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EDITED BY

Joanna Dean, Darcy Ingram, and Christabelle Sethna

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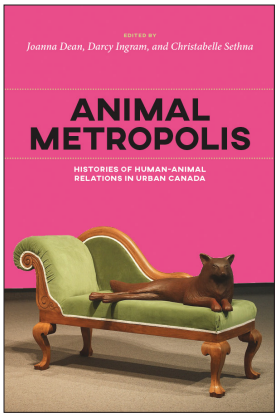

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Cetaceans in the City: Orca Captivity, Animal Rights, and Environmental Values in Vancouver

Jason Colby

In March 1967, "Walter the Whale" arrived in Vancouver, British Columbia. A six-year-old, 15-foot killer whale (*Orcinus orca*), "Walter" had been captured in Washington State's Puget Sound a month earlier by Seattle Marine Aquarium owner Ted Griffin, who agreed to display the animal at the upcoming Vancouver Boat, Trailer and Sport Show, held in the city's Pacific National Exhibition grounds. Hoping for Walter to make a good impression, Griffin cautioned would-be visitors that the whale might act a bit skittish. In addition to fatigue from the long journey by truck, he noted that killer whales were "quite gregarious" and that the young animal "probably misses the others."[1] He need not have worried about the public response. Displayed in a small pool at the boat show, Walter charmed and amazed curious spectators. Among them was a local fisherman, who reluctantly admitted to Griffin that he had shot a large number of "blackfish" – then a common term for orcas.[2] The high point of the visit came on 16 March, when Griffin arranged for a phone call between Walter and two pod-mates being held at the aquarium in Seattle. Broadcast by a Vancouver radio station, the whales' "conversation" drew even more attention to Walter and the boat show, which boasted a ten-day attendance of over 100,000.[3] The obvious public interest helped convinced the Vancouver Aquarium to buy the killer whale from Griffin for $20,000. Soon after, the

staff discovered the young animal was female and renamed her "Skana" – the Indigenous Haida nation's term for killer whale. Visually striking and responsive to training, Skana quickly became the aquarium's top attraction and a key asset for the city's growing tourist industry.[4]

For the next thirty-four years, Skana and other captive killer whales played a powerful and controversial role in the shifting economy and environmental values of Vancouver and the surrounding region. On the one hand, the Vancouver Aquarium's orcas became iconic attractions for British Columbia's increasingly urban-based tourist industry.[5] By the early 1970s, it was not only hunting and fishing opportunities in the surrounding areas that drew visitors to Vancouver but also the chance to see trained performances by an animal that was rapidly coming to symbolize the broader Pacific Northwest. In the process, captive killer whales became virtual mascots of the city, with local reporters following the news of performances, accidents, births, and deaths at the aquarium much as journalists in San Diego covered Sea World following the acquisition of its first killer whale, also from Griffin, in late 1965.

On the other hand, the presence of captive killer whales at the Vancouver Aquarium, located in the city's beloved Stanley Park, intersected in complex ways with broader demographic and cultural trends. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, even as traditional maritime industries such as fishing declined, Vancouver emerged as the countercultural epicentre of western Canada. From the beginning, protests in the city focused on environmental as well as Cold War issues. The most famous example of this confluence was Greenpeace, a Vancouver-based protest group that emerged from a 1971 expedition to protest US nuclear testing in Alaska and later turned its attention to commercial whaling.[6] It was no coincidence that the world's first anti-whaling organization originated in a city with publicly displayed cetaceans. Not only did the aquarium hold a prominent place in Vancouver's growing international profile, but the presence and actions of Skana and other captive orcas directly impacted the thinking and politicization of scientists and activists who played key roles in Greenpeace's development. Indeed, the organization likely would not have turned its focus to whaling in the mid-1970s, and hence gained worldwide fame, without a series of momentous interactions between humans and captive orcas.

Not limited to Vancouver, this transformative interspecies encounter extended throughout the transborder region washed by the "Salish Sea" – a term encompassing the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Puget Sound, and the Strait of Georgia. By the early 1970s, the capture, display, and sale of orcas by Sealand of the Pacific in Victoria, British Columbia, and Griffin's aquarium in Seattle had raised heated public debate on both sides of the border. In Vancouver, however, in contrast to Puget Sound and southern Vancouver Island, it was captivity, not capture, that became the central question. There were two main reasons for this. First, unlike Sealand in Victoria and the Seattle Marine Aquarium, the Vancouver Aquarium did not directly capture killer whales in local waters after 1964. Second, the aquarium, like the adjacent but unaffiliated zoo, was located in Stanley Park. In addition to being Vancouver's celebrated and symbolic "nature" reserve, Stanley Park was public, and hence easily politicized, space. As a result, the question of orca captivity became closely tied to the environmental and countercultural currents sweeping the city by the late 1960s.

The story of Vancouver's orcas speaks to key questions in the fields of environmental, urban, and animal history. In recent years, environmental historians have increasingly turned their attention to questions of urban values and identity, particularly in the Pacific Northwest. Matthew Klingle, for example, places the fate of the region's wild salmon at the heart of his environmental history of Seattle.[7] Likewise, scholars have explored wildlife conservation policy on the national and international levels, including recent studies of the science, diplomacy, and culture of commercial whaling. In *The Sounding of the Whale* (2012), historian D. Graham Burnett emphasizes the striking shift in global environmental values in which whales – "an anomalous order of elusive, air-breathing marine mammals" – came by the early 1970s to serve as "nothing less than a way of thinking about our planet."[8] Other scholars have examined the phenomena of spectacle and performance in human–animal relations. In her *Spectacular Nature* (1997), Susan Davis analyzes the business culture of Sea World in San Diego and emphasizes the iconic role of the "Shamu" killer whale shows in the tourist culture of southern California. More provocatively, Susan Nance's recent study *Entertaining Elephants* (2013) explores the role of animal agency in shaping the structure, culture, and economics of the North American circus.[9]

