Tom Michell is a British teacher.

In the 1970s, he worked at an English language boarding school in Argentina.

One day he visited a beach and found a penguin that was injured and alone.

Michell decided to help the bird.

He cleaned it, fed it, and even gave it a name - Juan Salvado.

From that day on, Juan Salvado lived on the terrace of his room in the school dormitory.

The following is part of the story, written by Tom Michell, about the penguin and a boy at the school.

From the first day that I brought a penguin to live at the school, one student in particular wanted to help with his care.

His name was Diego Gonzales.

Diego was a shy boy who seemed to be frightened of his own shadow.

He struggled with his classes, and none of the after-school activities seemed to suit him.

He was neither strong nor athletic.

On the rugby field, nobody passed the ball to him or involved him in the game, except to make fun of him.

Diego's early education had not prepared him well for life at his new school.

His knowledge of English was limited, so he avoided conversation.
However, Diego enjoyed the company of Juan Salvado.

Indeed, on the terrace, Diego could relax.

He had some friends who also had trouble fitting in.

Looking after Juan Salvado was good for those boys.

They fed him fish, swept the terrace, and spent time with him.

One day, I took Juan Salvado to the school swimming pool with the boys.

As soon as the other swimmers left, we brought Juan Salvado to the water to see if he would swim.

Juan Salvado had been living at the school for several months by then.

However, in all that time, he had never been able to swim because his feathers had been damaged.

"Go on!" I said.

The penguin stared at me and then at the pool, like he was asking, "Ah! Is this where the fish come from?"

Without further encouragement, he jumped in.

With a single movement of his wings, he flew like an arrow across the water and knocked into the wall on the opposite side.

Luckily, he was not hurt!

I had never had the opportunity to study a penguin in the water before.
Lesson 1. A Spark in You

I was familiar with the awkward way that Juan Salvado walked on land, but now I watched in awe.

Using only a stroke or two, he flew at great speed from one end of the pool to the other, turning swiftly before touching the sides.

It was amazing!

Everyone could see how much he was enjoying himself.

"Ooh! Aah!" The boys shouted, as though they were watching a fireworks display.

After a while, Diego came over and asked quietly, "Can I swim, too?"

I was astonished.

He had never gone near the pool before.

I was not even sure if he could swim.

"The water is cold, and it's getting late. Are you sure you want to go in?" I asked.

"Please!"

"All right then," I said, "but be quick!"

I had never seen him so excited before.

His eyes were shining with joy, and he seemed to be truly alive for the first time.

Without hesitating, he dived into the cold water.

I was ready to jump in and rescue him if he could not swim.
Lesson 1. A Spark in You

However, I soon realized that I did not have anything to worry about.

Not only could Diego swim, but he swam magnificently!

He chased after Juan Salvado, and they swam in perfect harmony.

It was like a duet written for violin and piano.

Sometimes Juan Salvado took the lead and Diego followed after him.

At other times Diego went ahead and the penguin swam around the boy.

Occasionally they swam so close that they almost touched.

I was almost speechless.

Suddenly Diego was not the sad little boy we had become used to.

He was a very normal boy with a very special talent.

"Diego! You can swim!"

"Yes, I can swim."

"I mean you are able to swim really well. Brilliantly, in fact!"

"Do you think so?"

He asked without looking directly at me, but I saw a smile on his face.

As we returned to the dormitory, Diego told me that his father had taught him how to swim in the river by their home.

It was the first time he had talked about his life.
I listened in silence, without making any corrections to his English, as he talked nonstop all the way back to the dormitory.

The events of that day were extraordinary.

A child had gone down to the water to swim with a penguin, and shortly afterward, a young man had emerged.

The ugly duckling had become a swan.

It was definitely a turning point.

Diego's confidence grew quickly after that day.

When the school had a swimming competition, he won every race he participated in.

The encouragement and acknowledgement given by the other boys was genuine.

He had earned the respect of his classmates.

Over the next few weeks, his grades improved and he became more popular.

Thanks to a swim with a penguin, a lonely boy's life was changed forever.