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Dancing on Water

Adventures with dolphins, whales, and interspecies communication

BY KARIN KINSEY

My father's death had been difficult. Twice over the holidays I had flown to Seattle—the first time, to spend what I knew would be our last Christmas together; the second, to sit with him in the hospital. He was in a coma. The day before had been the last time he'd had full consciousness. Once he blinked open his eyes, but it was in startled pain as we tried to turn him. I sat with him all afternoon talking to him and reading, even singing. Dad lay quietly with his eyes closed.

He passed away quietly the next day, in the evening. My brother and I arrived shortly after he died. We had been eating dinner when we got the call from the hospital and had rushed through traffic. I sat quietly in the dark room, looked out at the beautiful night sky and the lights of the city and wept.

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There are certain places on the planet that are particularly enchanting and seem to possess, to an unusual degree, the power to heal, restore and rejuvenate. For me, one of these is Maui, an island that had made an indelible impression on me when I'd first come to visit almost 20 years ago. At the time, I had fallen in love with its peaceful green hills, the waves as they crashed against the gentle curve of its shoreline, and the lush rhododendrons that bloomed on the slopes of Haleakala. Now, a few months after my father's death, I was here once again to nurture my soul.

My first major experience of swimming with dolphins in the wild had been off the Big Island of Hawaii three years previously. Finding them had been an exercise in nonattachment, requiring a certain amount of trust and surrender. It hadn't been as simple as calling them up on the phone and arranging a date. It had been more subtle than that—more like missing and longing for a lover or beloved.

At the time, it felt as though having a clear and sincere intention, along with a big leap of faith, helped in finding them. It also appeared as though I would get "messages," or a kind of

acknowledgment, back from the dolphins in the form of sounds or pictures. On the first Hawaii trip, I could hear them whistling in my head a week before I saw them. As I got closer to the dolphins, I was seeing vivid pictures of them in my head.

I had spent my first day on the island with a dear friend, another dolphin lover, and towards



An intimate moment with Tela and Karin.

evening, we found ourselves at the beach gazing out at the splendor of a Hawaiian sunset surrounded by music and friends. As we watched the last rays disappear on the horizon, we decided to go to a concert at a house up in the hills. When we arrived, I was greeted by more familiar faces, smiling under the dim lights. I began to relax, breathing in the strong aroma of exotic flowers.

As we wandered onto the porch, I was introduced to someone new. He was a healer, he said. "What kind of work do you do?" I asked, wanting to get specific details. "Cranio-sacral" was the reply. I had experienced a session of cranio-sacral

work once before and had enjoyed the gentle sensation of having my head slowly manipulated. "If you like, I'll show you," he offered. He didn't have to ask twice. I closed my eyes and slowly allowed myself to slip beneath his care.

The tension of keeping it all together for the past few months through the final arrangements of my dad's passing slowly began to drop away. There was a sensation of weightlessness, and then I saw myself floating in a night sky of brilliant stars. Pure light pulsed from a million tiny orbs as I drifted through space. Then, through the stars, I saw water and a skyline off a rocky shore. I looked more intently and to the left saw the single splash of what I knew was a dolphin.

After awhile, I opened my eyes and, smiling, looked at my girlfriend. "I bet you the dolphins will be showing up soon," I said.

The next morning, I was up early, driving with another friend to La Perouse, a bay surrounded by black lava rocks on the road south of Kihei. It's known by the locals as a place sometimes frequented by the dolphins. When we arrived, the sea was choppy. The wind was up, too. Maybe this wasn't a good day.

I started to walk across the lava anyway, my wetsuit in hand. When I'd walked some distance from the few cars parked in the lot, I gazed out across the water and focused my eyes to the left of the bay. There I saw a distinctive splash. That was all I needed to know. I squeezed into my suit and slipped over the edge of the rocks and into the dark water.

That morning I witnessed the largest pod of spinner dolphins I had ever seen. I watched, entranced, as they slowly danced their beautiful patterns. They swam in twos and threes, and then in huge groups, gliding gracefully across the bottom and then spiraling towards the surface. A few carried the little yellow leaves that they liked to play with. One dolphin playfully nudged the camera from the hands of a surprised swimmer. It was an amazing and breathtaking spectacle.

As I swam with them, I couldn't help wonder if individual dolphins or pods ever communicated with each other on a spirit level over long

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distances, and if they were aware of some of the projects that humans engage in relative to them (my "project" being a book which had already taken hold in my mind). Somehow, with the dolphins, I had the distinct feeling that a certain amount of "intelligence" was sent back and forth through the ether.

The next day, the dolphins were in the bay again. They were more rambunctious than on the first day; now they were roughhousing with each other and engaging in intense sexual play. They were closer to the shore, too, which made it a little less difficult to swim out to them. I laughed to myself — had they heard me moaning about my aching arms and legs the night before?

By the end of the morning, I felt complete. Shivering, I clambered over the sharp rocks to find the rest of my gear. I could feel every tender muscle in my body. It was time for a few days of "land" vacation. I felt that I had been given plenty to take in and integrate.

Later, I heard that the dolphins had also taken a break. What perfect timing, I thought. I breathed deeply, taking in the gift I'd been given. I felt a sense of renewal. I felt cleansed by the salt of the sea, the rare and translucent beauty of the dolphins' dance and my remembrance of the starry heights that had figured so vividly in my imagination on my first evening.

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Slowly, I felt my breath deepen. I could feel the weight and the drowsiness in my body and then the 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.

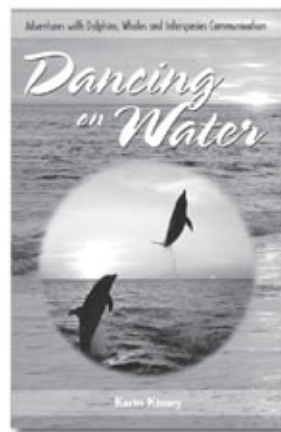
Out of the calm and now inky darkness I saw two shadowy forms, moving gently and certainly towards me. The translucent shapes of two dolphins began to reveal themselves, shimmering and winking in the near blackness.

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."

The grief and the ache in my heart over my father's loss remained, but the pain had lessened and what was left was held by a new sense of spaciousness. The future beckoned wide and open ahead of me. I knew I would remember these dolphins and their stellar performance for a long time to come.



Karin Kinsey is a freelance travel writer and graphic designer living in the San Francisco Bay Area. She leads dolphin encounter trips and has explored such places as Hawaii, the Caribbean, Mexico and British Columbia in search of marine mammal life.

Celebrate and meet the author at a book signing/dance event with the tribal jazz dance jam music of Rhythm Matrix on Fri., Dec. 30 (doors open at 7:00) at Larkspur Café Theatre, 500 Magnolia Ave., Larkspur. Call (415) 924-6107 for more information.