

Slaves of SeaWorld



By Amanda Johnson

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Since it's opening in 1964, SeaWorld has enslaved, exploited and abused the animals it has in its care. SeaWorld holds a multitude of animals including killer whales, dolphins, beluga whales, penguins, sea turtles, sharks and many more species. SeaWorld has locations in Orlando, Florida, San Antonio, Texas and San Diego, California. Not one of these SeaWorld locations cares about the wellbeing of its animals or animal trainers which shall be explained in the following pages. Despite the evidence that has emerged in the recent years that killer whales and other animals should not be kept in captivity, which has included three deaths from one of their whales, they argue that nothing is wrong and the animals are perfectly safe and happy. This is meant to educate and bring awareness to the reality of SeaWorld and the lives of the animals that are kept there.

SeaWorld's Bloody History

When SeaWorld opened their doors in 1964, few thought about what it would mean for the animals who they housed or would continue to 'collect' and breed in the future. In 1965 SeaWorld bought 'Shamu' the third killer whale to be kept in captivity into the park. And in 1966 she was taken to SeaWorld San Diego. During Shamu's capture her mother was shot with a harpoon and killed in front of her.

SeaWorld wants to be known as a giant in conservation and protection of SeaWorld, which as the past shows could not be further from their reality. 5 orcas at SeaWorld currently were captured from the wild in addition to many who already died.

Captivity of killer whales and other animals throughout history is based on wild capture. SeaWorld's methods of capturing these animals was so violent it brought them to court. Don Goldsberry and Ted Griffin are whale hunters that were hired by many aquariums including SeaWorld. They are responsible for the capture of many whales in captivity and the deaths many who in the process. When whales died in their hunting process they actually split the whales open and tried to sink them with rocks and chains to hide their deaths. A famous four whales weighted down were discovered. In court SeaWorld reluctantly agreed to stop hunting whales in Washington. Without skipping a beat, they moved on to Iceland to capture whales there. From 1976-1978 at least 9 whales were sent straight from Iceland to SeaWorld.

Whale capture or kidnapping is very traumatic. The captors are looking for the smallest whales due to possibly,

shipping ease. This results in the kidnapping of baby whales from their mothers. Through the process the whales are making vocalizations and speaking to each other, a former diver, John Crowe, who was hired by whale hunters and spoke in the movie *Blackfish* about his experiences. He described it as compared it to kidnapping a little kid away from their mother and said he was brought to tears when the reality sunk in of what was happening. Crowe also said it is the worst thing he has ever done or experienced. When their babies are being taken away the entire pod could escape but instead they stick together. The cries of a mother and baby whale, separated is possibly one of the saddest and most disturbing things to hear.

For unfathomable reasons Don Goldsberry became the Vice President of Animal Collections at SeaWorld, despite his admitting he killed four whales and attempted to cover it up, which sent him to court. Not to mention the extensive history of violent captures under his belt.



© Dr. Terry Newby

Tiklikum in a net.

The Important Bond of Mother and Baby

Not only did SeaWorld separate babies from their mothers in the wild, but they continued this practice once their breeding program took off. With the important matrilineal structure between mother and calf it is shocking that SeaWorld moves babies and their mother's apart, the only real family they have available to them.

Blackfish gave examples in which mother and baby were separated which causes great distress for both. In the wild male orcas, do not leave their mothers at all and female orcas usually stay within their mother's pods. Ikaika, Takara, Kohana, Keet, Keto, Skyla, Tuar, Shouka, and Trua are some of the living whales who were separated from their mothers though there are many others and many also who were separated who are now deceased.

After Blackfish, SeaWorld denied it moves its babies away from their mothers but later said they do so only to "maintain a healthy social structure". SeaWorld supposedly recognizes the bond as important, so it is puzzling that maintaining a healthy social structure would include the removal of young whales from their families and transferring them to a strange place with whales they do not know.



