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**FLYING THE FLAG  
FOR ARMED FORCES  
DAY THIS JUNE**

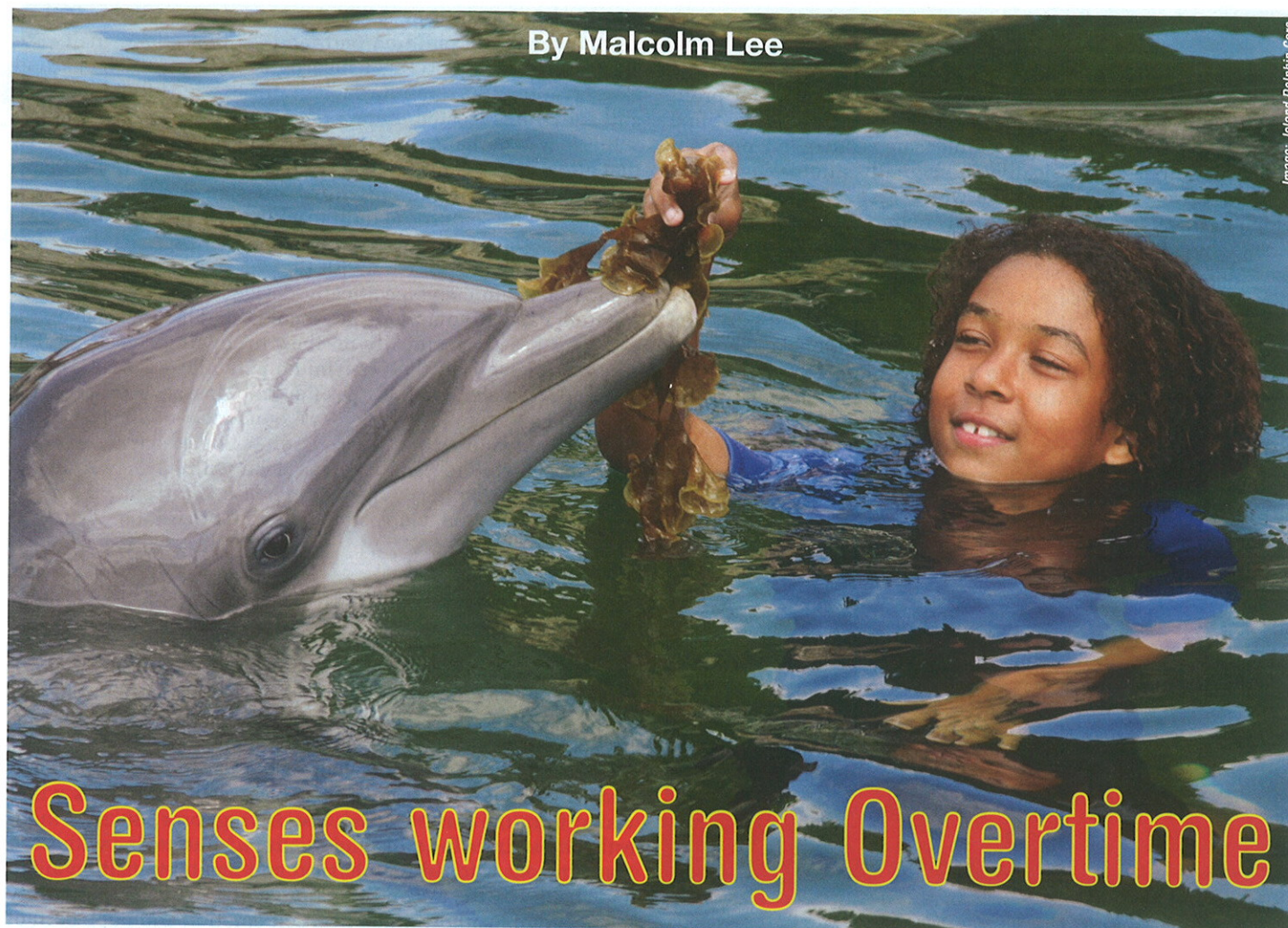
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By Malcolm Lee

Image: Island Dolphin Care



# Senses working Overtime

**Island Dolphin Care is a magical place that provides dolphin assisted therapy to children with critical illnesses, disabilities and special needs from all over the world.**

**S**oon after declaring war, Japan invaded the Philippines to capture US held military bases. By April 1942, the American-Filipino forces were defeated leaving only small pockets of resistance to carry on the fight. But as history has proven time and time again, even in the midst of great conflict, courage and humanity can never be suppressed.

