SECRET PSYCHOLOGICAL REVELATIONS OF DOLPHINS IN CAPTIVITY

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Secret Psychological Revelations of Dolphins in Captivity

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As with most things, the early years of Sea Animal training consisted of trials and errors, experimentations and false starts. Again, as with most things, those early efforts were analyzed and the successful efforts were kept and incorporated into the regular training routines. Improvements in techniques were implemented and over time, training evolved into an art form, a scientifically based art form.

SeaWorld, with its many parks is one of the most successful marine animal parks. It employs tested training techniques to not only enhance the entertainment enjoyment of the park quests, but also, and most importantly, to enhance the environment and mental stimulation of the animals.

Great care is taken by the trainers to ensure that the animals are provided for in as many ways as is humanly possible. This statement is critically important because it recognizes those human shortcomings, but it is also a statement as to those human shortcomings being constantly worked over, reassessed and reviewed with an eye toward continually improving the life of the animals. This statement is also cognizant of the host of detractors out there, who are quiet vocal in their distrust of the various animal programs. Ongoing efforts by SeaWorld and other marine animal parks attempt to educate those detractors, as well as the general public as to the value of those programs for the animals. Additionally, is the research that leads to a better understanding of the human/animal interactions and the human/human interactions. Finally, there is the value of those programs for pure entertainment purposes.

Some would even say that the use of animals for entertainment has reached the highest levels of human/animal interactions.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The use of animals in entertainment is nearly as old as man himself. In the United States, it began as an art known as the Circus. People are fascinated with animals that perform even when just doing simple tricks. This includes behaviors that the average person cannot train their own house pets to do, but particularly so, for the interaction with wild animals from a hostile environment. People want to see that same intimate relationship that is found in house pets with wild animals. Animals that would usually attack or create an unsafe situation can be shown as gentle and safe to be around. This is why it can be argued that the use of animals for entertainment has reached the highest level of human/animal interaction.

Man’s earliest interactions with animals were as a source of food and clothing. Later came domestication with animals becoming beasts of burden as a source of labor followed by bringing animals into the home as pets for friendship. More recently has been the use of animals for purposes of entertainment. Circus’s were very popular for that, having elephants on display, keepers riding on their backs, keepers bringing lions and tigers out on display and having them obey every rule and command was and is fascinating. This form of animal interaction was very different from domestic pets and was a must see event. People would make it a point to go to the circus. Training animals and having them on display was making money. As the money began to flow in the crowds started to look for bigger and more fascinating animals. The more exotic the animal, the better the draw.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF ANIMAL TRAINING

As the circus began to attract large crowds, the circus owners began to look for the most exotic animals available. That search led to the beginnings of marine mammals in captivity. “Dolphins were first kept and used for paid entertainment in the Marine Studios dolphinarium founded in 1938 in St. Augustine, Florida” (Reed 14). One of the first dolphins was Flipper, who was trained to do just a hand full of tricks or behaviors; beginning with jumping through a hula-hoop. This became a huge franchise. This simple behavior began a whole new world of animal training. The world’s entertainment venues were now taking marine mammals and having them live successfully outside of their normal habitat. How intriguing would that be to the public; to be able to finally see such animals that they only had a chance to see pictures of in books. One needs only to look at the early TV series about Flipper to know the answer. Flipper was an Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin, and the viewing public was getting the chance to not only see dolphins in National Geographic style documentaries, they were also getting the chance to see and meet them up close and personal as the dolphins performed on screen in a television series. “Presenting an animal with a keeper can significantly change zoo-goers’ feelings about a living thing. This knowledge can be used as a tool for zoos in the fight for conservation of wildlife. When zoo-goers see presentations of a keeper interacting with a creature, they not only get more information than they would have had if they had just viewed it in an enclosure, but they are also able to relate to the keeper as a model” (Clausen 29).

The first facility to have dolphins in captivity was MarineLand in St. Augustine, Florida. There, trainers quickly learned that dolphins could be instructed and that the dolphins caught on rather quickly (Clausen 12). Training animals is an art. One of the next marine mammals to be trained was the Killer Whale. “Killer Whales have taught us to always expect the impossible. This helps us more than it does the animal. If there is no response, that’s a sign that we need more educating ourselves, not the animal” (Blanchard et al. 13). At Marineland the Dolphin shows became the natural descendants of the popular Flipper.
Television show. At Marineland, dolphins were trained in a variety of behaviors. One of which was the continuously popular behavior of jumping through a hula-hoop. In the early years, the behaviors were called “tricks”. Let’s see a dolphin do a trick, dog tricks, animal tricks. As time passed, “tricks” were translated into “behaviors”. Behaviors are defined as a discriminative stimulus that an animal will perform for some type of reinforcement. Whether it is primary reinforcement, which is usually food, or a secondary reinforcement, which can be touch, such as back rubs, belly rubs, etc. Ice cubes, and EED’s (Environmental Enrichment Devices) which is another word for toys are also used as secondary reinforcements. Today, the politically correct term for animals that entertain is to say they are performing a behavior.

The very first dolphin facility did not do nearly the types of training that dolphin facilities do today, but it was the beginning. The facilities trained dolphins for shows and presentations that would draw the general public in and pay to see the dolphins perform. As the years went by, dolphins became more popular and a greater number of people became interested. In 1964, SeaWorld San Diego Park was opened in San Diego California, by a couple of college friends. The originally thought was to open a restaurant on the water while guests could be entertained by the Sea Lions. That idea had expanded by the time the park had opened. That original idea had become more elaborate with touch pools holding stingrays, orchids, and sea stars and a dolphin show. Eventually, SeaWorld added a Sea Lion and River Otter show and the most famous of all, a Killer Whale show, Shamu. That stage name is still used today.
CHAPTER 3

ANIMAL TRAINING 101

Animal training has evolved over the years. Animals that have shown signs of aggression have successfully been dealt with through the use of positive reinforcement and operant conditioning. This is the process by which a trainer only reinforces the desired behaviors (those that you want the dolphins to repeat) and the trainer pays as little attention to the undesired behaviors as possible, (this method of training works well with any animal, including spouses, siblings, co-workers, etc.) When SeaWorld first opened, many Trainers would use a system called Delta. The Delta system occurred when the trainer would take a metal rod and bang it against the pool whenever the animal executed an incorrect behavior. Upon hearing the banging the animal returned directly to the stage. The animal received no reinforcement. So even though they responded to the delta, they were not reinforced because they had performed the wrong behavior. That is when the LRS was applied. The LRS is “Least Reinforcing Scenario.” Whenever an animal offers an incorrect behavior and the Trainer does not draw attention to it. The trainer waits for the animal to terminate on its own, and for to return. The Trainer, looks at the animal for about three seconds with no emotion whatsoever and then the two move on to the next behavior. So imagine yourself as a dolphin, when you have done something correct. You return to your Trainer where she is smiling, laughing, showing you signs that you are correct and she gives you some type of reinforcement whether its primary (food) or secondary’s (rub downs, ice, Jell-O or EED’s). If you return to your Trainer after performing an incorrect behavior and all that your Trainer is doing, is standing there with no emotion, it’s very clear to you that your Trainer was expecting something else. You have applied a training method that works well when it comes to communicating with your animal correctly. It gives you the ability to establish a baseline with what you’re looking for in the relationship that you want to build with your animal. Learning to apply the LRS is an important stepping-stone in building a strong and successful relationship. “The ten keys to successful Training are one be patient, plan ahead, be realistic, be kind, avoid punishment, reward effectively, be generous, set goals
and stay positive. The simple truth of training is that you get what you pay attention to. Set your animal up to succeed, limit the options and reinforce what’s going right, then soon you have an animal that everyone will enjoy” (Bielakiewicz and Gerilyn 46). Following such simple rules leads to success and a better understanding between you and your animal.