Killer Whale Intelligence and Life in the Wild

Killer whales are highly intelligent animals, they have their own culture and language, which differs amongst pods. They communicate with distinctive calls and whistles and live 60 up to 100 years. Their brains have extended in the limbic system which suggests they lead highly emotional lives. Because of this extension, it is thought that they could be much smarter than humans. Orcas are part of a tightknit matrilineal system in which the older females show and model certain behaviors to younger whales. There is also increasing evidence that their culture shapes how and what they eat, their playtime activities and even who they mate with. The fact that SeaWorld rips young whales away from their mothers, the only family unit they have in captivity, only exemplifies just how little they care about the animals.



Picture on left: SeaWorld used this picture to show how important mother and calf are when in reality the two are separated.

SeaWorld Breeding Program

SeaWorld has not captured whales in over 35 years but NOT because the practice was immoral or cruel, but because they had found other ways to keep their tanks full. SeaWorld started captive breeding programs, especially with the help of their “prize-bull”, Tilikum who has a long history of aggression.

In the wild, whales choose their own mates, at SeaWorld they are forced to reproduce at much too young an age than what is natural for them and have no choice in the matter. SeaWorld masturbates Tilikum and freezes his sperm. This is done by having trainers get into the water and masturbate him. They then artificially inseminate female whales with the sperm, essentially raping them and forcing them into pregnancy.

Female whales in the wild only start reproducing at 12 to 14 years but because SeaWorld does not care about these animals, they artificially inseminate them at 5 to 8 years which is detrimental for mother and baby. The mothers who give birth at this age many times reject the babies, who die.

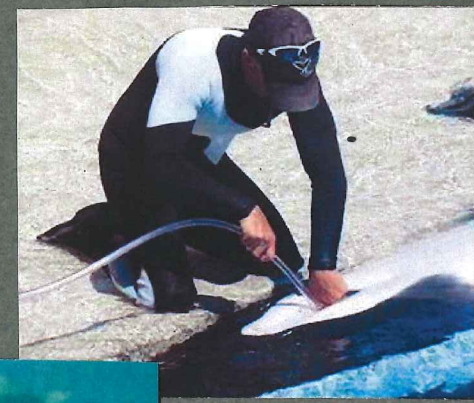
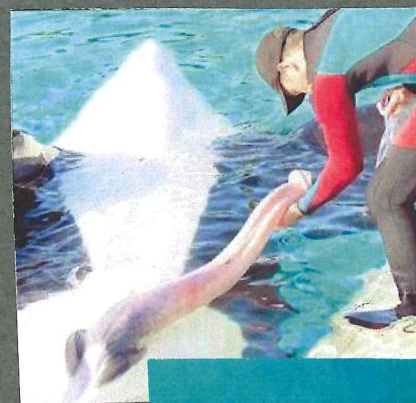
The number one and first rule in breeding, is that if an animal shows aggression towards humans, it should not be bred to create more animals who could very likely, have a similar temperament.

Tilikum has been involved in the death of three people. Two of these were killer whale trainers, Kelti Byrne and Dawn Brancheau. Another victim was Daniel P. Dukes, a civilian.

Tilikum now has 21 direct offspring, 10 of whom are still living and some have children of their own. This is a long lineage of whales which is indeed a problem, as their father has shown aggression in the past.

Tilikum is not the only whale with a past of aggression that SeaWorld has bred. SeaWorld artificially inseminated Kasatka with sperm from Kshamenk, an orca at Mundo Marino Aquarium in Argentina. Not only had Kshamenk displayed signs of aggression and hostility to trainers and handlers but Kasatka was involved in an attack on her experienced trainer, Ken Peters. Peters was bitten on the feet and dragged underwater multiple times during a show at SeaWorld San Diego, this incident nearly drowned him and left him greatly injured. This pairing led to the birth of Makani.

In March 2016, SeaWorld announced it will stop breeding its killer whales, unfortunately this appears more of a financial decision on SeaWorld’s behalf rather than one based on the animals’ welfare.



Left: Ken Peters being dragged under by Kasatka.

Problems Orcas face at SeaWorld.

Incompatible Tank Mates

In captivity, orcas are put in small tanks with incompatible tank mates. The killer whale culture is a matrilineal society in which females are in charge of order and males are kept on the outside. In captivity, the orcas are forced much too close together causing injuries, inbreeding and even death of orcas. In the wild, they can simply distance themselves and swim away if there is conflict, but in captivity there is nowhere for them to run and they suffer from one another. It is important to note that orcas do not form new pods if they are stuck in a tank together, they are foreign to each other and have whole sets of different vocalizations, equivalent to different languages.

