



Our family always stayed at the beach for the summer holidays, and this year Mum let me invite Jake to stay with us. We were both good swimmers, and were looking forward to the swimming sports when school went back. We trained by swimming across the bay every morning. Mum wasn't too happy about it at first, and used to stand on the veranda, watching us all the way. But after she saw us swim across and back without stopping, she didn't worry any more.

That morning, we were more than halfway across and I was in front. It was when I lifted my head, to check that we were going in the right direction, that I first saw the long dark shape moving in front of us. At first I thought it was the shadow of a cloud, but it moved too fast and then disappeared.

I swam on, not quite so fast, scanning the surface of the water. Had I imagined it? No – there it was again. It was closer, this time, and made a thin black line through the ripples.

I was suddenly very frightened. I tried to pull my feet up under me, panicking at the thought of a shark cruising round below. I seemed to have forgotten how to stay afloat. My head went under, and I swallowed a mouthful of salt water. Jake caught up with me as I came to the surface, choking.

“What's wrong with you?” he grinned. “Trying to breathe under water?”

“There's a shark over there,” I gasped, struggling to get the words out. “Look! There!” The dark shape, its fin cutting through the water, appeared for a second then dived out of sight. Jake looked everywhere but didn't see it. He looked scared



“Let’s go back,” he said. “Quick!”

“It’s further that way,” I argued.

“But we would be swimming away from it, and it probably hasn’t seen us yet!” Jake insisted.

But I knew it wasn’t going to matter which way we went, because now I could see it circling us, and getting closer as it went.

I’d never felt so frightened. I tried to think what I’d been told to do in case of a shark attack. I knew splashing came into it somewhere, but had no idea whether it attracted them or scared them away. I couldn’t take my eyes off that shadow as it came closer and closer.

Then Jake laughed! I thought he must have gone mad with panic.

“That’s not a shark!” he shouted. “It’s a dolphin!”

At that moment it leapt out of the water, and I could see that Jake was right. It was a beautiful, friendly thing!

*Source: Story by Marie Gibson. Illustrations Chris Gaskin. Choices, Learning Media, 1994. (Text abridged).*