Trainers communicate with the dolphins by using hand signals, body gestures and by whistles. Facial expressions and body movement play a huge part in how these animals are able to be trained. When a baby dolphin is first born and starts to show interest in the Trainer, the Trainer offers her hand as a hand target. When the dolphins come up and touch the Trainers’ hand with their rostrum, (the upper and lower jaw of their mouth), a whistle is blown and a fish or an ice cube is given to reinforce them. That is how they pair the whistle with something correct. Dolphins have a higher level of hearing than humans do, so the whistle is used to let the dolphins know that they have done something correct. From that point, Trainers begin to use target poles, (long white poles with a little buoy on the end), this long stick acts as a training tool to help shape the topography of a certain behavior. When training behaviors such as a back dive, front flip, breaches, tail walks, the long sticks are flexible enough to rotate in a circle, stretch across the pool and strong and quick enough for the dolphin to follow. Dolphins cannot hear human voices; the sound of a voice is at a frequency range below the normal hearing range of dolphins. That is one of the reasons why Trainers use the whistle so we can tell them they are doing something right. This is especially useful when the dolphin is in mid air, because the trainer’s arms are not long enough arms to reach out and pat them down when they are in the middle of doing an aerial 15-20 feet off the surface of the water. When they do something correct the whistle is blown, which is called a bridge. Some type of reinforcement follows the bridge. A tactile bridge is two taps anywhere on the dolphin’s body or a finger snap under water. A snap underwater can also be used as a signal to help a dolphin know where to go if pointed to another location where another control trainer is stationed. These signals are learned. Calves will learn such behaviors and rules by shadowing their mothers and other adult dolphins. Many behaviors can also be captured when pairing a calf or another dolphin with a dolphin that already knows the behavior. Most of the behaviors a calf learns are captured at a very young age. The calves are green and eager to learn and so you as a Trainer have the opportunity to take advantage of this time period and condition them to observe and shadow the members of
their pods. “There are several different forms of conditioning, and each may produce abnormal behavior as well as normal behavior. In operant conditioning, for example, humans and animals learn to behave in certain ways as a result of receiving rewards, or satisfying consequences, whenever they do so. In modeling, individuals learn responses simply by observing other individuals and repeating their behavior” (Comer 48).

Time lines for a dolphin to learn the various behaviors cannot be predicted. All dolphins have their own learning levels just like people do. Where some students excel in math and science, other students do well in literature and the arts. It is the same with the dolphins. Some dolphins are extremely intelligent, others more athletic, others more mellow, stubborn, sassy, etc. One of the behaviors that is trained is a simple behavior called a ventral pec wave away. This is where a dolphin after being given the signal, swims off on their back away from you while waving their pectoral flippers. It is very cute and popular behavior. It took 8 months to train that behavior to one dolphin and conversely only 15 minutes to another. The first dolphin is an animal that tries very hard at learning new behaviors, but has difficulty. This dolphin would get caught up on a step in the approximations of learning and consequently begin to assume that was all it had to learn. She would not pay attention to the next baby steps necessary to finish the behavior. Baby steps are the approximations taken to accomplish the behavior. The second dolphin was just like a sponge when learning anything new. She was patient, and capable of seeing the big picture, and learned on the first approximation and waited to see what the next step was, so that she could then put them all together. This second dolphin thrived on learning new behaviors, was eager to learn, and was an over achiever. Age does play a part in learning; the second dolphin was just a baby and very innocent. The first dolphin, however, was eager to learn, but she was older and also a Grandmother. As such her many varied experiences interfered with her ability to focus entirely on the acquisition of the new behavior. All that being said is very anthropomorphic. But everyone knows that Trainers add their own analyses no matter how politically correct it may be. It’s a skill that you must learn; it’s an art that you must practice at. There is so much gray when it comes to different training methods. However the ABC’s of animal training is you want to reinforce the right behavior. Reinforce the correct behavior. “SeaWorld trainers use positive reinforcement to train dolphins and other animals. All training is based on reinforcing desired behaviors and not reinforcing undesired
behaviors. Reinforcers motivate a dolphin to repeat desired behaviors. A variety of interesting, stimulating reinforcers are the key to training dolphins at SeaWorld” (Sea World Inc., Bottlenose Dolphin 33).

SeaWorld San Diego gathers many different species for their collections of animals. At the park there are beluga whales, pilot whales, killer whales, walrus’s, sea lions, harbor seals, fur seals, penguins, etc. The collection of these animals requires lots of paperwork and permits (Bendiner 148). With the passage of the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act it became illegal to interact with marine mammals off the coast of the United States. Interacting with these animals can interfere with their natural habitats and jeopardize their survival. Later it became illegal to collect animals from their natural environment. Yet, on occasion it is permitted, but only with the proper protocol of paper work. SeaWorld’s popularity has grown, and they have opened other parks over the years: SeaWorld Ohio, SeaWorld Orlando and SeaWorld San Antonio. They eventually sold SeaWorld Ohio and opened up Discovery Cove in Florida, an interactive park where you get a more intimate animal interaction with the dolphins and a chance to swim with over 120 different species of fish and feed over 80 different species of birds. Interacting with dolphins and other animals has become a mainstream activity. SeaWorld San Diego started their interactive program in 1999 (“Education”). The public was able to come into the shallow portion of the pool in a group of 4-6 people for 20 minutes and meet a dolphin. It was a chance to get up close and personal with amazing animals, such as the Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin. What society had been exposed to on television and in film and of course live show entertainment, could now experience it for themselves. This interaction began the whole start of “swimming with dolphins”. Over the years multiple parks would have open interactive programs of several different categories; a shallow interaction, or swim with them in deep water.

SeaWorld San Diego along with its sister parks started more interactive programs and behind the scenes tours. One could now interact with beluga whales, and meet, touch and feed dolphins during these behind the scenes tours. The great successes of these programs, both financially for the parks and genuine enjoyment by the visiting public, grew and evolved and have become a staple of the parks. One popular staple is the ability to get up close and personal with the dolphins at the feeder pool. SeaWorld San Diego used to sell trays of fish to the public. This process involved a bunch of people coming up to the wall to
feed the dolphins while getting a chance to touch them as well. As you might predict this process was very chaotic. This bunch of People (Guests) pushing and shoving for space on the wall, animals displacing one another for fish from the guests while getting reinforcement for incorrect behavior from the guests, all while being “teased” by the guests. For example, one guest shoved his 6-month old infant in front of a group of people to cut in line thereby causing his child’s shoe to fall in the water. Creating an unsafe environment, which led to Gracie, our 600lb pacific bottlenose dolphin to take full opportunity to swallow the baby’s shoe with the consequence of having a 2-hour medical procedure to retrieve it. Happily, this process was changed in May of 2010. SeaWorld stopped selling the trays of fish and now the guests are charged an entrance fee to participate in the program under the careful scrutiny and control of the Trainers. The animals stay under stimulus control with their Trainer through out the whole 25-minute public feed. Now the animals no longer displace each other for food, are no longer teased by the public and the primary reinforcement is being fed by the guest for proper and correct behavior. This is a better system for all participants involved. Plus, the new system stays consistent with current training techniques. The primary reinforcement is no longer in the control of the guests; they cannot tease the animals anymore by dangling the fish for longer touches, or by holding the trays that were already empty, and can no longer reach out and touch them incorrectly or in inappropriate places. The new system allows the Trainers to have 100 percent control over every interaction with an animal that involves a primary reinforcement.
CHAPTER 4

