

# Monster of Farallon Islands

Lane Walker



The Fishing Chronicles  
[www.lanewalkerbooks.com](http://www.lanewalkerbooks.com)

*Monster of Farallon Islands* by Lane Walker

Copyright © 2020 Lane Walker

All rights reserved. This book is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. This book may not be copied or reprinted for commercial gain or profit.

ISBN 978-1-955657-07-5

For Worldwide Distribution

Printed in the U.S.A.



**BAKKEN**  
BOOKS

Published by Bakken Books

2021

[www.lanewalkerbooks.com](http://www.lanewalkerbooks.com)

*To my son Rece, my favorite fishing buddy—  
I hope you dream big and know  
what a gift you are to all of us.*

## **Hometown Hunters**

*The Legend of the Ghost Buck*

*The Hunt for Scarface*

*Terror on Deadwood Lake*

*The Boss on Redemption Road*

*The Day It Rained Ducks*

*The Lost Deer Camp*

## **The Fishing Chronicles**

*Monster of Farallon Islands*

*The River King*

*The Ice Queen*

*The Bass Factory*

*The Search for Big Lou*

For more books, check out:

[www.lanewalkerbooks.com](http://www.lanewalkerbooks.com)

# - 1 -

The first time I saw her is a moment that will stay with me forever. The emotions I felt are hard to put into words. Fear ran cold through my body when the gigantic gray shark floated under our boat. She was too big to be real.

As the shark began to surface, her scars and war wounds began to materialize, hinting at her mysterious past. My initial fear turned to astonishment when I realized that this was probably one of the biggest sharks ever seen in the Pacific Ocean!

*Was I cursed or the luckiest person on earth?* Shaken and numb, I knew that this trip to the Farallon Islands would be one that I would never forget.

This stretch of the Pacific Ocean along the

California coast is different from the rest. It starts around Bodega Bay and extends south down the coast, stopping 50 miles past San Francisco in the Big Sur region. This area is known by the gruesome name of Red Triangle, due to the high number of shark attacks on humans, mostly caused by great whites. Last year in school we were shocked to learn that an estimated 38 percent of all great white shark attacks in the United States happen right there. Not too safe a place to be!

Growing up in the coastal town of Half Moon Bay put me smack dab in the middle of the Red Triangle. I often fished at the Farallon Islands, which is at the tip of the Red Triangle. The islands lie just 35 miles off our coast, and every fall they are invaded with gigantic white sharks.

I had no idea my love for fishing and the Pacific Ocean would bring me face to face with one of the biggest sharks ever recorded. I wasn't prepared for the monstrous shark or the dangerous adventure that followed.

My life was about to change forever.

# -2-

The light-blue waves of the Pacific Ocean rocked our boat, *Orca II*, when we left Half Moon Bay Harbor that day. We steered clear of the dangerous waters north of Half Moon Bay where the waves could top off at over 60 feet. Today we were heading northwest towards the Farallon Islands.

Traveling to the islands wasn't exactly a pleasure cruise. The trip has a laundry list of challenges, especially in late October. Temperatures are in the low 50s in the mornings, making it a cold trip. The most difficult challenge is the high winds that blow this time of year. These high winds wreak havoc on the Pacific, causing waves of up to eight feet and making the ride in the *Orca II* feel like you're in a washing machine spin cycle. When you add in the

heavy stream of sea spray and dense fog, going to the Farallon Islands can be downright treacherous. Sorry to say, the boat's small covered cabin offered little relief from the ocean's elements, plus it hampered the view.

Even with all the challenges, I never turned down a chance to fish with my dad on the charter boat. Inland fishing was fun, but there isn't a better feeling on earth than hooking into a giant halibut or striper out on the ocean. Today was a special day; it was Halloween. Dad and I were fishing for lingcod. One Saturday every month, Dad didn't book clients for fishing charters so he and I could fish together. It was my favorite day and one that he looked forward to as well.

The motor on the *Orca II* roared as we cut through the wind and the waves, heading due east straight to the Farallon Islands. The trip took around two to three hours, depending on the wind and waves. The loud, drawn-out humming sound of the boat and backdrop always hypnotized me. The Pacific Ocean offered a variety of colors and scenery that made me lose track of time.



