

A Lift

John Hargrove, author of "Beneath The Surface" is an ex SeaWorld trainer that also starred in the 2013 documentary "Blackfish". During his career at the marine park he has worked with many orcas. He quit his job in 2012 and since then has been stepping up as an advocate for the animals he used to train. One of his favorite killer whales to work with is a female known as "Kasatka". Kasatka was captured off the coast of Iceland on October 26, 1978 at just one year of age. After spending time in several parks she ended up at SeaWorld of San Diego. Kasatka has given birth to 4 calves.

Her first calf "Takara" was born on July 9, 1991 to Kasatka and Kotar. Kotar was captured together with Kasatka in Iceland and spend his life in captivity until he died on April 1st 1995 after a metal gate he was playing with came down on his head causing skull fractures. Takara was separated from her mother on April 24, 2004 when she got moved to SeaWorld in Orlando. The first born child of Kasatka has given birth to several calves herself making Kasatka grandmother and even great grandmother when one of her own calves gave birth.

Kasatka's second calf is a male called "Nakai". Born on September 1st 2001 Nakai is one of Tilikum's children. He got hurt in 2012 damaging his chin which left a big wound. The third calf born to Kasatka and Keet is a female called "Kalia". She was born in SeaWorld in San Diego on December 21, 2004. Like her sister Takara she has also given birth to a daughter named "Amaya" on December 2, 2014.

Last born to Kasatka is "Makani". The young bull was born on valentine's day 2013 (February 14). His father is Kshamenk a killer whale that is held in captivity in Mundo Marino, Argentina. SeaWorld acquired his sperm in 2011 to use for artificially insemination on Kasatka. Kshamenk was captured in 1992 and has been without the company of another orca since 2000. He now has company of dolphins during the shows but spends a lot of time swimming circles in a extremely small pool. During the birth of Makani her other daughter Kalia stayed with Kasatka.

Kasatka is a dominant killer whale that will, at times, attack other orcas at the park and sometimes even trainers. In 1993 and 1999 she has tried to attack trainers and in 2006 she grabbed Ken Peters, another trainer by his leg and dragged him under for a long period of time twice. Video of the incident shows that Kasatka is trying to drown her trainer but in the end she let's go of him and Peters escapes to the side of the pool before the orca can grab him ones again.

The daughter of Kasatka, Takara, is another of John Hargrove's favorite orcas. Less dominant then her mother she is a favorite for SeaWorld in their shows. It was during one of these shows that John learned how caring and friendly killer whales can be. Together with another trainer he was doing water works (performing with the animals in the pool)

when during a procedure where he was standing with one foot on Takara's rostrum, he slipped off while Takara was pushing him up in the air. Being unable to avoid collision, Takara slammed her rostrum into the side of John, breaking his ribs.

Now being hurt badly John found himself in the water with a big killer whale that could have been stressed out or even annoyed by the accident. Takara swam through the water towards him and seemed to understand he was in pain.

Could the female orca have used echolocation to see the injuries inside John's body?

Takara came closer but instead of doing any damage to the trainer that she worked so closely with moment before the accident, she put her pectoral fin under his feet. Slowly she pushed John towards the side of the pool, lifting him up as soon as they were close enough for him to step on the platform on the edge of the pool.

John could now get off her pectoral fin and be taken to a doctor for his injuries.

A Playful Killer

Tilikum is an orca who became "hot" after the release of the movie "Blackfish". This bull killer whale has been involved in the deaths of 3 humans and although it is believed to have been caused by him being in captivity, some say he is dangerous to anyone who comes near him. The theory of him being frustrated of being held in a concrete tank isn't that strange if you consider there has never been an incident involving a wild orca.

Wild killer whales have been named kind, gentle and even life savers. One story mentions wild orcas protecting humans from sharks and those who have been close to one of these animals in their natural habitat all lived to tell the tale. So is it possible that Tilikum got frustrated? That maybe he cannot adept to his life in captivity?

The last victim of "Tilly" as some call him was Dawn Brancheau, an experienced trainer who worked with him at the SeaWorld park of Florida. On February 24, 2010 Tilikum had grabbed Dawn by her arm, pulled her into the pool and killed her. A little over 10 years before that he had killed a man called Daniel Dukes who had entered the pool Tilikum was in after the park closed for the night. His first victim was a part time worker of Sealand of the Pacific named Keltie Byrne. On February 20, 1991 during a show she slipped into the pool where Tilikum was performing with two other orcas.

It would be easy to assume that it was in the nature of this large male killer whale to kill these 3 people. That maybe Tilikum was already a real killer before he got captured. Even today, after years of study and all the proof that has been collected about killer whales and their kind personality, some people do still fear orcas. The image created around them by humanity of them being merciless killers still sticks to them. But had Tilly always been this aggressive towards humans? And if so, why was there never decided to stop having people

around him? At SeaWorld they knew he had killed someone before he was transferred there in 1992. Still they decided to keep him and use him for their shows. Incidents involving their killer whales are reported and enclosed in the animal's profile.

Tilikum's profile reads:

"During times of frustration due to social stress in the environment, Tilikum has exhibited aggressive behavior by mouthing the stage, vocalizations, tightening body posture, banging gates, a deep fast swim and sometimes lunging toward control trainer. It is important to remember his previous history and potential. He was involved in the accidental drowning of a trainer at Sealand of the Pacific in 1991."

When Tilikum killed Keltie in 1991 he had been in Sealand for nearly 10 years. According to the trainers that worked with him he was fun to work with, they loved their Tilly. Steve Huxter who worked closely with him remembers him as being a playful orca. The former supervisor of Sealand had seen the bull killer whale arrive at the Canadian marine park when Tilly was only around two years of age. He has seen the juvenile grow into a large adult killer whale and was still at Sealand when Tilikum was sold to SeaWorld. And although it has been over 20 years since he worked with him, Steve has happy memories of Tilikum during his time at the park.

The nets that prevented the orcas to escape their pool at Sealand hung in the waters of Vancouver. This meant that small wildlife as well as seaweed could penetrate the pool the killer whales were in. Tilikum proved to be a playful guy when one day he took a bit of seaweed in his mouth and spat it out during a trained technique where he usually would just spit out water. The seaweed was thrown back in the pool and the bull orca took this as a new found game. Whenever the ocean plant was thrown back in the pool he would fetch it like a dog playing with a ball. It was decided that the new learned game the orca displayed could be used during the show to entertain the children that would visit the park. They would let a child throw the seaweed into the pool and Tilly would return it to the delighted kid.

