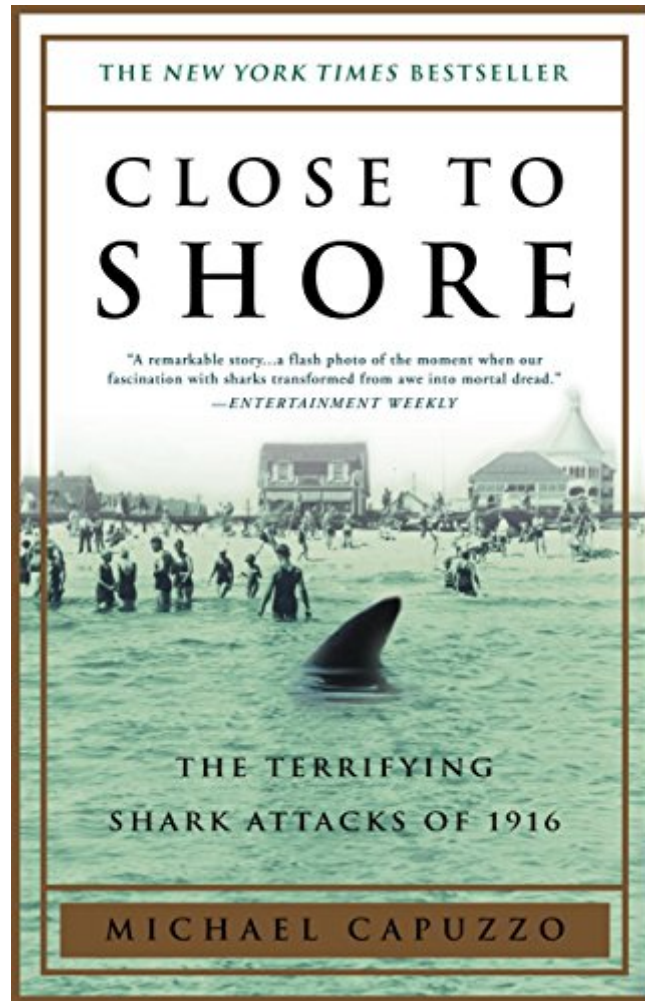


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# Close To Shore: The Terrifying Shark Attacks Of 1916



## Synopsis

Combining rich historical detail and a harrowing, pulse-pounding narrative, *Close to Shore* brilliantly re-creates the summer of 1916, when a rogue Great White shark attacked swimmers along the New Jersey shore, triggering mass hysteria and launching the most extensive shark hunt in history. In July 1916 a lone Great White left its usual deep-ocean habitat and headed in the direction of the New Jersey shoreline. There, near the towns of Beach Haven and Spring Lake--and, incredibly, a farming community eleven miles inland--the most ferocious and unpredictable of predators began a deadly rampage: the first shark attacks on swimmers in U.S. history. For Americans celebrating an astoundingly prosperous epoch, fueled by the wizardry of revolutionary inventions, the arrival of this violent predator symbolized the limits of mankind's power against nature. Interweaving a vivid portrait of the era and meticulously drawn characters with chilling accounts of the shark's five attacks and the frenzied hunt that ensued, Michael Capuzzo has created a nonfiction historical thriller with the texture of *Ragtime* and the tension of *Jaws*. From the unnerving inevitability of the first attack on the esteemed son of a prosperous Philadelphia physician to the spine-tingling moment when a farm boy swimming in Matawan Creek feels the sandpaper-like skin of the passing shark, *Close to Shore* is an undeniably gripping saga. Heightening the drama are stories of the resulting panic in the citizenry, press and politicians, and of colorful personalities such as Herman Oelrichs, a flamboyant millionaire who made a bet that a shark was no match for a man (and set out to prove it); Museum of Natural History ichthyologist John Treadwell Nichols, faced with the challenge of stopping a mythic sea creature about which little was known; and, most memorable, the rogue Great White itself moving through a world that couldn't conceive of either its destructive power or its moral right to destroy. Scrupulously researched and superbly written, *Close to Shore* brings to life a breathtaking, pivotal moment in American history. Masterfully written and suffused with fascinating period detail and insights into the science and behavior of sharks, *Close to Shore* recounts a breathtaking, pivotal moment in American history with startling immediacy. From the Trade Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is primarily a period piece about the summer of 1916. Details such as what was happening in science, baseball, social mores, etc. paint a spectacular portrait of American life at this time. Historical people, from scientists, doctors, and hotel owners to tailors and basket makers are examined and we see how they lived their day-to-day existence in that summer of '16. Meanwhile, of course, people are being attacked by a shark off the coast of New Jersey. As a breakdown, I'd say 40% of this book is the portrait of lifestory, and 40% is about the reactions of the people to the shark attacks. Probably 15% is a conjecture on the particular path the shark took along the coast, along with its primeval motivations as to why it was doing what it was doing. Only about 5% actually showcase the attacks, but it's a very effective 5%. The book is a very entertaining read, although some vocabulary and cultural references are just thrown out as if to show off how much research the author did. A dictionary was handy, and I've read a LOT. The other problem is the editing/proofreading. There were at least three occasions I could think of where contradictory information was presented ON THE SAME PAGE. For instance, the governor of New Jersey is called "Tom" and "Jim" on the same page. And, at one point, the nostrils of the shark are said to be below the mouth, which is incorrect. Minor annoyances, but inexcusable in a historical work. So, I give this 3-1/2 stars, upped to 4 due to the fact that it's a good read.