PERSONAL STORIES, EXPERIENCES

As one might imagine the training techniques have changed over the decades and throughout the life of the different programs that had started up. Trainers were now not only in charge of their dolphins but now also guests in the water. As an “interactive Trainer” you were in charge of your dolphin, your guests, and the other dolphins and guests on the different ledges in the interactive pool. As a “Show Trainer” you are only in charge of yourself and other parts in the show that are rehearsed. As an interactive Trainer you have no idea what kind of guest you will be getting. The longer you work there, the better you become at reading people. Trainers are behaviorists; they study the behavior of the animals, and also the behavior of people, plus the fact that it was a unique job that took much skill, patience and talent. As time went on, one was able to read the guests very well even before talking to them. Just like animals, people also have mannerisms that usually coincide with certain behaviors and personalities. After much practice and experience one could match certain groups of people with a certain dolphins’ needs and personalities. Some dolphins did better with children and smaller people. In one particular instance, a dolphin was much better suited for working with children and physically smaller people because she had difficulty with adults and people who were overweight. She did not like them touching her. A behavior called a car wash, (where the guests line up shoulder-to-shoulder, place their hands on the surface of the water, the dolphin is then sent by a signal to swim underneath the outstretched hands so the guests get a chance to touch and rub their backs). This particular dolphin would get right underneath the hands of the guests until she got to the overweight person, then she would turn away into the deeper part of the pool, so the guest could not reach her, or she would sink underwater to where she was too deep to be touched. It was of course very funny and entertaining for Trainers, because we knew exactly what she was doing. Just like in the human world where humans have likes and dislikes this particular dolphin Ripley had a dislike for obese humans. She had difficulty interacting with larger humans that them made her a golden dolphin for interacting with children. She could tolerate
their energetic behavior as opposed to the stoic behavior of large adults. The Trainers however, would work through it with the dolphin and depending on how strong the Trainers’ relationship was with her, one could usually get her to allow overweight people to touch her. When she did and got bridged for it, she would vocalize very loudly, which the trainers would pair with a human emotion of excitement and accomplishment. Another dolphin didn’t like kids; she was very averse to the constant jumping and fidgeting the children would do in the water. Kids can’t stand very still in shallow water and seem to always want to be moving. Some dolphin do better with adults, because adults listen and she found them very reinforcing. Other dolphins didn’t care what type of guests they had, as long as their control Trainer was variable. In every aspect of the dolphins training regimen one aspect must be consist and that is that the Trainer must be variable with some consistency. Whenever a particular dolphin got frustrated she would mouth you (lightly biting without puncturing the skin) or a guest or do what we referred to as a pony ride. She would split from her control trainer to another ledge and usually pick a guest to swim fast through their legs causing them to loose balance and fall backwards. The guests found it very entertaining and fun, but we Trainers knew the real reason behind such behavior and secretly laughed at the scene.

One of the best parts of being a Trainer is that you work with these animals 5 days a week 8 1/2 hours a day sometimes more. You know them inside and out. You know their personality as they know yours. You develop a strong reinforcement history with them and discover what they find reinforcing and what they find aversive. As I have mentioned before dolphins do discriminate against guests but they also discriminate against other Trainers. Some Trainers are good with all the animals; they have an innate ability for training and relating to animals. You may read every book and know every definition to every training term we use, but that does not guarantee you full success. You may be a very athletic person and strong swimmer, allowing water work behaviors to come very easily to you in a show environment. However in an interactive environment you are working with paying guests. You must know how to work your animal as well as your guests and make sure your guests are having a good time while simultaneously making sure your animals is having a good time too. I have seen Trainers with over ten years of experience, find it difficult working with animals during interactions that they are not familiar with. Not only
do you need to know how to train, you need to know the animal you are training. Just like humans animals have their own personalities and demeanors. “One of the most distinctive elements of the captive environment is close contact with humans, a factor that can be expected to produce a range of behavioral characteristics not found in a wild-reared animal. Rearing in captivity may produce taming: Hediger defines tameness as “having no flight tendency with respect to man” Older wild caught animals may be more difficult to tame than younger animals because of prior negative experience with humans due to the absence of humans during the sensitive period for socialization” (Kleiman, Allen, Thompson, and Lumpkin 320).

Some Trainers have the talent to be able to work any animal, where others do not. Just like some parents know what they are doing naturally, others read all the books in the world about parenting and still cannot relate. It is the same with animal Trainers. Watching other Trainers work animals, and watching those animals take them to the bank, the cleaners, whatever you want to call it, is amusing. Occurrences like that is what makes working with these animals so special. It is incidents like this that make the experience pleasurable and memorable, and one that the ordinary guest would never be aware of. Mostly because, One, they are not Trainers and wouldn’t know right from wrong and two, they don’t know the animal.

When training the animals, the whistle is paired sometimes with a positive reinforcement and that is why the dolphins connect the whistle with something good. After the dolphins do something correct we don’t always give them primary (food/fish) since that can become very boring and predictable. Predictability leads to frustration and frustration can lead to aggression. We want to be variable with our reinforcement. If I asked you to run the mile everyday and all you got was a small candy, by the 10th day you wouldn’t want to run the mile anymore. So to avoid the possibility of you becoming frustrated or bored, I would alternate rewards. Whatever it is, it would something different to keep you interested in running the mile. It is the same with the dolphins; the reinforcement must constantly be mentally stimulating for them. They should not be able to figure out what will be asked of them next in an interaction or show. For some of the really smart dolphins, you could put your hands in a position like you were going to give them a certain “discriminative stimulus” (Sd) for a particular behavior, and it looks like you will ask it, but instead you blow your
whistle, then you reward them for not offering it. Since they were not expecting the Trainer to offer that, it is a perfect way to be variable. If the animals are going to offer behavior before you even ask it, then you know you need to switch up your routine. Another way to be variable is to hold your hands in a position for a Sd for a longer period of time, then blow your whistle which is also known as bridging, this action on the part of the Trainer rewards the dolphin for being patient and not assuming you are going to ask them that behavior, but then indeed did ask for it. This is a method that is used with many dolphins. After they would get bridged they would get very squeaky. Even waiting longer to bridge a behavior than usual is being variable. One time I sent a dolphin on a ventral pec wave away. All trainers get into a habit of bridging certain behaviors after a few seconds, 3 jumps, 3 approximations and so on. I waited longer than usual to bridge this particular dolphin on this behavior, which probably caused her to wonder if she had offered the correct behavior and whether or not to terminate. When I finally did bridge her she was so excited, again I’m being anthropomorphic, she came flying back at me screaming! I rubbed her down and reinforced her behavior along with reinforcing her great attitude.

Variability plays a huge role in building a relationship. It is important to have a strong reinforcement history with each animal. For things to be variable you first have to make things consistent. If you change how you do stuff everyday then everyday is different and your variability will have no meaning. Dolphins are creatures of habit just like humans. They react to changes in their routine as well as their environment. One day we came into work and stepped down to all the animals. We asked a few over through the gate to the other side. The first three refused. Refusing gates is a regular occurrence. Bonds, and friendships, change regularly just like a soap opera. So one dolphin may have a strong bond with one dolphin and refuse to leave them for three full days, and then on the 4th day, you feel you are setting them up for success by pairing them with that buddy, yet you find out that is not the case at all. Something had occurred overnight and there is no longer a strong bond between the two. Back when the first three refused to go through the gate it was not surprising. We switched up our plan and sent in two different dolphins. They too, both refused and so we sent in two of our most reliable dolphins in swimming through the gate into another pool, which is known as gating. They both went into the other pool but refused to come under stimulus control. Now something was up. We looked down in the pool and
the food box had fallen into the deep end and was resting at the bottom. The other dolphins had refused to go over there because they were uncertain what that thing was at the bottom. They all feed off of each other’s anxieties. Especially the anxiety of one of the dominant dolphins in that pod.

Dolphin pods have a hierarchy just like a pack of wolves. “Wolf packs have their own established structure and well defined rules of conduct, and familiarity with the different ranks of animals and their role in pack is important in understanding much of wolf behavior” (Whitt 51). It is the same with the pods of dolphins and Killer Whales. So when a dominant dolphin refuses a gate or a behavior more that likely the less dominant and sub dominant dolphins will too. Needless to say, we pulled the food box out, set up new protocol for closing duties and went about our day as planned. The meaning behind this story is the dolphins are very aware of what is new and what is not and what changes have been made or not made. They know what belongs in their pool and what doesn’t. On very windy days when leaves and pine needles are falling into the water, one dolphin takes this job upon herself to clean up. You can hear her singing with her very unique vocals for us to come over and retrieve what she has found, so that she can go and find more. That particular behavior was very entertaining for us as Trainers and very endearing at the same time. Dolphins do not have a gag reflex so they can swallow anything whole. One dolphin was always the one to bring over huge pieces of rockwork. She would vocalize when the rockwork was taken and waited for you to offer a reward of some type of reinforcement. One time moving a gate, a pin fell off the gate, fell down and hit the bottom of the pool making some type of noise that the dolphins had never heard before. All the dolphins swam quickly out of that pool into the next, one mother scooping her baby, and dolphins leaving their control Trainers. A particular dolphin was the brave one who came back into the pool and retrieved the pin piece while vocalizing her “I got something that doesn’t belong in the pool” vocal loudly. Her vocals are so unique that other dolphins have started to mimic hers so as to get the same attention that she does.

