

that I had won a small victory over George Widener. There was only mild censure when I showed the ducks to Momma.

### Encounter with a Porpoise

One crisp morning in late November 1937, I made a second trip across to the Mackay Point pond hoping to get a black duck or two. I had set the alarm clock for 5:00 a.m., so there was only the faintest hint of approaching dawn in the eastern sky when I left Haulover Creek and entered the wide waters of the Pocatigo River. My destination lay on the opposite side, almost directly across, so I had to row briskly to buck the fast moving outgoing tide.

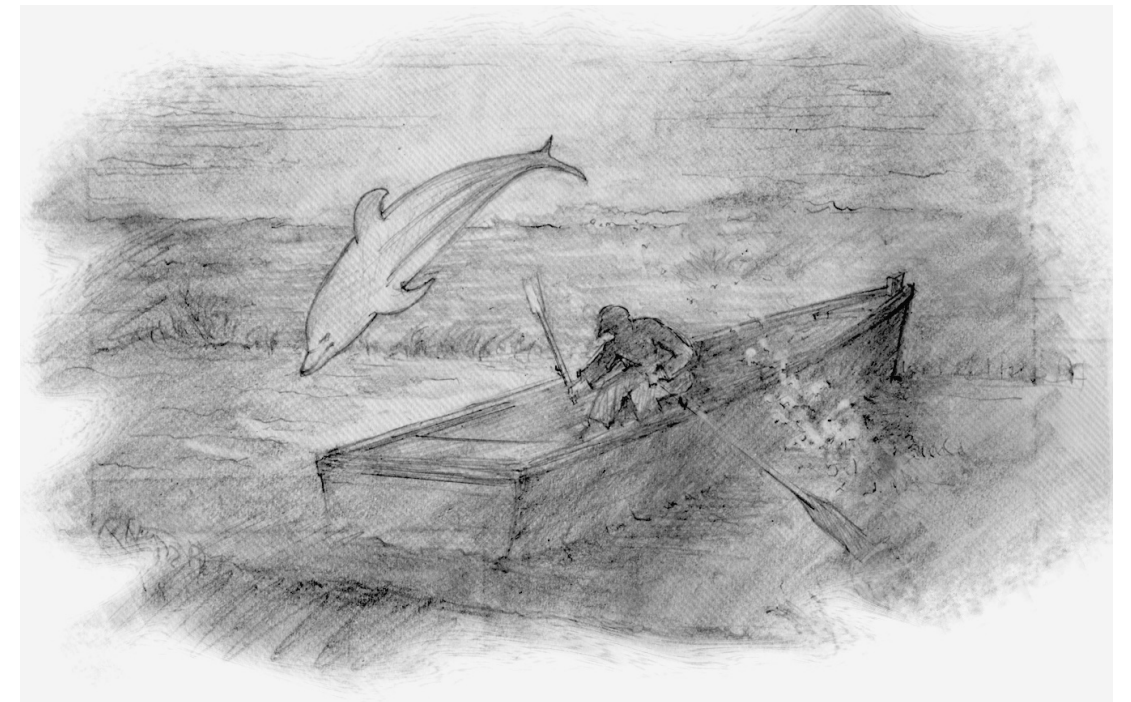
Entering the small tributary leading up to the duck pond, I was still ahead of schedule because the ducks would not begin coming in for another half hour or so. I did not slacken pace because the water level in the creek was fast dropping and would soon become unnavigable for my bateau. I had not proceeded far up the creek before I detected the unmistakable sounds of a porpoise, perhaps 200 yards ahead. He was blowing and thrashing about—no doubt hunting for mullet in the hole that lay up near the headwaters of the creek. I rowed on in eager anticipation of some sort of confrontation with a porpoise, though a more prudent course would have been to go back downstream and leave the porpoise to feed in peace. I was hell-bent on bagging a duck or two and wasn't about to let the other hunter's quest for mullet interfere. In the swift outgoing stream, my oars were digging into the mud banks as often as into the water.

Suddenly, when we were less than 200 ft. apart, the busy mammal became quiet. I knew that he had become aware of my presence. What would he do now? The porpoise would not retreat for the upstream and risk being stranded in shallow water. He must come out in my direction. With the stream now only about 10 ft. wide and 2 ft. deep, my bateau turned crossways in the swift outgoing current. There was no sound except the gentle lapping of water against the boat side. I expected

confrontation of some type at any moment and, heart pounding, turned to look upstream, searching the pre-dawn haze for anything resembling a porpoise.

I saw the rapidly approaching wave when it was only about 30 ft. away and instinctively turned my back and bent low on the seat. With a gentle "whoosh," the 300 lb. mammal leaped directly over my head, arched gracefully back into the water 15 ft. down stream and disappeared—having deposited a mere drop of water on the back of my neck. There was now just enough light that I was able to catch a fleeting glimpse of the end of this beautiful performance.

This was one of the most exhilarating moments I have ever experienced—a feeling of rare communion with a creature of the wild. How this porpoise could so quickly "size up" the situation confronting him—and make such a precise and appropriate response—has been a source of wonder and admiration for me ever since. He had demonstrated far more "common sense" than I had.



*A pre-dawn encounter*