For example, at both Sealand of the Pacific and SeaWorld, Tilikum has been constantly beaten up and bullied by the more dominant females. Because of his large size he cannot get away so he is covered in rakes from other whales' teeth and other injuries. Because of this, much of Tilikum's life was and is spent in isolation to prevent him from being injured by the female whales.

Yet another example is from 1989 when orca, Kandu V tried to assert dominance over another female whale, Corky by ramming into her, Kandu V ruptured an artery in her own jaw during a show and bled out in a duration of 45 minutes, with her calf, Orkid swimming beside her.

Nakai, an orca in SeaWorld was injured SeaWorld reported, by the gate along the pool, but witnesses report it was

from an altercation between Nakai and Ike or Keet. The injury went through his skin, flesh and blubber in an almost dinner plate-size wound. Whatever the reason it happened, it is clear SeaWorld is not a suitable place for killer whales to be.

Unfortunately, this is not the only consequence whales face from being held in too small of tanks and lacking of their natural pods.

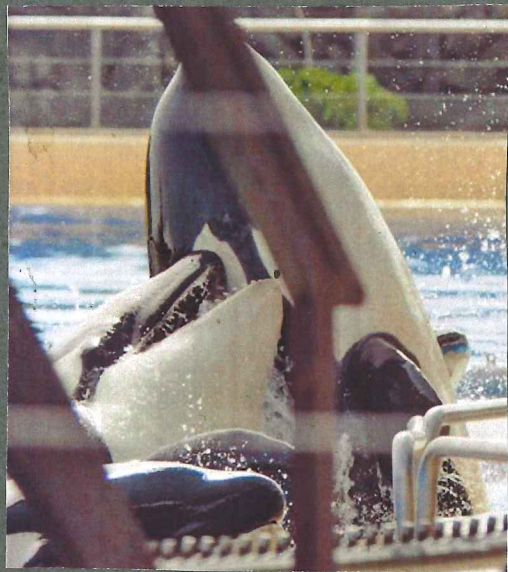
Like humans, dolphins and whales have developed instincts that keep them from inbreeding. In the wild there are options for whales of who to mate with but in captivity there are very few options and most of them are related. Katina, a killer whale was impregnated by her own son Taku in 2006. The calf that resulted from this, Nalani is the first inbred calf in captivity. There is a huge potential of risks with any inbred species including genetic mutations, mental illness and deformities.



Rake marks from another whale.



Above: Nakai's injury from other orcas.



Below:

Kandu V bleeding to death after altercation with Corky.



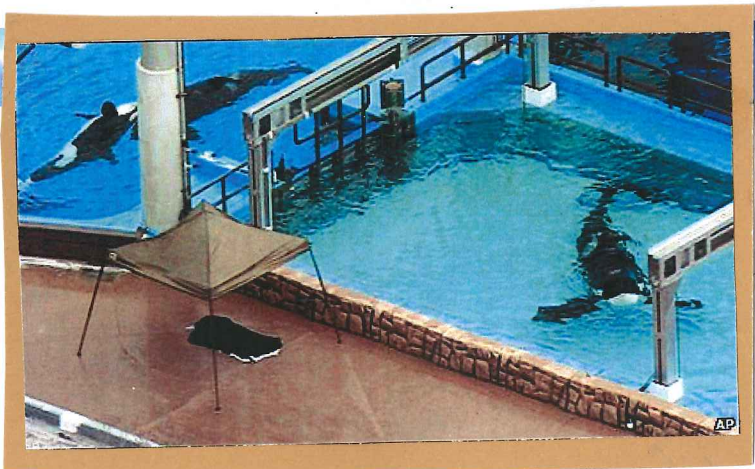
Lack of Space Leads to Psychotic Behavior in Cetaceans

In the wild, killer whales travel up to 100 miles per day so being in the concrete pools at SeaWorld is the equivalent of them being in a fishbowl. This causes a multitude of problems including suicide attempts, where dolphins and orcas may try to jump out of the tank or beach themselves and self-mutilation in which they bang their heads on the sides of tanks. They may be able to survive, but they cannot cope at all with this imprisonment.