There remains in the general public the belief and the misconception that animals in captivity only behave in a particular manner for food. Not all animals are food motivated. As mentioned above a Trainer must be variable with their reinforcement. If you are always giving the animals/dolphins food you will find them splitting from you. Splitting
is when the dolphins leave the trainers when they have NOT been pointed away. There are
many causes for an animal to split. It may be they are frustrated with you as their control
trainer, they are bored, they may be getting displaced by a more dominant animal, or by other
social issues within the dolphin community or a guest is being intolerable. But if after every
behavior you give your animal food, you will find them leaving/splitting from you. Once I
was working with an animal who was getting heavy and finding food very aversive. We
eventually lowered her base. Their base is the amount of food they get everyday. We weigh
our animals every Monday to keep track of their weight and health. If an animal is gaining
weight we will lower their base, if they are loosing weight we will add to their base.
Dolphins usually tend to eat 4-5% percent of their body weight on a daily basis. That is how
we determine their bases and base their goal weights on attitude, social behavior and
appearance. So this dolphin was getting heavy, but was still doing interactions with a great
attitude and lots of energy. When you went to give her fish, she would sink and come in a
push on your leg, or she would split. She clearly still wanted to interact but did not want to
be fed. It was very entertaining to have an exact story to tell guests how these animals do not
always do things for food. This dolphin found interacting reinforcing and mentally
stimulating. She continued the interaction properly, and we just used secondaries to
reinforce her for correct behavior. No other aggression took place and we adjusted her base
accordingly to her weight and behavior records. In these situations it’s good to be
variable. This is one of the reasons why we use operant conditioning with our
animals. James Kalat says “In Operant Conditioning an individual’s response is followed by
a reinforcement or punishment. A reinforcement is any event that increases the future
probability of the response: a punishment is an event that suppresses the frequency of the
response” (Kalat 364).

Aggression happens everyday to an animal trainer. Some incidents are more severe
than others. Some incidents have to do with the Trainers and other animals. As a Trainer
starting off in a new area, you first start working one animal, to get to know them, to find out
what they find reinforcing and what they find aversive. From there you move your
relationship along by asking more difficult questions, doing interactions, getting in the deep
water with them and training new behavior. Once you feel comfortable with them and are
checked off by a Senior I Trainer or Supervisor you can begin to work with another
animal. The ultimate goal is to be able to work all the animals in your area, to feel confident to be able to make safe, smart, and accurate decisions in a timely matter. People always ask how can you tell if they are happy or sad. Well those are human emotions; I cannot tell if they are happy or sad. To be technically correct, I can only tell what they find reinforcing and what they find aversive. We never punish our animals we just don’t reinforce the incorrect behavior. Karen Pryor’s views on this are to the point: “Modern behavior analysts identify punishment as any event that stops behaviors. B. F. Skinner was more precise. He defined punishment as what happens when a behavior results in the loss of something desirable, the pleasure of investigating if this object can fit into that hole, a popular pastime with babies--or when the behavior results in the delivery of something undesirable” (Pryor, 5). As just stated Trainers do not need to take it to the level of punishing animals. It is made very clear to them when they are correct. Over the years by using this method of operant conditioning and positive reinforcement this method has reduced incidents of aggression significantly.

The dolphins do give certain precursors before they aggress on you, such as a certain vocals, refusing to do a behavior, sinking their heads or splitting. Identifying the precursors aids in deflection of the behavior before it escalates. The few times that I have been aggressed upon where the dolphin made contact, I had a feeling not to ask that certain behavior, but not listening to my instincts I did ask, and as a result was aggressed upon. As Trainers we are behaviorists, we study the animals behavior, we study our co-workers behavior and those skills carry on to future jobs, and to your everyday life. In this field you acquire skills you never knew you would, and you master them. A very clear precursor for actions by dolphins is a set of vocals. Vocals are a superb indicator to aggression, either they are vocalizing towards another dolphin, or toward the trainer. Vocals can also follow the sound of the bridge. When dolphins hear that whistle and know they have done something correct, they vocalize a scream, or squeak (what we humans think of as a happy sound). You can find older dolphins vocalizing at the younger ones, whether it is a Mom teaching her calf or an older dolphin ordering the younger or less dominate dolphins to keep their distance. An example is a more highly dominant dolphin mother of six calves who is a great with her own calves, but not so much with other calves or with any calves while she is pregnant. She will bark at any dolphin, even the most dominant male in our pool, when she feels they are
getting too close. The other dominant dolphins just ignore her; the little ones who are not so high on the totem pole will swim away, or sit up with their control trainer as far away from her as possible. One incident while I was doing an interaction with Maggie, Sandy and Purina who were the two dominant dolphins of our pod displaced Ripley who then swam quickly into the interaction pool to displace Maggie. Which we refer to as displaced aggression. Ripley being lower on the totem pole than Sandy and Purina took her aggression and displaced Maggie. All while swimming so fast she hit my shin and I had a huge swollen bruise for over 2 weeks.

Of course as a Trainer you are not going to reinforce her until she allows the other dolphins to sit up next to her. In that scenario you would feed the less dominant first, then feed her last. That way she gets reinforced for allowing the younger and less dominant dolphins to eat. If you do feed the dominant one first you are just asking for trouble because they have already been fed. When you go to feed the other, the more dominant one will displace the others for their fish. They have nothing to lose, they have already gotten their food. Most of the time it becomes a game. You want to reinforce correct behavior. For example when a dominant dolphin is being correct you reinforce that correct behavior. Reinforcement is the procedure of providing consequences for a behavior that increases or maintain the strength of that behavior. “Charles Catania pointed out that a procedure must have three characteristics to qualify as reinforcement: First a behavior must have a consequence. Second, the behavior must increase in strength. Third, the increase in strength must be the result of the consequence” (Chance 141). I had a bucket on a stand next to the pool and we had been having exceptionally huge mackerel that had been delivered by the fish house (which is the animal care department of SeaWorld). The mackerel’s tail was hanging out of the bucket, a dolphin saw it, and started to lunge out of the pool to grab it. We were all shocked at how persistent she was, not at how smart she was. She is very clever. Another dominant is also well known for displacing other animals. It is a common rule for her to be fed last when stepping up, always. We always step down and step up from the animals at the same time, that way no animal is favored more than the other, which could cause displacement and or aggression towards an individual dolphin. All interactions with the animals must be equal. For example, Tobie our dominant female dolphin has a history of displacing younger and less dominant animals if she witnesses them being fed last. To cut
down on her repeating this incorrect behavior we make it a point to always feed her last while stepping up. With this rule we have created an environment where the less dominant animals demonstrate calmer behavior.

