

**ACTIVITY:** Stand-Up-Paddleboarding

**CASE:** [GSAF 2015.09.06](#)

**DATE:** Sunday September 6, 2015

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean off El Pescador State Beach near Malibu, Los Angeles County, California, USA.



**NAME:** Caterina Gennaro

**DESCRIPTION:** A 50-year-old female from Thousand Oaks. She is 5'6" tall, weighs 110 lbs, and she was wearing a rainbow-colored bikini. A competitive gymnast and television personality, she is also an expert diver and underwater photographer who has free-dived with numerous species of sharks, including white sharks. Her work has been featured in the Discovery Channel specials: *Air Jaws*, *Air Jaws 2*, *Diary of a Shark Man* (2003), *Great White Shark: Uncaged* (2004), *Shark Hunter*, (Biography of Frank Mundus), *Expedition Shark* (2008), *Shark After Dark*, and many more documentaries which she co-hosted, filmed, photographed, produced, and co-wrote. Her award-winning images have been published-*Popular Photography*, *Natural Geographic*, *Forbes*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Access magazine*, *Shark Diver magazine*, *Scuba Diving Magazine*, *New York Times*, *LA Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and can be seen regularly on the Discovery Channel website, in commercials, billboards and in numerous other publications. She also co-wrote "Tips for Filming Great White Sharks" for *the Field Guide to the Great White Shark*.



[Caterina Gennaro](#)

**BOARD:** A 9'6" paddle board, white underneath with black skeg, and blue up top, and she was using a black paddle.

## BACKGROUND

**WEATHER:** The sky was sunny and there was a light wind. The air temperature was about 80°F.

**MOON PHASE:** Waning Crescent, 36% of the Moon was illuminated. Full Moon, August 29, 2015. New Moon, September 12, 2015.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The ocean was calm with small white caps from the breeze and there was a rip current near the shore break. The sea surface temperature was 60° to 65°F, and underwater visibility was 20 to 25 feet.

**ENVIRONMENT:** There were no marine mammals in the area, although she had observed a dead pinniped on the rocks at the same beach four days prior with a large wound in the hindquarters.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** A quarter-mile

**DEPTH OF WATER:** Approximately 60 feet.

**TIME:** 17h30

**NARRATIVE:** Caterina Gennaro had been in the water about five minutes.

*"Once out into calmer water and somewhat flat, I suddenly was knocked off my board. It was fast, just a bump, so didn't think much of it.*

*"I got back on not understanding how that would happen because I never fall off. I got back on my board and about five minutes later I saw a shadow about 10 feet away. It*

was deep then it came up close to my board. I knew it was a Great White Shark, 11 – 12 feet in length and very clean with no scars. Then it disappeared. Within moments I saw it swimming towards me, as it turned and went under my board, which made it unstable.

“I immediately found clumps of seaweed (kelp) in water and put it on front and back of my board to make it more stable and also let it hang down so the board looked like floating sea grass. The shark kept coming back, circling, not aggressively. The current was taking me south and in shore but towards a very rocky area. I needed to stay in line with the beach so I used long, slow powerful strokes, so as not to make any splashes.

“The shark seemed to follow my paddle, which was strange. I would put the paddle in front of its snout, but not in an aggressive gesture, just to stop or deflect it from hitting my board. It would veer away for a minute or two then return. The paddle seemed to keep it at bay.

“The wind got stronger and waves bigger during that hour. I found some sea grass/kelp on the surface so I tied off so as not to drift and to keep sight of the shark. The shark returned and went under my board and broke the seagrass/kelp I was tied to. The last half hour or so the shark kept approaching from the back of my board no matter how I moved, so I turned to face backwards on the board.

“Every time the shark passed beneath my board it would become unstable and rock from side to side. I lengthened my paddle as far as it could go and out it in front of its snout as it approached. It then turned on its side just slightly under the water, its pectoral fin slightly out of water but did not touch my board. The shark looked right at me then submerged. I was able to see claspers when it turned so I know it was a male. He swam in front of me and submerged so I thought it was my chance to line up to the beach and paddle ashore. The beach was small and I had to line up perfectly to get in.

“Then the shark appeared again from behind me, I kept looking in all directions trying not to take my eyes off the shark. Fighting waves and the wind was the hardest part. My daughter and friends were onshore gesturing to me to come in. They thought I was just having fun out there. Then, unexpectedly, a large wave came from behind me. I turned my board into it, got on my knees with the paddle and headed toward shore.

“Suddenly I felt my board being struck from below and I went flying up in the air. It seemed like six feet and before I knew it the board was ripped from my hand, my paddle was gone and I was under water. As I surfaced, I immediately looked for the shark. I continued with my back to shore to watch for the shark, and making sure I was in line with the beach or I would smash into the rocks. I swam, very calmly taking each wave by going under and letting the waves take me in.

“My friend Dan Metcalfe realized what had happened when he saw me on the last wave getting hit, and what was going on. I saw him on the beach, and gestured not to come in, to wait till I was in at least 15 feet of water. I had my eye on the water the whole time, didn't swim fast, I was still in deep water. When I got into shallower water I remember , Dan picking me up over his shoulder to fight the waves together. He went under the waves and held me so I wouldn't tumble around, plus the shore break was very strong! As I came ashore I collapsed, my legs were shaking so much, and I cried, not believing what just happened. I just held my daughter and hoped that she didn't see much, the shark followed my board. My board floated away, I did see a fin following it as it floated

*south and into the rocks, the board went the opposite direction of me. Dan recovered the board on the rocks and paddle washed up on shore, The only damage was the string/leash was broken off.”*

**INJURY:** No injury

**SPECIES:** White shark, male. She describes him as “very clean-looking, no scars, a beautiful shark.”

**COMMENT:** A unexpected encounter with a large shark can unnerve even the most experienced, particularly when the individual is on the surface and the shark’s behavior is unusual.

**SOURCE:** Personal interviews with Caterina Gennaro.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Ralph Collier, GSAF