

Excerpts from the book

Dancing on Water

Adventures with Dolphins, Whales and
Interspecies Communication

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Dolphin Press

*It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
what is essential is invisible to the eye.*

—Antoine de Saint-Exupery

*Everything the Power of the World
does is done in a circle.... The life of a man
is a circle from childhood to childhood.*

And so it is in everything where power moves.

—Black Elk, Oglala Sioux (1863–1950)

Introduction

This eBook is a mini web version of the complete book *Dancing on Water* originally published by Dolphin Press. Each story in the book is written in a way that allows the reader to enjoy them individually or as part of a longer sequence. The narratives have grown out of the experiences that have been closest to my heart. They are primarily inspired by the dolphins who by various quirky turns of fate found their way into my life, bringing with them exceptional magic and profound joy. They are about how the dolphins in their own enigmatic way have become teachers and guides — always full of humor and enduring grace. Both in and out of the water, they have come into my awareness carrying messages and inspiration.

The *Dancing on Water* stories are interwoven with the fabric of family and friends and other animal companions. We are all connected by invisible threads — life's intelligence is inextricably interdependent, and our thoughts and feelings appear to influence each other and our reality. We are co-creators, fashioning ourselves and our beloveds into our own life stories.

The tellings here are about love. They are about realizing the depth of our heart's affections, and then having to let go. They are about the frailty of our human existence and our own vulnerability. The stories also point to something beyond these perceived limitations. They reveal a universe that is infinitely supportive, if only we would open ourselves to receiving what is continually being offered. It is knowing that what we may call

God, or our connection to Source, *is* Love itself, and is something that is with us always. We travel the world searching, looking for answers or for a particular person or teacher, only to return home and find that love has been at our own doorstep, patiently waiting all along.

Close Encounter

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life. For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

—Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

I opened my eyes, groggily, blinded by the glare of harsh white lights. I lay on my back as I was rolled down a long hallway. I was thirsty. I tried speaking, but my voice sounded gravelly and harsh.

I was very tired and drifted back into an uneasy sleep.

Later I awoke in a strange room and looked at a clock on the wall. 3:30. 3:30 in the morning? The light had been switched on, and a nurse came to stand at the side of my bed. “Just checking your vitals,” she said in a comforting tone. I saw an array of tubes taped to my arm that were connected to an elaborate machine on my right. I was grateful when the lights were dimmed and I could drift away again.

The next morning a doctor appeared in my room. He came to sit at my bedside and looked at me with a

faintly quizzical expression. “You gave me quite a scare last night,” he said. “You’re lucky to be here.”

Vaguely, I remembered him as one of the doctors from the emergency room the night before. Friends had rushed me through heavy traffic to Marin General Hospital. I had been bleeding — hemorrhaging, we later learned — from a tumor in my womb. I had fainted. In the car a girlfriend kept talking to me. “Stay awake,” she said. “Stay awake.” Later, as medics rushed to give me a blood transfusion, I remember feeling cold. I had started to shake and asked for a blanket. Strangely, at no time had I been afraid. Inwardly I felt calm, even though the frustration and fear was apparent in the faces around me. Time had seemingly slowed down, and I felt oddly disconnected from my body. Despite the panic in the room around me, I felt protected by some dimly perceived, expanded other presence that assured me that, whatever was happening, I was safe, and everything was going to be all right. I had only a faint memory of being hurried into surgery, of a mask covering my nose, and of being asked to slowly count backwards as I was put under anesthesia.

“That was quite a night,” my doctor continued. “About five more minutes and we would have lost you. We had to perform a hysterectomy. The good news is you still have one set of ovaries.”

Quietly I digested this new piece of information. No children. I think I had already let go of that possibility. Somehow all I could feel was relief and the surprise of being here at all. “Thank you. Thank you for being the

one on duty," was all I could manage.

Suddenly, I found that my life had been reduced to performing very simple tasks. I had no sensation in the lower part of my body. The aftereffects of the anesthesia lingered, and the constant drip of various fluids into my veins kept me sleepy and sluggish. Before I could eat real food, I needed to regain the use of my bowels. My goal became getting to the toilet. I advanced to taking short walks in the hallways, my tubes and apparatus dragging behind me. I flopped along in my one-size-too-big hospital slippers, trying to keep my short cotton gown from flapping open.

