

## Blackfish

I see that the Georgia Aquarium has killed another Beluga whale. I use the strong invective, kill, because I don't believe whales should be held in captivity. I believe the confined space that is dictated by housing an animal in an attraction gives rise to a number of physical illnesses. We can only guess at what the mental stresses of being confined in such a small area does to their psyche. As vast as the Georgia Aquarium appears to us visitors, we humans would tire eventually of being confined to the space devoted to the whale sharks. Imagine how confining and frustrating the aquarium is to the whales. It would be like putting one of your guppies in a teacup. It wouldn't be long before the guppy would be belly up.

The sad part of this story is that I have been to the Aquarium and recognized the absolute joy that the school children express when visiting the exhibit. The exhibits are amazing and very educational. No problem there. Where I draw the line is the confinement of a species that would have the oceans of the world as their playground, if they were free. The fact that the whales are mammals, and very likely as intelligent as humans, is the decider for me. Dolphins and whales have the ability to not only learn for themselves, but pass that information on to others. The ability to teach was originally thought to be just a human ability.

To me, the more we learn about the ocean's mammals, points out that incarcerating them is morally wrong. Like the wrongfully convicted man, the captured whale or dolphin spends his days locked away from his friends and family in conditions that are less than ideal. The fact that the dolphins and whales are put in a "sideshow" type environment is even more cruel than how we treat convicted humans.

There has been a great deal of controversy stirred up by the CNN documentary, "Blackfish". The documentary tells the story of how Seaworld went about capturing its whales for its exhibits, and the care of the whales after captivity. The bulk of the documentary focuses on the orca, or killer whale, Tilikum. Tilikum was involved in the deaths of three people and there is graphic footage of one of the trainers being attacked. It is shocking stuff, and the interviews of the various trainers that were willing to talk is heartbreaking.

The trainers loved the whales and certainly loved their jobs. What transpired over time was the trainer's realization that what they were doing was morally wrong, and

in the case of Tilikum, deadly. The trainer's were greatly concerned that the offspring of Tilikum were potentially as deadly as their dad, and those offspring would be sent off to perform at other sites around the world. The trainers saw this as another compelling reason to release the orcas back into the wild. Seaworld didn't see it that way.

Seaworld has stuck to their guns and continued to feature orcas in their shows. To the dismay of their shareholders, less and less people are coming to their shows. Eventually the Seaworld folks will have to decide if they will change their policies based on public opinion.

Maybe we could get a "Whitefish" documentary for the Georgia Aquarium's Beluga whales.