The presence and actions of killer whales have not figured prominently in the urban and environmental historiography of North America, for seemingly obvious reasons. In contrast to domestic animals, for example, orcas do not live intimately with humans. Moreover, as in the case of other marine fauna, their displacement by urban growth has been less visible than that of terrestrial species. Partly for this reason, the cultural and political impact of their shifting relations with humans has received little attention from historians. In her sweeping interpretation of Canadian wildlife conservation measures, for example, Tina Loo does not discuss killer whales or any other marine species.[10] Likewise, historians of Vancouver have given little attention to the aquarium and its captive orcas. In his superb study of Stanley Park, for example, Sean Kheraj observes that the park originally stood as a "living metaphor for Vancouver's origins and progress" and later became a "temple of atonement for the environmental destruction that was necessary to build the city and the province," but he devotes little discussion to the role of the zoo and aquarium in that transition.[11] For his part, Frank Zelko, in his history of Greenpeace, offers anecdotal discussion of the aquarium's orcas, but his primary interest is the organization's anti-whaling campaign, not the urban politics of killer whale captivity.[12]

Yet the orcas of Stanley Park played a prominent role in many of the political and cultural trends scholars have highlighted. Their story maps closely, for example, onto what Loo has termed "an emerging urban sentimentality about predators."[13] Well into the 1960s, killer whales, much like wolves, were viewed as threats to both people and resources, particularly salmon. In fact, orcas were often labelled, first by their detractors and later by their admirers, as the "wolves of the sea." In this sense, Vancouver's encounter with captive killer whales provides a revealing register of the city's shifting relationship to the regional environment and its marine wildlife. At the same time, the killer whale debate exacerbated tensions between Vancouver's growing tourist economy and the emerging ethos of animal rights. It was a bit awkward, after all, that the city known for launching the "Save the Whales" campaign proved reluctant to set its own whales free. Although some Vancouverites expressed discomfort with orca captivity from the beginning, local businesses benefited tremendously from the drawing power of such an attraction. For its part, beginning in the mid-1970s, the Vancouver Aquarium publicly espoused anti-whaling and other

10.1 Skana being transferred to her pool at the Vancouver Aquarium, March 1967. Courtesy of Terry McLeod.

conservationist causes, in part to shield itself from criticism. Yet these efforts proved only temporarily successful. With the end of capture in the Pacific Northwest and the importation of orcas from Iceland, ecologically based arguments against captivity lost much of their force. As a result, by the late 1980s, animal rights activists had taken centre stage in the opposition to killer whale captivity. Their efforts were bolstered by a rising public distaste for trained animal performances – a form of public spectacle long associated with circuses, and more recently with the "Shamu" shows at San Diego's Sea World.[14] Such criticism continued to mount, despite the aquarium's shift to a more "natural" form of presentation. After gaining momentum through a successful campaign to shut down the Stanley Park Zoo in the early 1990s, the local animal rights movement mounted an

effective challenge to orca captivity at the aquarium. By that time, it was clear that the saga of Vancouver's killer whales was part of the transformation of the city itself.

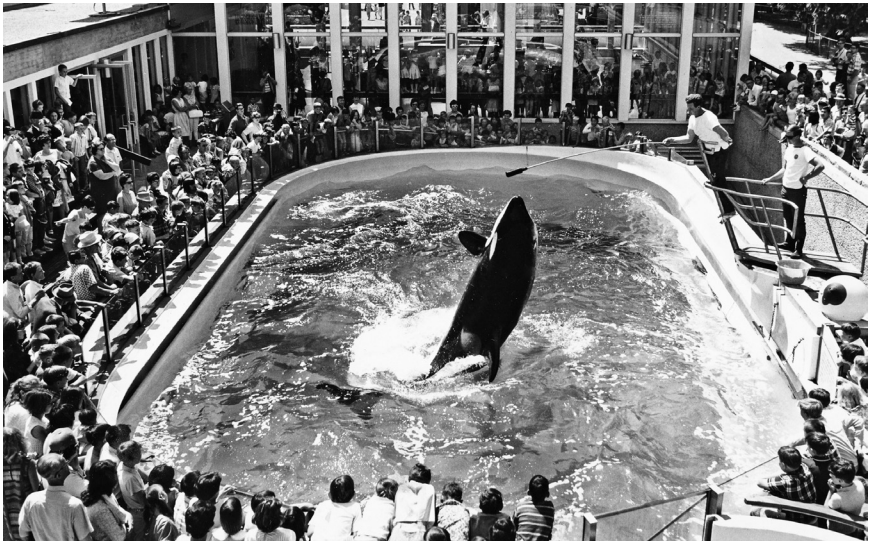
The arrival of Skana was hardly the first time residents of British Columbia had contemplated the meaning of whales. The coastal Indigenous peoples of the region had long incorporated cetaceans into their economies and belief systems, and orcas in particular held an important place in the folklore and clan structure of nations such as the Haida and Tlingit. One of the most prominent tales was that of "Natsilane," a young Tlingit who creates the first "blackfish," which in turn helps him drown his treacherous siblings before promising friendship with people.[15] Beginning in the 1840s, British Columbia became an important base for the commercial whaling industry, itself part of the extractive economy that characterized European settlement of the region. Whalers rarely targeted orcas, however, and the main postwar whaling port of Coal Harbour, on northern Vancouver Island, closed five months after Skana's March 1967 arrival to Vancouver.[16] Yet killer whales did draw the attention of local residents, many of whom considered "blackfish" a threat to the commercial and sport fishing industries.

In fact, the species was neither fish nor, strictly speaking, whale. The largest member of the dolphin family, *Orcinus orca* is the world's apex marine predator. Intelligent, adaptable, and intensely social within their matrilineal pods, killer whales have developed an astonishing array of feeding strategies throughout the ocean. In the Salish Sea, their population is sharply divided between two "ecotypes" or cultures: "transients," which live in small pods of between two and six animals and hunt seals and other marine mammals; and "residents," which live in larger pods of twenty to forty and feed primarily on salmon.[17] The resident killer whales are also generally separated into "northern" and "southern" populations, dividing approximately at Seymour Narrows, midway up Vancouver Island. Although whaling ships in Pacific Northwest waters sometimes encountered transients in their hunt for baleen whales, it was resident orcas that were most frequently targeted by local fishermen, who worried the "killers" would scare away, or simply devour, local salmon. Indeed, just as cougars and wolves were blamed for the scarcity of game and targeted by the government for elimination, orcas became a convenient scapegoat for declining salmon runs. And as in the case of land predators, this

perception spurred government violence. In 1960, for example, the federal Department of Fisheries went so far as to install a machine gun on Seymour Narrows, north of Vancouver, to eliminate killer whales – after deciding that a mortar would be impractical.[18]

