

THE SILVER LEI

Six long months went by as I charted the trip my husband Bill and I would be taking to Hawaii. Our plan was to photograph and study the superpods of wild Spotted and Spinner dolphins that cruise the Makua area of Oahu and to meet their best friend, Terry Pinney - alias the dolphin lady. I knew before I met her that we had a connection deeper than the Pacific Ocean.

Terry, the facilitator of the program Dolphins and You, appeared after her morning meditation on a high rock. She was wearing an angelic smile and said, The dolphins are about a mile from here. They're kinda far out there this morning. By the time she finished her sentence we had thrown our gear into the car and were ready to bolt. I was so excited about seeing the dolphins that I had forgotten to follow through on my instructions: ***Come alone and bring a lei***, an imaginary dolphin voice had advised me several nights earlier. I can try to come alone, but it's too late to bring a lei, I reminded myself, remembering that I had worn it to shreds in a futile search for dolphins the day before.

Moments later a bunch of us were hustling down to the water's edge. Terry hurriedly tossed each of us a pair of binoculars and showed us where to set our sights. My hair stood on end as I focused on two or

I began following along about ten feet underwater. By that time the chirpy, whistling songs of the dolphins were beyond hypnotic. They formed holographic pictures that only my heart could perceive. **Yes, Lord, you can take me now, I said silently, for I am already in heaven!** I had a fleeting vision of heading out to the deep azure, farther and farther out to sea going home for good.

To my delight, the babies of the pod were being paraded by at the flanks of aunties, mamas, and other volunteer baby-sitters.



I knew the calves would stay with their immediate families till the age of about six, so that they could learn the ways of the water world. But I didn't know what these ways entailed until, as if in response to some silent whistle, all the members of the pod flew out of the water, twirling, spinning and dancing on the surface, ending each aerial display with a loud belly-flopping slap! Everybody got in on the action. Slippery-backed gymnasts of every size

three hundred undulating, curved dorsals surging through the deep, choppy, sapphire blue Pacific. Thank you, God, I bubbled as I slapped on my fins.

Bill pointed out that this was not a calm, languid cove, but a choppy, windblown, open ocean. I, however, was too fired up to listen. Looking neither left nor right, I plunged into the pounding white water, holding my Nikonos--my new underwater camera--against my stomach with both hands to protect it from rocks and coral. Bill, surprised at my nerve, lunged forward with each stroke of his long limbs, determined to overtake me but never quite succeeding. It didn't take us long to realize that Mother Ocean seemed to be gently welcoming our little dolphin-savvy family.

Soon after hitting the waves, I could hear the sound of countless wild dolphins. Their joyous voices, eerily magnetic, were intensified by the water. Whistles, chattering, creaks, and clicks blended with a soothingly sweet chirping melody. An invisible cord seemed to be tugging me to the source of this oddly familiar music. I swam faster than ever toward deeper water, lured on not only by the sounds of the underwater choir but by the smell of ancient beginnings. Thinking I could hear Terry singing back to them, I joined her, warbling euphorically through my snorkel, Eeeeeoooh.

were singing, jumping, flapping and crashing in my face so violently that I could not have heard an ocean liner had one been in the vicinity.



Amid the chaos, I did not notice the original scout group coming quietly back and forming a circle around me. These four dolphins, appearing like translucent apparitions at my left shoulder, looked as if they were in on a secret. While the others watched intently, the largest and most handsome adult male came forward and stopped suddenly, within a few feet of my nose. He positioned his body parallel to mine, with his head up and tail pointed down.



As soon as our eyes met I was stricken with blissful wonder and a sense of deja vu. His eyes, wise and kind, were disturbingly familiar and



I was pulled farther into the choppy sea. All the while enchanting visions filled my head, as if I were returning home from an immeasurably long absence. My sense was that I was going to receive something from the wild cetaceans, but I had no idea what it would be. Their songs rang louder and louder, repelling off the insides of my body attracting me, and at the same time satiating a hunger deep within me.

