

Interactions between Killer Whales in Captivity and Humans

As humans encountered and became more curious about killer whales, these majestic animals were captured and further studied. As more whales were brought into captivity, scientists exchanged their knowledge and respect for these creatures with the world through entertainment parks. A heated debate has increased over whether keeping these animals of astonishing size and grace in small tanks instead of their natural habitats is humane.

In 1993, following the release of the movie "Free Willy", an argument arose about whether keeping these animal in captivity was humane. Men who had worked to capture these graceful animals said it was like abducting a young child from their mother. When they forcefully took young calves from their mothers, they would call out while they were hauled away. Their mothers were killed in most cases as they tried to stop the abduction and rescue their young. Which brings us to wonder, is it necessary to confine killer whales by captivity?

In 1964, Samuel Burich was commissioned by the Vancouver Aquarium to create a life sized sculpture of a killer whale to present within the new British Columbia Hall. The artist sought a model for his sculpture and harpooned a young calf as a pod of killer whales passed by. The calf in shock, after being struck by the harpoon, froze. As she struggled to breathe, two older whales rushed forward to help her reach the surface.

Suddenly, the calf emerged out of her trance and began thrashing about, emitting shrill screeches. Burich attempted to finish off the calf by firing multiple shots at her. The whale, soon to be known as Moby Doll, survived and Vancouver Aquarium director, Murray A. Newman, made the decision to drag the calf through choppy seas for over 16 hours to a small pen in Burrard Drydocks. Moby Doll, the first killer whale in captivity, became a magnet for tourists and scientists.

The calf was very unhappy. She swam aimlessly around the pool in a clockwise pattern. Moby Doll refused to eat, even though she was offered everything from salmon to horse hearts. After 55 days in captivity, she began to eat 200 pounds of salmon a day. After 87 days in captivity, she died. Her cause of death, a skin disease she had acquired from the polluted water in which Moby Doll was kept. An autopsy was performed, at which time it was discovered that Moby Doll was male.

Following the excitement surrounding Moby Doll's short period in captivity, Ted Griffin acquired a bull killer whale, in 1965. Two days before his captured, a pair of whales, an adult male, soon to be known Namu and a calf were spotted in a net. The fishermen cut the net loose and watched as the adult tried to lead the calf to freedom. The calf, confused, did not follow and remained tangled in the net. The fishermen returned two days later to find the calf gone, but Namu remained. Ted Griffin seized the opportunity and captured the whale in a floating sea pen and led him roughly 450 miles to the Seattle Public Aquarium.

The public fell in love with Namu and a movie as well as a song was made in honor of him. He ate 375 pounds of fish daily and was the first killer whale to ever perform for

the public. Even though he had hundreds of adoring fans he was in desperate need of the companionship of another whale. He would emit shrill screeches and sometimes other pods of killer whales that were passing by would respond with their own calls. Namu died abruptly, in July 1966, after 11 months in captivity. His cause of death was an infection which resulted from the polluted water.

In December 1965, the first killer whale was brought to SeaWorld San Diego by Ted Griffin. Shamu had spent a short time as a companion to Namu in Vancouver before being flown to San Diego. She was the first in a long line of economically successful killer whales for SeaWorld.

Shamu uttered distress calls from the day she arrived at SeaWorld and became aggressive during her six years in captivity. In one report, she grasped a girl's leg and proceeded to play tug-of-war with it. In August, 1971, Shamu died after six short years in captivity.

The capture of killer whales has always been a controversial subject, but the public strived to see killer whales, and their capture continued. In 1970, during a highly controversial whale roundup in Penn Cove, Washington, many killer whales were captured and sent to aquariums and many others were simply killed. Today, only one, Lolita, survives. She lives at the Miami Seaquarium in Florida performing daily.

In 1979, Keiko, the future star of "Free Willy", was caught. He was less than two years old, caught in a herring net, and shipped on a cargo plane from Iceland to Marineland in Ontario, Canada. Out of six whales at the Marineland, Keiko was the youngest and most timid. In 1985, he was purchased by Reino Aventura, and moved to Mexico City.

