

# 66 Days of Terror Adrift in the Pacific — Couple's Own Story

## Whales Sank Our Yacht 1,300 Miles Out to Sea — Then Huge Sharks Tore Holes in Our Raft

**BIZARRE ACCIDENT:** Massive whales rammed the Butlers' 38-foot yacht. Retiree William Butler, 60, and his 52-year-old wife Simone were adrift in a raft for 66 days after being shipwrecked more than 1,000 miles out in the Pacific Ocean. They braved vicious shark attacks, crazed whales and blistering sun. Their August 19 rescue made nationwide headlines — and here, exclusively for ENQUIRER readers, Butler tells his gripping story.

By WILLIAM BUTLER

On one side of us a bloodthirsty school of sharks was locked in a thrashing feeding frenzy — and on the other side a group of porpoises was gobbling up its share of tiny fish.

And stuck in between was our flimsy inflatable life raft!

It was the middle of the night — but in the dim starlight my wife Simone and I had ringside seats for a bloody sea battle that could turn us into shark bait!

We held on for our lives. I could actually smell blood in the salt brine strewn around by the fight. It was like being caught in the Shootout at the O.K. Corral — only instead of gunshots, our ears were filled with the angry sound of thrashing water.

"Is this it, Lord?" I prayed. "One good shark bite could easily destroy our raft — then Simone and I will be mauled!"

Suddenly, we felt water seeping in. A leak! We had no patches — and we couldn't even begin to look for the tear until dawn.

After a few minutes the frenzy died down. Simone and I bailed furiously for five straight hours, and as the sky lightened, I saw a two-inch gash in the bottom of our 6- by 4-foot raft.

Luckily, Simone had a needle and thread. We sewed up the hole, but it kept on leaking slowly . . . and never stopped.

We'd been adrift in the Pacific Ocean for six weeks. On April 21 we'd left our home in Miami, planning to

circle the earth in our 38-foot yacht. After sailing through the Panama Canal we set course for Hawaii — and were 1,300 miles out when our boat was sunk in the most bizarre accident imaginable.

I'd been standing on the deck when huge whales suddenly surrounded the boat — at least 30 on each side — butting our two-ton sloop around like it was a cork.

**CRRACK!** It was the sound of the fiberglass hull giving way. Then came the sound of water rushing in. "We're sinking!" I shouted. "Get to the raft!"

The raft was tied down on

deck. I quickly loosened it, put Simone in and lowered it into the water. I ran below deck and came back with our water purifier, plus all the food I could find. I also brought along a fishing pole — and a set of dominoes.

I jumped in — and turned just in time to see the sloop sink beneath the waves.

But I didn't have time to mourn the loss of my boat — our raft had a tear in it! Quickly we found the only patch in our repair kit. It barely covered the hole!

At that moment the Lord joined us — and never left.