I clearly saw the humor in my situation. In fact, I felt remarkably light in spirit, as if completely removed from the complexities and challenges of daily living and human interaction. I was now living inside a rarified bubble where everything had been simplified. All the while, I continued to feel the support of an overriding other presence.

If I do enough laps, perhaps I'll be rewarded with a meal, I thought. The day arrived when a tray was ceremoniously brought in to where I lay, propped up against the pillows. My dismay must have shown on my face. "Is everything all right?" asked the nurse. A cup of coffee and a bowl of raspberry jello stared me in the face. I grimaced.

The next time the phone rang, I was relieved to hear the voice of my acupuncturist girlfriend Nan on the

other end. “Nan, I need real food,” I whispered urgently. “Could you bring me a smoothie when you come to visit?” She did, along with some restorative Chinese herbs that I hid in the cabinet next to my bed.

A few days later, I asked the nurse if I could see my doctor. When he arrived, I shot him a conspiratorial look. “Do you think you could give me permission to go home? I’m actually feeling okay.” I added, “I haven’t had a real meal since I got here.”

He looked at me appraisingly. “Sounds good to me. But before you go,” he laughed, “I’ll have them order you up something from the kitchen.” I left the hospital in my nightie and slippers and with a full stomach of mashed potatoes, turkey and gravy.

My physical trauma notwithstanding, I was ready and eager to fully re-engage in life. Within a week I was out dancing, albeit gingerly, and within three I backpacked in Yosemite. My doctor gave me the thumbs-up. “You’re my miracle,” he said.

By the fall I was back to full-time work, but what I had become acutely aware of was the frailty and transitoriness of life. I felt that I’d been given a second chance. I’d been taken to a door that most people, when they get to, are required to walk through. I was certain that if I had gone through that door I would have entered into a realm of unimaginable peace and light.

Throughout my time in the hospital it was as if I had been protected, watched over, by something greater than

could be explained by what was happening on a physical level. I found myself asking, if life has the potential to end so abruptly, and if death is not something horrible and dark and final, then what keeps us from doing more of what we really want while we are here? What am I afraid of? What's to keep me from living life more fully now? What *is* really important to me?



As the new leaves began to appear on the trees in the spring of the following year I decided to follow some of my dreams. One weekend, my curiosity piqued by an inviting lecture title, I found myself in a room full of people waiting to hear a presentation on dolphins. The event took place at the Whole Life Expo in San Francisco, a huge gathering consisting of workshops and product displays involving everything from the latest in consciousness-raising techniques to holistic health — a sure setting for something out of the ordinary to happen.

When the speaker arrived, we were given a brief introduction, and then the audience was invited to close their eyes and to join in a group meditation. We were asked to pay attention to the breath, to gradually quiet the mind, to let go of the stimuli from the day — the lists, the worries, the conversations — and to sink into a place deep within. *Feel the weight of the body sitting in your chair. Feel yourself relaxing. Allow the tension in the muscles to drain out, letting it run down into the floor.* The voice of the speaker continued hypnotically, gently guiding us. Slowly, I felt my breath deepen. I could feel

the weight and the drowsiness in my body, and then an ever-so-slight twitching in my eyelids. I knew I was entering into a light trance. I began to feel myself floating slowly down through space.

As I sank, I gradually became aware of the watery blue light of the ocean all around me. Endlessly it stretched, expanding in every direction, and like a diaphanous angel I continued to fall, gliding into its depths. Long before anything else, I heard a soft whistling. With it came an almost imperceptible presence — radiant and softly inviting. Out of the calm and now inky darkness I saw two shadowy forms, moving gently and certainly towards me. The translucent shapes of two dolphins began to reveal themselves, shimmering and winking in the near blackness. Slowly, they began to spiral around me. As they spun their silver rings, the space inside my chest began to ache, and the pounding of my heart erupted with profound and indescribable joy. What I heard was, *You are so loved. You are a precious being.* I felt an explosion of light inside me, and I began sobbing. I felt overwhelmed and completely taken by surprise. What was happening? In this silky, watery world, the dolphins' presence had touched me at a place in the center of my being — a place of inexpressible love and joy and beauty. I knew I was being given an exquisite gift, an experience of the core Self — that which I Am. And I knew without a doubt that this was Home — a place of profound interconnectedness. Again I heard, *You are This.*

As we were gently guided back into the room and taken out of trance, I thought about my two underwater

messengers. I knew they had activated what could only be called a core or transcendental experience. Why and how had they become such powerful messengers? I knew I wanted to encounter dolphins in three-dimensional reality. Aside from always having been intrigued by them, I wanted to see and learn for myself who and what they really were.

