major sponsors.

The Turleys—Dr. Patrick and his wife, pediatric dentist and surfer Dr. Patricia Turley, and their two children Connor and Ryan—became fast friends with Bethany and her family.

"We've surfed all over the world," said Dr. Patrick. "The North Shore of Kauai is one of the most beautiful places in the world and we ended up buying a house there. When we visit, we get together with Bethany and her family for meals, surfing or worship services. And Bethany visits us in California, too."

"I really hit it off with Dr. Turley and his beautiful family," said Bethany. "I love surfing with them and enjoy their friendship."