

“A Place of Truth”

by

Tom Mahony
pacificoffering@sbcglobal.net
www.tommahony.net

Originally Published in *Kurungabaa*, Vol. 1, No. 3, October 2008

The Pacific Ocean sprawled beyond the bluff, cold gray glass, kelp beds and mudstone reef. Pelicans and cormorants plied the surface. My toothy friend patrolled the depths. Perhaps near, perhaps distant, but he was out there.

Somewhere.

I touched my wetsuit, felt the ridge of scar running thigh to calf beneath the neoprene. Exactly one year old. One year since the white shark ambushed from below, clamped my leg, and pulled me down. After some flurry of thrashing the shark released me and vanished.

I awoke in the hospital. Had nearly bled to death, they said, lucky to be alive. A year of slow and painful recovery followed, physical progress but mental decay. I faded into despair and its byproducts. A life saved yet gone forever.

One year to the day.

Out front, a sea lion circled beneath the overcast. A wild place, this, perfect waves and solitude. A place of truth. My toothy friend, out there somewhere. My toothy friend, inside my head.

I gripped my board and studied the ocean. Boils churned the glassy surface and triggered the familiar mental reel. Ambush, clamp, pull down. Ambush, clamp, pull down. My heart began to pound.

Too much fucking truth.

I turned and trudged up the dirt path toward the road. Each step slowed my pulse, calmed the fear. I reached my car and stared vacantly at the door. A woman walked past and gave me the wide berth afforded a muttering vagrant.

As I regained composure and inserted the key, dread overtook me. The dread of endless insomnia and night sweats, a prison of fear and depression. I needed to escape, to return to who I'd been. Or at least had hoped to be.

I walked back to the bluff and sat on a cypress log. Waves peeled over the reef, clean and empty. I longed for the place, feared it, needed it, wondered if I could ever go back.

I stood and started down the bluff toward the ocean. Five steps later I stopped, turned, and climbed back up. I sat on the log and watched a set feather over the reef. Yes, a place of truth.

Ambush, clamp, pull down.

I gathered my nerve, descended six steps, turned, and climbed back. And again—seven steps, return. Then eight, nine, ten. This would take awhile.

My toothy friend, inside my head.