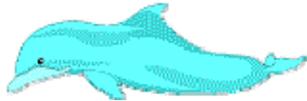




THE BOTTLE-NOSED DOLPHIN



Dolphins are very friendly animals and like contact with people. At several beaches in the world many dolphins come close to shore so that you can even hand feed these animals. They are very clever animals and can perform quite a few tricks.

Almost all the "porpoises", as some people call them, are really bottle-nosed dolphins. They can delight children, and older people as well, with their very clever performances. They can be trained to leap high into the air to grab a fish from its trainer's hand.

And just like dogs they can fetch a stick or a ball that their keeper has thrown far away.



In Perth, Western Australia, there is a place called "Underwater World". There are many fish in a large aquarium. You can spend a whole day there watching all these fish and many other interesting things. But they also have a few dolphins who can do many tricks. There were three large dolphins at "Underwater World". They were about three meters long and weighed more than 300 Kilos.

One dolphin, a female, was even bigger than the other two. Do you know why?

Because it was expecting a baby. Can you imagine how excited the keepers and trainers of "Underwater World" were? It does not happen that often that a baby dolphin is born in a place like that. So everyone was eagerly waiting for the big day.

Then one day the keepers who look after the dolphins noticed quite some excitement in the large compound of the dolphins. It must be happening soon, they thought, and they called all the other people who work there to come and have a look. They arrived just in time.

The baby dolphin was born soon after. Baby dolphins are always born under water. But they must breathe air just like we do. So as soon as the baby

dolphin was born the mother, helped by the other female, pushed her baby quickly to the surface for its first breath of air.

Oh boy, oh boy, all the people were so happy and excited when they saw the baby come to the surface. They all clapped and cheered and talked all at once. What a happy day this was for "Underwater World". Many, many, visitors came to admire the new born dolphin.

BUT, GUESS WHAT?

Even more exciting things were going to happen at "Underwater World". The premier, the most important man in the State, was going to pay a visit to this popular place. Many other important people were going to come along as well. So they arranged that they would come on the baby dolphin's birthday. Then they would all have a great birthday party for the baby dolphin.

So the keepers had a meeting together and they decided to put on a special performance for all these important people. They decided to train the three adult dolphins for this special day. They still had six months left and they thought that should be enough time.



They prepared a special programme and started training the three dolphins the next day. The dolphins were very happy and learned very quickly. But the baby, who was by now already six months old, also wanted to join in with the training. But that was not the idea. The trainers told the little one to keep out of the way during the training period.

That did not make the baby very happy. As a matter of fact it was very cross and jealous. Why could not he jump around and learn all the tricks that the others were doing? I'm not a baby any more. I'm six months old already. Alright, I'm still drinking my mother's milk but that is just to make me grow quicker. And in about five or six months time, when I'm nearly a year, I will be able to look after myself. Then I won't need my mother's milk any longer.

So every day while the others were busy training for the big day the baby was under water most of the time. He was extremely unhappy and sulked all day long.

But this baby dolphin, just like all dolphins, was very smart. Do you know what he decided to do? He watched very carefully what the other three dolphins were doing. He watched every movement of these animals and tried to copy them. This was not very easy. Especially because he did not want to be seen. That was his BIG secret. And each day when the training started he was copying all the movements and high jumps of the other three dolphins. Except he stayed under water all the time.



The keepers, of course, had no idea what was going on. You see, they can't see what is going on deep down in the dark water. But dolphins have been blessed by the Creator with very good eyesight and this baby dolphin could see all the movements of the other animals even when they were above water. He was a fast learner and after a little while he could copy all the gracious movements of the adult dolphins. He was just as fast and clever as they were and copied them exactly. He could also perform all the tricks that they performed.

This training went on for a few months. Until the day that these important people would come, the birthday party of the baby dolphin.

THEN THAT BIG DAY CAME

The keepers and all the other workers at "Underwater World" decorated the whole place with colourful streamers and hundreds and hundreds of balloons. There were red balloons, blue ones, orange ones, green ones, yellow ones and many other pretty colours all over the place. There were even some balloons with a picture of the baby dolphin. Everyone was in a very happy and festive mood. This was going to be the big day. The day with all the excitement. They had practised for a long time and put a lot of effort into all the preparations. Nothing was allowed to go wrong because that would be most embarrassing with all those important visitors around the place.

The premier with his secretary and all the other important men and women came exactly on time. After a speech by the owner of "Underwater World" and by the premier, of course, the performance started. First the band played some music and then the trainers went to the edge of the pool where the dolphins were kept. Nobody could see any dolphins. But they were there alright. They were only allowed to come up when it was their time to perform. Of course, they can't be kept waiting too long as they have to come up for air now and then.

THE BIG SURPRISE

"Ladies and gentlemen", one of the trainers said to the visitors, "In a moment or two, when I give the signal, you will see three beautiful large dolphins jump out of the water and perform some very difficult tricks for you".

They were all told to be very; very quiet otherwise the dolphins won't be able to hear the messages from the trainer. So everyone was as quiet as a mouse. The trainer stood there in his colourful uniform. The music had also stopped, everyone was dead quiet andwaiting for what was about to happen. Then the trainer put a tiny little whistle in his mouth. This is the way he communicates with the dolphins.

And while everyone held their breath hoping not to miss anything there was all of a sudden a big splash and three large dolphins graciously jumped out of the water. Three dolphins? No, there were FOUR of them. The little baby

dolphin was there, too. And he did exactly what the other three did. He copied them perfectly without fault. The visitors were absolutely delighted. They clapped and cheered for a long time.

But the trainers were very worried. They quickly talked amongst each other to find out a way to stop this little one. They were worried that he was going to spoil the show. So they announced that they were going to try and catch the little one and put him in another pool for a while so that the show could go on. But that was not to the visitors' liking. They called out No, No, let him be. He's alright. We like it. And they clapped and cheered even louder. And at the end of the pool you could see a tiny little tail just above the water waving at the visitors. This made them even more excited.

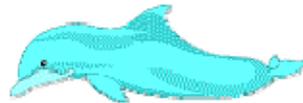
So after this cheeky little performance with the tail the trainers decided to carry on and hope for the best. But they worried for nothing. Each movement and each jump and every little trick was copied exactly by the baby dolphin. Of course, he was no longer a baby now. After all, this was his birthday. He was so happy that the crowd appreciated his performance that after it was all over he put on a special act for them.

He quickly dived under water and swam to the edge of the pool and before the trainer could even understand what was happening the little dolphin had taken the ball out of his hands and took off with it. Then it threw the ball high up and caught it on its nose and balanced it there for a while.



The crowd cheered and clapped and laughed. Everyone was so happy. The premier, too, was having a great time. Then the little dolphin saw a fish on the platform near the edge of the pool so he sneaked up to it, snatched it away and threw it high up into the air. Then it deftly caught the fish in his mouth.

The crowd was so excited. Again they clapped and cheered. Then someone started to sing "Happy Birthday". Everyone, even the premier, joined in with this song. Happy birthday to the little dolphin. And what a great day they all had.



And right in the middle of the pool three large tails and one small tail could be seen waving a good-bye and a thank you to the crowd. All the visitors then gave them a final and cheerful applause. They clapped again and cheered at the top of their voice.

We will be back soon for another performance.

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August 1997