“Free Willy” was released in 1993, starring Keiko. Soon after the release of the film, over 300,000 people from around the world called an 800 number that was broadcasted after the film expressing their desire that Keiko be released. In January 1996, a year after ‘Free Willy II’ was released, Keiko was moved to a rehabilitation center at Oregon Coast Aquarium, to begin learning how to eat live fish, and increase his health so that he could be returned to the wild in the hopes of him reuniting with his pod. This was the result of long term negotiation between the Free Willy Keiko Foundation and Reino Aventura. In 2002 Keiko was finally released in the waters of Iceland which he immediately left for the islands of Norway. In the waters of Norway he interacted with humans on a daily basis and remained dependent on them for food. He lived 15 months in the wild before dying of natural causes.

Tilikum, a whale who would become the most famous of them all, was captured off Iceland in November of 1983. In 1984, he was moved to Sealand of the Pacific, a marine park in Victoria, British Columbia. Two pregnant killer whales are at Sealand when Tilikum is there, necessitating his transfer to SeaWorld Florida as soon as possible. In January 1992, Sea World Inc. had not yet received a permit to move Tilikum, leading to his separation from the other killer whales, achieved by putting him into a miniscule holding tank. Here his health falls to such a low standard that SeaWorld applies for, and receives, a permit to import Tilikum on a medical emergency. What they didn’t consider was that they were bringing a known killer into their own pools.

Before being transferred to SeaWorld, Tilikum was the smallest whale at Sealand. He was slow to learn asked behaviors and when he errored, all the whales would be punished, frequently with starvation. The females would then retaliate by bullying, raking him with their teeth, and ramming him. Before this, Tilikum had been very kind and loved to play with the other whales and his caretakers, but their behavior angered him and changed his kind demeanor. This was revealed during a show when a trainer tripped and Tilikum rushed forward, grabbed her leg, and pulled her under the water. He repeatedly dunked her, holding her under the water and drowned his trainer, Kelty Burn while the females watched.

In 1992, he arrived at SeaWorld and was immediately rejected by the females stirring the rage inside of him. The trainers were forced to keep him isolated due to their rejection, but he was always happy to see the trainers. Tilikum seemed as if he wanted to learn new things. Management warned that he was aggressive, although the trainers did not believe it. Tilikum revealed his true behavior by lunging at a trainer working with him during a show. Until this incident, the trainers did not believe that Tilikum was aggressive.

Daniel P. Dokes was the next to experience Tilikum's aggression. Mr. Dokes was a homeless drug addict who snuck into SeaWorld after the park closed and decided to take a dip in the killer whale enclosure. The morning after, the trainers found Tilikum parading around the pool edge with Dokes resting on his back, dead. Dokes was his trophy, and Tilikum was proud to show the trainers his catch. Dokes's body was covered in bite marks and his cause of death was never released. The public

questioned why SeaWorld would continue to keep Tilikum after killing two people. It turns out that his sperm is very valuable. Today, nearly every killer whale in captivity has Tilikum's genes. This may seem unimportant, but could have severe consequences. What if aggression is hereditary?

Tilikum's next victim was his own trainer, Dawn Brancheau. On February 10, 2010, the training staff was frustrated as the whales had failed to perform throughout the day. Everyone was stressed and feeling the pressure to excel during the last show. Tilikum was performing a behavior, but missed the quit queue and continued to perform. When Brancheau corrected him, he became agitated, grabbed the trainer's arm, pulled her under water, and held her there till she drown. In his agitated state, he continued to hold her under water and then shredded her body. In court, SeaWorld argued that Brancheau was to blame for her own death. They claimed that they had instructed trainers to wear their hair up in a bun, and she had worn hers down in a ponytail. SeaWorld claimed that Tilikum, thought her ponytail was a toy, grabbed it and pulled her under in play. This is false. Tilikum killed Dawn Brancheau in an act of rage.