By the mid-1960s, however, as in many other North American cities, the environmental politics of Vancouver were in flux. In addition to the rising concern with industrial pollutants raised by publications such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), a growing number of city dwellers were coming to view wildlife outside the framework of economic utility. Spurred by seminal works such as naturalist Farley Mowat's memoir *Never Cry Wolf* (1963), many urban Canadians re-evaluated the ecological role of previously vilified predators.[19] While this shift is often associated with the reduced importance of farming and ranching in the interior, it had its parallel on the West Coast, where the fishing economy was already in steep decline by the time local aquariums began acquiring their own "sea wolves" for display.[20]

Vancouver came by its first captive killer whale by accident. Since its 1956 founding as a public institution under the Stanley Park Board, the Vancouver Aquarium had grown steadily under the directorship of Chicago-born Murray Newman, who proved skilled at raising funds from local business leaders. Although the institution would later become famous for the exotic species Newman collected all over the world, it initially focused on regional fauna.[21] In the spring of 1964, in anticipation of the opening of the aquarium's new "Pacific Northwest Hall," Newman hired artist and part-time fisherman Samuel Burich to slay a killer whale and use its body as a model for a sculpture in the building's foyer. On 16 July, after months of waiting, Burich and his young assistant, Josef Bauer – another Vancouver fisherman – harpooned a juvenile orca in the nearby Gulf Islands. Despite being struck by the harpoon just behind the head and shot several times, the young animal survived. Initial news reports placed the event in a heroic light, with one *Vancouver Sun* reporter writing glowingly of the two brave Vancouverites doing "battle" with a killer whale.[22] In reality, Burich and Bauer were so touched by the orca's screams and the efforts of its pod-mates to keep it afloat that they found themselves shielding the animal when local fishermen arrived to help finish it off. Soon after, Newman decided to bring the young whale alive to Vancouver.



10.2 Skana performing at the Vancouver Aquarium with trainer Terry McLeod, 1968. Courtesy of Terry McLeod.

The inadvertent capture immediately raised spatial questions. Even a juvenile killer whale was too large for the aquarium's facilities, forcing Newman to find a holding area for his new prize. In fact, as the boat towing the whale approached the city, Newman's primary concern was not whether the public would object to the aquarium's harpooning a killer whale but rather where he could put the animal. After much cajoling, he convinced Burrard Drydock to provide space for a temporary pen in a flooded berth. Within days, however, the company's manager was complaining that the animal's presence was disrupting operations, not only by occupying a berth but also by distracting his workers and attracting thousands of sightseers.[23] On 24 July, the aquarium moved the whale to a shallow pen located at the Jericho Army Base, just west of the Kitsilano neighborhood. A range of local businesses and government agencies assisted in the ten-hour process: the dry dock allowed its berth to be towed away, Navy frogmen from the Esquimalt navy base in Victoria helped connect the pens, and the Vancouver police boats used their sirens to scare the reticent whale into its new enclosure. With all this equipment and time donated locally, Newman declared, the aquarium had a "debt" to the city

and "couldn't sell the whale." Eager to nurse the animal back to health, however, the veterinary staff declared the site closed to the public.[24]

Yet excited locals could hardly wait to catch a glimpse of the fearsome creature. Among them was seventeen-year-old Mark Perry, a Vancouver resident whose stepfather worked in the BC fish-packing industry. "Killer whales and fishermen were like oil and water," Perry recalled. "The fishermen thought the killer whales ate all the salmon, and every time they had a chance to take a shot at one, I think they did." When he learned of the animal's move to Jericho Beach, however, Perry decided to have a look, even if it meant sneaking onto an army base. "It was low tide, so I stayed down by the water, out of sight of the MPs," he explained. "And I heard this explosive breath out in the water to my left – scared the heck out of me." Rather than flee, however, Perry decided to linger, mesmerized: "Every time it came up to breath, the fin was there – the dorsal fin. And, I thought, 'wow, that's amazing. This huge animal isn't trying to tear the place apart.' I couldn't believe how placid it was." Moved by his experience, Perry attempted to share it with his stepfather. "He thought it was all a waste of time. I couldn't convince him," recalled Perry. "But it sure changed my attitude."[25] Indeed, the chance encounter helped shape his life's path. Three years later, he would catch a glimpse of Skana at the Vancouver Boat Show, and a year after that he would be working as one of her trainers at the Vancouver Aquarium. For Perry, as for so many other Vancouverites, an encounter with a captive killer whale was the beginning of a transformation in their views of the region's environment and wildlife.

The young orca's capture immediately raised the profile and prestige of the aquarium. Newman himself was named Vancouver's Man of the Year, and soon after he dubbed the animal "Moby Doll"—mistakenly believing it was female. The killer whale's presence also stirred interest among researchers, including Patrick McGeer, head of the Kinsmen Laboratory for Neurological Research at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and one of Vancouver's MLAs in the BC Legislature (1962–86). McGeer continued these efforts after the young animal's death. Weakened by his wounds and insufficient feeding, and exposed to the warm, polluted, and desalinated water on the surface of Vancouver's English Bay, Moby Doll died in October 1964. Scientists such as McGeer and future killer whale expert Michael Bigg used the ensuing necropsy as another opportunity to examine the understudied species, with McGeer harvesting the brain as a

unique specimen for his laboratory. For its part, the public in Vancouver, as it would many times over the following decades, mourned the death of a captive orca.[26]

For the next two and half years, Vancouver did not play much of a role in the unfolding story of people and orcas. Despite aggressive collection of other species in BC and throughout the world, Newman did not attempt another direct capture of a killer whale. In June 1965, he had a chance to acquire a second orca when fishermen near Namu, BC, accidentally netted a calf and young bull, but he lost interest when the calf escaped, and as a result it was Ted Griffin, owner of the Seattle Marine Aquarium, who stole the headlines. After paying the fishermen $8,000, Griffin transported the bull, now named "Namu," to Seattle, where it became an international sensation, particularly after Griffin began performing with the animal in the water. Even before Namu's death in the summer of 1966, Griffin was capturing killer whales in Puget Sound for sale to other aquariums. In the fall of 1965, Sea World bought a young female, which became the first "Shamu," and in February 1967, Griffin netted a resident pod in Puget Sound that included the future "Skana" – the orca that would put Vancouver and its aquarium back in the spotlight.[27]