It is very common for both orcas and dolphins to display psychotic behaviors in captivity. These behaviors are similar to the symptoms of prison neurosis which is characterized by panic, anxiety, and claustrophobia. The way the animals display this is floating without moving for long periods of time, establishing dominance and swimming in circles constantly.

These behaviors have negatively damaged the orcas' teeth from chewing on the concrete pools and gates. Their teeth become broken, chipped or need to be drilled to get the pulp out of the center of the teeth.

Captive orcas all show at least one of these problems, if not multiple.



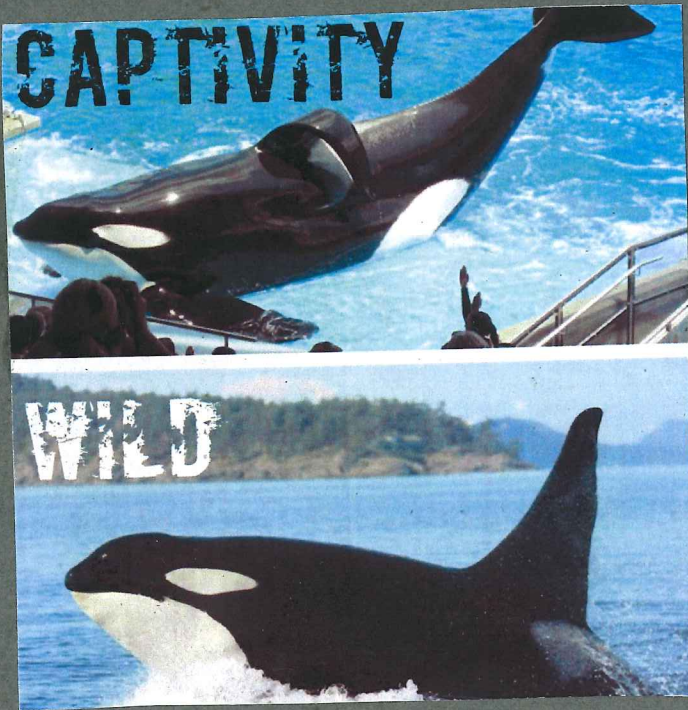
SeaWorld and Psychoactive Drugs

How does SeaWorld attempt to deal with these problems? By drugging them out of their minds, of course. SeaWorld has admitted and documents have shown that benzodiazepines, which is a drug that consists of valium and Xanax among other things is given to the orcas to ensure their mental health is stable in captivity. These mental problems clearly result from being in captivity which SeaWorld does not acknowledge or admit to.



Collapsed Dorsal Fins

Contrary to what SeaWorld would have you believe, collapsed dorsal fins are very uncommon in the wild. SeaWorld reports to its visitors that 25% of whales have their dorsal fin flop over, which is a complete lie. In reality, only 1-5% of male killer whales have collapsed dorsal fins and only in certain pods; many pods have no collapsed dorsal fins whatsoever. The rate of dorsal fin collapse in mature male orcas at SeaWorld is 100% and many females have their dorsal fins collapse as well. Dorsal fin collapse is a telltale sign of an unhealthy orca and seems they are caused from captivity itself, an unnatural unhealthy environment.



Shortened Lifespans

Another lie SeaWorld likes to tell visitors is that the lifespan of killer whales is 25 to 35 years which is again, completely false. In the wild orcas live 50 to 80 sometimes even reported to 100 years. Only two killer whales at SeaWorld have made it past the age of 40 and no males have survived past 35. The average age of death for SeaWorld killer whales is 13 years old. It is clear captivity causes killer whale life spans to decrease dramatically, and that being captive is no life at all.



Trainers

The trainers at SeaWorld come in very ill-equipped to deal with marine mammals. They are chosen for having a good personality (for shows) and being good swimmers. Many people would like to assume they are trained marine biologists, which they certainly are not. Trainers are there to entertain and put on a good show rather than understand the animals or educate others about the animals.

