

Name _____ Date _____

Pelorus Jack

A pelorus is something like a compass. It helps sailors find their way. This is the story of a dolphin who was like a pelorus. He helped sailors steer their ships safely. The dog is often said to be a human's best friend. Maybe it is, but some people think the dolphin is our best animal friend. There are many stories about dolphins helping people. Some of the stories go back thousands of years. Some of them tell how dolphins have saved people's lives. It has never been recorded that a dolphin attacked a person. They are friendly animals. They are fun-loving, and they seem to enjoy being around people.

Dolphins are very clever. They can be trained to do many things. They can be taught all sorts of tricks. The United States Navy uses dolphins. They are a part of underwater study teams. They carry messages to teammates. They also take tools to people working underwater. If divers are in trouble, trained dolphins may help rescue them.

Perhaps the most famous dolphins of all was Pelorus Jack. Some New Zealand sailors first saw him about eighty years ago. He was almost white. He would appear each time a ship sailed through a narrow passageway called Cook Strait. He would leap and splash in the water near the side of the ship. After a while he would move to the bow, or front of the ship. He would swim from side to side, and he would always stay just ahead of the ship. He seemed to be leading it away from the dangerous shoals. These shallow places lay on either side of the strait. Sometimes two ships would be headed through at one time. Then Pelorus Jack would speed ahead of the faster one. He would lead both ships through the strait.

Pelorus Jack never turned away until he had guided a ship safely through the strait. Then he would swim back. He would wait for the next ship. It could be all day. It could be all night. The dolphin was always there. At night one could see the trail of sparkling water he left behind him. He never failed to judge correctly the speed of a ship, and he never was caught by the propellers.

People would stand on the decks of every ship going through the strait. They wanted to see their faithful friend. If they caught a glimpse of him, they felt lucky. The sight of his sleek body slicing through the water meant a safe trip. The dolphin never let them down.

In a short time Pelorus Jack became famous. New Zealanders wanted to make sure he would always be safe, so a special law was passed. It protected the dolphin from danger. At that time it was rare to have laws protecting animals. This law was for just one animal. Pelorus Jack didn't know this, of course. He just went on taking ships through Cook Strait. He would flip his tail or leap high in the air. People on the decks would clap their hands as they watched him lead the way.

Then one day Pelorus Jack disappeared. For weeks people watched for him. They looked and looked, but he was never seen again. No one knows what happened to him. The sailors who sailed Cook Strait talked about Pelorus Jack for many years. They never forgot their special guide. For twenty years he had been faithful. He had helped his human friends. He had led ship after ship to the safety of calm waters.