By the time of Skana's arrival in March 1967, the city's political culture was changing. Over the previous year, the anti-war movement had grown more visible, due in part to an influx of US draft resisters.[28] In addition, many young Vancouverites, particularly in the Kitsilano neighbourhood, were espousing elements of the West Coast counterculture associated with California's Bay Area. Referring to San Francisco's famed hippie district, Mark Perry went so far as to dub Vancouver "Haight-Ashbury North." Young people were trying to "do their thing" in the face of "huge opposition from the mayor and the police," he recalled. "It was a tumultuous time."[29] In May 1967, less than two months after Skana's arrival, the first issue of the influential countercultural newspaper *Georgia Straight* appeared. Over the following years, American expatriates helped form the city's first environmentalist groups, including a Vancouver branch of the Sierra Club. And as historian Frank Zelko observes, "the site where Vancouver's alternative scene met the city's mainstream was Stanley Park," which became the site of regular "ecological protests" by 1969–70.[30] It was no coincidence that this same space witnessed the world's first public debate over killer whale captivity.

The central figure in the controversy was scientist Paul Spong. A native of New Zealand, Spong had been trained in psychology and neuroscience at UCLA, where he had immersed himself in the local counterculture and become fascinated with the work of John Lilly. A decade earlier, Lilly had won funding from the US Navy to establish research facilities in the Virgin Islands, where he conducted experiments on captive dolphins. By the 1960s, Lilly was a leading figure in the transformation of cetacean science, and his books *Man and Dolphin* (1961) and *The Mind of the Dolphin* (1967) made a deep impression on Spong.[31] As a result, when Spong learned of a position at UBC's Kinsmen Laboratory, which included a research contract with the Vancouver Aquarium, he leapt at the opportunity. Clean-shaven and bolstered by impressive credentials and a compelling proposal to study the aquarium's dolphins, he won the appointment. When Spong arrived with his wife Linda months later to begin his work, however, he made his allegiance to the counterculture clear. As his former research assistant Don White put it, "when Paul had come up [for the interview], he was very clean cut – short hair, wore a tie." When he arrived to take up the position, however, he looked "not dissimilar to Allen Ginsberg." In fact, according to White, Newman and his staff "were in shock" at Spong's hippie-like appearance and demeanour.[32]

Over the following year, Spong and White, then an honours psychology undergraduate student at UBC, conducted a series of tests on the aquarium's cetaceans. Aimed at assessing visual acuity, the tests initially focused on the facility's Pacific white-sided dolphins. In the spring of 1968, however, Newman instructed Spong to shift his research to Skana. The tests themselves were fairly simple, requiring Skana to distinguish between two lines whose distance from one another was adjusted. If she pushed the correct lever with her rostrum (snout), a light went on and she received a partial herring as a reward. Over the course of several weeks, Skana learned to respond accurately. During one session with White, however, she abruptly began giving entirely incorrect responses while vocalizing loudly. Interpreting her behaviour as an expression of boredom and frustration, White found himself profoundly affected. "For me, personally, that was transformative," he reflected. "I've got an organism in front of me [whose] behaviour I can explain by assuming it has similar thought processes to my own." Once he made that leap, White found himself asking, "What does it feel like to be in this tank?"[33]

Skana's behavior had an even more radical impact on Spong. Initially frustrated with the animal's intransigence, he, too, began contemplating the reasons behind her actions. One day in August 1968, as he sat pondering these questions with bare feet dangling in Skana's pool, he experienced a stunning display of Skana's subjectivity. After several benign passes, the young killer whale suddenly opened her mouth, lightly raking Spong's feet with her teeth and causing him to yell and yank his legs from the water. After recovering from his shock, Spong returned his feet to the water, only to have them raked once again. After a dozen passes, he finally managed to keep his feet still. Once he stopped responding, Skana ended her experiment.[34] For Spong, it was a revelatory moment, spiritually as well as intellectually. "I thought she did that deliberately to get rid of my attitude toward her," he later observed. "I considered that a great gift, as I've never felt fear around another whale again." In the process, he found himself wondering about the alien marine intelligence before him.[35]

The changes in Spong's thinking were closely tied to his immersion in the Vancouver counterculture. By the spring of 1968, he and Linda had moved to Kitsilano and were socializing with activists, musicians, and writers who regularly discussed issues such as the Vietnam War and social inequality. In fall 1968, the Spongs attended an anti-war speech on the UBC campus by American Yippie leader, which prompted a protest action at the faculty club.[36] Meanwhile, Spong was waging his own fight against the aquarium's power structure. Much of this centred on his interactions with an orca calf the aquarium had recently acquired from fishermen in Pender Harbour, north of Vancouver. Dubbed "Tung Jen" by Spong, the calf had been held in an isolation pool for months, where he seemed to grow despondent. Himself the father of a young son about Tung Jen's age, Spong became deeply concerned about the lonely calf's mental health. Convinced that both killer whales were suffering from social and acoustic deprivation, Spong brought noisemakers, musical instruments, and eventually live bands into the aquarium. Although Skana and Tung Jen seemed to respond eagerly, Spong's methods clashed with the aquarium's straight-laced approach. Murray Newman seemed worried that the counterculture was seeping into his staid institution. For head trainer Terry McLeod, however, the main issue was the safety of his animal charges. In particular, he was livid when he found wine glasses at the bottom of Skana's pool after one of Spong's nighttime gatherings.[37]

Soon after, Spong shifted to full rebellion. In April 1969, he delivered a lecture at UBC in which he emphasized the intelligence and social ties of killer whales as well as their need for acoustic stimulation. Arguing that the decision to keep Tung Jen in isolation had "severely damaged" the young animal psychologically, he concluded that "these whales should probably be freed, and that we should continue our studies with free or semicaptive *Orcinus orca* in its natural habitat."[38] Considering that many of Spong's aquarium and university colleagues were in attendance, it was an act of profound professional courage. It was also the last straw for Murray Newman, who cancelled Spong's contract with the aquarium. But the young scientist refused to go quietly. By June, he was mounting a sit-down protest calling for Skana's release, and he quickly gained the support of local activists. After suffering a mental breakdown, however, he checked into UBC's psychiatric ward, where a reporter from the *Georgia Straight* talked him into an ill-advised interview. "I was thinking of destroying the Vancouver Public Aquarium, and letting the whale go," he declared to the interviewer. "I was just beginning to get into Skana's space, just beginning to feel what the whale needed, what the whale wanted, WHAT THE WHALE WAS, just beginning to feel it, man. And they fired me."[39] Such ravings aside, Spong's sit-down protests deeply affected some aquarium staffers. "I'd go into work, and there were times when I felt, 'Jeez, I'm on the wrong side here,'" reflected Mark Perry. "I felt like I should be sitting with Paul."[40]

