

# THE MAGICAL WHALES OF LA MERCY

Every time I see a whale breaching outside my back door, I make a wish! And this year I've seen a lot of whales! There's just something so magical and magnificent about these mysterious gentle giants, with their deep haunting songs and incredible acrobatics. Despite their size they leap and soar, slap and twirl, as if to celebrate the joy of being alive. And their playful babies are the absolute cutest.

My husband and I are new to La Mercy. We decided to move to the coast during COVID-19. When remote-working became a norm we realised life was too short to live in polluted Joburg. So we bought the cheapest house in La Mercy with the best sea-view. 60 meters above sea-level so that we can miss any Tsunamis. We did our research!



So we moved in April 2021 and woke up every morning to a magnificent east coast sunrise and gorgeous uninterrupted ocean views.

Imagine our surprise when the whales appeared in May. I couldn't believe it! We are both deep-sea divers and we LOVE LOVE LOVE whales. The last time I saw whales was in Hout Bay and Hermanus. My husband is just gaga about all sea creatures. So we started researching them. We found out that the largest whaling station in the world was at Durban and it was closed in 1975. In those days only 340 whales migrated past, as they were mercilessly hunted and killed around the world.



Today, 46 years after the brutal whaling was banned, about 7000 whales migrate past Durban every year. The humpbacks live 40 to 60 years, so the oldest whales can still remember being hunted and murdered in Durban. It has taken them over 40 years to trust us humans enough again (<https://whaleheritagesites.org/thebluff/>, 2022).

The bloody whaling history of Durban, set the perfect horror movie stage for what was to follow... the July 2021 riots. What horror! What tragedy! The only thing that prepared us for the nightmare was watching alien-invasion and zombie survival movies. Packing bug-out bags before we sleep in case we get attacked in the middle of the night. Practicing our evacuation drills... you grab the cats... you grab the dogs... I grab our IDs (and the gin)... into the car...!

It was scary being at home while hubby did the 3am guard slot, which was the least popular. Not knowing if I will see him again. The empty feeling in the pit of your belly, knowing that no one was

coming to help us. Not the police, not the government, not the army. We were alone and we had to stand together as a community, as La Mercy. The Civic Association, the volunteers and the security companies stood together in unity and successfully protected this community against all the threats.

Being compassionate people, we also bought food from wherever we could find it, for the two informal settlements, where so many people were now starving. La Mercy was well taken care of by the kind donations from the mosque and the temple. A small group of us knew we had to help people in Pholani and Lungelani, because all black people are not looters and there were innocent women and children who were now destitute. It was an opportunity for nation-building, for building a ONE LA MERCY.

So much goodwill and friendships were achieved across the class and colour divides. The BOTTLES OF HOPE women's group provided thousands of family meals, and so many community members donated clothes and food.

The magic of the whales and the horror of the riots were followed in 2022 by NOT ONE, BUT TWO "one in a hundred year" flood disasters. We watched in horror once again, as hundreds of homes slid down muddy banks, and roads and bridges washed into the sea.



Multi-million rand Umdloti penthouses and squatter camp shacks – all equally reduced to rubble in the mud. We are all equal in the face of Mother Nature!

Once again, there was no help from the police, the government, the army... we were alone. We only had each other in the community to lean on. My husband and I supported the civic association and community volunteers to house, clothe and feed displaced refugees in the community hall. They had lost EVERYTHING! While our government leaders were missing in action or focused on their selfish needs (DA Councillor Missing-in-Action Geoff and ANC Premier Water-Tanker Zikalala) this community stepped up and mobilised angels of mercy like The Gift of the Givers and religious organisations, volunteered for traffic control, demarcated broken roads, raised funds to repair our bridge, fought for water and electricity repairs and kept us all in the loop with regular community announcements and information. This is an amazing community spirit! I have personally never seen so much achieved by one community, such as in La Mercy. So while there may be historical squabbles and old feuds between groups and companies, we must not forget how strong La Mercy was when we all stood together. We were even at the center of national news at one point, speaking TRUTH TO POWER (and Water-Tanker Zikalala).

So coming back to the magical migration of the whales, and the amazing sight of about ten whales all splashing joyfully at the same time today, I wished for peace and cooperation in our community.

I wished for my neighbour next door to finally greet us. I wished for my other neighbour to give us back our walled-off garden. I wished for people to help Eileen Gogo to water the plants that she and Dr Harilall are so dedicatedly beautifying the entrance to La Mercy with. I wished for people to realise that the servants who clean our rich houses and gardens, only earn enough to live in squatter

camps. I wished for people to be kind to their vats and dogs, and to the vervet monkeys, who are losing their habitat.

And finally and most importantly, I wished for peace and security in La Mercy. We know what it feels like to be in mortal danger. We know we need unity. We know that when the “shit hits the fan” we only have each other. We will achieve more if we put aside our differences and work together.

As residents we must not allow our security companies and factions to divide us. Let the whales do the breaching, fluking, lob-tailing and flipper-slapping, not the service-providers. We must insist on unity, on working together for OUR collective interests, as a united La Mercy community.

La Mercy is a magical place! Let’s appreciate it and cherish it!

**By: Cassandra Gabriel, La Mercy Resident**

## WHALE BEHAVIOR:



### Whale Blow

When whales exhale, its blow releases a puff of spray. The blow is often the first sign that whales are present and the sound of it is often surprisingly loud.



### Breaching

Breaching is when a whale propels its body out of the water & upon its re-entry creates an impressive splash. Breaching is not fully understood, however, suggestions for this type of behaviour include communication, mating, competition and play.



### Fluking

A whale’s tail is composed of two lobes each of which is called a fluke, hence a whales tail is called “its flukes”. When a whale dives into the water column, it raises its tail before it slips below the surface.



### Lob-Tailing & Flipper Slapping

Whales slap the surface of the water with their tails, as well as their flippers. It is suggested that this type of behaviour is associated with mating and communication.



### Sailing

Sailing often looks like a “whale standing on its head” as it holds its body vertically in the water column with its tail sticking out of the water surface. Whales either undertake this activity to catch the wind and “sail” through the water, or as a method to cool down.



### Spy-hopping

Spy-hopping is when a whale looks like it is vertically standing in the water column with its head sticking out of the water surface. This allows a whale to get a better view of its surrounding activities.

(Source: Whale & Dolphin Tours Durban, 2022)