

# Podsworth

## CHAPTER ONE

Valerie Talbot wanted a little girl and after she married Alan Cropp she had one.

She had a little boy too.

They lived on a housing estate with some shops plus a launderette nearby and in general were quite content and happy.

Valerie, or "Val" as she was usually known, had worked as a machine operator in a factory and Alan had worked on a different kind of machine in the same factory.

Mutual attraction led to romance and marriage.

As the industrial base in England diminished Alan completed some higher education to help him obtain a better job and an improved income.

Later he learned to drive at a local driving school, passed the L test, but didn't buy a car immediately.

Pestered by his young children to take them somewhere one summer he hired a small four-door hatchback and drove the family members from their home in South London to Brighton.

The trip may have been instigated by junior one and junior two but Val didn't object and thoroughly enjoyed the outing.

Val had not learned to drive but was a good observer and took note of features of motorways and other roads. Alan thought she would do very well in the driving theory test if she ever took the plunge.

As they reached the seafront they went around a small roundabout and headed east for a short distance before parking.

"There was a sign back there about a dolphin exhibition place or something, can we have a look?!" asked Val with an excited sparkle in her eyes.

"What do you think?" Alan asked the children.

"Yes, let's have a secret peek!" said the little girl.

"OK" said the little boy, who was usually very quiet, for a little boy that is!

The 'place' was very close to the roundabout. The Brighton Aquarium and Dolphinarium had existed since 1968 but the Cropps and Talbots didn't know anything about it until Val's sharp eyes glimpsed the sign.

Pleased that he had recently found a way to improve his income Alan gladly paid the entrance fee when they returned at opening time. That was after a walk on the beach, a paddle, and doing the things young families do at the seaside in summer. Including the queue at the loo as Val reminded her hubby.

The dolphin show was a total delight from start to finish. They all loved it.

## Brighton Aquarium 1872 - 1972

One hundred years ago the Brighton Aquarium was acclaimed as being the largest and most imaginative Aquarium in the world. It is still making news today.

The idea to build the greatest Aquarium in the world came from a London architect and designer of marine plans, Essekus Birch, Brighton, on the south coast, with splendid hotels and a new railway link to London, seemed the ideal choice. A site facing the West Pier, which he had already designed, was the first choice but the ultimate decision was for a building at the west end of a new road now known as Madeira Drive, where once stood a toll house for the famous Chain Pier.

Before any work could commence it was essential to obtain permission from the local authorities and from Parliament. The first of several Acts of Parliament for the project received the Royal Assent on July 12th 1869 and work started immediately. The estimate for the building involved a sum of £100,000, further increased to £133,000 the following year. Because buildings were not allowed to rise above the Marine Parade, a great deal of excavating was carried out. Facing stones used in the protecting sea wall came chiefly from blocks that made up the original Blackfriars Bridge, London.

The courtyard had five terra-cotta arches supported by pillars enriched with carvings of mermaids, sea nymphs and other marine symbols. In the large entrance hall and lining the 224ft. long corridor, were the fish tanks in archways leading up to a vaulted ceiling, supported by columns of polished red Edinburgh granite, and green serpentine marble, with pillars of Bath stone and a mosaic flooring. The somewhat subdued light coming from inside the tanks, controlled to suit the environment of the marine life inside, gave an impression of mystery and excitement, almost as though one was deep under the sea, looking into the strange world of fishes. The wide corridor led to a conservatory which had an attractive grotto complete with a cascade of water. Later this became a popular meeting place.