Tilikum's History

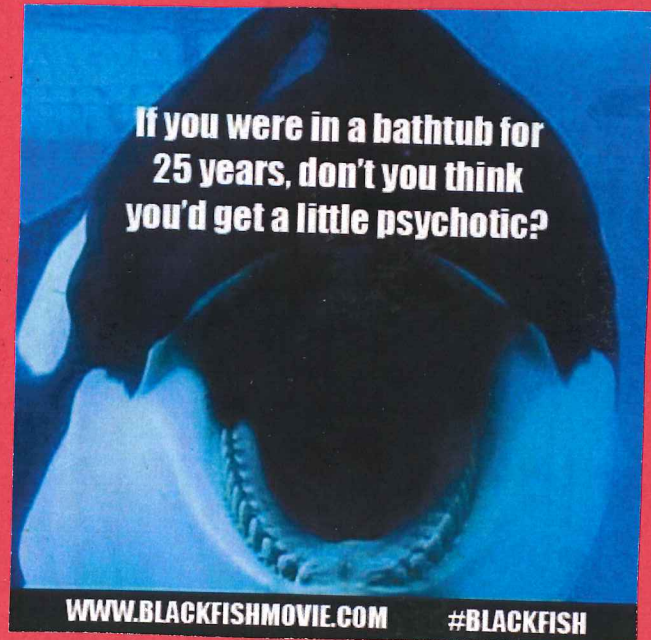
Tilikum was captured off the coast of Iceland when he was only two years old. Ripped away from his mother, he was brought to live at Sealand of the Pacific in British Columbia, Canada. After the death of Keltie Byrne in 1991, Tilikum was bought by SeaWorld where he has continued his life of misery. At SeaWorld, he is kept in a miniscule tank pool, often isolated from other orcas and forced to deal with relentless boredom and frustration due to being in captivity. At SeaWorld, he was involved in two other deaths.

SeaWorld continues to be in denial about Tilikum's happiness and well-being. Though his teeth are worn down and broken from biting the pool and gates out of boredom and his once straight dorsal fin is fully collapsed, it seems SeaWorld thinks Tilikum would rather be kept in a tiny enclosure performing tricks for dead fish for the sole purpose of entertainment of humans.

Helen O'Barry of the Dolphin Project wrote about the life Tilikum might have enjoyed if he had remained free:

"(H)e would likely still be traveling the deep, chilly waters of Iceland for miles each day, going from one destination to the next. His world would have been one of tremendous diversity, new challenges, and boundless activities, such as hunting, playing, and socializing with pod members. With every leap pout of the water, he would see an endless ocean, free of barriers other than where the ocean meets the shore. At more than thirty years of age, he would have acquired the skills of a master hunter, and, under the experienced guidance of his mother, would have learnt an

impressive number of team-oriented methods of hunting live prey." -O'Barry.



Death at SeaWorld

In the wild there have been no reported deaths throughout history of humans killed by orcas. In the wild it seems a very common occurrence. There have been four deaths involving SeaWorld whales and many more injuries. SeaWorld's corporate incident log was revealed contains reports of more than 100 incidents of orca aggression at its parks, usually resulting in injuries to humans. In the documentary, Blackfish, former trainers reveal they were never told of any of these incidents upon working there.

In February 1991, Keltie Byrne, a 20 year old marine biology student, champion swimmer and part time trainer at Sealand of the Pacific, Vancouver slipped into a pool that held Tilikum, Haida II and Nootka IV. Official reports do not identify which whale instigated it but eye-witness reports from guests at Sealand that day easily identify the instigator as Tilikum. Tilikum dragged her under the surface, preventing her from resurfacing and at one point she reached the edge of the pool, but he dragged her back under the water as she screamed. She was thrown a life raft but Tilikum and the other whales prevented her from reaching it. She came to the surface approximately three times before she drowned and died, it took several hours before her body could be taken from the pool. After Keltie Byrne's death, Sealand was soon shut down in November 1992. Tilikum was then bought by SeaWorld for breeding purposes.