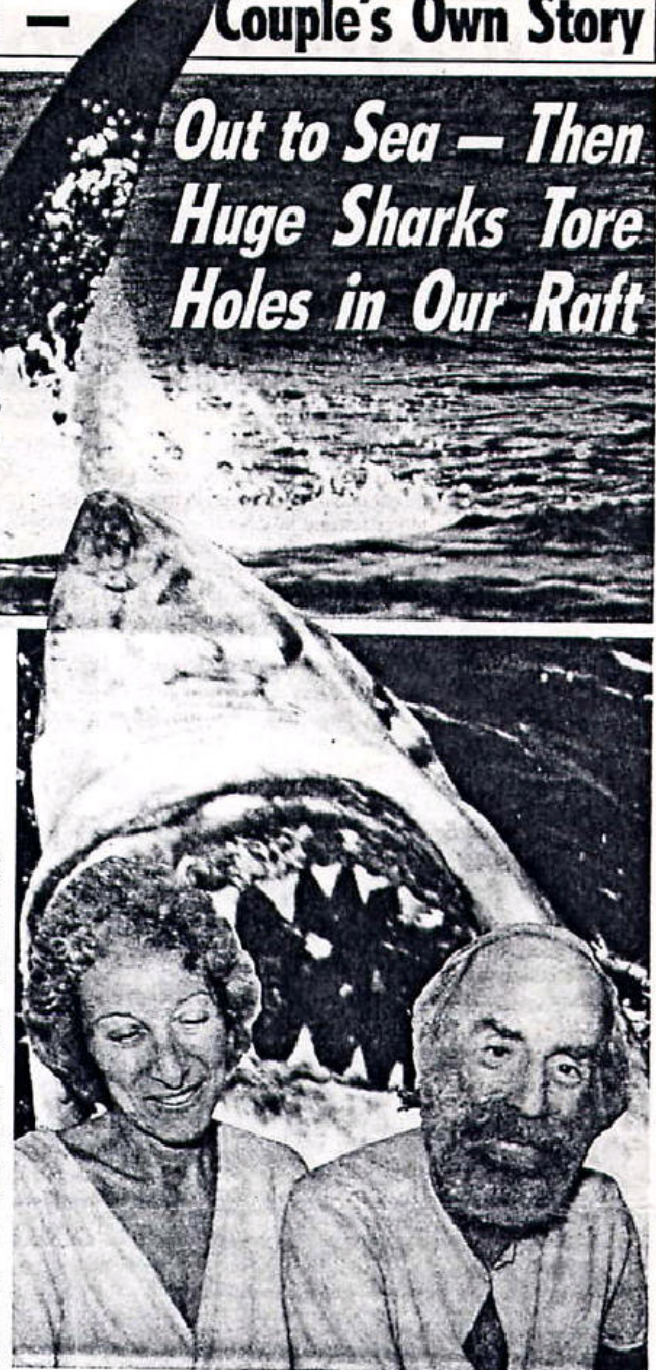
We had plenty of food to start — two cans of crackers, about 10 cans of vegetables and fruit and a jar of peanut butter. For 15 days we had about three meals a day and played dominoes. Thanks to our purifier, which took the salt out of seawater, we always had three liters of drinking water on hand.

When the food began to run out, I decided we'd have to start fishing. I caught a small turtle by hand, we ate most of it raw — and used the rest for bait.

I caught fish every day — but about three weeks later I lost my hook. After that I caught fish by hand — little triggerfish that followed underneath our raft. We ate about two pounds a day.

But the triggerfish attracted sharks and dolphins — which came swarming after them the horrifying night when our raft was nearly sunk.

A couple of days later another large shark opened a



**LUCKY TO BE ALIVE:** William Butler, 60, and wife Simone, 52, spent 66 days at sea in a leaking inflatable raft that was attacked twice by sharks.

half-inch gash in the side of the raft, which we sewed up. But the holes left us with the constant job of bailing and pumping.

Weeks went by, and our daily routine continued: constant pumping . . . catching fish by hand . . . searching the horizon for ships . . . huddling under the raft's canopy to protect ourselves from the sun.

One night after 65 days adrift, a merchant vessel sailed within a couple hundred yards of us. We fired our flare — the last one — and screamed ourselves hoarse.

I wanted to jump for joy when a searchlight came on — but it passed over us. The ship sailed away. Simone

and I held each other — and sobbed.

"Don't abandon us now, Lord," I prayed. I thought that after that crushing disappointment we wouldn't make it through the night.

We did — and just as the sun went down the next day, a miracle happened: I saw the winking light of a boat . . . headed straight for us!

"It's a ship!" Simone yelled hoarsely. It was the Costa Rican Coast Guard. Incredibly, we'd drifted back to Central America!

They pulled us on deck — and I watched as they lifted aboard the raft that had been our home for 66 days.

As it touched the deck, it fell apart. It was truly a miracle we were alive!



**HELLISH ORDEAL:** Solid line shows route of the Butlers' yacht. Dotted line indicates where they drifted after yacht sunk.