Over the following months, the public controversy over killer whale captivity at the aquarium seemed to abate. By the summer of 1970, Spong was devoting his energies to setting up a research outpost in Blackfish Sound at the northern end of Vancouver Island. Combining the counterculture's back-to-the-land impulse with Spong's desire to develop passive means of studying orcas, the venture would eventually lead to the founding of OrcaLab on Hanson Island. At the same time, the debate over the treatment of killer whales increasingly turned to the question of capture. In March 1970, Sealand in Victoria made headlines when it netted a small pod of orcas, including a young "albino" female.[41] The decision of Sealand owner Bob Wright to hold the remaining animals in the bay over the following months stirred public criticism as well as dissent from his employees, several of whom quit after one of the whales drowned. Meanwhile, in August 1970, the Seattle Marine Aquarium captured nearly the entire

southern resident orca population off Whidbey Island in Puget Sound. Onlookers protested the removal of six calves for sale, and the public was further horrified when the bodies of several calves washed up on shore in the following months.[42] Amid these dramatic events, the Vancouver Aquarium's display of two captive orcas received little attention.

Yet Newman's aquarium faced public criticism on related issues. In August 1970, just as the countercultural Vancouver band "Fireweed" was travelling north to serenade wild killer whales near Spong's new outpost, the aquarium captured and transported six narwhals to Vancouver for display. The three calves died almost immediately, and the adults soon after. For many Vancouverites, it was the first time they questioned the aquarium's collection operations, as well as the costs of captivity to animal life. Among the most outspoken critics was Irving Stowe, author of *Georgia Straight*'s "Greenpeace Is Beautiful" column. In September, Stowe quoted Patrick McGeer as stating: "It's really a much better life for a narwhal in captivity because of the dangers to them in the Arctic." Denouncing such "doublethink," Stowe asked, "Do you feel godlike enough to decide that deathtrip captivity is a 'better life' for a whale than its normal environment?"[43] Stowe's question was significant on several levels. First, McGeer had close ties to the Vancouver Aquarium, having studied Moby Doll during his captivity and participated in the Arctic narwhal expedition. Second, Stowe himself would play a central role in founding the organization that took its name from his column. Although "Greenpeace" would spend its early years focused on nuclear testing, commercial whaling, and the harp seal hunt, Stowe's comments underscored the connection between cetacean captivity at the aquarium and the city's shifting environmental politics.

The initial formation of Greenpeace had little to do with the aquarium or Paul Spong. Rather, it emerged from the so-called "Don't Make a Wave Committee," which launched a protest voyage against US nuclear testing on Alaska's Amchitka Island. For transportation, organizers hired John Cormack, a struggling fisherman whose boat, the *Phyllis Cormack*, was temporarily renamed the *Greenpeace* – a transaction that highlighted the simultaneous decline of the fishing industry and rise of environmentalism. The quixotic voyage captured headlines around the world and generated great enthusiasm in Vancouver, leading to the official foundation of the Greenpeace Foundation in early 1972. At this early stage, however, the

group remained focused on the existential and ecological threats emanating from the Cold War.[44]

Meanwhile, Spong was splitting his time between studying killer whales on Hanson Island and promoting social justice in Vancouver. In 1971, he played a prominent role in the debate over the Maplewood Mudflats. Located along the shores of North Vancouver, the area had long been a site of informal housing for marginalized people, including adherents to the counterculture such as Spong and his family. Although he vocally opposed city plans to clear the Mudflats, he was away in December 1971 when officials evicted residents and burned their homes. The thought of his wife and young son standing in the cold watching their home in flames further radicalized him and strengthened his tendency to look to cetaceans to inspire solutions for human problems.[45] Over the following years, he would repeatedly call on people to turn to killer whales as models for living in harmony with the environment and each other. In the process, he played a central role in popularizing the use of the term "orca" to underscore the shifting public view of the species.

The convergence of Greenpeace and the whaling question began with an impromptu chat between Spong and naturalist writer Farley Mowat. In November 1972, Mowat was visiting Vancouver to promote his new book, *A Whale for the Killing* (1972), an account of his failed attempt to save a trapped fin whale from the ignorance and cruelty of locals in a small Newfoundland village. Moved by Mowat's impassioned warning about the impact of commercial whaling, Spong resolved to jump into the fight. By December 1972, he and Linda were busily distributing "Save the Whale" pamphlets throughout the city, and in early June 1973, Spong organized a "Whale Celebration" in Stanley Park. The following autumn he met with Greenpeace leaders, convincing them to approve a fundraising initiative for an anti-whaling campaign. By the end of 1973, Vancouver had become the centre of an incipient movement to end commercial whaling.[46]

If Spong's "Whale Celebration" implicitly challenged the Vancouver Aquarium's cultural authority in Stanley Park, Greenpeace's anti-whaling campaign presented the aquarium with a public relations opportunity. Eager to associate his institution with conservation efforts, Newman allowed Spong to hold a press conference at the aquarium in February 1974 to announce his upcoming speaking tour in Japan, on the condition that he not raise the question of captivity. The event proved a transformative

experience for Greenpeace leader Bob Hunter. As reporters looked on, Skana joyfully greeted Spong, then gently took Hunter's head in her mouth before releasing him. While the orca's intentions are impossible to determine, the encounter left a deep impression on Hunter's psyche and helped drive his messianic crusade against whaling in the coming years. Indeed, in her encounter with Hunter, as in her earlier influence on Spong, Skana had unknowingly helped shape the development of Greenpeace.[47]