Keltie Byrne (left)

Daniel P Dukes

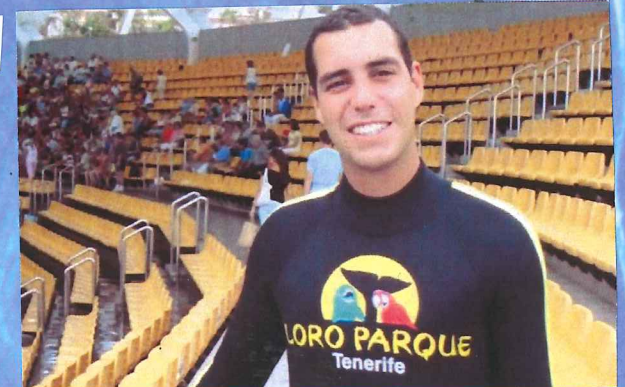


Blackfish interviewed trainers who were working at SeaWorld and with Tilikum at the time of his transfer and it was never revealed that he played the major role in killing a trainer.

The next death occurred in 1999 when Daniel P. Dukes evaded SeaWorld security and went into Tilikum's tank. In the morning, they found Dukes naked, draped over the back of Tilikum. Medical examiner reports say Tilikum stripped him, bit off his genitals and bit him all over his body. The official report of death was drowning. There were no drugs or alcohol in his system.

In Puerto de la Cruz in Tenerife, Spain is located Loro Parque, a zoo with a bad reputation. SeaWorld owns all of the orcas at Loro Parque and their orca trainers were trained by top SeaWorld trainers. On December 24, 2009, top Loro Parque trainer Alexis Martinez was killed by killer whale, Keto. Reports say he was crushed to death in Keto's jaws, his chest had seemingly exploded from the damage. Keto held him underwater for 12 minutes before they could bring Martinez's body back up. The autopsy report says he was killed by deadly injuries from Keto, including multiple compression fractures, tears to vital organs, and the bite marks all over his body. This incident was kept very quiet and not highly publicized or recognized until the release of Blackfish. SeaWorld is responsible for these whales and ultimately owns them, yet in court after Dawn Brancheau's death, they denied any affiliation.

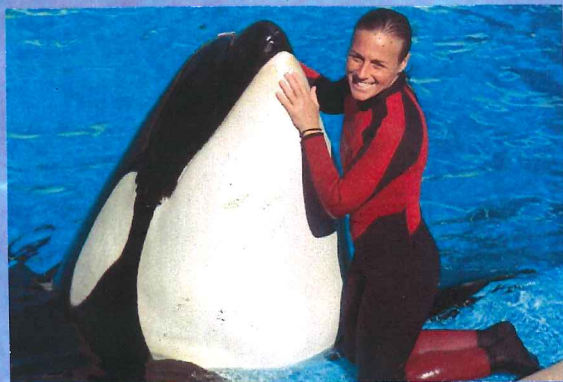
Alexis Martinez



Exactly two months later on February 24, 2010, Dawn Brancheau, one of the most senior and experienced trainers was killed by Tilikum at SeaWorld Orlando. She was killed after a dine with Shamu show featuring Tilikum. Dawn was rubbing Tilikum as part of an after show ritual when he grabbed her arm and dragged her underwater. The autopsy reports show she died from blunt-force trauma. She was scalped and Tilikum ate her arm. Instead of taking responsibility or offering any condolences in the loss of Brancheau, SeaWorld placed the blame directly on her. SeaWorld claims she was grabbed by her pony-tail and not her arm. They say she should not have been wearing a pony-tail and that the whale had grabbed her. Witnesses debate this and report she was grabbed by her arm. SeaWorld has no problem placing the blame on a trainer who is not even alive to defend herself. SeaWorld also said nothing like this had ever happened before though just two months earlier Alexis Martinez was killed by their whale Keto.

The fact that SeaWorld did not take Keltie Byrne's death as a warning sign and let other trainers interact with him, as well as not taking the death of Daniel P. Dukes seriously is completely and utterly horrifying.

Dawn Brancheau



SeaWorld After Death

To this day, SeaWorld denies any responsibility for any death or injury that has occurred because of their orcas. A result of Brancheau's death is the court forcing SeaWorld to keep a barrier between the animals and the trainers which SeaWorld has tried to appeal. After the release of the 2013 documentary, Blackfish, SeaWorld attendance has gone down significantly, they have lost many endorsements and celebrity sponsors.