Of course this became a very popular item in the shows but at some point Tilikum had decided to make the game more interesting for both him and the children. It could have been that he grew tired of performing the same game over and over or it could be that he just wanted to test the small humans that would cheerfully run around his pool. Whatever it was, it was the orca himself that changed the gameplay. One day, during a show, a child was selected to "play" fetch with Tilly. As usual the seaweed was thrown into the pool and Tilikum would get it, take it in his mouth, and spit it out in front of the child to pick it up and throw it in again. This time however, the orca would swim to the opposite side of the pool and spit the plant out on that side. The child would run to the other side of the pool to reclaim the seaweed and throw it back in the pool. Once again Tilikum picked it up but would now swim to the side the child originally started the game from.

This went on for some time and it looked like the orca was "training" this young human to

perform the game the way he wanted it to be played. Tilikum learned that he could control these cheering creatures by having them chase him from one side of the pool to another. One time he tried to change the game a bit more by picking up a nontoxic jellyfish and spitting it at the chosen child. He soon found out that the small humans did not want to risk picking up a jellyfish and he switched back to seaweed.

Christopher Porter who was also a trainer for Sealand of the Pacific in the 90's has a similar experience. While Tilikum and Nootka were the more "playful" orcas in the park, Haida would seldom interact with trainers. She was the matriarch within the park's "pod" and performing was a build in routine more than a cheerful interaction. She would mind her own business while the other two whales were trying to get attention from their trainers. One day Christopher watched as after one of the many shows Haida spy hopped high up in the air (the docks of Sealand were 3 to 4 feet higher than the surface of the water) and looked him in straight in the eyes. In her mouth she was holding herring that came from her last bucket of fish. She seemed to be offering the herring to Christopher. Although the other killer whales at Sealand were known to play with their food, Haida would never be seen playing with a herring. It was food and that was exactly what she used it for.

"After standing stunned for a bit, as it is a bit intimidating to take a herring from a 16,000 pound animal, she spy hopped again. I could see she was insistent that I take the fish. I took the fish and threw it behind her and was shocked to see her pick it up and spy hop and offer it to me again. I picked it up again and we played that game till I got worried the sea gulls would steal the fish from her. I left by giving it to her thinking that we just had a fun playful conversation."

- Christopher Porter.

For years Christopher had seen Haida's interaction as a game that she wanted to play with him. Only a few years ago, while he was taking a trip down memory lane with his daughter, he figured he had been wrong all along. He now understood that Haida was telling him she wanted more food in the only way she could think of.

A World War Victim

Holland is not a country that is known for its killer whales. Other than having some in captivity over the years and a lost whale found near the coast (Morgan), there is no history with living orcas. A lot of people don't know that Holland did have stranded whales throughout the years though. Old records show that on several beaches of The Netherlands orcas have been found as well as fossils of killer whale bones.

The first record of a stranded orca dates back to 1783. On the beach of Domburg (a city in the south-west of the country) a pregnant female was found. According to some stories the adult female was cut up for its meat. The fetus however was prepared and displayed at a museum in Middelburg where it remains to this day. Over the years more than 30 killer

whales were found on beaches around Holland and while some of the remains would be collected for museums, others would be lost. It wasn't until August 1968 that the Dutch could see a live orca in their country for the first time.

Captured in the waters of Malcolm Island, Canada a young male killer whale was sold to the Dolfinarium of Harderwijk. On August 17 the animal arrived after (accordingly) a trip of about 60 hours. The costs for the animal and its transport are believed to have been around 50,000 USD. The young orca was called "Tula" (pronounced Too-laah) taken from the name Sointula meaning "Place Of Harmony". From the day of his arrival at the Dutch marine park he drew many visitors. Tula's condition however was very poorly. The long journey to Holland dried out his skin and parts of it fell off. Only within 3 months of his arrival, on October 23, Tula died at the Dolfinarium due to external fungus and a growth in the heart. He is believed to have been part of the Northern Resident killer whales of Canada.

It wasn't until 1976 that the marine park would have another orca in captivity. This time the animal was captured in Iceland and was named Gudrun (after the boat that captured her). In 1987 she was sent to SeaWorld in Florida to become part of their breeding program. Gudrun had two calves (Taima & Nyar) but after the third time, she gave birth to a stillborn calf. She died 3 days later. The last recorded stranding of an orca in Holland dates back to 1963 when on October 10th a male was found on a beach of the small island of Texel, and eight days later on October the 18th a female was found on the beach of Noordwijk aan Zee.

If you look at all the recorded strandings of killer whales in Holland you notice that it happened about once every 5 years up until 1963. One could question why, since then, no more orcas have been found on the coasts of the country. Only the young female named Morgan was found swimming near the shoreline since then. It is known that the waters of Scotland and the Nordic countries are connected and close to the waters of Holland so one would expect to find orca's more often near the country.

One specific stranding (or actually two) stands out because of the date and course of the story.

On May 10th, 1940 the German army invaded Holland. World War II started months earlier and the Germans were on an unstoppable rampage to conquer many European countries. The Dutch army was no match for the highly armed forces of Adolf Hitler and within a few days Holland had to surrender. The German forces soon took over houses in several cities of The Netherlands to offer shelter to their soldiers. Surrounded by water this country has many cities near beaches and a small group of islands in the north that also houses citizens. It was on one of these islands called "Terschelling" that within two weeks, two killer whales stranded on locations very close to each other.

The first was on July 8th and was a pregnant female. The second was on July 20th and other than the stranding not much is known about it. The female however was alive when she was found. Since most of the food was hard to get during war time a stranded whale

would make a thankful meal for any hungry human being. It is unclear if the orca was found by soldiers or citizens of Holland but the record does show that the animal was shot dead by German soldiers and eaten by both soldiers and citizens. The remains were not collected for any museum and so are lost. This could well be the only documented orca killed in the Second World War. On August 1943 an orca was found on a German beach. All 3 orcas are assumed to be from the same pod.

Brothers

One of the most amazing things about orcas is that they live in pods also known as families. The resident whales of Canada are known to stick by their family for as long as they live, only leaving the pod for a short time while mating. The pod is led by the oldest female of the family also called Matriarch. New born calves and young orcas will remain in the middle of the pod, the safest place for them to be, while the older males (bulls) will swim on the outer side.

The orcas have a tight bond with their families but will also every now and then socialize with other pods related to them. These meetings can sometimes expand to several pods and form a so-called "super pod". During these meetings the male and females will usually separate to be with the same sex orcas of the other pods. Much like humans, the men will go off and "fool around" while the women will get into chit chat.

Orca men are real momma's boys and will stick with her until she dies. The next female in line will then take over and the bulls will be loyal to her and her offspring. The family helps each other with all they do. From catching food to helping give birth to the newest member of the family. Killer whales are extremely social.

