

DOLPHIN SKY

By Ginny Rorby

Epilogue

Buddy Martin, five months and a week into her thirteenth year, sits on the sea wall beneath Smallwood's store and watches the water move like a cold breath back and forth across her tanned feet. Between her thumb and the side of her index finger, she rubs the tooth that hangs on the thin, gold chain Jane gave her for no reason at all.

Jane was drying dishes when she left, but now she hears her laugh at something her father says. They must be sitting in the porch swing again tonight. Buddy smiles.

In the channel, she hears first one dolphin then another surface and exhale. She holds her breath listening for a third smaller blow, but none comes.

Buddy hooks her right arm around a piling and, with her left index finger, draws circles around the small mound of sand beside her. She divides the wait for him between watching the horizon and the circles she draws.

She stops finally, wipes her sandy finger on the leg of her overalls, puts her cheek against the wood and shuts her eyes.

For an hour she waits like that, eyes closed, cheek against the piling. There's no sound, no breeze, only her toes feel connected to life as the cold water silently seeps in and out. Not until she becomes aware that the blackness behind her lids has lightened, does she open her eyes.

"Admiral?"

Just above a mangrove island, as if seated in the branches, rests the full moon. Its pale, ancient face smiles at her.

"Is that you there, Admiral? I've been waiting."

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What can you do to help?

Never buy a ticket to see "-a pathetic, beaten-down dolphin going through a bizarre ritual in order to be fed. It's an issue of supply and demand. If there is no demand to see them jump through hoops, the capture of dolphins and whales for this purpose will stop.

"Only three things are killing dolphins, our pollution, our fishing nets, and our captivity (programs.) Captivity kills."

Ric O'Barry

Glossary

by Elizabeth "Buddy" Martin

I was thinking how hard it was for me to read, much less figure out what every one of them words meant and that you might have trouble with some of them yourself. I made a list of the ones that might trip you up and defined them the best I could. 'Course, just about everything I know, the Admiral taught me. I guess I'll always be seeing the world through his eyes.

I know lots of folks ain't ever seen an airboat. I still ain't never rode in one, and I live here. The Admiral hated them 'cause of the noise, but I'd kind of like to see for myself what it's like to ride in one. Guess that don't help you figure out, does it?

They're made of aluminum and flat as a skillet on the bottom 'cause they're only used in real shallow water. They can go just about anywhere in the Everglades, even across dry land with a good head start, 'cause instead of a prop underwater to get snagged on stuff, it's got an airplane propeller mounted on the stern, which blows the boat across the water. The driver steers it with a stick that controls the rudders. A little push one way or the other changes the direction that the rudders is pointing, which shifts the wind the propeller is making and blows you off in another direction.

They can about turn on a dime. I've seem 'em do it.

The driver's seat is real tall, like a baby's high chair, so the driver can see where he's going. It's attached to the big wire cage around the engine, which is there to keep the driver from getting some part of himself lopped off by the propeller.

Stevens's airboat rides were along trails through the prairie where the sawgrass had been beat down from the constant traffic. But anyone cutting through dense prairie that ain't sitting up high comes out looking like he's been paper-cut from stem to stem.

If you was to open a tin can at both ends and toss the lid and bottom away, you'd have yourself the spitting image of a bait chute. You need one big enough to shove a fish head through, but anything real smelly is about all that's needed to get a crab's attention. A lot of the crabbers have started using cheap cans of cat food as bait. They punch a few holes in the top to let the smell escape into the water. That way they don't have to be handling fish heads and guts, and the cat food lasts a lot longer.

In rough seas or a good hard rain, a boat takes on a lot of water. Most of it runs off the deck through holes in the sides of the boat called scuppers, but some is always getting below deck where the engine is.

Without a bilge pump to pump that water out, you'd pretty soon find yourself on the bottom with the crabs feasting on you.

In English, we got so many words spelled just alike but don't sound alike and ain't even related. Bow is one. You can tie a bow or take a bow. Bowline sounds like the take-a-bow one, which makes sense. Miss Daniels says one has a long O, and the other has a short O, but they look the same size to me.

(I'm kidding. I know what she means.)

To connect Chokoloskee to rest of Florida, they built a causeway. It ain't nothing more than piled-up oyster shells and mud they dug out of the bay. When they had a high, dry strip long enough to reach from the island to the Everglades City, they paved it. The Admiral loved when storm waves washed over the causeway, 'cause it cut the tourists off. He said if they'd built a bridge instead, we'd never get a break from people wanting to come here and 'rough it' for a day or two.