The organization's anti-whaling expedition in turn brought new attention to Vancouver as a centre of environmental and animal rights activism. In the spring of 1975, as Spong engaged in a publicity and intelligence-gathering tour of Iceland, Norway, and Western Europe, Greenpeace prepared to launch its first anti-whaling expedition. Focusing its efforts on the Soviet whaling fleet rumoured to be operating off the coast of California, it received a range of endorsements in Vancouver, with the aquarium, the BC Federation of Labour, the Vancouver Police Department, Socialist Premier David Barrett, and timber company MacMillan Bloedel all voicing their support.[48] On 25 April 1975, the Greenpeace crew visited Skana one last time for a "farewell serenade." The following day, they departed from Jericho Beach, the site of the now-closed naval base. None in the group seemed to reflect that it was near the very spot that Moby Doll had died eleven years earlier, but they did carry with them their new Greenpeace banner, which proudly incorporated an Indigenous Kwakwaka'wakw image of a killer whale. Two months later, the expedition's confrontation with the Soviet whalers, occurring simultaneously with the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission in London, brought Greenpeace massive international attention. After a triumphant visit to San Francisco, the crew returned to Vancouver where they were greeted by thousands.[49]

The expedition's media success had an immediate impact on the Pacific Northwest killer whale debate. In August 1975, just weeks after the Greenpeace team's return, Sealand captured a transient pod of six orcas in Pedder Bay near Victoria. Fresh from their confrontation with the Soviet fleet, Spong and his fellow Greenpeacers jumped into action, gaining the ear of the provincial government. Although maritime activities remained regulated by Ottawa, the BC government attempted to outlaw orca capture in provincial waters.[50] The following year, Washington State had a similar confrontation with the US government in response to a Sea World

capture operation in Puget Sound. In this charged atmosphere, officials at the Vancouver Aquarium realized that future acquisition of killer whales would have to come from outside the Pacific Northwest. At the time, this did not seem a pressing matter. Skana and Tung Jen (now renamed "Hyak") were still drawing large numbers of visitors, while the continued public focus on commercial whaling facilitated the aquarium's efforts to claim a conservationist mission. Indeed, by the late 1970s, it seemed that most Vancouverites had accepted captive killer whales as part of their city's cultural landscape.

Yet the following decade brought new challenges to the aquarium. In October 1980, after thirteen years of captivity, Skana died suddenly of a vaginal infection. Newman immediately began exploring options to acquire more killer whales, but he knew times had changed. Because "the people of British Columbia and particularly those of the Victoria-Vancouver region had become familiar with killer whales through the aquarium and the media," he reflected, "I knew it would be unpopular for us to try to capture a live killer whale locally and felt a little frustrated about it." Instead, he announced plans to purchase killer whales from Iceland. Although the aquarium succeeded in importing two orcas (soon to be named "Finna" and "Bjossa") in December 1980, it faced fierce opposition from Greenpeace and other environmental and animal rights groups.[51] The criticism only grew over the following years as Newman used the acquisition of the whales to push for a substantial expansion of the aquarium. His logic was simple: as he later put it, "you can't remain small and keep killer whales."[52] But many in the public perceived a clash between the importance of Stanley Park as "natural" space, and the expansion of the aquarium's "artificial" whale shows.

These debates came on the cusp of a new era in Vancouver's environmental politics. The mid-1980s brought a surge of environmental and animal rights activism in the city, which continued to grow into the 1990s. At the heart of this shift was the city's changing economic and demographic profile. Although Vancouver remained an important hub for extractive industries such as timber, its culture was increasingly defined by young, middle-class residents more oriented toward the urban economy, and hence inclined to view the environment and wildlife more in terms of recreation and spiritual connection than extraction and livelihood. Vancouver's municipal government celebrated this new identity through its

hosting of a world fair, EXPO '86, which emphasized the city's transition away from its extractive past and toward a modern future. Among the attractions city leaders sought to highlight was the Vancouver Aquarium and its killer whales. Many residents, however, found the aquarium's trained performances, as well as the nearby Stanley Park Zoo, offensive. Indeed, it was no coincidence that the following year brought the first of three public referenda on the future of the zoo.

At the centre of these efforts was Annelise Sorg. Born into an international banking family in Lima, Peru, Sorg had lived in Toronto and Ottawa before moving to Vancouver in 1983. A lifelong champion of animal rights, she quickly connected with local activists, including the Vancouver Humane Society. Hired as an interpreter during Vancouver's EXPO '86, Sorg had shepherded foreign dignitaries through the aquarium on VIP tours, an experience that left her incensed at what she considered the "demeaning" nature of the whale shows. The following year, she was appointed head of the Humane Society's Entertainment Committee. In addition to pushing successfully for a ban on circuses within city limits, she led the fight to close the Stanley Park Zoo.[53] Driven primarily by animal rights sentiment rather than environmental concerns, Sorg and her colleagues were well positioned to make their case. After all, by the late 1980s, there was no compelling *ecological* reason for the release of the aquarium's killer whales. By this time, most scientists agreed that the major threat to the local orca population was pollution, maritime traffic, and the depletion of salmon. Ecologically, the fate of three orcas – two of which were from Iceland – was of negligible importance. On the other hand, a growing number of Vancouverites were uncomfortable with the killer whale shows, which many believed denigrated an animal increasingly revered as a symbol of regional culture.

Some within the aquarium shared these sentiments. In 1984, the institution unveiled a sculpture entitled "Killer Whale, Chief of the Undersea World." Although its creator, Haida artist Bill Reid, later disavowed it, the sculpture became part of the aquarium's effort to join the regional celebration of the species.[54] Soon after, in an effort to mute criticism and distance itself from the circus-like atmosphere of Sea World, the aquarium ended its scheduled whale shows, instead encouraging visitors to observe the animals' "natural" behaviours.[55] At the same time, it made several moves to bolster its educational and scientific credentials, including

hiring biologist John Ford, who would become a leading expert on killer whales.[56] Along with the end of orca capture in the region, this growing emphasis on research and education helped mute the environmentalist critique of the aquarium. Yet these changes were less suited to dispelling the claims of animal rights activists, who focused on the lives and emotional health of individual animals rather than the long-term fate of species and ecosystems. In fact, the aquarium likely made itself more vulnerable to such protests through its naming practices. In contrast to Sea World, for example, which tended to mask the individuality of its captive orcas with glitzy "Shamu" shows, the Vancouver Aquarium gave each animal a unique, and geographically evocative, name. While this decision likely helped emphasize the "foreign" origins of "Finna" and "Bjossa," it also enabled activists to refer to the animals by name, rather than simply as "the orcas." The implications of this became apparent following the death of Hyak in February 1991.[57] After performing a necropsy, the aquarium opted to dispose of its long-serving captive by cutting him into pieces and dropping them into the Strait of Georgia. When local tides washed several grisly pieces ashore, however, the aquarium was forced to admit they belonged to Hyak, prompting widespread outrage. Aquarium staffers and the broader public were further saddened when a calf sired by Hyak and delivered by Bjossa died shortly after birth.[58]

