

# When One Becomes Many

My family used to live in Big Bell, a gold mining town in the middle of Western Australia.

In the summer, my father played Country Week Cricket and one year we went with some other families to Busselton on the coast.

We stayed at the caravan park and we all went fishing, crabbing and played on the beach. The water was crystal clear; you could see the crabs twenty feet below your boat and the beach was covered with thousands of iridescent sea snail shells.

We took half a bucket back to Big Bell, to make necklaces and to dream of clean oceans filled with fish, crabs and

whales. I was about seven or eight. I wanted to be a marine biologist.

Years later, with two of my grandchildren, I went whale watching off Hillarys Boat Harbour. A whale, her baby and an aunt took a position between our boat and the shore, and swam back and forth for about 40 minutes.

The mother whale came so close to our boat we could see the barnacles growing around her great head; her skin rough and mottled.

There was no denying the power of this huge, intelligent, social creature as we stood, spellbound, just a few yards away and she looked directly at me.



Looking into the eye of a whale is like looking into the eye of God.

You cannot just look away and be the same, ever again.

Having a passion for environmental issues is not hard. Creeks get blocked or polluted with household rubbish and toxic road waste, they flow into rivers laced with fertilisers that feed algal bloom. Scrub is cleared in marginal areas and salt lakes spread like a cancer on the earth.



Old growth forest is felled and monoculture creeps across farmlands with a dull green sheen that hides the sterile world beneath its leaves. The tide brings ashore an increasing harvest of plastic and abandoned fishing nets; while overhead the very air we breathe has a constant veil of smog between us and the open sky.

Caring is not hard. It is simply a matter of deciding where you

can really make a difference. But I was only one person.

In December 2008, I read about the secret slaughter of dolphins in Japan (as made famous by the Oscar winning film, *The Cove*), which compelled me to start lobbying local Shire and State Governments through emails, letters and blogging on my site at No Tall Poppies on Wordpress. One or two friends joined me.

At the Writers' Festival at the University of Western Australia in March 2009, I met Chris Pash, author of *The Last Whale*, a

history of how Greenpeace helped close down the whaling station in Albany and his passion encouraged me to continue to lobby, blog

and write to State and Federal Ministers in support of whales.



In September 2009, I began working as a volunteer with Save Our Marine Life, which is an alliance of Australian and international conservation groups that have come together to seek the establishment of a network of large marine sanctuaries in the south west of Western Australia. We have learned a great deal about the proven science of marine sanctuaries and how they add to the sustainability of marine species.

Now, we are many! I have built a following of nearly 13,000 people on Twitter, I broadcast every SOML event to a huge audience by blogging and tweeting promoted SOML petitions, rallies, events and their Facebook page.

**Save Our Marine Life** is campaigning for people to join us in telling the Australian Federal Government that having less than one per cent of our

coast line protected as marine sanctuaries is not enough. We have great biodiversity around our WA coastline and recently the Federal Government granted mining leases to an area under consideration for marine sanctuaries, off the south coast near Margaret River.

In my life, I have ventured far. I've been to Baja California, because I read Earl Stanley Gardner many years ago and was inspired by his stories of great grey whales that come there to breed and nurse their young.

I've swum with seals in the Abrolhos;  
with  
spinner  
dolphins in  
Hawaii;  
and  
scratched



the back of Henry, an old green turtle who loves to visit you, visiting him.



I've watched mother and calf humpbacks migrating from their nursery in Camden Sound near Broome, in North Western Australia; seen sea snakes oaring their way towards me across an aquamarine sea and been dazzled by the flash of bronze whaler sharks telling their savage story.

I have stood in a boat on a calm day, when the only sound was the whales' song, echoing up through the hull. Out on the ocean, even deaf people can "hear" a whale song.

Yes, it's easy to be awed by nature. It's easy to care. But one can become many and our voices will be heard. We can make a difference. Let's sing in harmony with the whales.

*\*Editor's note:*

*A trip to the beach as a child was never forgotten for Lesley Dewar. Now a grandmother, she has learned that one tiny voice can join with many to roar like the ocean. This story, written by Lesley Dewar, was published on the ABC Website on 1 June 2010.*

# Twittering Nana Passionate About The Ocean

DNS server, marine conservation, WiFi, campaigning – the string of words may be confusing to most but for 66-year-old Lesley Dewar they make up her busy lifestyle.

She may be a retiree but retired she's not. The East Victoria Park resident has a busy schedule as a marine activist and author.

Ms Dewar said she was a number-crunching financial planner before becoming an activist.

"If it's in water, near water, underwater, I like them and I'm passionate about them," she said.

"I was passionate about marine conservation but I was busy working, raising a family and looking after an invalid husband. I was in the corporate world as well so it wasn't a good look to be tied to a bulldozer or hugging a tree."

The turning point came about twelve years ago when she experienced a touching moment with mother nature. "I went whale watching with a grandchild off Hillary's," she said. "We were really lucky because there were three whales - a baby, a mother and an aunt. "They just swam up and down and came really close to us. That was the trigger. I came home and thought to myself, we really got to do something to make sure the whales were taken care of."

The grandmother attended her first public meeting of the Conservation Council of WA in September 2009. She joined as a volunteer for the Save Our Marine Life Alliance. "I worked in revegetation program in the hills as well," she said. "So I did my fair share of tree planting, weed pulling and gumboot slobbering."

While the marine life is her first love, writing is a close second. Ms Dewar said she started writing six years ago. "It wasn't until I really retired that I could take on things on an active basis," she said.

"About six years ago, I was in Canada in the middle of winter. "I said to my daughter-in-law - quick, quick, give me a piece of paper, I want to write something." I wrote a story about where have all the spiders gone. It just struck me one day when I was walking with the dogs that there were no flies. And I started backtracking - no flies, no spiders and no birds. Because I was so far away from home, I could have an objective look on our bushland. Even though I was living in an environmentally friendly way, just that fact that we were there has already impacted on the environment."

Technology did not faze Ms Dewar. Her works were published in an environmental magazine and she built a blog with an online business. "People would be able to subscribe to what I write for a fee and I deliver it to them via email," she said. "Ever since I got an iPhone I've done a lot of computer work anytime I want.

"Once I wake up, I check my twitter on my phone and spend an hour replying to them or writing tweets. I find it quite amazing - I meet young people, in their 20s and they are saying, look at her with her iPhone going tic-tic-tic on the keyboard. A lot of young people that I thought would be technology savvy, aren't."

With so many projects on her plate, Ms Dewar said she could not imagine kicking her legs back during her retirement. "Retire? I am having so much fun, it should be illegal," she said. "My mum reckons she should tie a ribbon to my ankle, to rein me in from so many activities. But I'm a bit of a freak."

### **Editor's Note**

This article was published in the Vic Park Examiner on June 25, 2010.  
Journalist: Brenda Chew.