But what if the next orca in line is a male?

While orcas are much beloved by humans all over the world these days, they weren't always this popular. Fishermen wanted them dead, the army used them for target practice and some people feared them so much they would try to kill them on sight. This sounds like ancient times but this happened not so long ago in Canada. Due to this, a lot of orcas were killed and pods got close to vanishing completely. Some orcas still alive today wear the scars of attacks by humans. Also, the captivity industry took many calves to put on display in marine parks. During these captures other pod members were killed. A few of these captured orcas still remain in these parks on this day.

The residents in Canada are still recovering from this brutality brought on them by mankind and it will take many more years before they can be considered "out of danger". These days they are considered an endangered species although some of the fishermen still would rather see them die out because of them stealing "their" fish.

A well-known pod is the A36 Matriline. A36 was a female orca named "Sophia". She was the

daughter of “Stubbs” who died in 1974. Due to the lack of females in this pod researchers were aware of the fact that this pod would at some point stop to exist. Sophia gave birth to 3 bulls named Cracroft (A32), Plumper (A37) and Kaikash (A46) and one female (A44) which died at the age of 2 years old. When Sophia died in 1997 the 3 brothers were left without a matriarch in their pod. Scientists were observing closely what would become of the pod now they had no female to take over leadership. Surprisingly the brothers would not leave each other but in fact chose to stick together.

While they did socialize with other pods they encountered they never stayed with other orcas. The brothers or “The Boys” as they were also called by some, were alone together. They became local celebrities and many felt warm hearted for the brothers who were the last of their line.

Cracroft was the oldest of the brothers. Believed to be born in 1964 he was one of the oldest males among the Northern Residents. His dorsal fin was rounded instead of the usual pointy shape and so was easy to recognize for scientist and whale watchers. Cracroft died in 2010 leaving his two brothers as well as a son with another pod (Skuna I42) behind.

The second oldest of the brothers was Plumper. He was born in 1977 and just like his two siblings popular among whale watchers. While his older brother Cracroft would sometimes take off on his own for a short period of time, Plumper always stayed close to his youngest brother Kaikash.

During the summer of 2014 Plumper was spotted and looked starved and in bad condition. When I was in Canada in August 2014 I was told Plumper had not been seen for a while and had probably died. During my time at Johnstone Strait Kaikash did pass by several times on his own. Kaikash is the last remaining orca of the 3 brothers. Born in 1982 the bull will now have to survive on his own. This is difficult for a social animal like the killer whale as they do seem to need the companionship of others.

A good example for this is an orca named “Springer” who got separated from her pod, was captured and after being released joined the brothers briefly for some social interaction. During the time Springer was with them the brothers would let her swim in the center of them as if she was the Matriarch.

One incident with a Dall’s porpoise in 2004 raised a lot of eyebrows as the brothers chased and charged the much smaller animal several times. Northern Residents do not kill and eat other mammals but live from a diet of fish. The porpoise in the end got away safely and unhurt but one can expect it not getting to close to killer whales anymore.

Whale Killers

The name “killer whale” is feared by those who have never encountered one. Lucky enough for the animal, more people are calling them “orca” these days and more people are

learning about these “ocean panda’s”.

But where does the name “killer whale” come from?

It is believed to have originated from the whalers back when almost every country connected to the sea and / or ocean used to hunt whales for their meat and any other parts useable According to the stories the whalers witnessed the big whales being hunted by these black and white monsters that would chase the whales, kill and then eat them. This would explain where the name and image came from. These days with all the studies that have been done and all the information we can access, the name “killer whale” seems out of order. Of course one could say that these predators are fearless hunters that hunt and kill their prey but then this would also mean we have killer cats, killer birds and killer fish roaming our planet.

The name “orca” taken from “orcinus orca” has a more friendly sound to it and is being used worldwide by scientists, marine parks and lovers of these amazing creatures. Although people feared them a long time ago, today it seems that the orca is one of the more popular ocean creatures. These big black & white dolphins have the same charming look to them as the more common known bottlenose dolphin. Marine parks like SeaWorld claim to have changed the public’s view on these animals and maybe in some way they have. However, these parks are not the first to bring humans and orcas close together. Many think it was the first displayed orca “Wanda” that was captured in 1961 who opened the eyes of the world. Others claim that it was “Moby Doll”, who had been harpooned, survived and was put on display. Then we have “Namu” and “Shamu” who are seen as the start of a bond between humans and orcas by many people.

Looking at the total interest created for these animals it could be said that all this contributed to this, but a bond between orcas and humans was already established long before any of these animals were put on display. While the rest of the world was gaping at these huge, friendly and intelligent orcas on display in a park, on the other side of the world there already was a long history of humans and killer whales being “friends”.

On the east coast of Australia, in a town called Eden, people were already well aware of the kindness and intelligence of orcas. Twofold Bay had been the location for the Australian aboriginals to hunt for whales long before any European set foot on the shore. They had seen killer whales hunt baleen whales into the bay and even witnessed the whales beaching themselves to escape the black & white danger that chased them. For the aboriginals (Yuin) these killer whales were seen as friends or even family. They provided them with food and oil. They believed the orcas were tribe members who passed away and reincarnated as these powerful oceanic creatures.

In 1828 the first European whalers started using Twofold Bay as a whaling station but it wasn’t until years later that these whalers would start to work with the orcas to catch whales. Alexander Davidson together with his son John would build up an amazing and magical relationship with the “whale killers”. This bond would continue for several years

until the bond was broken by the hand of humans.

While whalers before them hated the orcas and even tried to kill them the Davidsons found that these animals were only interested in the tongue (some stories say lips too) of the whales and would leave the rest of the whale. The Davidsons decided they would hunt the whale, leave it for the orcas to collect their delicacy and then come back the next day to collect the body of the whale. Over time the orcas seemed to understand the offer and in return would help the Davidsons to hunt the whales. When a whale would come close to Twofold Bay the pod would swim as close to the shoreline as possible and draw the attention of the whalers by slapping their tails on the surface of the water. The whalers then would get out in their boats and follow the orcas to the whales where they would both participate in killing the whale.

The orcas would be rewarded with the parts of the whale they loved most and the next day the whalers would pick up their share. Seeing them as friends instead of rivals the whalers named the whales. Many were named after whalers who had died. Big Ben, Little Jack, Walker and Youngster were a few of the names the animals were given.

The most famous of them was and still is "Old Tom", a male orca whose skeleton is on display in the Eden Whale Museum. Driving whales into Twofold Bay and then alarming the whalers Tom was very much loved by Davidson. Three generations of Davidsons would keep the pact with the orcas intact but then disaster struck.