The Admiral used to say that the Indians is the only ones who built real chickees. There must be a secret to 'em that I don't know. A chickee is only pine or cypress posts and layers of palm fronds for a roof.

I guess it's how they layer the fronds, 'cause I ain't never been in one that leaked in the rain, and they're sure shady and cool in the summer.

The first time I heard about those metal pointy things on the bottom of football players' shoes called cleats, I was confused. A cleat to me is a two-armed metal thing on a dock that you tie a bow or a stern line to. They don't look nothing like something that would attach to the bottom of a shoe.

Don't cowl'ing sound like a baby cow? It ain't, of course. It's the cover over an engine to keep rain and dirt out.

A culvert ain't nothing but a big concrete or metal pipe underneath a road or levee to let water through. If they hadn't built the levee, or the road, they wouldn't need a culvert.

A dory is a boat about twice as big as the pitpan but just as flat on the bottom. The pitpan has real low sides, but a dory's are higher and flare out. It will carry a bigger motor and will take a lot rougher water, but I'm happy with a pitpan though I don't use it as much as I used to. Sometimes when dolphins is going by, I take it out and just sit there, hoping one of them is Annie.

An eddy is like an underwater tornado, a whirlpool. Next time you flush your toilet; that there's an eddy.

The Admiral told me that north of the equator the water rushes around one way, and goes the opposite direction south of the equator. I ain't yet figured out how that's so.

Jane's the one who explained all about estuaries to me. Seems that in most places where rivers flow into the sea, they get kind of wide and shallow, and this is where the flow of a fresh water river mixes with the saltwater tides. The mouth of Turner River is an estuary. But Jane said that our whole coast from the west side of the Keys to over near Naples is an estuary because the Everglades is nothing but one big wide river emptying into the Gulf. Turner River looks like a river because in places mangroves line its sides, but it ain't bound up with dry land. In the middle it's just got water too deep for mangroves to take root.

A gunnel is also called a gunwale. I don't know why they need two names for the same thing; spelling one is hard enough. Anyway, a gunnel is just a strip of wood that caps the sides of boats. On big boats, like the Missing You, it's wide enough to walk along if you've got something to hold on to. On the pitpan, it's all that keeps it from being a raft instead of a boat.

Like I said before, the Everglades is a very long, very wide, very shallow river that used to flow in an unbroken sheet from Lake Okeechobee to the Gulf of Mexico. For years they have been building levees to either drain it for farming or channel it toward the east coast so the people living over there (Miami to West Palm Beach) have enough water.

Levees is just long banks of shells and dirt-not as fancy as them dikes they got in Holland, but they do the same thing: keep water from where it ain't wanted and force it to go somewhere it wasn't meant to be. Deep water canals run right alongside every levee 'cause that there's where the dirt came from to build it.

Mangrove trees is the most common tree along the coast of South Florida. There are three kinds: the red, the black, and the white. The red mangroves can go right in salt water and have a tangle of roots called prop roots, which come out of the tree trunk about ground and arch over, growing down through the water and finally into the mud. Mangrove roots is a safe place for baby fish, shrimp and crab larvae to grow.

At docks, parking spaces for boats are called slips. Each one is separated by a couple of huge posts driven into the muddy bottom on one side and a dock on the other. The posts keep the boat from bumping against each other.

I never thought to ask my grandfather why they are called slips, but I guess if you think about it, it's because you just slip your boat in.

I don't think I'll ever outgrow fearing storms. On a rainy day when a squall suddenly sets all the tree limbs blowing like they were gonna pull themselves free of the soil and fly off somewhere, I remember Dad and me that night on Turner River during the hurricane. Instead of being scared, I guess I should try to remember the good that came from that night.

About the Author

I was born in Washington, D.C. in the Florence Crittenden Home for unwed mothers, and as an infant, I was adopted by Kathryn and Noel Rorby. I grew up in Winter Park, Florida. Though I was academically challenged, I still managed to land a job as a flight attendant, where after eleven years flying, I went back to school. While at the University of Miami, I wrote an editorial about an abandoned dog and sent it to a local newspaper. An editor at that newspaper encouraged me to continue writing. I subsequently received a bachelor's degree in Biology and English, and went on to earn an MFA in creative writing.

Note to teachers and Media specialists and students: I am available for phone in interviews with your classes, book clubs, or reading groups. To schedule an interview, please email me at ginnyrorby@mcn.org