Wounded in the fighting, Corporal Bill Wynne of the 26th Recon Photo Squadron was recovering in hospital when his friends smuggled in the airman's Yorkshire Terrier, Smoky. The dog had been found by GIs in an abandoned foxhole in the jungles of New Guinea and Wynne had adopted the pup almost immediately.

This convergence of events and the foresight of the Commanding Officer of the Hospital Unit, Dr. Charles Mayo, who recognised the very real therapeutic benefits of contact with the dog, is quite probably the first instance of animal assisted therapy recorded.

Not only did the inseparable pair get through the rest of the war, but the tiny Terrier survived 12 combat missions securely fastened in the airman's backpack as well as 150 air raids and for the rest of the war, Smoky and Corporal Wynne attended military hospitals throughout the conflict area, where Smoky's ever chirpy demeanour and talent for balancing tricks brought much needed psychological comfort to injured military personnel.

Today, animals specially trained or merely chosen for their placid or affectionate natures are used the world over in the treatment of both children and adults, offering a unique alternative form of therapy that can often provide positive results where more conventional means have failed.

Everything from Lizards to Llamas are used in these interactive therapy sessions, but it is perhaps the use of man's favourite marine mammal that is the most interesting. Man has been fascinated by dolphins since the days of ancient Greece when their

What Plutarch may have noted from mere observations, science has since confirmed and the dolphin's social skills with other group members and their obvious intelligence and vocal communication skills are now a matter of fact. It should therefore, come as no surprise then that these bright, friendly mammals should among all others in the Animal Kingdom interact so well with man.

Although dolphins are found in many locations around the world, the waters off the coast of Florida are most readily associated with them and it was there that youngster Joe Hoagland would have his very first up and close encounter. Born with a heart defect that required numerous surgeries, Joe, at the tender age of three, suffered a massive stroke during one of the procedures. It not only left him partially paralysed down his left side, unable to stand, sit or lie down without help but also with a myriad of neurological challenges.

## Freedom

Not responding well to traditional therapy, his mother Deena, a licensed clinical social worker, psychotherapist and teacher, thought water activities might give Joe more physical freedom. So Deena took Joe to Dolphins Plus, a Key Largo facility offering public swims with dolphins. That's where Joe met Fonzie, a 600 lb, 10-foot long Atlantic Bottle Nose dolphin. An event which marked the start on an incredible story.

Through regular visits, Joe took inspiration from the dolphin's irrepressible character which, says his mother spurred him on to put in the hard physical work that saw the boy eventually recovering from his paralysis. As a mother she was obviously overjoyed at her son's recovery, but as a psychotherapist she couldn't help believing that if this interaction with the dolphins could help Joe feel better about himself and motivate him to try new tasks, then they may also be able to do the same for others.



Continued from previous page

[www.islanddolphincare.org](http://www.islanddolphincare.org).

From comparatively humble beginnings IDC, a not for profit organisation based in the Florida Keys has earned a justified reputation for excellence. Creating safe, controlled environments that are both physically and mentally stimulating for the many children from around the world with educational, emotional or physical needs that have sought out the centre.

This therapeutic success, in an environment less threatening than standard medical settings, eventually led to their expansion and the opening of a state of the art facility in 2005. Here, says Deena Hoagland, the unconditional love and support from the dolphins is combined with a unique educational experience that often allows children to become more expressive and develop closer bonds with parents, doctors, and therapists upon returning home.

The new purpose built spacious, multifunction centre now



▲ Having fun in the water. Image: Island Dolphin Care.

a special place  
for special children

[www.islanddolphincare.org](http://www.islanddolphincare.org)

Island Dolphin Care  
provides  
dolphin-assisted therapy  
for special needs children  
from all over the world



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Care

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Make  
room  
for joy

provides full handicap accessibility and also allows IDC to accommodate the children and families that attend their programmes. The facility also incorporates Marine Science and Conservation Education through multiple educational displays and aquariums located in the indoor learning centre.