In 1900 one of the killer whales stranded and while they were on their way to rescue it the Davidsons witnessed a man called George Silk shot the whale. Then in the 1920's a whaler named John Logan ignored the pact and tried to bring the whale, tongue and all, to shore. Old Tom grabbed the rope the whale was tied to and tried to stop the whalers from taking the trophy for their own. In the process Tom lost some of his teeth. A struggle between the humans and the orca was the end of a long time bond that had been one of the most amazing one's ever created. The daughter of John Logan remembers her father saying

"My God, What have I done?"

It was the end of the relationship between the orcas and the whalers. Old Tom washed up on the beach in September 1930. The orca that once befriended the human whalers died of starvation.

Sunglasses

Damon Stapinsky is the owner of a wildlife tour organization called "Wildcoast". Different to some other wildlife and whale watching tours he believes it is best to observe the killer whales from a kayak. The engine of zodiac boats and other vessels would disturb the animals in their daily routine and could possibly cause a meal to be interrupted. Damon has spent a lot of time on the water and has had numerous encounters with orcas while

paddling through Johnstone Strait.

"Wildcoast" has a luxury base camp for its guests on the shore of Johnstone Strait right next to the Robson Bight Ecological Reserve. The reserve is a no go for any wildlife tour operator and is a popular place for the orcas to come and rub their bodies against the small rocks on the bottom of the channel. The reason for them to do so seems to be unknown. However, some scientists say the animals do this to scrub dead skin of their bodies while others believe it is a "social thing". Strangely only the killer whales in British Columbia and Alaska show this behavior. During the rubbing the whales get very close to the beach and this is why the beach of the reserve is off limits.

From the "Wildcoast" camp its visitors can observe the orcas from its beach at close range. The orcas pass the camp regularly to enter the reserve and will often pass the camp so close that you can clearly see the animal's eyes. The unique location of the camp gives orca lovers an opportunity to be as close as possible to a wild killer whale. Also on the kayak paddles they could encounter them even closer.

Damon is a whale enthusiast and loves to share stories with his guests. His experience with the animals in the wild as well as the stories about the first encounter of guests with these animals in the wild gives him plenty to talk about. There is one story however that he will tell with such passion that his eyes will sparkle as he tells it. During a paddle on Johnstone Strait with a group of guests Damon lost his sunglasses in a shallow part of the channel. While giving these tours the guides will often go to the less deeper parts to show the guests as much of the underwater world as possible. Starfish, jellyfish and other creatures will be carefully picked up and be shown to the often amazed and amused guests.

The guides are respectful to nature and the wildlife in Johnstone Strait and will do their best not to disturb it while teaching about it. Paddling in shallow water also has the advantage of seeing the plants on the bottom and the schools of herring passing underneath your kayak and for many guests this is a "first time".

While reaching for a starfish at the bottom of the channel to show to one of his guests Damon flipped his whole kayak upside down. As a professional he was able to make a complete roll, head down, and flip his kayak back up while grabbing the starfish. He did however forget he was wearing his sunglasses on top of his head and when he got back up they already fell down to the bottom close to where just a moment earlier a starfish was enjoying his oceanic life. Damon could see his sunglasses lying on the bottom of the Strait but when he flipped his kayak over once again to grab them he found that by doing so his vision got to blurry to see them while underwater. He then figured he could come back later when the tide was low and be able to get them then. The guides and their guests continued the tour before heading back to camp for dinner and a peaceful evening in the most beautiful surrounding one can think of.

The next morning Damon got up early and found all the guests and the rest of the guides were still fast asleep. He decided he could sneak out quickly to retrieve his glasses and be

back before anyone would notice he was gone. He grabbed one of his kayaks and quietly let it slide into the water. Then he jumped in and peddled away to the spot where a day before he lost his sunglasses. Johnstone Strait was covered in mist and while getting closer to the location where he did his roll to grab the starfish he realized the tide was not as low as he wanted. There he was on the spot, mist all around him and he could only see about 30 feet to each side of him. Then he heard something that was very familiar to him. The blows of orcas...

While trying to figure out from which direction the sounds came he realized he could not figure it out as the blows seem to come from all around. He wasn't mistaking that much. In front of him he could now see the black dorsal fins of A30 pod. Some females and a calf were slowly moving thru the water as if they were not even aware of his presence there.

When killer whales sleep, like dolphins, they will continue to move though in a slow pace. They could be asleep, they could just be waking up or they could just not care about the human that was close behind them.

Before he could even think about all this, Damon saw a huge dorsal fin appear right next to him and right after a second one on the other side of his kayak. Having spent so much time among these animals he could easily identify them as being Blackney (A38) & Pointer (A39), two bulls of the A30 pod had snuck up on him and were now staring at him from both sides of his kayak. These two males could flip him over and kill him if they wanted and even though the residents have never done so, getting to close to a calf is always dangerous when the orcas don't want you anywhere near. Damon knew there was nothing he could do but to put down his paddle and let the current take him where it wanted while these two huge animals made sure he wasn't getting to close to the rest of their pod.

It was like they were telling him "HEY, we see you, we are keeping an eye on you, don't do anything stupid or...". Damon knew these animals like no one else and of course knew not to push his luck but to rather sit back and enjoy this experience others may never experience. When the rest of the pod had created a bigger gap between themselves and that human in the plastic floating thing, the two bulls pulled away from the kayak and slowly followed the rest. Damon could now paddle back to camp. Without his sunglasses but with an experience he would never forget.

The Lost Ones

Killer whales live together in pods, they help each other, play together and hunt as a group. But every now and then one of them (usually a young animal) will somehow lose track of its pod and get lost. As orcas travel many miles a day, getting lost can be deadly for a juvenile if it does not find its way back to the other members of the group. Over the last couple of years several cases of a young orca getting lost have been recorded and have become famous by the turn their stories took after that. Probably the most famous of them all was

the small bull named “Luna”.

Born in 1999 to Splash (L67) in the L-pod of Southern Resident orcas Luna was known as L98. His name was given to him after a newspaper held a naming contest for the newborn orca and as it was unknown if L98 was either male or female the name “Luna” was picked as winner. Luna was already the “exploring one” at a young age he was seen leaving the side of his mother to socialize with another pod for a few days and returning to Splash after that. It is believed that the other pod had one female who gave birth to a stillborn, and Luna went to her to feed on the milk she was producing despite of her lost child. In the summer of 2001 Luna showed up in Nootka Sound, Vancouver Island alone. No one knew why the young male was on his own and there was no sign of the rest of his pod. Five other orcas of Luna’s pod disappeared in the winter before and speculation was that maybe the young bull had witnessed a horrible event that led to the death of these members of his family.