Letting Go

Faith means living with uncertainty — feeling your way through life, letting your heart guide you like a lantern in the dark.

—Dan Millman, *The Laws of Spirit*

I started researching dolphin swim programs and trips. Later that summer, I attended an engagement party for friends where I met Jon, a personal growth and workshop leader. He was leading a trip to Hawaii the following March to swim with the wild spinner dolphins on the Big Island of Hawaii. Our mutual interests soon sparked into romance. I signed up for the trip and agreed to help design the visuals for his flyers and advertising. I was thrilled! In my imagination I immersed myself in the dancing waters of Kealakekua Bay, I flew with the Goddess Pele over rivers of underground molten lava and sacred caves, and I felt the breath of balmy ocean breezes on my skin.

As the months went by and we got closer to our departure date, I began to wonder what the chances were, realistically, of actually finding the dolphins. After

all, we were meeting them somewhere out in one of the largest natural bays in the Hawaiian islands. I felt a great sadness well up inside me as I considered the possibility that this encounter might not happen. For days I struggled within myself, wanting to prepare myself for a very real scenario — the likelihood that they would not be there. Over and over I've observed this dilemma between the doubting mind and the heart. The heart longs and aches, and the mind scrambles to protect us from disappointment, from failure, from disillusionment. For days I prayed and had conversations with the dolphins in my head. Finally, I came to a place of letting go. I let go of my attachment to seeing them. If they chose not to come, that was okay. I would still enjoy my vacation in Hawaii. Nothing would be lost. In fact, everything would be perfect just as it was.

It was at this place of detachment, of letting go and surrender, that something miraculous happened. I was very busy with work the week before we were scheduled to leave. I was putting in long hours, and I had countless details to attend to. Then, in the midst of all this preoccupation and noise, I started to hear something else. I started to hear, faintly at first and then louder, small distinct chirpings and whistlings. It became unmistakable — it was the sound of dolphins, and it got louder. I don't believe this, I thought. I signaled back anyway: Thank you for communicating, but now I'm having a hard time concentrating. All week long it was like being tuned into a very special and exclusive radio frequency.

At the end of the week we flew from San Francisco to the town of Kona on Hawaii. From the air I could

see the moonlike lava landscape of the west shore. We arrived at our beautifully situated hotel south of town, ate dinner and then headed for bed. We were scheduled to wake up early, at 5 A.M. the next morning, to carpool to Kealahou Bay with our wetsuits and snorkel gear. In the haziness of early morning light we sheepishly greeted one another, coffee cups in hand. My heart hammered in my throat. The moment had arrived. Would the dolphins show up for their date — an invitation made through the ether and precipitated in the heart? Slowly, we drove the winding road down towards the glistening waters of the bay and pulled into a sandy parking lot. Large red hibiscus flowers lay strewn across the ground. I walked toward the beach, and then I saw it — the splash of a single dolphin jumping just off shore.



*Karin and Jon at the City of Refuge on the
Kona coast of Hawaii.*

I was so astonished that I started to cry. I realized then that if this was to be the only contact we had with the dolphins all week, I would still be extraordinarily happy.

To me, they had decided to keep our date. Later, at the end of our swim, I spoke briefly with an old Hawaiian man who sat watching our foray out into the water. He grinned and quietly commented, “They haven’t been here for weeks, but today they are here.”



Spinner dolphins off the Hawaiian Islands.

We did find a huge pod of dolphins — or perhaps they found us. They showed up on each of the three days we had hoped to swim with them. It was magical and extraordinarily dreamlike — like being in an altered state of reality or another dimension. In the evening Jon led us in meditations. “Visualize,” he said. “What more do you want to create for yourself with the dolphins?” My inner vision had been flooded with brilliantly colored pictures of the dolphins ever since our first swim in the water. It was like watching my own inner nonstop movie. I wondered — was I creating the pictures, or were the dolphins sending them to me? As I sat quietly attending to the in and out of my breath, I saw myself gazing into the eye

of a dolphin as it slowly swam next to me. Then another one leapt high up in front of me. The next morning I found myself transfixed by the gaze of a dolphin as he gracefully swam past me. Then a loud splash caught my attention as a dolphin leapt into the air, spraying me with water. I laughed out loud. They must have gotten my message. Or maybe I got theirs.