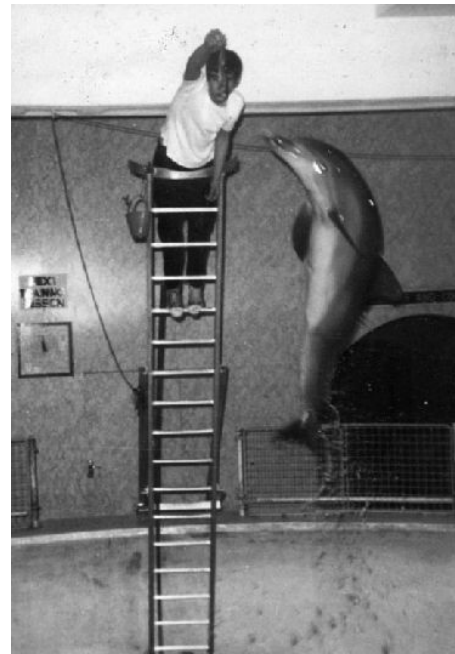
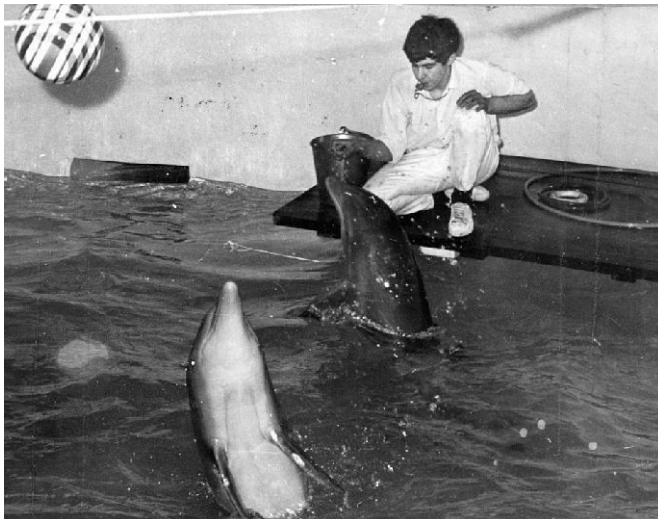
Although the building was far from ready, it was decided to open on Easter Saturday 1872, with the idea that the official opening would take place during August, when the premises would have been completed. Queen Victoria's third son, Prince Arthur, arrived that Easter, in Brighton, with Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar. The Royal Party expressed a wish to see the new Aquarium and it was necessary to carry out immediate work on the roadway in order that the Royal Party and their ladies could enter the Aquarium without sinking up to their ankles in mud. With flags flying, the Princes enjoyed their visit, pausing "over and anon" to view the interesting specimens. The Press described this impromptu opening as "very propitious" and "it could scarcely have entered the minds of any of the most sanguine of the Aquarium directors that its opening would be attended by a Prince of the Blood Royal. On August 10th 1872 the Mayor, Sir Cody Burrows, declared the premises open, despite great problems with contractors, a difficult site, the sea and the weather, plus many battles with Parliament and Brighton Council.

The Aquarium Clock Tower became famous all over the world and picture postcards of its familiar facade sold in their thousands.

*(Continued on inside back cover)*



BRIGHTON AQUARIUM  
AND  
DOLPHINARIUM

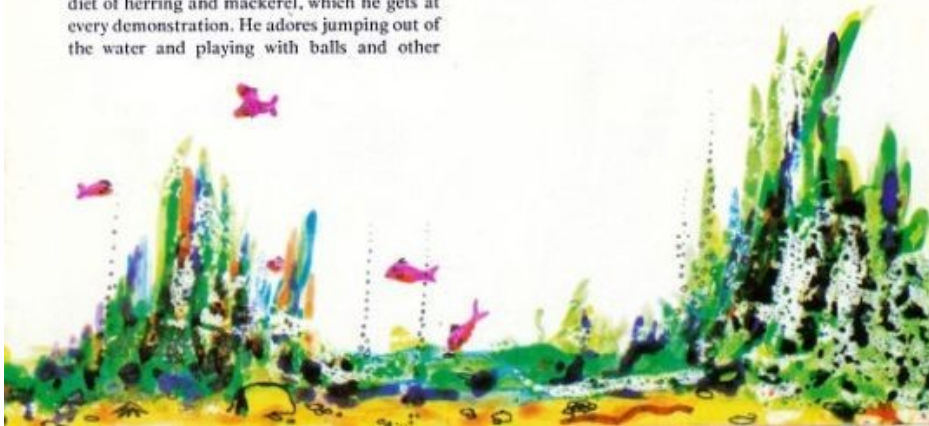




The dolphin swims incredibly fast, kills sharks, communicates with his own kind, herds fish and is more generally found off the Atlantic coast from Florida to Maine. Being a mammal, it gives birth to fully-developed young which are suckled on milk. The baby has no teeth at birth, but as an adult will have some 80-90 perfect teeth. The dolphin is gunmetal in colour with a pinky-white underbelly. The "smile" is due to the curvature of the mouth. Fully grown he will be 8-12 feet in length and weigh between 200-600 pounds. He enjoys a diet of herring and mackerel, which he gets at every demonstration. He adores jumping out of the water and playing with balls and other

floating objects, but can retrieve a small coin or other object from the bottom of the pool. He is responsive to human speech and is quick to learn any special behaviour that is introduced.