It must have been a confusing world for the young orca as he had to try and survive on his own without the knowledge of how to do so being passed on to him by the older members of his pod. One can only guess how afraid this “lost boy” must have been while facing a world full of danger and, maybe even worse... humans! At first Luna stayed well away from the two legged, clothed beings and their noisy floating crafts. But after a while loneliness and maybe even curiosity got the bigger part of the orca and he would get closer and closer to people. Luna started to enjoy the company of people that gave him attention and was soon swimming towards boats to greet the beings on it that were waving at him and talked to him in a language unknown to him. The people of Nootka Sound and others fell in love with this black and white animal that seemed to want to play with them.

With this also came danger of course. Not everyone was happy with a playful killer whale roaming the waters of Vancouver Island and it didn’t take long before some started complaining and even talked about having Luna killed. People started fighting over what should be the faith of the young bull while Luna continued to try and get the attention of his new found friends. There were several ideas going around on what was best for Luna and the 3 most obvious solutions were:

1. Have him killed.
2. Catch him and take him to a marine park.
3. Let nature take its course.

The people of Nootka Sound could not have been more divided in their thoughts on these options. Some fishermen wanted Luna shot, the natives wanted him to stay free while a marine park showed great interest in the orca. No one (of course) asked Luna as he would not be able to understand and answer but it does make you wonder what his answer would have been if he could. I highly doubt being shot or captured would be his pick but then being away from his own kind might have felt just as bad.

By now people weren’t allowed to “play” with Luna anymore. If someone was getting to close to him or was touching him they would be fined for disturbing the young bull orca. Of

course those who would run into Luna could not resist. Having such an experience with a wild killer whale would make anyone break the rules and so people would often risk to be fined just to be around him.

At some point it was decided that Luna was indeed to be captured and relocated. The Natives would not have any of it and decided to fight for the young orca. While boats tried to lure Luna into a floating sea pen, the natives took to the water in their canoes and started singing and drawing the attention of the juvenile killer whale. Curious as Luna was he switched from the motorized boats to follow the canoes. This plan seemed to work but before they could bring the animal far enough the other boats came and lured Luna back again. This “game” went on for some time until it became clear that it was too dangerous to continue. Then on March 10, 2006 the whole discussion stopped as the message came that Luna was dead. The young orca had swum up to a tugboat and got sucked into the propeller. It is believed that he was dead instantly. All parties involved were shocked and sad by the news that the orca they had been fighting over was killed.

Around the same time that Luna showed up in Nootka Sound another young killer whale was seen alone in Puget Sound, Washington. This juvenile female was identified as being A73 also known as “Springer”. Just as with Luna this orca sparked a discussion on what her fate should be. And like Luna, Springer would also seek the companionship of humans. She was often spotted near boats and people loved seeing this adorable killer whale up close.

It was decided that Springer would be caught and relocated to the waters of Johnstone Strait in Vancouver. To do so they needed a team of people that could capture the orca safely and a sea pen in which they could observe her and get her back to full health. On June 13, 2002 she was captured and brought to a seapen in Manchester, Washington to be cared for. A month later she was found healthy enough to return to her native waters and on July 13 she was brought to British Columbia by catamaran. For that day she was put into another pen filled with wild salmon which she gratefully caught and ate. She also was able to communicate with other killer whales that passed by and it became clear she was ready for release.

On July 14 Springer was set free and the first thing this little female wanted to do after spending so long without her own kind was to be with other orcas. She spotted a pod traveling by and headed for them like a child on presents on Christmas morning. The sudden appearance of the juvenile however, was a bit too much for the pod and instead of showing interest or attention for this stranger they panicked and let her on her own once again. Now Springer went back to the creatures that did accept her and had given her attention before, humans. Boats that came by were “harassed” and soon people were told to stay away from the orca to leave room for her to get back with her own species. Springer started “hanging out” with A4 and A5 pod, a group of killer whales that were related to her. She was accepted and taken care of by a female called “Nodales” (A51) for a while who would make sure Springer would stay away from the humans. Nahwitti (A56) took over from Nodales together with her mother Yakat (A11).

Years later in 2013 Springer was spotted with a calf of her own. She had given birth to “Spirit” in the winter of 2012 - 2013 and had become a caring mother. The rehabilitation program had been a great success for this once lost killer whale.

On June 23, 2010 an orca was spotted swimming close to the coast of Holland. Since Dutch waters are not known for having killer whales in them it quickly became obvious this animal was lost. A team was put together to have her captured and brought to the Dolfinarium in Harderwijk. This marine park had orcas in the past performing in their shows and was the only location an animal of this size could be held. The young female killer whale was called “Morgan” which is Celtic for “lives by the sea”. When Morgan was found she was in bad shape and probably had not eaten for days. It was assumed she came from a pod of orcas that remain in Scottish waters.

The original plan was to get Morgan back to health to rerelease her back in the wild as soon as they had found her pod. But then a statement was released that it would not be in the best interest for her to have her put back into the wild. The scientists of the Dolfinarium said it would most like kill Morgan and therefore they spoke out against the rerelease of the orca. Other experts like marine biologist Ingrid Visser pointed out that Morgan was a perfect candidate to be reunited with her pod. The Dutch marine park responded by saying it would probably be impossible to find the pod she belonged to. But before being able to make serious attempts of finding her family the people who wanted to see Morgan back in the North Sea received more bad news. The scientist who were taking care of Morgan in the marine park claimed the young female killer whale was deaf. They stated that even if her family was found it would be impossible for her to survive in the wild and so it would be better to have her in the care of human hands.

A long period of discussions and lawsuits followed and even Dutch politics were used to help decide the future of the orca who was awaiting her faith in a small tank in Harderwijk. In July 2011 the marine park asked for a permit to have Morgan transported to the island of Tenerife to have her in captivity. That same month this was granted and on November 29 Morgan was shipped to the Spanish island. Since then several organizations have been trying to have the permit be declared illegal but up till now this has been without success. Morgan still remains at Loro Parque where she has been spotted while being attacked by the other killer whales that remain at the marine park.

Three young orcas who got lost all have had a different ending to their stories.

The White Ones

Albino animals have always been sure to make be more interesting to people. White tigers, pet rats and snakes are some of the most common known animals to have albinism. The word “albino” comes from the Latin word “albus” meaning “white”. It is an inborn disorder that has white skin and / or hair as the most well known feature. Marine mammals with

albinism are rare and not often sighted. The ones that are spotted often become famous among scientist and whale and dolphin lovers. One the most well known albino whales is Migaloo, a white humpback whale that swims in the waters of Australia. The animal was first spotted in 1991 and received the name "Migaloo" from the aboriginal language which means "white fella". In 2011 a second white humpback was seen cruising the coast of Australia. This time it was a young calf and it is believed to be the child of Migaloo.

