



The Best Gift Ever

Tim Tunks

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The stories in this book are the inheritance author Tim Tunks is passing from his mentors on to the next generation of sailors and those who love the water. Accompanied by drawings and photographs, his clear explanations and vivid descriptions transport the reader through unique and entertaining experiences in which much wisdom is embedded. Here is an example: "It takes a village to raise a child." became a popular slogan in the 1990s, which was my decade aboard Scallywag, sailing in the warm waters of Western Mexico. This saying was well known in both Native American and African cultures well before Hilary Clinton picked it up. I witnessed a drama that expressed this message in a most unexpected manner, and it is there that I begin my story of discovery. The stage was set in a beautiful little bay called Bahia San Francisquito on the peninsular coast of the Sea of Cortez. About sixty miles south of Bahia de Los Angeles, this calm body of water with its narrow entrance and sandy beaches is a popular birthing center for dolphins. This was something I didn't know until I witnessed it early one morning while serenely anchored enjoying a morning coffee. Like many events that unfold before our eyes, the significance of what transpired revealed itself gradually. With the "stage" about 150 yards away, powerful binoculars gave a good view of the performance without influencing the action. The prologue was an unusual grouping of Common Dolphins milling about near the beach. Suddenly three juveniles began a series of exuberant leaps and spins into the air. These acrobats performed to announce each birth, giving us first one encore and then another to announce the third pup's birth. The juveniles were like the teenagers you sometimes see at family picnics, weddings, and other gatherings. They seem to be serving the needs of the event while really amusing themselves with their own private games. From my reference books onboard I learned the birthing mother was generally accompanied by two or more "aunts" who stayed close by to assist if required. The juveniles swim about at a respectful distance, keeping a watchful eye for any approaching dangers while the rest of the pod seems to doze, swimming in slow motion and surfacing for a lazy breath now and then — until the pod was alerted by the suddenly leaping youngsters. In the next act of this dolphin drama, adults nosed the calves to the surface from time to time, helping them get the rhythm of breathing and swimming as the ensemble repeatedly paralleled the beach. The calves were "drafted" along between the adults, just as my old VW Microbus driven close behind fast-moving trucks got sucked along for better efficiency on highway trips. Witnessing such an intimate scene colored the rest of my day, and I chose to remain there at anchor until the next morning. That second morning I witnessed a remedial swimming lesson for one pup, who, for whatever reasons, had not gained sufficient skill from his first day's efforts. The pup's mother and mentors patiently repeated yesterday's lessons, for the pod cannot depart until the newest members have sufficient swimming skill to tuck into the slipstreams and be carried along in the flow of their extended family. It seemed the extra tutoring took hold after a bit and this village regrouped and swam together out of the bay—off to their aquatic life of feeding, resting, birthing, playing, and defending their group from dangers. I became nostalgic for my early youth lived in the 1950s mid-western U.S. where we were all members of the same tightly-knit family looking after one another. You may be certain this experience had a profound effect on me. Perhaps this is why I am ready, nowadays, to apply a bit of mentoring when I see the need. The Best Gift Ever "It takes a pod to raise a pup." seems to be the apt takeaway, and giving thanks for the opportunity to witness such an intimate event is part of my mission in writing this book.

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