

Dear children of Class 4b

Thank you for your letters! It's always wonderful to hear from readers, especially from far away. I'm glad you enjoyed the story so much.

I will try to answer all your questions.

Sara

*Why did Bill and Digger come to Sam?*

They were out at sea, fishing, when they saw the stranded whale. They were collectors of whale's teeth so they came ashore to see if they could get some.

*How old is Sam?*

He is about 8 years old.

*Does Sam have relatives?*

I think he has parents and maybe brothers and sisters but they weren't part of my story, so I didn't focus on them. I wanted it to be a simple story about one boy, a dog, and the whale (plus the fishermen and Angus).

*Was the whale injured?*

The whale was not injured. Whales become stranded on beaches quite often. No-one is quite sure why it happens. Maybe they get confused about the depth. Sometimes large families, or pods, of whales all get stranded together. It's awful because most of them die, even if people try hard to rescue them.

Sophia

*Is the story real or made up?*

It's both! I'll explain...

*How did you come up with the idea?*

I wanted to write a story about a boy called Sam who loved collecting things from beaches. I imagined what would happen if he came across a beached whale that was alive and needed his help. I went to the museum in Launceston (Tasmania) and asked an expert to help me choose a species of whale that is found in our area, and which was small enough for one boy and a friend to rescue. It also had to have teeth, so that the fishermen would want to steal them. Then I spoke to an expert on whale rescues to find out all about how to do the rescue. That was how I learned that you must protect the whale from sunburn.

As I discovered all the facts, a story began to form.

*Is there a sequel?*

I have tried to think up a sequel over the years, as people have often asked for one. I've never found an idea that I thought was good.

I wonder if you have read *Die Nacht der Vogel*. It's not a sequel but it's like a 'companion story' – it's also about rescuing animals.

Heidi and Lamar

*What was the inspiration for the book?*

I spent a year living on Flinders Island, near Tasmania. I was a class 3 teacher. Some of my students brought whale bones and teeth into the classroom. They told me how they'd collected them from beaches. I went to see some of the huge skeletons they told me about. That's where my ideas began. One of my students was called Sam. He was interested in

everything to do with the sea. When I left the island, I decided to write a children's story. Sam seemed like a perfect character.

Lamar

*When did you write the book?*

More than 30 years ago!

Emil

*How long did it take to write the book?*

It didn't take very long to write the story for the first time – only a couple of weeks. But that was after doing all the research and thinking of the idea. That took much longer.

As usual, the story had to be re-written several times. The first draft, for example, was in the present tense, and the finished version is in the past tense.

Once the writing was finished, I spent time with the illustrator, helping him visualise the story.

*What's the message of the book?*

Whales are precious and should be protected. This is true of the whole of the natural world.

By working together people can make a difference.

Below is a very old photo of me standing with a whale stranded on a beach in Tasmania. This experience occurred to me a few years after I wrote Sam's Wal.