## MONSTER OF FARALLON ISLANDS

---

I hardly noticed when the roar of the motor slowed to a dull hum. We had hit a large patch of dense fog, momentarily blocking our view of the ocean. Fog was a sure sign that we were finally close to the Farallon Islands. Most mornings during the fall, fog could be seen creating a thick wrap around the islands, helping to blanket its mysterious allure. Many ships were lost when they dared to venture too close to the misty Farallon Islands.

A strange rock formation magically appeared out of thin air, peaking through the heavy fog and signalling to us that we had arrived at our destination. The boat shook and swayed as Dad began to lower the anchor. Dad spent almost every day fishing the rich waters of the Pacific Ocean— both as a passion and a business. He always knew the best places to fish, especially near Farallon Islands.

I had most of the fishing poles baited and ready when Dad stepped out of the boat's cabin. The fishfinder had marked several large schools of fish, and we were hoping to hook into big lingcod, between 40-50 inches in size.

In a matter of minutes, I saw one of the tips of

the fishing poles bend into a familiar arched shape. The bite looked strong as I jogged over and jerked the rod to set the hook. We were bottom fishing in about 100 feet of water, so my pull was delayed a couple of seconds before I could feel the weight of the fish. I could tell instantly the fish was a good one, and it took a lot of strength to start reeling it up from the dark depths of the Pacific Ocean.

I reeled and reeled, straining with all the power a skinny 14 year old has. After the first few minutes, I slowed and gave my back and arms a quick rest to prepare for the rest of the battle.

The fish was tiring and getting closer to the top of the water. I felt the line relax, forcing me to intensify the strain on the line. Suddenly the pressure from the fish disappeared, and the line went completely limp.

Typically, a lingcod couldn't break our 40-lb braided fishing line. *Had I given it too much slack and allowed the fish to come unhooked?*

Disappointed with myself, I peered over the edge of the boat. I squinted, trying to see the light beige and pink belly of the lingcod through the

## MONSTER OF FARALLON ISLANDS

---

murky water. I grabbed the edge of the *Orca II* and leaned over to get a better line of sight.

It was hard to see through the water since there seemed to be a shadow blocking my view. At first, I thought it was a large cluster of seaweed or maybe a shadow from the sun. Then it moved...

I squatted down on the deck of the boat to get a closer look. The gigantic shadow continued to move lazily, swimming under our boat. Suddenly I realized that it wasn't seaweed or a shadow; it was the dark outline of a great white shark!

Surprised, I jumped back and watched in amazement as an 18-foot great white passed under our boat, thrashing what was left of a lingcod in its monstrous jaws.

# - 3 -

Native Americans used to call the Farallon Islands the “islands of the dead” because of their dangers. They also believed the islands were home to the spirits of their dead ancestors.

Mariners referenced the islands as “the devil’s teeth” because of the number of shipwrecks associated with their treacherous coast. On a clear day, the islands’ sharp, jagged cliffs are visible from the coastal beaches many locals call paradise.

Great white sharks migrate to the islands during the fall months and usually remain to feed there through late winter. The giant sharks fill the water and add to the diverse Farallon Island ecosystem.

The *Carcharodon Carcharias*, which is more

commonly known as the great white shark, is one of the most mysterious and intriguing animals. Over 450 shark species roam the world, but none rival the size or predatory skills of the great white. Adult great white sharks can grow up to 20 feet long, weigh over 6,000 pounds, and live for an estimated 30 years. Typically, females are much bigger than males.

Great white sharks are the perfect predators. Their jaws contain serrated blade-like teeth that can grow to over six inches in height, with the upper jaw having between twenty to thirty teeth. They can also swim up to 35 miles per hour, placing them at the top of the food chain.

Cool water and an abundant population of prey help make the Farallon Islands an ideal hunting grounds for white sharks. These sharks aren't the only gigantic animals roaming the Pacific Ocean, however. They share the water with huge blue and humpback whales and their only known enemy, killer whales.

To some, the Farallon Islands are the ultimate destination to view oceanic wildlife, a bucket list

trip for whale watchers and shark enthusiasts alike. With all the names given to the Farallon Islands, I chose to call it something else, something much more personal. For me, the Farallon Islands were paradise. I fished the islands for the first time six years ago, and my stomach still churns with the same excitement and anxious butterflies.