In the wake of these events, public misgivings toward the captivity of killer whales and other large mammals continued to grow. One indirect expression of this sentiment came in a 1993 referendum, in which city voters stunned the Park Board by choosing to shut down Stanley Park Zoo. Although the vote did not directly affect the aquarium and its captive orcas, it was becoming clear that a growing number of Vancouverites viewed animal captivity as incompatible with the civic and environmental meaning of Stanley Park. Indeed, subsequent analysis revealed that many believed they were voting to close the aquarium as well as the zoo. Such sentiment helped convinced Sorg and others that a campaign against killer whale captivity was feasible, despite the immense political influence of the aquarium.[59] And as they geared up for this next struggle, activists received an unexpected boost from the Hollywood movie *Free Willy*, which depicted a young boy helping a killer whale escape from an aquarium. Released in July 1993 amid the preparations for the zoo referendum, the popular film spurred private efforts to release the animal used to make the

movie – an Iceland-caught male named Keiko then held in Mexico – and brought greater public attention to the issue of killer whale captivity.[60]

In the following years, the Vancouver Aquarium found itself drawn into an increasingly heated debate. Tension only grew when John Nightingale replaced the retiring Murray Newman. An aggressive operator with previous controversial stints at the Seattle Public Aquarium and New York Aquarium, Nightingale clashed with activists and aquarium staffers alike. Among the most contentious issues was his demand for the resumption of scheduled killer whale shows.[61] In the eyes of many aquarium employees, the institution could not ignore changes in public opinion. "For the first twenty years, Vancouverites loved the killer whales," recalled former aquarium employee Kathryn Cook. "It was just like a love affair." By the mid-1990s, however, there were frequent protests outside the aquarium entrance. They tended to be small affairs, she noted. "Annelise and her little crew of supporters would come." Yet Cook conceded that the small protests belied a larger groundswell of public sentiment. "If you were to poll Vancouver back in the 1990s," she speculated, "you would have found a strong number of people felt that killer whale captivity was wrong." Moreover, she noted, some staffers shared their misgivings. The death of another calf born to Bjossa in March 1995 proved particularly painful. As Cook recalled, both within the aquarium and through the city, "there was a real sense of sadness when the calf died." Throughout the 1990s, she observed, "people were wrestling with [the question] 'we love it, but is it right?' 'Is it still okay?' Inside and outside the aquarium, those conversations were taking place."[62]

Events in the late 1990s finally tipped the balance. In 1996, Sorg and other activists convinced the city to pass a municipal bylaw restricting the importation of whales and dolphins into Vancouver parks. That same year, the Park Board, now with members sympathetic to the activists, forbade the aquarium from holding any killer whale captured after 1996. The death of Finna in July 1997 further soured many. Although Nightingale pushed for a continued killer whale program, public opposition had grown too fierce, and in April 2001 the aquarium sold its last orca, Bjossa, to Sea World in San Diego, where she died six months later.[63]

The departure of Bjossa ended a significant chapter in the history of Vancouver and the broader Pacific Northwest. Beginning with the arrival of Moby Doll in July 1964, and especially following the purchase of

Skana in March 1967, the Vancouver Aquarium had become a famous and contentious site of killer whale display. The presence of orcas brought expansion and fame for the institution and its top officials and contributed to the rapid growth of Vancouver's tourist industry throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Yet the debate over killer whale captivity also played an underappreciated role in the city's shifting environmental politics. Informed by the growing counterculture of the late 1960s and 1970s, encounters between orcas and people at the aquarium helped radicalize key scientific figures such as Paul Spong and had a profound impact on the institutional development of Vancouver-based Greenpeace. Although the debate over killer whale captivity subsided in the late 1970s, its resurgence in the late 1980s and early 1990s came to reflect the city's shift from an outpost of extractive industry to a middle-class urban centre that valued the environment and wildlife for their recreational and symbolic meaning. By the time of Bjossa's departure in April 2001, a large number of Vancouverites viewed the captive orcas of Stanley Park as incompatible with the imagined values and identity of their city.

Yet the departure of the last killer whale did not end the captivity debate. The aquarium still held small cetaceans such as dolphins and belugas for display, and animal rights activists continued to press for their release. In 2005, activists exposed the aquarium's unauthorized importation of dolphins from Japan, and soon after, Nightingale announced an ambitious plan to develop a live-breeding program of dolphins and belugas, as part of a $60 million expansion of the aquarium into the old grounds of the Stanley Park Zoo. Over the following years, the protests continued, gaining a boost with the 2013 release of the documentary *Blackfish*, which criticized the history of killer whale captivity, particularly at Sea World.[64] As it had so often before, the aquarium argued that the protestors were only a "small group," dwarfed by the much larger number of willing patrons. What the aquarium could be less sure of, however, was broader public opinion in a city that increasingly considered cetacean captivity, in the words of the *Vancouver Courier*, "a relic that must end."[65]

Notes

1 "Whale of a Time Awaits Walter," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 11 March 1967.

2 Ted Griffin, *Namu: Quest for the Killer Whale* (Seattle: Gryphon West Press, 1982), 216–21. Although "blackfish" was an Indigenous term for orcas, it had assumed a pejorative connotation among white residents in the region by the postwar period.

3 "Killer Whales 'Talk' Over Telephone," *St. Joseph News-Press*, 17 March 1967.

4 "Walter Is Really Whale of a Girl," *Vancouver Sun*, 21 March 1967; Murray Newman, *Life in a Fishbowl* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1994), 107–8.

5 On the development of the BC tourist industry see Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890–1970* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005).

6 On the origins of Greenpeace in Vancouver, see Frank Zelko, *Make It A Green Peace!: The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), chapter 3.

7 See, for example, Matthew Klingle, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); and Jeffrey C. Sanders, *Seattle and the Roots of Urban Sustainability* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

8 On conservation, see, for example, Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006); and Kurkpatrick Dorsey, *The Dawn of Conservation Diplomacy: U.S.-Canadian Wildlife Protection Treaties in the Progressive Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998). On whaling, see Kurkpatrick Dorsey, *Whales and Nations: Environmental Diplomacy on the High Seas* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2013); and D. Graham Burnett, *The Sounding of the Whale: Science and Cetaceans in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 329.