The mother dolphins with calves in the pool are very protective of their calves. They don’t like them playing with toys, interacting with guests, or even learning how to come out of the water onto the scale to get weighed. Its very entertaining to see how protective the mom’s can be. Once we were working a scale behavior on a baby calve at the time, her Mom was in the Dolphin Interaction pool doing an interaction, heard a vocal come from her baby, split from her control Trainer, swam back to the out pool and scooped her baby up from near the scale as to tell the baby to stay away from there. After swimming around with her baby by her side, she went back to her control trainer. There were times when she would never make it back to her control trainer if she felt that we would start working the scale behavior again, or give her baby a toy to play with. She would just stay in the back, and if that was the case we ended up having to get another separation between our animals so we could have enough animals for our guests interactions. The funny thing is, the babies want to learn, they’re sponges and are eager to learn new things and try out new things, and the Mom’s are just so controlling and bossy. The Mom’s also get tired, one dolphin was a solid gater, and she never refused to leave one pool to the other and vice versa. Her daughter had a mind of her own, like most children do, she would not hold for a gate close, and kept splitting to the other pool when we would get close to closing the gate, which caused her Mom to go and scoop her from the other pool and bring her back. This Mom will not tolerate being in another pool without her calf. The reason being is we never worked those separations between them. If the calf is in a pool all by herself, their Mom is not there to protect them. You have to separate the Mom and calf for at least a month to break the bond, to where the Mom will not always have to be in the same pool or go and scoop the baby to always be where they are. Well with this one calf always splitting to the other pool and her Mom having to scoop her twice already, by the time she split for the third time her Mom was done. So this Mom just went and split to the other pool as well. This was behavior very unlike this particular dolphin. It was evident that this Mom was tired and was letting the calf win that battle. Everyday scenarios between most Mom’s and kids, parallel to the trial and tribulations of Dolphin Mom’s and dolphin calves. You watch these animals learn and watch
their calves, which are learning along with them. Learning is defined as a change in behavior due to experience. “What changes when learning occurs is behavior. Behavior may be defined as anything an organism does that can be measured” (Chance 37).

Not all animals are challenging, some are always over achievers. Always willing to do whatever is asked, and others not so much. For example, this one particular dolphin is a great interaction animal, but a challenging gater. She would refuse to gate many times. It boils down to their own individual personality, their confidence level, and their number on the totem pole. The dolphin pods, which consists of the dolphins that they are living with in captivity, has a hierarchy. Most calves when separated from their Moms are automatically at the bottom if the totem pole. Their future placement on the pole is dependent upon the other dolphin’s personalities, and not their size. One particular young dolphin was not at the bottom but definitely not at the top. She is a busy body, and is always having to be involved in everything. When opening and closing a gate, she would be asked to put her chin on the wall, but she would release herself from that behavior so she could turn her head and see who was coming and who was leaving. Of course in between looking at the gate she would place her head back with her chin on the wall probably hoping you didn't notice her leaving the chin on the wall position to see who was leaving. When you arrive in the morning and are planning the activities board for the day, you plan such separations and gates that will set the animals up for success. Some gates are set up to be proactive, that way if the animal does make the right decision to leave when asked, they get reinforced and then asked right back into the pool with the animal that they have trouble leaving. Writing the board is a busy process and is usually done the night before by Senior Trainers, Senior I or Supervisors. Then the board is discussed with the team the next morning to make sure everyone is on the same page with the plan. Imagine how much planning goes into setting up the dolphins for success and in turn getting success. The bonds and cliques change everyday with the dolphins while some never change at all. Just like people. It’s amazing.

How observant and aware the animals are of their environment amazes me everyday. Sometimes I will be driving home at the end of the workday saying to myself, “I just witnessed what?” The animals are definitely a gift to work with. Their intelligence levels are varying, which then causes our training skills to vary as well. Popular questions include how the dolphins are moved from one area in the park to another, along with from one park to
another. What is done is to drop the water level in the pools or gate the animals into a med pool, which has a lifting floor. At that point 5-6 Trainers grab them and then usually two Trainers bring in a sling. The sling is positioned underneath them, attached and then rigged them up. After rigging the animal is attached to a crane that lifts them up and places them on the bed of a truck; the truck then drives to their new area, either in their home park or to a new park. There a crane is used to reverse the loading process. The sling is used to unload them into their new pool. If they are traveling to another park they are usually dropped in a tub of water that is in a huge transport plane primarily FedEx or UPS. Moving animals is now an art form that can be done very quickly and precisely.

When we talk about animals doing separations and gates, many Trainers feel that you should do multiple proactive gates. That is asking an animal to gate over to the other side of the pool and if they go, reinforce them for it and then point them back. Again all training concepts are gray; It is always best to help the animal experience their own learning cycles and practice cycles. “When Trainers realized that their basic reinforcer, food, was not sufficient to meet their goals with their animals, they began to look for something else. RIR is one such attempt to find that something else. It is a formal attempt to incorporate reinforcers other than food into the training structure” (Ramirez 336). Every animal is different. I worked with one dolphin at the Dolphin Interaction Program, who would never go near B-ledge, one of the four ledges in the pool for guest interactions. B-ledge is deeper than the other three and the ledge goes back further than the others. After working with her for more than three years, I was the first Trainer to have her working on the B-ledge. It was something that I didn’t force on her everyday; I built a strong reinforcement history with her and had built a strong relationship. She felt very comfortable with me and I was able to have great success with her on that ledge. By the time we left the Dolphin Interaction Program to move to a new area in the park she was performing full DIP’s (Dolphin Interaction Program) on B-ledge. Gating is just like working a behavior. You don’t work it everyday multiple times a day. You work it at least once a day. But if you have 5 gates a day, you should not work her on gating 4 out of the 5. Maybe work it 2 gates out of the 5, short and sweet and to the point. Other animals that are very strong at gating can gate all day everyday and never fail.
Psychological revelations of the dolphins in captivity is so intriguing and interesting. The animals are all so different. In each area that you work, the animals you meet all have their own social bonds with one another. Finding out those bonds is just half the joy of working with animals. “One area of dolphin life that appears to be more complex than that of most other animals and which rivals that of primates is their social lives. The more we find out about dolphin social interactions, the more we discover how complex they are. In Oceanic and coastal species, each dolphin may have several hundred associates and with each it may have a different relationship” (Wilson 360). Another dolphin in particular will just come right up to you and start screaming and if you touch him he gets even more excited and more vocal. He is definitely just an outgoing animal and always soliciting attention just to be touched. All at the same time, he is also interested in a particular female. This female has a powerful place in his imagination and not in real life, but he won’t go in another pool with out her, and if she leaves one pool to go to another he will follow her. He needs to be at her side, not at her request. Very entertaining. He also finds ways to entertain himself. He is a boy and definitely shows it. I never thought there would be a huge difference between the males and females but there is. He is always involved in trouble. For example he has a history of grabbing guest’s maps out of their hands and swallowing them! The park guests have access poolside to our dolphin pools and if the animals choose to swim up to them the guests are allowed to reach over and touch them.

All of this has it plus’s and minus’s. The plus side is the guests love it and its great for customer relations. The minus side is guests are usually irresponsible and take advantage of the freedom to touch them poolside and don’t listen to the rules. They reach over way too far, drop foreign objects in the water which could be harmful to the animals if swallowed, touch them in inappropriate places and try to sneak around with putting their cameras in the water to get some underwater pictures. What they don’t realize is dolphins do not have a gag reflex so they can swallow anything whole. So every night we do a sweep of the pool to pick up any foreign objects that we did not catch falling in during the day. Little toys, sunglasses, coins, bottle caps all can be found at the bottom of the dolphin pools. Some dolphins will find these items for you, unless it’s a map. Once I was with a guest who accidentally dropped her camera in the pool. This particular dolphin was the first responder, I shall say. Grabbed the
camera with his mouth and brought it back up to me. Such a good boy, needless to say I was very excited that he did not swallow it.

Every day we come in to work and step down to the animals. We do a body check, in which we look for anything out of the ordinary such as cuts, tears. We make sure their body parts are still moving well and then we do husbandry behaviors. Husbandry behaviors are the science and health management of our animals. We do mock blood samples, and mock injections. We constantly work these behaviors because they are a necessity. If an animal gets sick or their behavior seems off we want to get a blood sample on them right away. If the behavior has not been worked, then it becomes more challenging to get that blood and if we can’t get it voluntarily then we would have to drop the pool which can take up to 2 hrs. That is two extra hours of waiting to see if the animal is sick or if it needs medication(s). Those two extra hours may mean the life or death of that animal. Dropping the pool is the term for when the pool is emptied. The animals are at the bottom and it’s much easier for us to grab them when they can’t swim away. This is a situation that we try to avoid as much as possible. Procuring the bloods and injections voluntarily is much more rewarding for Trainers and less stressful for the animals.