Mandala of shells, flowers and leaves.

One of the things we discovered was that the dolphins liked playing a game with leaves. They particularly seemed to like the large yellow leaves that floated out from shore. The dolphins would pass them from one fin to another, sometimes catching them on their flukes (tails) or carrying them on their rostrums (their long beaklike jaws). As a group we decided that we would come down to the bay for a fourth day and bring the dolphins a gift of leaves and flowers. That last morning we carefully swam out with our gifts, looking for the dolphins, but they had disappeared. We had not had a

prior agreement to swim with them, and in their enigmatic fashion they had quietly vanished. We returned to the beach, and on the sand we created a farewell mandala of shells, red hibiscus flower petals and yellow leaves. I was touched by the delicate beauty of our fragile creation. It seemed appropriate that our last encounter would be with our group together standing in a circle holding hands, with the temporal beauty of nature spread out at our feet.



The teaching for me here was about the power of the heart, of letting go and surrendering. What I learned was that we are enormously powerful if we choose to create out of love. I felt as though I understood in a new way the old adage: Let go, and love will find you. With the distance of hindsight, my mind would sometimes argue that I tend to have a very overactive imagination and that I am a prime candidate for hearing and seeing things. How would I ever know whether the dolphins would have shown up regardless of anything I did or felt? Wasn't it all just a matter of random chance?

Over the years, however, the truth of these experiences has become more and more palpable. The dolphins are a constant reminder to check in with myself and to ask whether a wish for something or someone is truly coming from my heart. If the answer is *yes*, then those things — be they people, projects, places, experiences — seem to come towards me. They *do* show up. It is not a logical road. If my desire is coming from a place of ego or of trying to control a situation, the outcome is less

predictable. The “message” doesn’t seem to get through — or if it does, it doesn’t seem to have much power. Over and over again, I have heard the communications to *relax* and *surrender* and *let go*. As a result, I find that I cry more, and I laugh more. I try to let myself be in the river of life, no matter how scary it may sometimes appear — to go with the flow rather than trying to resist it. I try following my intuition or my gut, often down a seemingly illogical path. Ultimately, the power of Love seems to find a way. It appears to be irresistible.



Spinner dolphins close-up.

Since these initial experiences, I have become familiar with the term *telempathy*, a phrase coined by Joan Ocean, who has spent years swimming with the wild spinners in Hawaii. Telempathy is a combination of telepathic and empathetic communication, or empathy at a distance. Empathic communication occurs when we experience the exact sensations of someone or something else with whom we are emotionally close. My own experience has shown me that dolphins tend to

be extremely empathic. They seem to have the ability to feel the pain and emotional state of another being. This, combined with their echolocation or imaging skills — the ability to project clicking sounds (created in the air sacs beneath the blowhole) out in front of them, then interpret the soundwaves as they are reflected back, thereby determining the size and distance of foreign objects — seems to make for a very sophisticated form of telepathy. I am reminded of a woman in our group on our trip to Hawaii who was pregnant. She didn't go into the water for the first couple of days because she felt tired from the flight. When she finally did, she was surrounded by dolphins who seemed to show a particular interest in her. It was as if they knew she was carrying a child and needed special attention. The combination of these two skills — the ability to be empathic and also to “see through things” — makes the dolphins especially suited as “healers” (by their very presence) and as messengers, perhaps even cosmic messengers.

When people ask if dolphins have changed me, I say that I seem to have more dreams now and fewer plans than I used to. I hold my dreams out in front of me and then let them go. Invariably my dreams show up in unexpected ways and sometimes in new forms — *here we are, it's time, here's the connection or the opportunity*. I worry less about the details and spend more time putting color into my daydreams, adding scents and enjoying the warmth of the sun on my skin.

In the midst of great change or loss I am reminded to trust that everything is unfolding perfectly. Stay calm, listen and catch the next wave. I try to practice living

in dolphin time. To me dolphins live in circular time as opposed to linear time. For many of us life appears to move in straight lines, but perhaps it is more accurate to say it moves in many directions at once perfectly synchronized. We are not separate from one another, but part of a much greater pod that has its own intelligence. Our job is just to tune in and then get out of our own way.