



Impact Statement

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***The "Tooth" of Clark*, 2026**

Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 20 inches

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Unsung Hero: Dr. Eugenie Clark

Many scientists have made important contributions to the world and challenged misconceptions, yet not all of them are well recognized by people. Especially for female scientists, who often face being underestimated. I've always loved marine biology and marine creatures, so I want to choose my Unsung Hero as someone who not only studies the ocean but also changes people's perspective. This is why I chose Eugenie Clark as my Unsung Hero, who spent her entire life studying shark behaviors and breaking stereotypes regarding how people define sharks.

Eugenie Clark was born on May 4, 1922. At a really young age, Clark lost her father and was raised by her mother and grandparents. Clark's mother dropped her off at the New York Aquarium every day while she worked at a newspaper stand. This contributed to Clark's interest in aquatic life and led her into the study of zoology. Due to her Japanese heritage, Clark also loved Japanese ocean cultures. She had always dreamed about swimming with sharks one day in the future, just like the people in the shark tank. William Beebe, an American biologist who invented the bathysphere with Otis Barton, was Clark's hero. In the early 1940s, Clark went to Hunter College and New York University to study zoology, where she supported herself by working as a chemist at a plastic company. She also applied for Columbia University, but a scientist told her, "If you do finish, you'll probably get married, have a bunch of kids, and never do anything in science after we have invested our time and money in you." This made Eugenie Clark strive to stand out in a male-dominant society and prove that women are not just people to get married, but people who can make a meaningful contribution that positively impacts the world. In 1949, Clark conducted research on the Red Sea from the Al-Ghardaqah Marine Biological Station in Egypt. The live-bearing reproduction of platy and swordtail fish, which made her receive a doctorate from New York University, has been reported as the first person in the United States to perform a successful experiment of artificial insemination on fish. Eugenie Clark completed 72 submersible dives in her life and was one of the first women to use scuba gear.

What brought Eugenie Clark to explore sharks was the construction of Mote Marine Laboratory in 1955, where she was requested by a cancer researcher to catch sharks for him to study the livers. After 3 years, Clark started to learn about shark behavior, with a focus on lemon sharks. The research includes whether sharks can be trained, how they forage for food, their ability to memorize things, and whether they take the initiative to attack humans. She found out that some sharks do not swim constantly to breathe. After spending years with several different

species of sharks, she concluded that sharks have a high IQ, and they do not actively attack people. Most shark attacks reported are caused by curiosity. Furthermore, their bad eyesight makes them misread humans as prey. People had always thought of sharks as creatures that are “dangerous”, “cruel,” sometimes even described as “human killers.” After she completed the mission, she started to give lectures in public on shark behaviors and changed people’s perspective on sharks. She was nicknamed the “Shark Lady” after all her research and effort put in, which made more people know about sharks. Dr. Eugenie Clark wrote the books, *The Lady and the Sharks* and *Lady with a Spear*, which delve into her career and further explain the behavior shown by sharks.

When designing my artwork, I decided to separate it into four different parts: young Clark standing in front of a shark tank, Dr. Clark as a diver and wearing scuba gear, the red sea where she explored in the background under the aquarium tank with a shark fin, and lastly, shark teeth around the canvas. I focused more on sharks but not the poisonous fish, as I thought sharks were more important to her life and what she mainly focused on. Her childhood built up her interest in marine creatures, so the aquarium shark tank is in the background and takes up a large space in the background. At first, I didn’t add the shark teeth around the canvas, but my art piece looked really empty after I finished sketching everything. The circular shape of the canvas reminds me of the shark teeth (Megalodon shark teeth) that could perfectly surround my piece.

I used acrylic painting to do my artwork, which I really challenged myself. Years ago, when I first tried acrylic painting, the landscape I drew looked horrible, and that made me never want to try it again. I am more of a sketching fan, but after planning and deciding, I chose acrylic paint to beat my fear, just like Clark breaking the stereotypes about sharks. Mixing colors made me confused a lot. How could a color that looks like green be the skin color? When drawing the face, I added blue, red, yellow, and a variety of different colors into the base skin color paint to make it look more realistic. Her work inspired me. When I’m following my dreams, I do not give up, even though I could be misunderstood by others. She also changed my perspective on sharks. I wish I could also be a marine biologist in the future and create remarkable research just like Eugenie Clark did.

References:

<https://mote.org/staff/dr-eugenie-clark/>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eugenie-Clark> <https://www.mbl.edu/>

<https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life/sharks-rays/eugenie-clark-shark-lady>