Having examined how we conduct our medical procedures, let us now turn to why it’s imperative that we build strong relationships with our animals. A perfect example of why it’s important to know your animals’ behavior. One dolphin named Dottie was acting very odd one day, and was not eating. We tried to get a blood on her and she refused. A Trainer who had a very close and strong relationship with her was able to get her blood. Lucky for us that this Trainer did because we found out that she was having kidney failure. We dropped the pool right away and took her to the back area where there was a lifting floor and she was examined. She was in the back area for over 4 months and became our miracle dolphin. She almost died but for our quick action and response in getting her to the Veterinarian staff. They were able to get her back to a healthy state. Our Veterinary staff, Vets from the Navy and two human Doctors proceeded to perform a surgical procedure to remove her kidney stones. It was an amazing experience and a wonderful survival story. It makes you realize how much love, care and attention these animals receive while living at SeaWorld. How much their lives mean to Trainers but also everyone else in the park that they come into contact with. They receive excellent care with us and I’m so proud to be a
part of that. Guests always ask me do I think they are happy? Of course I do. They have nothing in the world to worry about. We take such great care of them. They live longer and are healthier than in the wild.

Eleven dolphins were altogether in open water and could of have swum away to be free when hurricane Katrina hit their facility, yet they chose to remain in the local area waiting for their keepers to find and rescue them. At work we have what we call squeeze cages for the Sea Lions. They go into the cage and then each side is pulled down which then squeezes the animal to the bottom of the cage to where they can’t move and then keepers or Trainers or Vets can work on them or give them shots or draw bloods. The cage as you can imagine is paired with uncomfortable procedures and the animals will probably refuse to go in there knowing what will be happening next. Just like how your own animal feels and acts when you take it to the Vet. Well if the animals are not conditioned to find the squeeze cage reinforcing you can imagine that if asked into it, it would refuse. Well after hurricane Katrina hit some keepers from a facility were looking for their animals that got washed away. They found one of their sea lions sitting on a rock, it had been two or three days by now and the sea lion was probably very hungry. They called his name and he looked up and swam over to the boat, they fed him and then asked him into the squeeze cage. He didn’t hesitate one second, he jumped right in. Just makes you realize that all that sea lion wanted was to go back to his home at the facility. In the wild the animals are always thinking about survival. They are always searching for food because they don’t know when the next time they will be able to find any. When people or guests ask me if I feel like the animals are stuck in here, stuck in these pools like a jail or a hospital, my response is always, no. I don’t feel that way, obviously because I work here. Being stuck in a hospital or jail is awful for humans. Our world is not that of the animals. Their freedom out in the ocean seems swell to us because we like to have the freedom to move around and do what we want. We always plays sports, knit, listen to music, take up homes, decorate, wear clothes, work for money etc. etc. Again you can’t be anthropomorphic when talking about dolphins. Their freedom does not consist of the joys of our freedoms. They are out there trying to survive. Here at SeaWorld they are at Club Med. Nothing to worry about, food is provided and the animals are mentally stimulated. It’s a good gig, and people who work in this industry, are privileged to know that what they do every day is of a great benefit to the lives of the animals. Life is good for these animals.
CHAPTER 4

DETRACTORS-OPPOSING VIEWS

To be fair, there are those who do not believe human/animal interactions have reached their highest levels. For example the documentary film *The Cove* portrays SeaWorld Entertainment as a bad corporation, one that contributes to the slaughter of many dolphins in Taiji. In Taiji, Japan the fisherman are killing the dolphins to keep them from eating their fish (Catsoulis, C4). The real reason why the fish are no longer as abundant as they once were is because the world is overfishing. The dolphins have very little to do with the decreasing catch of fish. Taiji also says that they take the dolphins because huge corporations like SeaWorld are buying them. SeaWorld is NOT buying those captured dolphins. However, SeaWorld will take the dolphins, if their facility cannot care for them by themselves. The places that are buying these dolphins are the smaller facilities in Mexico and the Caribbean. This in not necessarily a bad thing, these smaller facilities are taking these dolphins and giving them a home rather than see them being murdered by the Japanese fisherman. I am at a loss to understand how the documentary film can say that SeaWorld paves the way for the slaughter of dolphins or the capturing of them. Those are actions that Taiji participates in alone. SeaWorld is not involved in those actions, nor does it provide for them to engage in such acts.

The documentary film is focused on Rick O’Barry. He was one of the first Trainers on the set of *Flipper* and feels responsible for all the interaction facilities going up and around the world. He feels that having animals in captivity is a bad thing. Rather, it is a good thing. Having these animals in captivity allows for so much research, and allows us to learn so much, and gives us the knowledge and the means to help stranded and sick animals that do come from the ocean. Rick O’Barry should be proud of what he started instead of trying to bring down everyone who has followed in his path.

Rick O’Barry became involved with dolphin training while working on the “*Flipper*” TV series (O’Barry 94). However, as successful as he was there, that was the extent of his training work. Much like the sad individuals who brought the term; “going postal” into
vogue, Mr. O’Barry seems to harbor some sort of resentment against the organizations that built upon his early work and then prospered ... but who did so without him or his advice. Most of the other key interviewees in The Cove are former employees of SeaWorld. They too are bad-mouthing their former employer. Yet, the film never says why they left or what the circumstances of their departures were. I believe that omission leaves the viewer with a one sided slant, rather than a full explanation of events, such as the implication that the Japanese fisherman in Tajii were in the employ of SeaWorld. A fair analysis of those events is that they occurred over 30 years ago. SeaWorld was in its infancy as an organization and as such was not able to influence events at all, much less to the extent that the film has suggested. The reality of the events in the film is that while tragic and cruel - they are hardly the practices of SeaWorld then or now! For the film to so suggest or to imply is simply wrong. Mr. O’Barry and those of his ilk who are trying to discredit something of which they are no longer a part is sad. They are relics of a bygone age.

Yes, we have followed in his path, but we have learned from his mistakes. SeaWorld and other organizations have taken the training of these animals to a whole new level and the care of the animals has only improved. How Rick O’Barry finds that to be the worst for them is astonishing. When was the last time he visited a facility and spent the day there? Where does he find the audacity to make such claims about SeaWorld and then go on about how we condone what is happening in Taiji, Japan? The action that takes place in Taiji is so tragic. I can only hope that they become more educated and realize the resources that they are damaging by killing off the dolphins and hope they realize the benefits of leaving them alone and finding other ways to keep the abundance of the food and game fish around. Don’t blame natural selection on the ways of the dolphins; blame humans for over populating this world. “Many people are aware of the concept of close co-operation between members of a dolphin group. More surprising is the fact that bottlenose dolphins are one of the few animal species to have developed a symbiotic feeding relationship with humans. Early visitors to the southeastern coast of Australia recorded scenes in which Aborigines would slap the surface of the water with their spears on seeing a school of mullet. Dolphins then drove the mullet before them, towards the shore and the Aborigines dashed into the water with spears and handnets to catch some of the fish” (Thompson and Wilson 29).
The movie *Blackfish* is the type of documentary that covers over its flaws in argumentation with the sort chicanery you would expect to see in political campaigning. The movie contains decontextualized video footage presented in slow motion, with a voiceover offering the most damning possible explanation of its meaning, while the soundtrack strikes gut-churning minor chords. Through interviews with former whale trainers, an OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) expert who is out to take down SeaWorld, the film attempts to make several cases at once while dishonestly withholding its ultimate message. The documentary focuses on the tragic death of SeaWorld Trainer Dawn Brancheau while working with the 12,000-pound male orca Tilikum. The documentary takes on its own account the description of Tilikum. Describing him as a violent whale, and a ticking time bomb. They use contradicting accusations, one saying orca whales are sufficiently intelligent and have never harmed a human in the wild, and then go onto to describe orca whales as uncontrollable and dangerous (Hall 2). Having work directly with killer whales in captivity and know first hand what it is like my opinion is valid. Killer whales in captivity are like working with any other animal in captivity. They are strong; super intelligent, and very challenging. They are more aggressive than dolphins, one reason being they are a different species. Never once was I scared to work with the whales. It is a feeling that is like no other. I loved my times spent with the dolphins. However working with whales is a natural high. It was physically, emotionally, and mentally challenging. As it was my responsibility to challenge them and mentally stimulate them in their environment, they too did the same for me. It’s a safety sensitive area to work it and rightfully so. You are working with wild animals. Yet again, as I mentioned before I never felt scared or feared that my life was in danger. Those animals are my babies. I miss them when I go on vacation. My whole job is for the well being of these amazing animals. I go home with some of the most incredible experiences. To read articles that depict SeaWorld in a bad light and say we use animals for profit is disgusting. The *Blackfish* film has interviews and footage of incidences that happen years ago. One of the theories that *Blackfish* stirs around is the idea that an animal with a high intellectual capacity would react to trauma the way a human would. That maybe Tilikum’s acts of aggression are because of his captivity and not because he’s a predator (Hall 1). The truth is, Dawn’s death was an accident. An accident in the work place. The responsibilities and consequences are all put out there when we enter
this field and everyone is very aware of that fact. Our animals live a life a luxury, with excellent heath care, a never-ending food source of frozen fish. The whales are magical magnificent animals that are a dream to work with. When I watch them do behaviors it gives me the chills. SeaWorld whose overall record for animal care and animal training is exemplary will overcome the negative news press and continue to care for all the animals with the upmost attention and guardianship.

