

PREFACE

“A time comes when silence is betrayal.”

--Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Since antiquity dolphins have possessed an undeniable and compelling appeal for the human species, surfacing gracefully in our art, mythologies and literature, creating a liquid imprint upon our psyches, which in recent years has intensified, inspiring everything from new age fervor to multi-million dollar theme parks. In our profit-driven age, suppliers are never far behind demand, and discovering people will eagerly pay exorbitant sums for the opportunity to get close, enterprises offering captive “*dolphin encounters*” can now be found in most tropical tourist-frequented locales. Enticed and lulled by the promise of proximity, millions of people annually swarm to aquariums, marine parks and dolphin-swim venues to pursue an infamous mystery; to caress that shining skin and perhaps glimpse what lingers behind the dolphins’ curving, archaic smile.

However desperately our affinity with the natural world needs reaffirming, we must be wary that in our enthusiasm to seek and foster such connection, we do not in the same breath become a part of its desecration and undoing. Such cause for concern is embodied by these lucrative “*Swim-With-the-Dolphins*” attractions mushrooming throughout the US, Caribbean, Mexico, and various other vacation destinations, cashing in on the human hunger for close contact with these powerfully charismatic creatures.

Growing numbers of people are starting to realize that in caging wild things for our convenience and forcing them into our confines, something most precious is irretrievably lost—a treasure we claim to value above all others—*freedom*. Even as enthusiasm for “swimming with dolphins” grows, millions of people are increasingly objecting to the idea and practice of keeping dolphins captive. The resulting controversy has become volatile, impassioned and intensely polarized. Commercial practices insist they represent perfectly acceptable opportunities for the public to fraternize with fleet, exotic marine creatures—while critics maintain that capturing and imprisoning such sentient, far-ranging beings for public amusement and corporate gain demonstrates *unacceptable* approval towards something *intrinsically* and ethically wrong.

In this way, the ineffable lure of the dolphin has become an apt symbol: Of the terrible harm that can result from blindly pursuing our desires—and the rising voices of those who advocate compassion and freedom rather than amassing wealth through exploitation. I have plunged deep into the fraught waters of this clouded, ethical debate and its far-reaching implications. This is the story of what I found there.

Rekindling the Waters reflects on nearly twenty years of unique experience, advocacy and study, chronicling the trials of a particular family of dolphins held captive at a popular tourist destination in Cuba. In sharing the story of the Cuba Dolphins' troubled lives, their losses and struggles at the hands of their human captors and visitors, I wish to make people aware of the *truth*—of the ruinous and exacting toll extracted for fleeting human pleasure. Trapped behind human barriers, exquisite tenderness, suffocating heartbreak, colliding conflict and flickering

hope, etch an indelible portrait of the suffering that lies behind the dolphins' smile. Only when people come to understand and empathize with this detrimental reality, will their participation in such harmful activities cease. In taking a closer look at the very *real* effects of certain seemingly harmless choices, we see how even a whimsical or well-earned holiday excursion can support horrendous suffering.

My time among the dolphins has taught me that some things, though they may be sold, can never be bought. Some things hold value beyond measure: Unconditional aid in adversity; a kindly presence when lost, tired, afraid or grieving; the unveiled look in love's eye and the trust of a wild heart, aligned by choice, with one's own, as an equal, and as a friend. Most of all, they have shown me the true value of Freedom—*freedom of choice*. These are inestimable treasures and their loss is devastating. How ironic, with so much talk of freedom and liberty; with so much righteousness in the air—that we routinely steal that which means most from others without a even a thought.

Dolphins enslaved by greedy corporate entities are indicative symptoms of a much deeper and insidious malady; one that could claim us all—a grievous lack of awareness, respect and regard for *life*—human, animal and ecosystem. Whether we recognize it or not—we are all interconnected, and whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, atrocities continue—and it is we ourselves who make them possible. Marine parks and captive dolphin-swim attractions are fueled by tourist dollars, without which, they will go extinct.

The liquid passage through my life, of the ocean's most lucent, sought-after creatures, has lifted me up to touch and take part in a vast kinship and through an incredible alchemy, I have in a fashion, *become* that which I love. I owe a life debt and I have a story to tell. *Rekindling the Waters* is *Their* story, a story to *rekindle* kinship, by immersing us in the lives of *Other*—so that *Other* becomes *Us*.

Hope for a better future lies in shifting the underlying attitudes responsible for our destructive ways and it begins with *realization*. As hearts and minds open—positive reaction and global restoration follows. As one of the world's most beloved and beleaguered creatures, it is perhaps appropriate that dolphins serve as an illuminating focal point in helping to achieve this end.

REKINDLING the WATERS
Chapter One

OCEAN ARDOR

*“We’re of the going water and the gone
We are of water in the holy land of water”*
—Kate Bush, *The Jig of Life*

I recognized destiny when it swam up and looked me in the eye. Beyond banal and reassuringly safe human borders, *something* waited for me to hear the call, and accept the summons...

I cannot remember a time when I did not love dolphins. Inexplicably riveting, impossibly familiar, any glimpse held me spellbound, with swelling sea waves of joy as they came flashing across the flickering television screen, leaving a trail of goose bumps in their wake.