There are also albino dolphins and other then the whales they have a pink color instead of white. In 2007 one was spotted in Calcasieu Lake, Louisiana. The young calf was found swimming next to its regular colored mother. The dolphin was named "Pinky" after his body color. In January, 2014 a young albino bottlenose dolphin was captured during the brutal yearly dolphin hunts in Taiji, Japan. Each year a group of these hunters take to the waters of Taiji to round up hundreds of dolphins between September and April. They drive the animals into a cove and slaughter most of them in an inhumane way. The water from the cove often turns red from all the blood of the dolphins killed there. Other dolphins are sold to marine parks all over the world. The albino dolphin captured in January was put in the Taiji whale museum.

Every now and then a white orca will show up somewhere in the world and this leads to great interest from both scientist as well as marine parks. A white killer whale is a rare sighting and not many have been recorded yet. Although they are mostly white they are not seen as albinos. Usually they have grey areas on their body and lack the red eyes which are typical for albinism.

In March 1970, Sealand of the Pacific in Canada was looking to get a mate for their killer whale named "Haida". They took to the waters of Pedder Bay, Vancouver Island and rounded up six orcas. One was a female known as T4 and it would set Sealand on the map instantly. T4 became known as "Chimo". She suffered from Chediak-Higashi syndrome which made here partially white. This made her the most exiting captured orca of the time as no park in the world had ever held a "white" killer whale before.

Years before the capture of Chimo, in the early sixties, another white female was spotted and named "Alice". It is believed that Alice did not survive up to reaching a mature age. She was only seen for a couple of years before disappearing.

Due to her syndrome Chimo was sensitive to illnesses. After spending two years in captivity she died in October 1972 to pneumonia leaving Haida behind alone for several years. Later it was found that Chimo had been a transient killer whale who belonged to the T2 pod. Alice, the white killer whale that was spotted before Chimo was captured, is also believed to come from this pod.

In 2010, off the coast of Russia a male white orca was filmed while swimming with its pod. With his dorsal fin raising out high above the water it was soon named "Iceberg". He is an adult male, around 16 years of age, that seems to be healthy. It therefor is believed that he does not suffer from the same syndrome Chimo had as these animals usually don't reach

maturity.

Recently another white colored orca was spotted in Russian waters. This time a small juvenile was seen by researchers of the "Far East Russia Orca Project" were out to identify killer whales. While taking pictures of the orcas they seeing the fog thickened and soon they could barely see further than a hundred meters. All of a sudden they were approached by a pod of orcas and right next to their boat the young white killer whale appeared. The orca swam off into the fog and could not be spotted afterwards.

The Disabled Ones

Many animals will not accept others with a handicap. If the other is "different" to them they will usually abandon it and in some cases even kill it. The animal kingdom can be beautiful but also look ruthless at times. Like humans, orcas are more social and emotional compared to other species. They have lifelong friendships and can take care of others when needed. The killer whale is known to be a big friendly giant that will even rescue a human in need. One story tells that whalers in Australia that got knocked over in their boat were protected by orcas from sharks. Another tale known is off a killer whale escorting a human to safety when she got lost on the waters of Vancouver, Canada.

But what about disabled members of their pod? Would they take care of one animal that would not be able to survive on itself? There are a few records of disabled killer whales both in the wild and captivity. And although they are rarely born with a handicap, the tales about those who are disabled are both sad and stunning at the same time.

In 1973 a young killer whale in British Columbia was hit by a ferry crossing the water. Badly injured by this accident it was not able to breathe on its own. Two older whales swam up to the young one and started pushing him to the surface to breathe. Two weeks later the injured whale was spotted again, still being helped by the others to survive. The faith of this orca is unknown but one can assume it did die in the end as no further records can be found.

In 1996 scientists took pictures of a disabled young orca in Norway. The female misses most of her dorsal fin and has a deformed spine. She was called "Stumpy". Although she was not spotted for a few years she was located again in 2002. She has been seen swimming with several different pods indicating that she gets "adopted" by other orcas. In 2012 Stumpy was studied in Norway and one of the things that was noticed was the way she got her food. Not being able to hunt herself she relied on others to help her get her daily dose of fish. The others would hunt the fish while Stumpy waited patiently for her turn to join in for a meal. She would swim next to another killer whale that just caught a fish, the other orca would then bite off a chunk and let Stumpy eat the rest of it.

In 2013 a disabled killer whale was spotted of the coast of Africa. Just like the orca in Norway, this one also was called "Stumpy". The young male misses his dorsal fin and his

right pectoral fin which makes it harder for him to swim and hunt. It was witnessed that the other orcas were hunting a whale while Stumpy stayed away from the hunt. When the rest had killed the whale he would swim down to join them in eating the prey. These 3 stories are examples of how killer whales take care of each other and the intelligence of these animals.

However, not all killer whales are alike and conditions in which they live can be very different.

Gudrun was a female orca that was captured in Iceland and sold to the Dolfinarium of Harderwijk, Holland. In 1987 she was sent to SeaWorld, Orlando to become part of their breeding program. On December 31, 1993 Gudrun gave birth to her second calf called "Nyar". Born to Gudrun and Tilikum this young orca showed to be unhealthy. The veterinarians of SeaWorld had to do their best to keep Nyar alive and noticed she was progressing like other young orcas did. Gudrun had been a great mother to her first child "Taima" but did not accept Nyar. She tried to drown her new born child several times and the park had to separate mother and calf to prevent Gudrun from killing Nyar. The young orca was kept away from the public as it was not able to perform in the shows.

On February 22, 1996 Gudrun was giving birth to her 3rd calf when things went dramatically wrong. The calf was stillborn and the veterinarians had to pull it out of Gudrun using an iron chain. Due to the complications Gudrun was given antibiotics and painkillers. On February 25, 1996 Gudrun swam up to the gate that separated her from Nyar, softly rubbed her nose against her daughter and died not much later. Was this a mother seeking comfort and/or forgiveness? Almost one month later on April 1st Nyar's immune system gave in. The young orca had difficulty breathing and died that same day just 3 years old.