The sights and smell of the islands are welcoming and familiar to me. Although the stench of the Farallon Islands was well known, it didn't bother me. The legendary odor of the islands can be smelled from ships a half mile away. The ammonia in bird and marine mammal feces casts a terrible smell.

I thought I knew a lot about the animals that called the Farallon Islands home and had studied most of them. Over the years, I had seen a lot of great white sharks on our trips fishing near the islands, but nothing like what I was about to encounter. I had no idea about the true dangers lurking in the turbulent waters off the islands of the dead.

# -4-

Being raised near the golden sandy beaches in Southern California was a gift that I enjoyed every day. My life was pretty simple. Mom was a registered nurse at Seton Coastside Hospital in nearby Moss Beach. My 12-year-old sister, Sara, loved needles and blood and wanted to be a nurse like Mom. Me, I wanted to be just like my dad!

My dad owned a fishing charter business called Ultimate Saltwater Adventures that specialized in all kinds of saltwater fishing. The *Orca II* was a 38-foot Canaveral express cruiser decked out for fishing the great Pacific Ocean.

Our family has a unique love for the ocean. My mom had grown up in San Francisco and loved

living near the beaches of Southern California. After she graduated from high school, she packed her bags for Milton, Massachusetts. She had accepted a full-ride athletic scholarship to play softball at a small Division III school called Curry College.

She had always dreamt of exploring the Atlantic Ocean and spending time near Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard, so she sent Curry a highlight video of her playing softball. Once they saw the velocity on her fastball and the way the ball shook and dipped on her change-up, they offered her a scholarship.

Massachusetts was thousands of miles away from San Francisco. My Great-Aunt Joanie lived near Curry College in a town called Quincy. My aunt and the thought of a free college education was enough reason for her parents to let their baby girl leave the Golden State.

One weekend while sightseeing at Martha's Vineyard, she saw a crazy sun-bleached 20-year-old blond guy doing back flips off the American Legion Memorial Bridge. For some reason, my mom was smitten. Turns out that lunatic would



later become my dad! He had spent his entire life in Martha's Vineyard, and when he wasn't fishing or scuba diving, he was working as a deckhand on a crab boat. They hit it off instantly and shared a strong, mutual passion for the ocean.

Dad's oceanic passion started at the age of seven when a director named Steven Spielberg invaded Dad's hometown of Falmouth, just outside of Martha's Vineyard and began to film *Jaws*. One cool thing about the movie for our family was Dad being filmed as an extra in one of the beach scenes at the beginning. Our family has probably watched the movie over twenty times with Dad pointing out each time the three seconds where he and my grandma can be seen on the beach.

For my dad, watching *Jaws* being filmed started a journey of exploration and respect for the ocean and sharks. Not everyone saw sharks as my dad did. Shortly after the movie was released, a shark hysteria took over with the senseless killing of record numbers of sharks. It has taken conservationists and biologists several decades to change the man-eater narrative of *Jaws*.

Throughout high school, Dad fished and explored the coastal waters, enjoying his daily interactions with striped bass, white marlin, tuna, and a wide variety of sharks. Dad loved the Atlantic Ocean but always had a deep-rooted curiosity to explore the secrets of the Pacific.

Mom and Dad dated that entire year, and the next summer Dad flew out to Old Moon Bay to visit my mom and her family. That was all it took. After a weekend of fishing and diving in the rich Southern California waters with her, Dad was in love. The next week he got down on one knee and proposed to my mom at Pillar Point Harbor as the massive waves pounded the nearby rocks. Nine months later, the two were married and moved into a small two-bedroom house overlooking the Pacific shoreline of Half Moon Bay.

Mom never returned to Massachusetts but instead got her R.N. degree from a college in San Francisco, and Dad bought a charter fishing boat. He named it the *Orca II* in honor of the boat the sheriff and Quint used in *Jaws* to chase the giant great white shark.

## MONSTER OF FARALLON ISLANDS

---

That was the start of Ultimate Saltwater Adventures and our family. I was born first, then two years later my sister, Sara, came along, making us the James' family of four.

