



Singing with Whales and Dolphins

by Shauna Crockett Burrows

Healing can be accelerated by connecting with joy and happiness and one way of doing this is to be with whales and dolphins, say healers Winnie and Kees Van de Velden

Earlier this year, I found myself bobbing about in a boat, surrounded by pilot whales, singing 'Amazing Grace' with my friends Winnie and Kees Van de Velden, their daughter Annet and son Jaap. The whales appeared to be an appreciative audience. We were in waters off the south west coast of Tenerife in the family's very appropriately named boat, 'Delight'. They had invited me to join them to see the way they were working with the healing energies of dolphins and whales. In all the years I have known my friend Winnie it was as a healer and a practitioner who worked with flower remedies. She had been responsible for translating the life story of Dr. Edward Bach into Dutch. Now, I was discovering

new talents, unbeknown to me: as a child of musician parents she had been destined for a musical career until fate stepped in diverting her life's journey into healing. But here she was in the middle of the sea, sitting in a small boat singing to whales and dolphins.

I was there for one short but happy week going out in the boat as often as possible to be near the dolphins and whales. The sea surrounding the Canary Islands attracts many species of cetaceans so our encounters were many and varied. The first day with Winnie and Annet we had not gone very far before spinner dolphins approached us at great speed leaping out of the sea and arching above us, then diving deep down below the

boat. They are huge dolphins and the strength and power of their bodies was awe-inspiring. As suddenly as they had appeared they vanished. And so it was many times. The routine was to chug out, often accompanied by small bottle-nose dolphins swimming along side the boat part of the way, to a patch of ocean. There we would stay rocked by the waves as we played music and Winnie sang and sooner or later whales and dolphins would arrive.

One day we came upon a mother whale and her baby, a little apart from a large group of pilot whales. The baby was very curious and immediately swam to the boat circling around it and underneath it. As he came to the surface,

A more serious and disturbing side to this story follows but with an outcome that brings hope for whales and dolphins everywhere.

When Winnie and Kees returned to Holland from Tenerife in October, I received a very distressed email telling me that at least twelve dolphins had died off the coast of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura during NATO exercises taking place in the seas surrounding the islands. Immediate investigation was called for as the waters around the Canaries are considered to be protected for cetaceans.

This is all part of a wider picture. Around the globe, nations have been testing and beginning to deploy 'active sonar' technology, which uses extremely loud sound to detect submarines. However, active sonar can injure or even kill marine animals.

In March 2000, four different species of whales and dolphins were stranded on beaches in the Bahamas after a U.S Navy battle group used active sonar in the area. Despite efforts to save the whales, seven

of them died. The Navy initially denied that active sonar was to blame, but its own investigation later found hemorrhaging around the eyes and ears of dead whales, indicating severe acoustic trauma. The government's study of the incident established with virtual certainty that the strandings in the Bahamas had been caused by mid-frequency active sonar used by navy ships passing through the area. Since the incident, the area's population of beaked whales has disappeared, leading researchers to conclude that they abandoned their habitat or died at sea. Scientists are concerned that, under the right circumstances, even the transient use of high-intensity active sonar can have a severe impact on population of marine mammals.

As awareness has grown about the effects of active sonar technology, so have the efforts to stop it. This has coincided with U.S Navy leading a push to increase its use. One strongly supported campaign has been lead by oceanographer Jean-Michel Cousteau, musician James Taylor and actor Pierce

Brosnan. They say they teamed up because they all share something in common: a deep love of the ocean and marine mammals.

But now for the positive news. Environmental activists managed to take the US Navy to court on October 31st, 2002. The federal court granted a request to block the Navy deploying a new high-intensity sonar system that scientists believe poses a threat to entire populations of whales, dolphins, seals and other marine mammals.

This is a great victory for dolphins and whales everywhere. But this may not be the end of the story and we need to stay vigilant. For my part I will never forget looking into the eye of that playful young whale full of trust and innocence and I want to do all I can to help.

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For information on active sonar:
Natural Resources Defence Council Website:
www.nrdc.org/wildlife/marine/nlfa.asp



very close to the side of the boat his head rose up and I looked straight into his eye, which was sparkling with mischief, intelligence, innocence and complete trust.

The young whale continued to play for a long time, swimming back to his mother at intervals, who stayed a short distance away, as if to reassure her that he was safe. Then the two of them dived, tail flukes up to the sky, as in farewell, and vanished from our view.

Winnie and Kees now spend a lot of time in Tenerife but are still working part of the year as holistic practitioners in Holland. They have produced a beautiful, short video for people interested in joining them for encounters with whales and dolphins. They are now making a much longer video for people who would like to share the experience without travelling there. This video will be for sale and we will give details at a later date. Both videos were filmed by Jasp who took all the photographs for the article.

Winnie and Kees do not arrange full holidays but there are apartments to rent close to the marina of Poblano, shown below, where their boat 'Delight' is moored. There are several hotels nearby and also accommodation in the villages and small towns not too far away, that are off the tourist track.



Right: Winnie and Kees
Below: Marina of Poblano
Overleaf: whales in the evening sun