Suddenly, there they were hundreds of streamlined, light-dappled shadows moving in unison, dark against the blurred ocean floor so very far below. I felt my eyes swell with emotion, and braced myself for whatever was to come.

The first squad of dolphin scouts appeared about eight feet from my fins.

staring deeply into mine. I was stuck somewhere between pain and ecstasy when I realized that this creature might be almost as old as I was.



His energy, however, was joyous and was moving many times faster than my own. I wanted to use my new knowledge of entrainment that I had learned at the One-ness workshop. I knew this would be a powerful experience, but when I pulled God's energy down through my crown to entrain with them, I got all caught up in it. My head began to reel, and I could feel my temperature quickly rising. My cheeks became hot against the cool water. Nothing on earth could have doused such a searing flame.



Without breaking eye contact, the ambassador widened his pectoral fins,



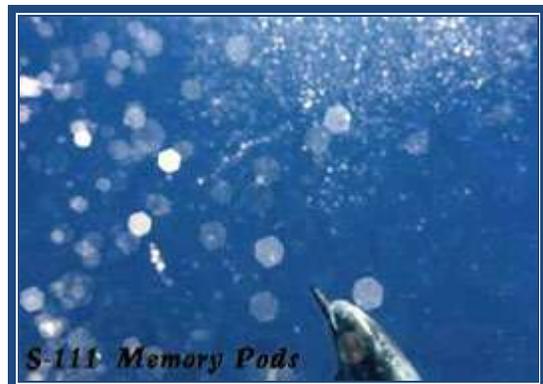
There were four of them cool, relaxed spinners that were smiling all over; three of them had cookie-cutter-like shark scars on their sides. I, too, was grinning, and thrilled with delight. Then about two dozen more spinners approached and, making a wide detour from my left, darted in front of my mask, perhaps to check me out as a perspective pod-mate. Another dozen glided serenely below, while about fifty or sixty swam at my sides, some of them flashing their gleaming white bellies as they turned upside down to get a better look at the happy visitor.



With trembling hands I tried to hold my camera level, but I was being zapped by sonar at such close range that my camera was vibrating and my teeth began to rattle! I was

lowered his head, and blew an enormous bubble from his blowhole. But first he held his rostrum down so I could see the top of his head; there, held by silken skin over muscle, the large valve opened wide with a loud **bloop**, then shut tightly. He briskly nodded, whereupon the huge bubble expanded to form a wreathlike ring above our heads.

The orbiting hoop reminded me of a smoke ring. It looked to be about a foot thick and at least three feet across. Moreover, it seemed to be a model of the entire solar system as well as portions of the earth's landscape, for within it were tiny bubble-sculptures shaped like planets, mountains, trees, birds, flowers, sea creatures and shooting stars. As if on cue, the sun came out from behind a cloud, illuminating every inch of this ring of life as it spun only inches from my disbelieving eyes. After a breathless eternity the ring hit the water's surface, releasing millions of minute bubbles that each exploded like a sizzling silver spark on the dark navy canopy above us.



He then glided toward his buddies.

sure the dolphins were bouncing these sound waves off of me to determine what I had eaten for breakfast, which was zero. Who can eat when the dream world and reality are about to merge?

Emitting vibrations akin to those of a passing freight train, the four original scouts glided by much closer than before, slipping between me and the rest of the pod. When they were only a few feet away, our eyes locked in a loving stare-down. The violet in their eyes reminded me of the amethyst ocean of my dreams. Am I in my bed dreaming again, I wondered? *No, Star*, said a voice from nearby, *this is really happening!* As the entire pod circled around me I began laughing and crying at the same time a difficult feat to accomplish when your lips are wrapped around the mouthpiece of a snorkel.



Never before had I experienced such loving energy! Feeling as though these creatures were hugging me, I heard: *This is not for your camera, Star. This is for you. You*

Still smiling in an almost serious manner, he looked over his shoulder at me and winked! *Now where's that lei?* came a voice. Then he winked again. Instantly I realized that the silver ring had been a lei a welcome home lei! How I wished that I had not forgotten to bring my shredded one for an exchange.