Maybe it was genetics, but from the first day I could remember, I loved everything about the ocean. My earliest memory was exploring the sandy local beaches. I remember when I was five years old and finding my first shark tooth. I thought I had found pure gold! Looking for shark teeth became a hobby, and I have collected hundreds in all shapes and sizes over the years.

It was hard to pinpoint what really attracted me to the ocean the most, but the blue waters, bright sunshine, and incredible pounding surf could make anyone fall in love with the California coast.

# -5-

“Dad! Dad! Get over here!” I managed to yell in a high squeaky voice after I had seen that huge creature slide under our boat. Dad was standing at the front of the boat and threw down his rod and reel. He sprinted to the edge of the boat just in time to catch a glimpse of the giant back fin called the caudal fin of the great white.

“Careful, Casey, whites aren’t the kind of fish you want to pet,” Dad said with a chuckle.

Fishing the islands for the past twenty years had spoiled my dad when it came to great white sightings. Around town, Dad was known as a bit of a shark expert.

Great white sharks were my favorite animals on

the planet. It was a unique love affair filled with admiration and fear. Seeing a great white shark in person gave me a feeling of excitement but also made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. It was the perfect mix of excitement and fear that I felt every time I saw a white shark.

Even though I was only 14 years old, I had seen my share of great white sharks. This was definitely the biggest one I had ever seen.

“She’s at least 18 feet, maybe more,” Dad told me.

I assumed that the shark was a female since females are typically four to six feet longer than males. A male white shark averages between 11 to 14 feet, where females can be much bigger. We both rushed to the other side of the boat just in time to see the huge shark float by, bumping the *Orca II* with its top dorsal fin. The shark turned and disappeared back into the dark-blue waters surrounding the Farallon Islands.

What a rush! Seeing such a huge great white shark was awesome. We didn’t let the shark keep us from fishing since we knew that at this time of year, the water around Farallon was always infested with

huge sharks. We spent the next couple of hours bottom fishing, catching lingcod, rock cod, and one real nice striper. The striper put up a great fight and tested my angling skills. It was a great battle!

Sometime around mid-morning, the wind picked up. I glanced at our flag on the bow of the boat as it whipped violently back and forth. Dad was seasoned on the water, but high winds are something not even the most skilled mariner liked to deal with.

“We better get heading back to Old Moon,” Dad said. I could tell by the way he was pulling up the lines that he was concerned with the shift in the wind. We pulled up the rest of the lines, but Dad noticed the last pole felt heavy.

“Son, reel this in quickly! I think there’s something on it.”

Dad handed me the pole and went into the cabin to start the engine. I reeled the rest of the line in before seeing a big rock cod on the end. Rock cod have a gorgeous orange color and are excellent to eat, so it was a good way to end our fishing trip.

“Casey, get that fish in, we need to jet,” Dad yelled

in a concerned voice. I looked up towards the stern and could see the flag blowing even harder, but this time towards the crooked, jagged Farallon shores. I rushed into the cabin just as Dad hammered the boat's accelerator.

A storm was coming, and all the controls of our boat were loudly beeping and squawking. The front of the *Orca II* was cutting through the waves that continued to grow and pound the boat. The storm front shifted and was moving directly towards the islands. The rain started to pick up, masking them off from our view. Off to the horizon, the skies were dark-blue and gray. The waves were growing bigger and bigger; the only thing I could see was the crest of each one and then felt it crash. The storm had snuck up on us, but we weren't the only ones unprepared.

The loud thumping sound of the boat hitting the waves was replaced by a high-pitched buzzing sound coming from the *Orca II's* radio.

The buzzing suddenly stopped, and a man's muffled voice came on the radio with a strong Spanish accent that was hard for us to understand.

Dad reached down and adjusted some of the dials on the radio to make the audio clearer.

“Mayday! Mayday! Need immediate help! Large freighter S.S. *Atlantis* is taking on water. We’re going down! Mayday! Mayday! I repeat!”

Dad quickly responded, “*Atlantis*, what is your location?”

“37°37’N 123°17’W. The ship is very heavy and sinking fast,” cried the man.

“We are in route, not far, hold tight!” Dad quickly shouted.

He turned to me. “Get ready to help, Casey.”