a friend in need

When former TV presenter *Melody Horrill* found a way to trust and love again thanks to a wild dolphin, the relationship helped free her from the trauma of childhood domestic violence.

'Can you hear me, Mel?"

The voice is coming from the small rubber bug lodged in my ear.

"Yep, loud and clear," I answer. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes, 10 seconds to air and remember to throw to your dolphin report at the end."

I adjust my dress, breathe deeply. I can feel my heart thudding in my chest. Even after years of presenting Adelaide's weather live every weeknight, I can still feel tendrils of past anxiety prodding at my core.

I launch into my script, chatting to the inanimate cyclops in front of me like an old friend, knowing that people at home are watching, listening. I feel so grateful and humbled that they do. I have been a weather presenter for almost 10 years and an environment and science reporter for close to two decades. I finish tonight's segment talking about the latest baby dolphin born to the pod in Adelaide's Port River.

I feel the grin lift my cheeks. The smile is genuine. Tonight, I can hear the sparkle of joy in my own voice as I talk about the dolphins. I love them and have worked hard to ensure that every television job I've had has allowed me to showcase and support these amazing wild mammals, which live right on the doorstep of the city.

My passion to help protect the Port's dolphins set me on a course I was constantly amazed to be on. I never planned a career in television. I felt I never fitted the TV mould. I was an outsider, an ordinary girl, nothing special. I was an interloper who had somehow stumbled into an extraordinary realm. But I worked hard to learn my craft, with help from some generous mentors, and I was proud of my achievements.

My TV persona had always disguised a niggling fear that I would never amount to anything, something I learnt from my father. As a child, he reminded me of my uselessness during those times he actually acknowledged my existence. Of course, he also noticed me when I threw myself between him and my mother during their violent fights at home. She would frequently come off worse than he did, suffering a bloodied nose, lip, or black eye. Little did I know that worse was to come.

Photography by Mike Bossley; *Portside Messenger*