9 Susan G. Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Susan Nance, *Entertaining Elephants: Animal Agency and the Business of the American Circus* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

10 Loo, *States of Nature*.

11 Sean Kheraj, *Inventing Stanley Park: An Environmental History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 190.

12 Zelko, *Make It A Green Peace!*.

13 Loo, *States of Nature*, 10.

14 See Davis, *Spectacular Nature;* and Nance, *Entertaining Elephants*.

15 See Mary Giraudo Beck, *Heroes and Heroines: Tlingit-Haida Legend* (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Press, 1989), 1–14. See also Robert Bringhurst, *A Story as Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2011).

16 Robert Webb, *On the Northwest: Commercial Whaling in the Pacific Northwest, 1790–1967* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988); L. M. Nichol et al., *British Columbia Commercial Whaling Catch Data 1908 to 1967: A Detailed Description of the B.C. Historical Whaling Database* (Nanaimo: Pacific Biological Station, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2002).

17 For an introduction to the species, see John K. B. Ford, Graeme M. Ellis, and Kenneth C. Balcomb, *Killer Whales: The Natural History and Genealogy of Orcinus Orca in British Columbia and Washington State* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

18 John K. B. Ford, "Killer Whales of the Pacific Northwest Coast," *Journal of the American Cetacean Society* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 16.

19 Loo, *States of Nature*, 173–77.

20 On the history of the Salish Sea fisheries, see Lissa K. Wadewitz, *The Nature of Borders: Salmon, Boundaries, and Bandits of the Salish Sea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

21 Newman, *Life in a Fishbowl*, chapters 1–3.

22 "Two Battle Killer Whale in Strait," *Vancouver Sun*, 16 July 1964.

23 Murray Newman, "Close Encounters of an Unexpected Kind," Moby Doll Symposium, Saturna Island, 25 May 2013; "Killer Whale to Quit Dock for Jericho Beach Pen," *Vancouver Sun*, 18 July 1964.

24 "Moby Doll the Killer Whale Is Not For Sale," *Daily Free Press* (Nanaimo), 25 July 1964.

25 Author interview of Mark Perry, 15 May 2013.

26 "Death of Whale Claimed Needless," *Vancouver Sun*, 10 October 1964.

27 Two years later, a similar sensation hit Victoria. In April 1969, the newly created Sealand of the Pacific acquired its own orca, also from Griffin. The young bull "Haida," along with a rare "white" killer whale captured the following year, would draw unprecedented attention and tourist traffic to the growing provincial capital.

28 John Hagan, *Northern Passage: American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

29 Author interview of Mark Perry, 15 May 2013.

30 Zelko, *Make It A Green Peace!*, 30–39; quote from 57.

31 Burnett, *Sounding of the Whale*, chapter 6.

32 Rex Weyler, *Song of the Whale* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1986), chapter 1; author interview of Don White, 28 September 2013.

33 Author interview of Don White, 28 September 2013.

34 For the best account of Spong's interaction with Skana, see Weyler, *Song of the Whale*, chapter 1.

35 Paul Spong, "Adventures with Orcas," Saturna Island, 3 May 2014.

36 Rex Weyler, *Greenpeace: How a Group of Ecologists, Journalists, and Visionaries Changed the World* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004), 47–48.

37 Weyler, *Song of the Whale*, 46; author interview of Terry McLeod, 25 April 2015.

38 Weyler, *Song of the Whale*, 53.

39 "Dr. Spong Wails," *Georgia Straight*, 26 June–2 July 1969.

40 Author interview of Mark Perry, 15 May 2013.

41 "Killer Whale Captured," *Palm Beach Daily News*, 5 March 1970.

42 Jason Colby, "The Whale and the Region: Orca Capture and Environmentalism in the New Pacific Northwest," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 24, no. 2 (2013): 425–54.

43 "Can An Enemy of the Whales Be a Friend of the People?," *Georgia Straight*, 23–30 September 1970.

44 Zelko, *Make It A Green Peace!*, chapter 4.

45 Weyler, *Song of the Whale*, 99–100.

46 On Greenpeace's fundraising, and particularly the "Whale Show" and December 1973 concert, see Zelko, *Make It A Green Peace!*, chapter 5.

47 Robert Hunter, *Warriors of the Rainbow: A Chronicle of the Greenpeace Movement from 1971 to 1979* (Amsterdam: Greenpeace International, 2011[1979]), 139–42.

48 Zelko, *Make It A Green Peace!*, chapter 7.

49 Ibid., chapter 9.

50 Weyler, *Greenpeace*, 344.

51 "A Whale of a Flight," *Ottawa Citizen*, 22 December 1980.

52 Newman, *Life in a Fishbowl*, 191–200, quote on 191.

53 Author interview with Annelise Sorg, 22 March 2014.

54 Reid interviewed in Douglas Hand, *Gone Whaling: A Search for Orcas in Northwest Waters* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1994), 75–76.

55 Author interview of Elin Kelsey, 9 July 2013.

56 Over the next thirteen years, Ford would conduct acoustic research on the aquarium's captive orcas, as well as studies of wild killer whale populations.

57 "Star Killer Whale Dies at Vancouver Aquarium," *Spokesman Review*, 18 February 1991. Just four days later, at Sealand, a bull orca named Tilikum, acquired from Iceland, killed a trainer named Keltie Byrne, prompting owner Bob Wright to sell the animal to Sea World.

58 Author interview with Kathryn Cook, 8 May 2013.

59 Author interview with Annelise Sorg, 22 March 2014.

60 For a superb analysis of these events, see the documentary *A Whale of a Business*, *Frontline* (November 1997).

61 Author interview of Elin Kelsey, 9 July 2013.

62 Author interview of Kathryn Cook, 9 May 2013.

63 "Orcas to Get More Companionship," *Victoria Advocate,* 20 April 2001.

64 As recently as Sunday, 23 March 2014, activists mounted a "children's protest" against cetacean captivity at the Vancouver Aquarium, with many of the young participants citing *Blackfish* as their inspiration. For media coverage of this event, see http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Canada/BC/ID/2444043795/.

65 Geoff Olson, "Captive Whales a Relic That Must End," *Vancouver Courier*, 27 March 2014.