The life of a dolphin in captivity is a good long life. They all have such distinct personalities. One cannot fully explain the significance of and the genuine love for these animals. One can only relate the joy that they bring into our lives and the experiences we trainers get to share with the guests. It has been my privilege to show our guests the true being of the dolphins that I work with and to personally enjoy their lives with them. Not just meet them in an interaction but to know them. Each day lets me swim with them, play with them, feed them, challenge them, mentally stimulate them, and play games with them. The work we accomplish, the lives we save, and the people we meet along the way are priceless.
CHAPTER 5

INTERVIEWS WITH TRAINERS

Interviews with several trainers have indicated that these are almost universal experiences for trainers. While the experiences of the trainers are essentially the same, the reasons stated for becoming a trainer are as many as there are trainers. Just as in the small sample of these 3 interviews we have learned that one became a trainer to help animals, another because of a desire to something other than sit in a office all day while the 3rd sought the excitement of the training job. Yet, as diverse as these reasons are, the one constant is that they all came to love the job. Each day is different, each day is a challenge in some way, each day has its joys and successes and lurking somewhere in the background is the certain knowledge that each day also has its dangers. Few other jobs offer these kinds of attractions and rewards. It might be argued that astronauts and members of the military experience all of this but neither of these groups have yet interacted with a different species, whose native intelligence levels approach our own. “I have ALWAYS loved being around animals and from a young age said I wanted to be a Vet, and I think my Dad would say that to me since he knew I loved animals, that would be a logical choice with decent salary, he always called me Dr. Kristin... After volunteering at vet clinics during High School and College I decided that that wasn't for me and I decided to start volunteering at Cypress Gardens Zoological dept. in Florida when I was about 14. I worked with exotic birds and trained them for educational meet and greets and to go to classrooms to promote conservation in schools. I absolutely LOVED it! Conservation education, endangered species and education. I changed my major from Biology to Psychology after talking to a Killer Whale trainer and doing a Killer Whale internship through a Biology college course for a semester. Looking back I actually remember going to SW in 6th grade for a field trip and I told my best friend, after the show I wanted to talk to the trainer, so I waited until the stadium was empty and she was done talking to other tourist, and I asked her how I could become a trainer like her. She said be a good swimmer, get certified in CPR, Lifeguard, get a degree in Biology/ Psychology is preferred, and get scuba certified. I engraved those requirements in my brain! When I turned
sixteen, I became a lifeguard at a local water park in Kissimmee, and then eventually applied to Discovery Cove when I moved to Orlando for college at age 18 and lifeguarded (sic) there, continued in school, got my scuba cert, then tried out for a position. I got it the 2nd time around” (Ritch, Kristen. Personal Interview. August 2012).

“I grew up in the hospitality industry with both of my parents working at SW, my Mom worked as a Pearl Diver and Aquarist, and Education staff, and my Dad managed the Operations dept. Growing up with SW as my backyard was any kids dream, and at 5 years old I got to sit on the back of Katina, a killer whale at SWFL. I truly believe from that moment my mind was made up.... how can that be, at 5 years old!! (I have a picture of it somewhere.) That moment was engraved in my memory and the feeling I had being that close to a killer whale never left me, I always wanted more. It's a dream I have had from that moment on, and I am so grateful to have made it a reality, to live my dream everyday, and get paid for it!! I love conservation, animal training, education, and the whole field. My passion is my work” (Clausen, Joy. Personal Interview. August 2012).

“My parents took me to SeaWorld when I was four and I fell in love with dolphins. They seemed magical and level of trust between animal and trainer fascinated me. As I grew older I wanted to be one to share how special these animals are with others.” Indeed, these are magical animals and the sense of self-fulfillment and self-accomplishment when coupled with the close relationship with the animals is magic.’(Beck, Deanna. Personal Interview. August 2012). To put it another way, imagine coming home one to discover that the family dog could speak ... oh, what a wonderful world! Working with dolphins everyday puts trainers on the very edge of that wonderful world.
CHAPTER 7

SUPPORTING STATISTICS (ANIMAL RESEARCH OF CETACEANS IN CAPTIVITY)

If the day comes that I leave the world of animal training I will take away such marvelous memories that will truly last a lifetime. There will always be a special place in my heart for the animals I worked with. They have become like family. We Trainers see them everyday, we take care of them and our love for them is unconditional. That is what the public needs to see, that is what the public should know. No matter how much Rick O’Barry, PETA and other associated organization object, these parks will stay open for business because the public enjoys seeing animals up close and personal. They also enjoy hearing our unique stories of each individual animal. Not to mention that they pay to get into the park, and that money goes towards conservation and preservation for the animals. Not just the animals in the parks, but even the animals in the wild. SeaWorld is a great company to work for and be a part of. They do great things for the environment and all Marine Animals. It is an honor and a privilege to work here and be surrounded by such amazing people who share the same passion and love for these animals as I do. I am pleased with what I have been able to do in my career, what I have witnessed and what I have experienced. I have been truly blessed to have had such an amazing, unique, and one of a kind job. I love dolphins, I love animals and I have loved working in my career field.

There are many organizations that feel the same way. One of them is IMATA (International Marine Animal Training Association). IMATA is dedicated to advancing the humane care and handling of marine animals by fostering communication between professionals that serve marine animal science through training, public display, research, husbandry, conservation and education. Its also dedicated to providing and advancing the most professional, effective and humane care of marine animals in all habitats. IMATA holds an annual conference so that Trainers from around the world can join together and share information to help advance each facility to be the best it can be. There is also the AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums). AZA is an organization and network of more
than 6,000 committed zoo and aquarium professionals, and suppliers worldwide. There are so many members in just these two organizations that you just know there is something right going on here. No matter how many complaints are received from outsiders, you just have to do your research and educate yourself on the benefits of having animals in captivity. Having the ability to work hands on with them and learn from them is a great thing. So great, that it has reached a level in which human/animal interaction for entertainment has also become one of cooperation. “Studying animals in a zoological park is often the best and sometimes the only way to observe and record behaviors. Some of these studies would be difficult or impossible to do in the wild” (Sea World Inc., *Wild Careers!* 38).

After working with Dolphins for over 8 years I was moved to Shamu Stadium. I would be working with six Killer Whales. I was excited about my move. I would be leaving the comfort of knowing the animals like the back of my hand to meeting new animals of a total different subspecies. Killer Whales are Dolphins. Both creatures are in the same order of Cetaceans. However Killer Whales are much bigger, smarter and more aggressive. I was going to have my hands full and I couldn’t wait.

Working Whales was and is completely different from working Dolphins. There is a considerably larger amount of decisions to consider when thinking about the consequences involved in your decision-making. It was much more intense. Not only are you responsible for yourself, your actions and decisions can also affect someone else’s safety. My early days in my new area were spent on building strong relationships with the new animals I was working with but also building strong relationships with my new co-workers. Teamwork in this area is essential to having a safe day. I was thrilled with my new challenges and couldn’t wait to get back to it the next day.