In March 2016, SeaWorld said they would end the breeding program of their killer whales and would phase out the performance show. This is better but these animals are still being held captive, as SeaWorld's slaves. They need and deserve to be treated humanely, given compassion for once in their lives and put into seaside sanctuaries where they can feel the waves of the ocean and be free from concrete pools. SeaWorld has the funds to do this but they deny that it would be in the best interest to the whales.



Alexis Martinez and Dawn Brancheau



Ellen Ericksen



Q and A with Ellen Ericksen, Activist Extraordinaire.

Ellen Ericksen is the organizer of nearly all the protests at SeaWorld San Diego. She works with Peta and its campaign, SeaWorld of Hurt as well as working for other causes, advocating and protesting against horse racing, Ringling Brother's circus in the past, and doing vegan outreach. I had the pleasure of interviewing her about SeaWorld and activism in which she shared great insight, knowledge and spirit in the name of SeaWorld and all non-human animals.

Author: Why is this cause so important to you?

Ellen: I think any group that is oppressed should be important to all of us. I think that we as human beings, that have the strength and the ability to bring awareness to not just individuals but to animals that are exploited, I mean that is our job as human beings to raise awareness and I think it's really important. When I moved to San Diego 15 years ago, I got back involved with animal rights. I became very active in organizing almost all the protests here for years. Even way before Blackfish so that's been a project of mine for a very long time.

Author: And what are protests at SeaWorld like?

Ellen: Some of the protests at SeaWorld, are big, some are small, I've had protests where I've had over 600 people come and they've been peaceful protests and SeaWorld, just flips out. I can't go on the property because they would arrest me for trespassing [and] where I have my protests they ended up putting up additional security fencing so people in the parking

lots couldn't see us from inside [which] cost them a fortune. You need to change people's minds to not buy tickets, that has impacted SeaWorld ticket sales here and they're down 25%. I organize at SeaWorld every holiday all year round so no matter what holiday it is, when they're busy that's when I want to be there.

Author: How much has Blackfish affected the anti-SeaWorld movement?

Ellen: I think it's great, the day Blackfish came out I had a huge protest at SeaWorld and a lot of people that were in the movie came. I think the movie was very impactful, even though I have friends that have been protesting SeaWorld for thirty years, the movie has brought so much awareness, I think the movie has changed a lot of people's minds about SeaWorld. It was just amazing to watch the movie with all those people, showing the truth of what goes on with those animals and that's just the orcas. They have 4,500 animals at SeaWorld here, for me it's not just about the orcas it's about every animal that's locked up in SeaWorld. When the media interviews me about SeaWorld saying, they won't use the orcas for entertaining shows anymore, it's a bunch of bullshit because nothing has changed at SeaWorld, they're just renaming everything. The Orcas, penguins, dolphins, sea lions are all still there, nothing has changed there. Everything that they do is whitewashing in the media, trying to save their image. They're making an anti-blackfish movie right now.

Author: What have been some difficulties in protesting against SeaWorld?

Ellen: They've threatened me, I've been assaulted by employees, I've almost been run over at SeaWorld deliberately, where someone has run up on the sidewalk with their car and almost plowed me down as I was setting up for a protest and I was almost abducted in my neighborhood three years ago, after a big protest when I went out for a run, someone was following me, got out of their car and came after me and I'm 99% sure he worked for SeaWorld. I'm not going away. I will stop protesting SeaWorld when they're closed, for me it's not only about the orcas, it's about all the animals there.

Author: SeaWorld has been affected bad media and press surrounding Blackfish but how long do you think there is to go to free the animals and shut SeaWorld down?

Ellen: We have a long way to go, we still do I hate to say it even with their ticket sales down they're always doing stuff to try and reinvent themselves. A couple weeks ago, they had a hearing to get a larger tank built and have wall paper scenery. The orcas know they're not in the Pacific North West, it's so ridiculous and now the big hype is 'see the orcas because they're not going to be performing after this year', trying to drive up ticket sales that way. The orcas are still going to be there next year, they're still going to be in the small tanks and they can rename the show but the bottom line is they're still abusing the animals. And until it closes down I'm going to continue going out there, until they're gone.