At that point I was sure my temperature had shot off the gauge of the standard thermometer. I was on fire in the ocean, and a trail of vapor was streaming forth from my finned feet! Not only was I feverish, however I was humbled, extremely grateful, exhausted and limp.

Rising to the surface I saw sunlight shimmering on the backs of the multitude of dolphins as they continued flying, flipping and spinning several feet out of the water. How lovely it would be to splash, sing and play eternally in this underwater Shangri-La, I mused, suddenly aware that I had lost track of time, that I had been living in dolphin time, in no-time.

I whimpered pitifully as the pod of liquid silver began turning their sleek

are experiencing unconditional love. Remember that you are a part of us, and always have been. The covey of message bearers cruised around me in a tight circle, shared caresses, then cozily blended into its indigo element.

I stared blankly at the myriad of Spinner dolphins that had surrounded me, their bodies now sleek gray outlines about fifty feet below the surface of the water. After a while a pod of Spotted dolphins scooted by my mask, wide-eyed with fascination. Their lips, long and spattered with dark spots, had white blotches on the ends, as though they'd been daubed with chalk-white lipstick. *You can help us spread the sense of love and kinship across the planet. You are one of us let you are one of them, and so you can do it!* was the message that seeped into the center of my forehead.



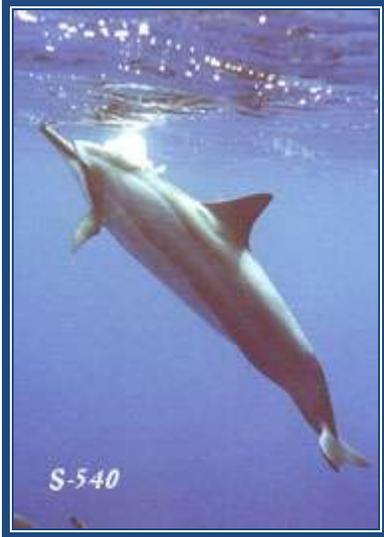
I felt as though I had returned to an ancient civilization that was awakening within me memories of knowledge long forgotten. The impact of their communication,

backs to me in farewell, bidding me *mahalo*. Despite my unspoken protest, they flipped their tails and headed west, disappearing fast, like torpedoes of light. In their wake came twelve words describing my earthly mission: *You and your love for us can help turn the world around.* I bowed my head in prayer.

The disappearance of the dolphins forced me to plan my return to civilization. But a wave of dread fell upon me as I discovered that I could barely see the beach I had set out from. Here I was, separated from my human pod and bobbing around in the great ocean like a tiny bottle containing a message. The wind was blowing briskly in my face, and the current was pulling everything out to sea. Arms locked tightly around my camera, I pointed my dishrag body toward land and began to methodically kick for what seemed like forever.

As soon as the last crystalline wave had its way with me I collapsed, vomiting while crawling up to the beach, dragging my new camera through the sand. Terry, poised behind her binoculars, had deftly monitored my entire trek back. Flashing a dolphin smile, as if aware of the winking guy and his silver-bubble lei, she offered her hand. With her help I arrived unceremoniously in high sand, landing just out of reach of the turbulent white water. Rolling clumsily onto my back after a long pause, I reluctantly tried to adjust to the dry world. Streams of hot saline tears dripped down my gritty,

combined with their roaring energy, caused my head to ache and the pit of my stomach to throb. In response to the pressure I simply dangled, grinning dumbfoundedly through my mask at this assembly of teachers.



sand-caked cheeks as I sadly realized that my fins were made of rubber!

Then I saw Bill and the rest of the group perched on the beach, evidently awaiting my return. **I was home with them, ya'll**, I blubbered. But I didn't have to tell Terry. The dolphin lady had beamed that smile because she already knew.