Which makes us ponder, why are we keeping these mammals captive? The answer is unclear. They have value for both research and entertainment in a captive setting. Scientists have the opportunity to discover new things about killer whales that could not be learned in the wild. The public has the opportunity to see these majestic creatures perform even if the behaviors are conditioned. Is there another way this can be achieved without all of the casualties, human and animal? The answer is yes, most likely.

Compared to wild killer whales, captive ones are sedentary. Their health deteriorates as they are denied the exercise they would receive in the wild. This is a function of tank size. The largest killer whale tank is less than one ten-thousandth of one percent the size of the smallest home range of a wild pod. Additionally, free whales mingle with who they chose, allowing for minimization of social stress and immune system stimulation. Captive whales damage their dentation by chewing on the gates that confine them. Even though their teeth are regularly drilled and cleaned, the damage allows clear routes for bacteria to enter the bloodstream. Dietary differences between captive and wild whales add additional stress on a daily basis. These are only a few factors, there are many more. Stated simply, captivity kills killer whales.

Today a whale may survive twenty years to perform to endearing audiences, but eventually the stress of captivity will kill them. They die much younger than their wild counterparts. So what is the solution?

Facilities must be created which allow for captive killer whales to be retired from the show life. These sanctuaries would be designed through the collaboration of experts around the world. They could be sea pens or netted off bays or coves, allowing the whales a more natural environment. The animals would be free from the stress of daily performances and would not be forced to deal with the constant parade of strangers. Trainers would not be necessary. Only expert caretakers would continue to condition the whales to allow for veterinary procedures, and would obey the "protected contact" in the zoo parlance. The whales would dictate how much time they spend interacting with humans. Breeding would no longer be allowed and in a few decades captive killer

whales would no longer exist. This would not crush marine theme parks fiscally; this plan is meant to be an adaptive, not immediate. Even devout SeaWorld supporters are beginning to wonder if it is time to think outside the concrete pool.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

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This film gave me a view of what SeaWorld was doing from past trainers as they described what had happened during the death of Dawn Brancheau. It showed how the tragic death of their past fellow trained affected them and how the keeping these wild animals in captivity was dangerous both for the whales and the people involved.

By Jane J. Lee, National Geographic PUBLISHED January 17, 2014. "Former SeaWorld Trainer: Stop Using Killer Whales for Entertainment." *National Geographic*. National Geographic Society, n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

<<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/01/140116-killer-whales-bridgette-pirtle-blackfish-ocean-animals-science/>>.

While I explored this certain part of the website I learned how trainers worked at SeaWorld and what the relationship between them and the whales was as well as how special and unique it was. It shows a past trainers opinion and her love for the job she had even now when she fights against the SeaWorld Corporation.

"How Did We Get Here? The Evolution of Whale and Dolphin Captivity in the U.S." *One Green Planet*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

<<http://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/evolution-of-marine-mammal-captivity-in-the-u-s/>>.

This helpful article helped me to understand how the captivity of killer whales changed over time. It also helped me to understand how the mental health of the animals could deteriorate the longer they were in captivity.

"Truth About Blackfish." *SeaWorld Cares*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

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This article shows SeaWorld's reaction to the film/documentary 'Blackfish'. It tells us the lies that 'Blackfish' relied on to prove that SeaWorld was neglecting the whales they were keeping in captivity, and how they dug up the truths to dismiss the film.

Secondary Sources

"8 Reasons Orcas Don't Belong at SeaWorld - SeaWorld of Hurt." *SeaWorld of Hurt*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

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This web page shows me the consequences that can be forced onto killer whales when they are kept in captivity over time and the injuries they can sustain while locked

away in small tanks. It was helpful in my project because it helped me to understand how hard it is on the whales to live in the small tanks they are forced to perform like circus animals in.

"The First Captive Killer Whales - A Changing Attitude." *The First Captive Killer Whales - A Changing Attitude*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.
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This certain source helped me to understand how the first killer whale was captured and what he was to be used for. It showed how the aquarium director changed his mind from killing the whale and instead bringing him into captivity.

"SeaWorld Barred from Breeding Whales in Captivity - BBC News." *BBC News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2015. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34489029>>.

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