Author: What are your hopes for the freedom and liberation of all non-human animals at SeaWorld?

Ellen: My goal is to get them all out if there. The orcas are going to be tricky because they've been locked up so long they don't even know how to feed themselves, it's horrible. They're neurotic, they're not well, they're crazy. These animals are crazy. They all have mental breakdowns but I think because orcas are so much smarter than the humans, they're capable of relearning how to take care of themselves. My goal is to get them in seaside sanctuaries and rehabilitate them and let them go back to their natural environment. I think it should be that way for every animal in SeaWorld not just the orcas and dolphins but the sharks and the thousands or other species that they have in there. It's horrendous and they all need to be free, they all need to be liberated. It's not that easy to liberate an 11,000-pound orca, there's a lot of people working on it and there's a lot of people that have the same goals as me and SeaWorld is not willing to budge. The sad part is it's all about financial gain, they really don't care about the animals at all there or their wellbeing, so my goal is to work for total liberation of all the animals there and close the park.

Author: What do you recommend for someone who is far away from SeaWorld, who is passionate about the liberation of the animals, what they can do to be involved and help out?

Ellen: I think there's a lot of things you can do, letter writing to politicians in the state of California or any place that has animals in captivity, if SeaWorld is your passion, you could leaflet, you don't have to live in San Diego to tell people the truth about SeaWorld. I think everyone needs to know, you don't have to be near SeaWorld to educate people, you tell one person and then they tell two people and then they tell three people, I mean that's how the change is going to happen. You

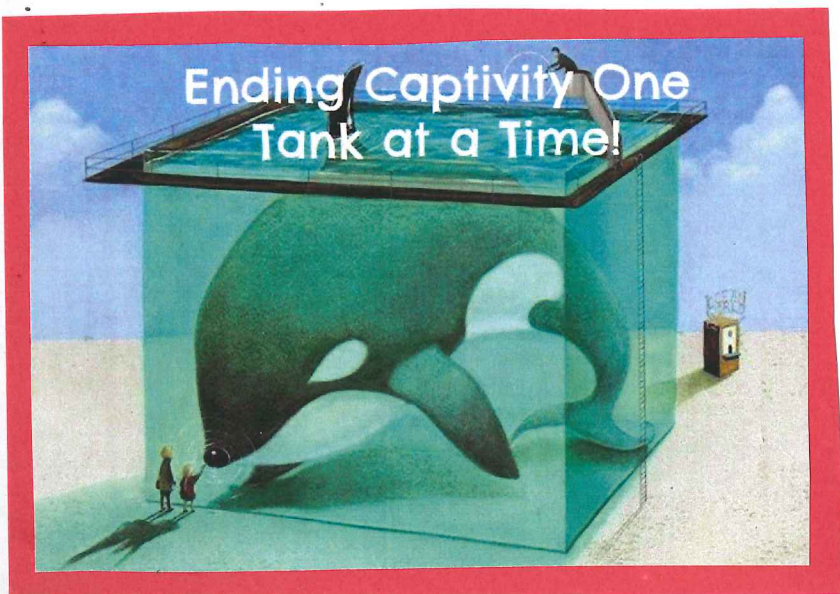
don't have to be in San Diego to be an activist for SeaWorld. People don't want to hear the truth, they don't want to see it, they don't want to know it, but we have to keep telling it. We have to keep speaking and being a voice for these animals whether it be peaceful protests, loud disruptions, leafletting, educating, showing movies, that's our obligation as human beings.



Moving Forward and Getting Involved

In order to help animals at SeaWorld, do not buy tickets, visit the parks or support them in any other way. There are many petitions you can sign through Peta to get the whales into seaside sanctuaries and free them from their prison. www.seaworldofhurt.com is a great place for information and they have a place for donations, which are always welcomed.

Watching the movie *Blackfish* is a good place to start educating yourself and others. Leafleting, spreading the word by mouth and educating people overall the truth about SeaWorld and their practices will affect change.



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