He loves human company and has a great sense of fun. With patience he can be encouraged to perform remarkable tricks of skill and intelligence, due to the dolphin's predominant sense of curiosity and the fact that he is undoubtedly a "show-off".







<p><b>Brighton Aquarium and Dolphinarium</b></p>  <p><b>SAVE MONEY</b> with a rail and admission ticket 7 January 1979 until further notice</p> 	<p><b>Brighton Aquarium and Dolphinarium</b></p> <p>Save money with a rail and admission ticket</p>  <p>30 November 1980 until further notice</p> 	<p><b>Brighton Aquarium and Dolphinarium</b></p>  <p><b>SAVE MONEY</b> with a rail and admission ticket 2 January 1977 until further notice</p> 
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The things those creatures did, the precision with which they did it, the hours of careful training it must have taken, were all mind boggling.

They left at the end of the show having been completely entertained and fulfilled.

"Can we get something to eat?" from the little boy shortly afterwards. "Those dolphins had lots of fish from that man and it's made me hungry".

So they went to one of those places where the meals can be described as making children happy.

That day out was the start of a greater interest.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

The job Alan had move into proved quite lucrative and he was able to take Val and the children abroad by a fairly comfortable aeroplane a soart of a package deal.

He arranged a one-way car hire and they flew from London Gatwick to a warm destination and a half board hotel.

It wasn't long before one of the four spotted a leaflet in the hotel foyer showing a dolphin.

"Look!" said the little girl excitedly. "It's like the one we saw before!"

The leaflet advertised a boat outing to a place where dolphins could be seen playing in the sea and sometimes swam very close to the boat.

"Can we go?" asked the children in unison.

"What's the magic word?" asked Alan.

"Abracadabra" said the little boy.

"Near enough!" said his dad as he and Val laughed.

The boat was fairly crowded but not to capacity. "Who wants to be a sardine on a dolphin trip?" thought Val.

They did see dolphins and the dolphins did rise to the occasion, taking tidbits from the passengers and performing all sorts of antics.

"They certainly love acting to an audience, I wonder if they have Equity cards!" Val heard a passenger say to his wife.

The little girl asked the boat captain if the dolphins had names. "Yes", he replied in broken English, "They is name dolphins".

Alan explained to his daughter that they may not be the same dolphins in that part of the sea every day and because they all looked the same it would be hard to give each of them names without getting confused.

He thought she understood and added "When we go back to the hotel we can look at the pictures we took then you can pick your favourite big fish and give it a name. How does that sound?"

"Good!" she replied and smiled at him warmly.

The photos were high definition and Alan was able to show them on the TV screen in the hotel room that evening, thanks to modern technology.

Following a chat and a bit of Internet searching the Cropp children decided they would call a female dolphin Drusilla.

"But what are we going to call a boy dolphin?" the parents wanted to know.

After some more web searching the little girl said "Lucky".

"Why lucky?" asked Val.

"It says so there", responded the little girl, pointing to text on the screen.

"I think it says Drusilla's husband was Lucius", said Alan to Val.

"No it doesn't, it says lucky us", said their little girl who overheard him.

Val and Alan realised that their little girl, who recently started learning to read, had simply used the "cat-sat-mat" way of translating letters to sound. She read "luci" as "Lucky", followed by "us". They knew it was not the right time for grammar lessons and really thought "Lucky Us" for having such a beautiful daughter.

"OK, Lucky it is then!" said mum and dad.

"Drusilla and Lucky, or is it Lucky and Drusilla?" uttered the little boy.

"Well, D comes before L in the alphabet so it should be Drusilla and Lucky" said Val, pleased that she had scored a point for female sexism.

Not long afterwards the children went to bed, exhausted after such a fun day.

But Alan and Val stayed up for quite a while looking up dolphin facts on the Internet. He had a laptop, she had a tablet computer. Luckily the hotel had free wi-fi.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

They found that dolphins use Signature whistles and echolocation for communicating. What humans hear sounds like a clicking sound.

"Ha Ha!" from Val.

"What's up with you cranky?" asked Alan.

"It says here that a dolphin doing the clicking sounds and waiting for a reply fell in love with a football ratchet rattle.

Evidently there was a fan of the Bantry Blues GAA, which is the Gaelic Athletic Association, walking along the bay making a lot of noise because his team had just won a game."