I can't remember the last book I absolutely could not put down, until "Close to Shore" swam by on Father's Day. As engrossing as the stories of shark attacks were, I was even more impressed with

the author's evocation of an era much maligned or misunderstood. As America clung relentlessly to the myth of isolation from Europe's problems, a denizen of denial from the deeps shattered the enforced social order of the Victorian Jersey shore. I was enthralled by Capuzo's recreation of the pulse and rhythms of life in 1916. It helped me gain a new appreciation for my native state of New Jersey and the life my Dad grew up in, as he was born in New Jersey in 1913. The old European world with its new problems dragged him and others of his era into modernity with the same force and urgency as the shark dragged young men to their deaths. More than a gripping story of sharks and sea, *Close to Shore* is a reminder that clinging to an outdated belief system in the face of facts is foolish and, in some cases, fatal.

"Close to Shore" does an excellent job in telling the tale of the 1916 Jersey Shore shark attacks. His main achievement in spinning this sea monster yarn is in laying the groundwork - to be convincing and achieve the real horror of the vent, Capuzzo had to put the reader into the perspective on an American of the period - prior to *Jaws*, "The Summer of the Shark" and all that. To us, shark attacks are a morbid curiosity and a subject of tabloid journalism and horror movies. To the people in 1916, well, they were not even sure if some sharks were dangerous to man (dismissing stories of such things as ignorant or superstitious). This is done with loving attention, and achieves great effect by the time the first attack is described. I gave the book three stars rather than four because of Capuzzo's departure from good historical journalism in dismissing the possibility that the shark was a bull shark (quite possible), or that separate sharks were involved. It makes for good drama to have a single "character," and to our modern post-*Jaws* sensibilities, that would just HAVE to be a great white (we are talking sharks here). However, this is supposedly a work of non-fiction, and such devices are both unnecessary and detract from the overall value of the work. That said, the book is an good, page-turning read. My sister borrowed the copy from me as soon as I was done with it, and she almost never borrows books from me. I still haven't gotten it back!

I just wanted to respond to the other reviewer because the truth is, nobody knows what type of shark was responsible for the attacks, or even if there were two different sharks. This is my main problem with the book as well. Capuszzo obviously doesn't even entertain the idea that it may have been a bull shark (a reasonable theory), which is somewhat unfortunate. But it could have very well have been a white shark, and hell it's a lot more psychologically terrifying than a bull, so he went with it. I guess it's not that big of a deal, because once you get started on this book, you won't be able to put it down. It's expertly crafted and very well written, and the period details are fantastic. It's

a very quick and easy read too; I was done in two nights. I especially liked the way he paralleled the life of the shark and the life of the first victim, and all the details leading up to their inevitable encounter. I'm a huge fan of Jaws, and I thought that made me think twice about swimming in the ocean... Well, I can honestly say this book did an even better job. I doubt I'll be in the water much at the beach this summer. That's not a bad thing either, it's the sign of a very effective book.

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