Changing Strategy

Sealand of the Pacific was Marine Park in British Columbia, Canada. It opened in 1969 and became a popular tourist attraction. The park became famous for having killer whales in captivity that would perform tricks for the paying audience. The first orca they had was a bull they called "Haida" who had been captured in 1968 at around five years of age. A year later a partially albino (Chediak-Higashi Syndrome) female was captured and became a mate for Haida. The new orca was called "Chimo". A third orca was captured alongside Chimo and was called "Nootka". She stayed in the park for a short period before being moved to California. Chimo died in 1972 and is till date still the only (partial) white killer whale ever to be in captivity.

Due to pressure from anti-captivity protesters, Sealand decided to release Haida back into the wild. However, only a few days before the planned release Haida died while still being in the park. Over the more than 20 years Sealand was in business, they had several killer whales held in captivity. Probably the most famous orca that was held there was a bull

named "Tilikum". He came to the park after being captured in the water of Iceland in 1983. Tilikum was captured together with 2 other orcas. One was a female who was called "Samoa", the other a male who received the name "Nandu". While Tilikum was sold to Sealand, Samoa and Nandu were sold to a park in Brazil. After Nandu died in 1988, Samoa was sold to SeaWorld where she died giving birth to a stillborn calf in 1992. Tilikum was placed with two other Icelandic orcas named "Nootka IV" and "Haida II" both female.

Killer whales in Iceland have a good taste for herring. The way they hunt these is as a team. They will drive the herring up into a big ball of fish by producing a high pitched sound. When the fish are all close together, the orcas will then slap their tails at the school of herring bedazzling many fish who then become a silver snack for the killer whales.

Sealand was, different to other marine parks, not an inland park. It was a floating structure in South Oak Bay near Victoria, Canada. Due to this the animals in it were swimming in natural water which was also home to a lot of wildlife. The pool the orcas were in during the day was sealed underwater with netting. This would prevent them to escape their enclosure while still letting the Canadian water run through. After closing time the killer whales would be lured into a module where they would remain until staff of the park arrived the next morning. This was to make sure activists could not free the orcas while the park was closed. The nets in the pool allowed small marine life to swim into it and often one or more of the orcas could be seen playing with an eel or small rockfish. Some year's big schools of herring would swim through South Oak Bay and so it would make their way into the pool of the killer whales. While at first Tilikum, Nootka and Haida would see the silver shiny fish as a fun toy to chase around, it didn't take long for their hunting instincts to kick in.

One day they were observed by supervisor Steve Huxter while they were chasing the small fish around the tank. Previously the orcas would hunt individually with small successes as a result. That day however, Steve noticed a change of tactics. While they would usually chase the herring at high speed the killer whales now moved slower through the pool. They also seemed to work together, coordinated and staying in formation. They would not just launch at the school of fish but seemed to be herding the herring. Steve looked on as the 3 orcas slowly moved the school of fish to a corner of the pool before diving into it, mouths open. At that time he could not tell if they had a bigger success hunting together but soon he would find out how their change in strategy would remain the same with new schools of herring that entered the pool. Tilikum, Nootka and Haida most likely perfected their techniques every time these fish would enter their territory. Adjusting their speed and formation until they became the perfectly coordinated hunters.

Then one day, during a show, Steve and two colleagues approached the stage. One of the orcas came up to them, chinned up over the edge and spewed a huge mouthful that spread over the stage like a mini-tsunami of wriggling little fish. According to Steve it was at least 5 pound of fish that was now lying in front of them.

I watched them repeat their team efforts and was struck by the coordination and efficiency of their fishing technique. It was a circumstance that neither of the three had encountered

before so how did they learn that they would have more success if they worked together? It was as though they realized that their individual efforts were showing limited success and they had a conversation among themselves with Haida, the matriarch, saying: "Listen, this isn't working, we're catching diddly-squat here. Let's team up. Tilikum, you take the right, Nootka the left and I'll take the centre position." It notched up my appreciation for their intelligence and ability to communicate, by quite a few degrees. The seals and sea lions enjoyed the same benefit of the herring getting into their pools but, their efforts always remained individual, there was no attempt at teamwork. It was only Haida, Nootka and Tilikum who improvised and learned to hunt more efficiently.

-Steve Huxter

It seemed that the orcas, like their wild relatives, had started learning themselves how to hunt. And while the killer whales in Iceland use their tails to slap the fish, Tilikum, Nootka and Haida adjusted their strategy to their surroundings. The pool provided them with corners in which they could drive the herring before feasting on them.

Different strategies of hunting can be found among orcas all over the world. While the Icelandic ones slap their fish, the Canadian ones seem to stun their salmon with sound waves. The mammal eating species that are found around the world also have different tactics to get their food. Whales, penguins and seals are all caught in perfectly planned attacks. This makes the orca the apex predator in the world's waters.

Lost Voices

In 1969 a young female orca was captured in the waters of British Columbia, Canada at the age of 4. Taken from her mother A23 (Stripe) from A5 pod she was transferred to Marineland of the Pacific, Los Angeles to perform to the paying public.

Marineland opened its doors in 1954 and at that time was the largest marine park in the world. Like many other marine parks, next to killer whales they also held dolphins, seals and sea lions. Marineland of the Pacific closed in February 1987 after it was purchased by the owners of SeaWorld San Diego. They moved the orcas from Los Angeles to their park soon after.

The young female calf captured was called "Corky II". She was moved into a pool with a male orca they named "Orky II" who was captured a year before Corky. On February 28, 1977 Corky gave birth to a male calf without anyone even knowing she was pregnant. It was the first ever orca ever to be born in captivity. The young bull died only a couple of weeks later. During her time in Marineland Corky would give birth to six more calves. Her longest surviving child died after only 47 days. When she was transported, together with Orky, to SeaWorld in San Diego she was again pregnant. At the new park the female orca had a miscarriage, losing child number 8. She would not become pregnant anymore after this.

While their new pools were bigger than their old pool in Los Angeles, Corky and Orky had now had to share it with the other killer whales that were already in this SeaWorld park. They were trained to perform in the park's shows and Orky was a welcome addition to SeaWorld's breeding program. Orky would become a father on September 23, 1988 to a young female orca. Orky died 3 days after Kandu V gave birth to his daughter. The female calf was named "Orkid" (a combination of Orky and Kid). Kandu V died after attacking Corky in 1989. Being the more dominant female she ruptured an artery in her lower jaw while trying to rake Corky. While she was slowly bleeding to death, she kept swimming next to her daughter Orkid. After the death of Kandu, Corky took over in caring for Orkid showing how emotional and social killer whales are.