A typical sylph, slight and agile, I was forever climbing trees, scraping knees; pursuing grasshoppers and snowflakes with equal relish; balancing flower petals on my tongue, or smelling the folded paper secrets of maple keys. A perpetually tussled look clung to me, which has not faded with age. I still come in from the garden with leaves or rain in my hair. In winter, driven to indoor amusements once the icy seep of snow percolated into my mittens and socks, my mother, an artful raconteur, often read to me. While my extremities thawed, I became quietly wed to this hieratic magic; tales of distant isles, sailing ships and abysmal serpents on the high seas, tumbling from the pages.

The only real dolphins for miles around were at Marineland. Commercial jingles and shiny magazines handed out at the turnstiles promised dynamic, cheerful dolphins, leaping in joyous precision—cartoon characters made flesh. Sitting in the distanced stands, the music trumpeted and suddenly the dolphins appeared, twirling and hoop jumping to the accompaniment of the park’s grandiose theme song. To my innocent eyes, every arc, every spin was perfect, their curving smiles demonstrating obvious delight.

After the show, we went to watch the dolphins through the underwater window. Here, the dolphins no longer jumped for joy; instead, they paced in endless circles. In the false, watery light, without the glamour of tawdry theatrical distraction, the sight of the circling dolphins made me feel uneasy. Nose sprinkled with summer’s freckles pressed to the glass, I watched as they passed blindly by only inches away, going round and round. Despite their proximity, the dolphins felt even farther away than when I’d been up in the stands and in a pure, un-worded child’s way, I understood that even though they were right in front of me, those dolphins were hardly there at all.

Even with all the attractions and distractions the marine park offered, I left feeling a little shadowed and saddened, though my parents put it off to too much sun after a long, exciting day. All the way home the dolphins circled in my head, as they had in the tank. I tried humming the marine park’s bubbly show tune, but it rang empty and hollow in my ears. Shaking my latest acquisition, a glass globe filled with snowflakes and dolphins, brought no comfort either and I remained silent and pensive the entire journey home.

I was perhaps seven, when my Grandmother brought me to Cuba for the first time. Stepping off the plane onto a windy runway lined with coconut palms, the heavy humidity of the tropics wrapped itself around me, singing into my skin. I wore a blue-flowered dress, off the shoulder style, balancing with cute concentration along a curb while awaiting our luggage. My memory of the long bus-ride from Havana has become blur of sun-kissed, earth-toned faces with dancing eyes, expressively gesturing, positively trilling as they spoke. The smells of bright blooms and cigars blended with a thousand others, novel and dizzying. Our bus, crowded with loquacious Cubans, clunking luggage and flustered chickens, bumped along to the thrumming of a guitar's Spanish aiguillette, giving me the impression I had suddenly become part of a riotous gypsy caravan.

I awoke before the sun that first morning, listening to the wondering sounds of an unfamiliar dawn through the ocean's ceaseless whispers. Enormous gnarled, long-needled pine trees guarded the beach. My feet were bare and I had to step carefully to avoid the tiny, prickly pine cones scattered over the winding roots. The sand was soft and pale and rather cool, leading in gentle, frozen ripples to the misted whispering of the waves. It was still so early, the ocean and the sky had not yet decided what color they were going to be.

I paused, hypnotized; the Sea lay before me, almost undulating, surreal, like some great grey mythical beast... A sweet, salt-breeze reached invisibly out, touching my cheek and stirring my hair. The waves entreated softly, luring me to follow some latent, magnetic path over the sand to stand before the ever-shifting water's edge. Gulls uttered long wails overhead. Looking at last upon the ocean, a sea-secret rose to over-flowing in me, so that I felt I must become water myself and melt into it... Tentatively, I stepped forward... with this aqueous meeting, came the knowledge that there would be others.

Though it encompassed only a couple of weeks, that first childhood visit to Cuba became a lifetime in itself, offering a fresh stream of experiences, which remained at once immediate and dreamy. Days fell past, my skin grew dark and I never wanted to leave that place. Mornings were spent gathering shells left by the receding tide and scampering after crotchety crabs hiding amongst the flotsam and twiggy footprints of sea birds. I waded through tropical gardens laden with flowers and swimming with scent, escaping the sultry heat in the airy, marble-cool of hotel halls.

I also came to know some of the ocean's different moods and guises: Wild and ominous, the frothing waves causing the earth to tremble, as they cast themselves ashore in sobs of foam, or pensive and quiescent, blanketed in seeping mist. But it was the days of inexorable sunlight, when the water held a scintillating spectrum of pale inviting aquamarine, smoothing into deeper layers of teal and peacock that would haunt me for years with a sharp longing to return. Every day that ocean held me, imbuing my spirit with the enormity of its shifting swelling strength and I was certain I would shrivel like a fallen leaf if I ever left.

But the final hour stole upon me, standing disparate on the sand, feet shod and locked away from all conversation with earth and water, gazing at the glinting Sea one last time. The idea of the flight, of home, of school and snow remained an impossible reality, while I looked upon that sparkling oceanic plain. As I was ushered onto the bus, the tropical warmth was swallowed up by a sterile, air conditioned chill, and with a grinding moan the bus lurched into gear and I was carried away—away from all that had so easily, so naturally replaced my entire world.