But it was perhaps the introduction of the 3 new classrooms that allowed the centre to combine their unique dolphin therapy with structured and individually designed educational sessions. With these purpose built teaching facilities, the organisation was able to bring in professionals such as therapist Gretchen Thomasson, who with the aid of special eye tracking computer technology specifically designed to allow sufferers of Cerebral Palsy to communicate, enabled staff to tailor-make programmes based specifically on their needs, thus ensuring that every child achieves their maximum potential.

'People sometimes think that the dolphins have magic sonar that's going to cure their kids', says founder Deena Hoagland, but adds, 'what we in fact do is take traditional methods for working with special children and combine them with having fun in the water with the dolphins. When they're relaxed and enjoying themselves they just tend to do better, they actually want to do better.'

## Self confidence

Karen Hanson, whose autistic son Zack had recently completed a stay at the centre agrees, 'it's a sad fact but true that some kids just can't be cured, but when your child is four and a half years old and you haven't heard him say a single word, saying a complete sentence after his third session with the dolphins just feels like such a huge milestone. By the time we left, his self confidence had just elevated to a whole new level.'

Co-founder and the other half of the hard working husband and wife team, Pete Hoagland has been right behind his wife's vision from the start, 'Deena's the driving force,' he says modestly, 'I just drive the nails and the truck.' But having witnessed his own sons astonishing physical and mental transition aided and abetted by the unconditional trust of Fonzie, he is also only too aware of just how much heartfelt emotion and hope born of desperation can be felt by the parents of the children they treat. 'We stay away from suggesting or implying that the dolphins are in some way miracle workers,' he says. 'But having said that, we do see some amazing things happen between the kids and the dolphins.'

There is considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that dogs

► Peter and Deena Hoagland.  
Image: Island Dolphin Care.

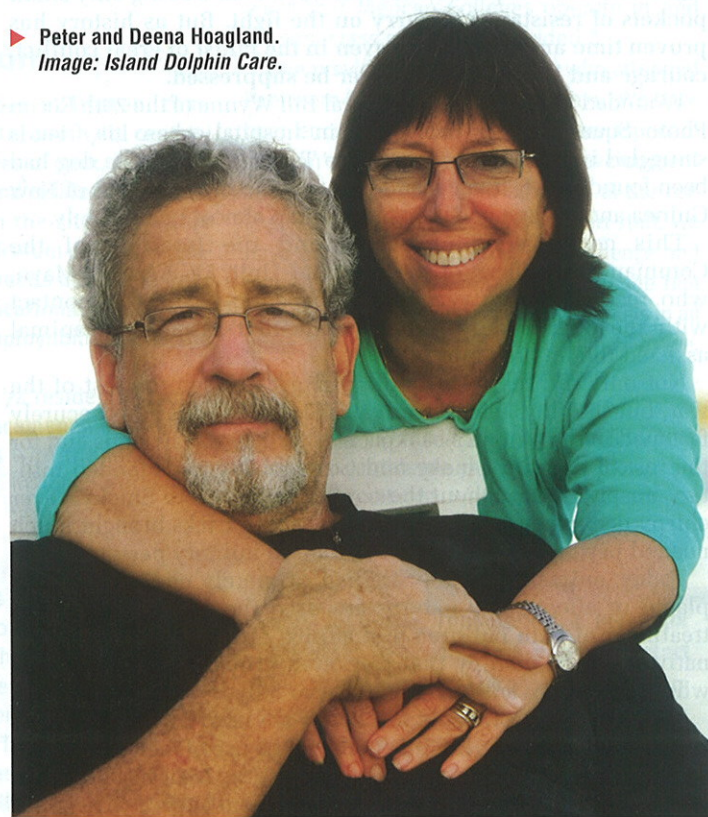






Image: Island Dolphin Care

with their keen senses can predict an impending illness such as an epileptic fit or heart attack in their owner. Obviously, the animal is picking up on subtle changes in the body's physiology, but could it also perhaps be sensing something else on a much deeper level that we simply cannot detect? Dolphins are intelligent, warm blooded social mammals, they have a wide vocabulary, have been scientifically proven to have problem solving skills

and have shown an affinity towards man since the time of ancient Greeks. Is it then too farfetched to put forward the theory that perhaps with the dolphins keen radar and sensing skills, it can pick-up on for example the abnormal brain patterns and body rhythms of an ill child? Obviously not something that could ever be scientifically proven, but then Mother Nature has been around an awful lot longer than technology. **an**

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