During this time many people already were stepping up against captivity. It was the kindness and intelligence that these killer whales showed that made them wonder if these orcas belonged in captivity. Studies showed these animals were extremely social and smarter than most other species on the planet. Then in 1993 a discussion started about releasing Corky back to her family in the wild. While activists stated she should be set free in the waters of Vancouver, Canada, SeaWorld said the female orca had spent too much time among humans to make it in the wild. They doubted if she would even recognize her family after spending 24 years in captivity.

An American news show called "ABC Nightline" did a report on the discussion on Corky being in captivity and the opinions of both sides. They interviewed a man named Paul Spong who had then been trying to get SeaWorld involved in an experiment. Dr. Paul Spong, a scientist from New Zealand, who has studied the wild orcas of Canada for over 30 years asked SeaWorld a daring question. Over the years he had recorded the vocalizations of Corky's wild relatives and as an experiment he wanted to bring the recordings to SeaWorld to play to the female killer whale. As orcas all have their own dialects he wondered if it was possible that Corky would still recognize her family if she could hear them "talking". SeaWorld refused his experiment.

Now ABC Nightline asked the park the same question and it was accepted. They brought the tape to the park and played it to Corky. No one could know how the killer whale would react to hearing her family for the first time after 24 years. When they pushed the "play" button and the sound of A5 pod came out of the speaker, all the orcas in the pool reacted to the sound of the wild orcas. Corky however started shaking and reacted different than the other SeaWorld animals. Maybe it was coincidence but it looked like the female orca did recognize the voices she last heard when she was a juvenile. The fight over the release of Corky is still going today.

In 1996 a similar experiment took place in the Miami Seaquarium. The oldest marine park of America opened in 1955 and has been the home to an orca called "Lolita" for over 40 years.

Lolita was captured in Puget Sound, Washington on August 8, 1970 and sold to the Seaquarium to become a partner of their male orca called "Hugo". Hugo was also captured in Puget Sound two years earlier in February 1968. When Lolita arrived in Miami she and

Hugo were kept separated as it was feared they would fight. The two orcas however came from the same family and spoke the same language. They started communicating back and forth and soon it was decided the two should be put together.

The Miami Seaquarium has one of the smallest pools for orcas in the world. It is only 60 by 80 foot (18 by 24 meters) and 20 feet deep (6 meters). Still they had these two giants perform in it together and although the audience enjoyed the show, Hugo seemed to be less happy. Often he would refuse to perform, act aggressively towards trainers or bang his head against the concrete wall of the pool or the viewing glass. Many believe this is what led to the death of Hugo when he died in March 1980 of hemorrhage on the brain. Since then Lolita has been the only orca at the Miami Seaquarium.

NBC Dateline showed an item on TV in 1996 where they brought recordings of Lolita's family that were provided by Ken Balcomb, a whale researcher and specialist in killer whale identification, to the pool Lolita was in. Like with Corky, Lolita reacted to the recordings of the voices of her pod that she had last heard over 35 years ago. She came close to the reporter holding the tape player and started spy hopping. At one point she came up high out of the water and leaned towards the reporter almost touching him with her rostrum.

Although it is not scientific proof it sure looks like orcas remember the sounds of their families even after spending many years apart. And many feel these animals should and could be reunited with their pods in the wild.

From Pool To Pod

Many peoples first encounter with an orca is in captivity. The many parks around the world that have killer whales in their shows are a popular attraction. Young children will press their noses against the glass around the pools of the orcas to get as close as possible to the magical black and white giants. Seeing these huge animals jump up out of the water and splashing down back in the water leaves an impression many will never forget. Probably the largest group of people in America that have seen a killer whale have done so in one of the SeaWorld parks. Before water work was banned after the death of trainer Dawn Brancheau, trainers would swim with, stand on and "play" with the animals in their parks. These shows were THE place to be for paying visitors. Almost every show would have a part in it where one or more children would be picked from the audience to have an up close experience with one of the killer whales. Some would be lifted on top of the animals back for a picture, others would be allowed to touch the animal. Of course this is a unique opportunity for anyone and the children would be filled with joy when they were selected from the crowd to join the trainers on the platform the orca was lying on.

Rick Wood, filmmaker and killer whale enthusiast is one of those who in his youth had a close encounter with an orca in his childhood. The make of "Fragile Waters" was 10 years old when his parents took him to SeaWorld to see "Shamu" perform tricks. Shamu is the

performing name for the killer whales at SeaWorld.

In October 1965 a female orca was captured for the entertainment industry. She was taken from the waters of Puget Sound, Washington as a mate for "Namu" who was then held in the Seattle Marine Aquarium. The female would be named "Shamu" as a combination of "She" and "Namu". Namu got his name when he was found by a fisherman in one of his nets close to the shore of Namu, British Columbia in 1965. The orca was sold to the Seattle park for 8,000 dollar to become the only killer in captivity at that time.

Shamu would not stay with Namu for long as in December 1965 she was bought by the SeaWorld park of San Diego. On April 19, 1971 SeaWorld wanted to use Shamu in a publicity stunt. A female employee of the park was asked to ride the female orca wearing a bikini while being filmed. Shamu threw the woman of her back and started dragging her through the pool by her leg. She was rescued in the end but ended up with 200 stitches. After the incident Shamu was retired. She died shortly after in August 1971. SeaWorld continued to use the name "Shamu" for its orcas.

Being at the show in 1980 Rick was amazed by the agility of the black and white giants that were splashing through the pool. They looked happy to perform and the audience cheered for every trick these animals would show them. Then it was time for the orca to swim up to the pool and "greet" the children that were picked for the "pet" session. Rick was one of the lucky ones that could step up to the platform to touch the animal. He went down to the platform and stared at the orca that was lying there waiting for him to reach out his hand. The mouth of the animal lay open and Rick reached inside to touch its tongue. While doing this he wondered "Why wouldn't Shamu just close its mouth on my arm?". Little did he know that only 10 years earlier the original Shamu had sunk her teeth into the leg of the employee.

After this experience it would take 21 years before he would encounter his next orca. In 2004 after recently moving to Washington State, Rick decided he wanted to go on a whale watching tour. San Juan Island is well known for its orca sightings and other marine wildlife. The Southern Residents roam the waters surrounding the island and so there are many companies who offer wild life tours. While on one of these tours Rick saw a mink whale. The sight of such a big animal was impressive for sure! But not much later something more exiting to him appeared in the best possible way. A super pod of orcas consisting of J, K and L pod came by their boat. About 90 animals together swimming together left Rick mesmerized and in awe. These animals would not do tricks on command, these animals enjoyed their freedom and played and socialized with their families and friends.

This encounter changed the way he looked at killer whales and captivity. Never again would he visit a marine park to see orcas. He now educates people on orcas and what humanity does to them. By pen and through film he shows others why these majestic creatures should be free and protected.