"Where was that?"

"Bantry Bay in south-west Ireland. Seems it's a popular place for tourists to take boat trips to see the dolphins, you know, like we did. Sounds a bit colder than the Med, though!" replied Val, then continued

"It also says there was a dolphin called Fungie, also known as the Dingle Dolphin. It was a male common bottlenose dolphin which became separated from other wild dolphins and lived in very close contact with humans in Dingle on the south-west coast of Ireland.

Fungie was known to interact playfully with swimmers, surfers, kayakers and divers in the water. He was Named after a local fisherman who was mocked for his attempt to grow a beard and was nicknamed "Fungus". But in 2020 the dolphin swam off and nobody knows where he went."

Further on they found a reference to another scientific group who stated "We have been tagging dolphins with suction-cup-mounted digital acoustic archival tags (DTAGs) at the end of a health assessment to monitor their movement and use of sounds in the wild."

"Pits Fungie didn't have a DTAG so they could find him!" said Val.

"Now there's a thought", said Alan, looking serious.

"What?"

"Suppose we could get someone to fit a tag to a dolphin for our kids so they could track it and work out how many sea miles it covered!"

"Do you think that's possible?!"

"Well, people adopt donkeys and rhinos and other creatures so maybe we could adopt a dolphin. No harm in asking" Alan assured her.

The read that dolphins can swim over a hundred miles in a day, some live for more than sixty years, and females over fifty years old can have babies.

Also they learned that whilst some dolphins stay in the same area all their lives others migrate. They thrive in both tropical and cooler, more temperate waters.

After going back home for a while Val and Alan continued enquiring and found the The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group based in County Clare could help.



## CHAPTER FOUR

The next family holiday was in County Clare.

The children went out in a boat with mum and dad and members of the Group.

It was quite a long way from Bantry Bay but the weather was good and the dolphins looked happy enough.

The little boy and the little girl chose a dolphin they thought looked about right and watched as the Group members fixed a tag, all very kindly and without harming the creature in any way.

They gave him some fish they had taken with them.

“That is Lucky the dolphin and this is your lucky day!” said the Group leader. “Now we will be able to see where he goes”.

“Can you guys communicate with dolphins and get them to understand things?” asked Alan.

“To be sure, to be sure”, came the reply. “Was there something you had in mind?”

“OK”, continued Alan, “Without intending any disrespect to the Emerald Isle or its people, I wondered if a dolphin could be encouraged to go to a warmer ocean or sea. We saw dolphins in the Mediterranean not too long ago and perhaps the local dolphins here don’t know there are warmer places like the Med or the Indian Ocean”.

“Yes, I see what you mean. We could give it a try if you like!”

By careful experiment and by recording sounds from dolphins from different parts of the world the Group members did eventually manage to encourage some “Irish” dolphins to go exploring and even transmitted some direction to them.

The “experiment” involved dolphins in captivity in the UK, Florida, California, Canada, several other European countries, Asia and Australasia.

The biggest dolphins they came across were in a giant aquarium in Texas.

After two years the Group observed as Lucky departed his habitat and went swimming off into the Atlantic Ocean south-west then south, past Portugal and southern Spain, to Gibraltar. Then he seemingly stopped for a rest, and perhaps to enjoy the warmth. At least that’s what the children wanted to believe.

Alan had continued to earn a reasonable income so the occasional overseas family holiday was not too much of a stretch.

He and Val had kept in touch with the Group in Ireland and their counterparts in other countries.

So when they decided to go to the Mediterranean again they were able to liaise with enthusiasts who had the tracking necessary tracking equipment.



“Third time lucky?” said Val as they went out on the charter boat for the third consecutive day.

“If we don’t find him today we’ll have to wait until next year before we can try again, because I’ve got to get back to work”, Alan told his family.

Ten minutes later a beeper sounded in the cabin.

“Gotcha!” said a crew member.

It took about twenty minutes and a lot of fish from the cold box to get the dolphin alongside the boat, but they did it.

“That is definitely your dolphin, said a crew member. But there seems to be another one very close to it”.

“Yes, I’ve seen that. They do seem to pair off like lovers”, said another crew member. “I’ve noticed them hanging around together for a few weeks now. But the other one doesn’t have a tag so I don’t know what its name could be!”

“We do!” said the children together.

“It’s Drusilla!”

The End

This is a short story written by Philip W Baker in October 2020

for his beautiful wife Margaret