The whales were huge, the biggest dolphin I had ever worked with weighed around 810 pounds, now the biggest animal I would be working was over 9500 pounds! A huge difference! In the beginning of starting at Shamu Stadium I was learning the area, learning the new animals and learning how to work with the animals in a show setting. Feeling the pressure of the Entertainment department to be always making sure you hit every cue, every musical cue and key part to the show can be overwhelming. First and foremost is your safety, then the safety of the animals then finally the show. But a lot of times you get so
wrapped up in making sure that you are also fulfilling the Entertainments wants and needs, that you become less aware of your own safety.

You can be in a show environment and put your relationship on the line with your animal for the sake of the show, or maybe you are feeling the pressure and make an unsafe decision or bridge an incorrect behavior. So many things can go wrong and so much can happen in just a short 3-minute segment. You have to be able to think fast on your feet and multitask. It’s a key part of being successful at Shamu Stadium. Everything is more important in this area; everything is more of an issue. When the dolphins displace each other it is noted. When the Whales displace each other it is discussed, the Vets are called out to examine the animals and a preset plan is set up to make sure the displacement does not happen again. Everything the Whales do is more serious because they are much bigger. When dolphins rake each other, the cuts are very minute. When the Whales displace each other it looks like they have gone through a shredder. So of course it’s more serious.

This is what I tell everyone who asks me how I like the Whales. I say I love it! I love the people I work with, and I love the animals. While the new position is intense and stressful, I have been able to deal with it successfully. Some younger trainers’ learn early in their career that the level of daily stress is more than they can handle and select themselves out of the Killer Whale program. Those trainers that can successfully deal with the levels of stress have learned to accept the experience because it challenged them to become a better employee. You want to succeed, you want to do better and you want to be at the point you were in your other areas. I love having this challenge. I’m pushed mentally and physically and sometimes emotionally.

You build these relationships with these animals that you can’t quite explain unless you build one yourself. You feel a strong closeness to these animals and have a love for them that is so strong you love them as much as you would if they were your own children. However you also learn that these animals live in captivity and learn to accept that you could one day leave or vice versa. The time I left my first facility I was worried that I would never find another animal like my first dolphin, but I found other animals that I love just as much if not more but for different reasons. Just as you have a million different types of friends that you like for a million different reasons, you have the same experience with
your animals. So as you get to know these animals you find yourself building a bond that you will carry throughout your life. No one will ever be able to take that away from you.

I have been very blessed with a job that I love. A job that I miss if I’m gone too long on vacation. A job that I’m super passionate about and will fight and defend for. A job that I’m so proud of, it’s my dream job and I never gave up. I love what I do and am so grateful for the opportunity to be surrounded by people who feel the same way. We care for these animals, for their well being and their safety. It’s what we do everyday; it’s part of our profession. We come in and make sure that these animals are healthy and are constantly mentally and physically stimulated.

Just as the animals are physically challenged so are we as Trainers. We are held to a high standard of physical fitness. Having to pass a swim test every three months. Everyone always passes, but some people freak out. Some people listen to music before hand to calm their nerves, others put it off till the last minute while still others talk about it coming up for 3 weeks prior to it being due. Whatever the case may be, the bottom line is that it has to be done. The actual swim test consist of pulling yourself up and out of the water onto a wall that is about an arms length above your head while you are floating at the surface, then swimming 120ft underwater with no breaths, diving down 36ft to pick up a 3lb weight and then swimming 240ft basic freestyle and accomplishing all of these actions in under seven minutes. The successful swimmers use that anxiety to help you to not only get through the test, but also makes you go faster and causes you to be unaware that you are swimming in 55-degree water.

All of the Whales are very intelligent and all have their own personalities, Orkid being SeaWorld’s smartest Whale. She loves a challenge and when you watch her getting work in a session you can literally see the wheels spinning in that head of hers as she is figuring out what you want. One day I was walking up on the 2nd level of the stage and she was following me. So as I walked behind the screens I would wait awhile before she could see me just to see what she would do. She then waited there for me to walk back out from behind them, and followed me all the way down till I got to the end of the pool. Orkid is a whale that is very relationship based. Not just with her Trainers but also her pod. Having a strong relationship with the dominant female places her high on the ladder of hierarchy. When our dominant female Kasatka gave birth to her male calf, there was an underlined
quick learning of where this calf’s place was in the pod. Knowing his position, Orkid was very delicate in how she would interact with him. One particular day the baby wanted to swim with Orkid in one pool while his mother was in another. Orkid was clearly not satisfied with his decision and continued on with guiding him back into the pool with his mother. It quickly moved towards Orkid having to block his access to the pool where she was swimming, so he would learn to understand that Orkid wanted him to stay with him mother. Observing these social skills, and the rearing of calf’s from other members of the pod proves that not only are they the top predator of the ocean they are also a small village. “Killer Whales are also without a doubt the most socially stable species on the planet and the most widely dispersed mammals, next to humans. Just as we occupy all of the world’s landmasses, orcas occupy all of the oceans, and like us they are the top of the food chain” (Friend 228).

At Shamu Stadium we have a family of three. Our dominant killer whale (Orcinus Orca) is Kasatka who still lives with her second calf Nakai who is ten and her youngest calf Kalia who is 7. For short we call them the kids and Kasatka’s nickname is Mom. Sometimes certain whales will refuse to eat, will refuse behavior and even sometimes refuse to move when Mom is around. She is superior to the other whales. Just like how children are when the Principal walks around school. Same with the Whales. Anyone who is anyone will always straighten up their back when someone superior walks in the room. Dolphin pods consist of 2-12 dolphins, with a dominant one in charge. “Dolphins and Killer Whales live in stable extended family units called pods. These pods are composed of mothers and their offspring, including sons and brothers, and it is believed that both sexes may spend their lives within their natal pods. Each pod has developed its own pod specific acoustic dialect” (Reynolds and Rommel 385).

Kasatka is our dominant female Whale. Killer Whale pods are made up of a matriarch pod, so the females rule the coup. At SeaWorld San Diego we currently have 10 whales, 5 female and 5 male. Kasatka is not the biggest one but she is the dominant one. Our Killer Whales range in weight from the smallest weighing in at about 3,000 lbs to our biggest weighing in over 9,500 lbs. A huge range of weights and width.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Working with Whales, Dolphins and all of the other animals in the SeaWorld Park is an opportunity of a lifetime. It’s challenging, thrilling, exciting and dangerous and I wouldn’t give it up for anything. The animals are well cared for and well treated. They enjoy being in front of the visitors and the audience loves seeing what we do together everyday. For the mental, emotional and physical health of both animal and human trainer, the entertainment that is provided benefits all involved, including the visiting public.

Some would even say that the use of animals for entertainment purposes has reached its highest level of human/animal interaction. Guests can come into the park and get poolside next to these magnificent animals. They can feel connected in ways they never knew existed. Guests will have experiences that will last a lifetime and inspire them to celebrate connect and care for all animals. SeaWorld provides an aroma of nostalgia that brings you back to being a kid. Where you’ve the world in front of you and are capable of doing and changing whatever you desire. If you can make a difference in the life of a child those memories carry on into adulthood and mold that individual into the mature grownup that they are today. Those inspirations while being raised are carried on and have a huge impact, influence in you daily life. Coming to SeaWorld can remind you of those inspirations and in doing so inspire you again to not only better yourself but also the planet you’re living on. SeaWorld reminds you of the importance of conservation, preservation and taking care of our planet and the well being of the humans and creatures that live on it. Having animals in captivity is a way of getting up close and personal, feeling them, seeing them and most importantly hearing them. As a child you watch in wonder and your imagination takes flight. As an adult you’re reminded of the joys animals bring to you and again you begin to think of what you can do to make a difference. Recycle, reduce and reuse. Make drain water safe, clean up the oceans so the sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers of these amazing creatures can live on forever. The secret psychological revelations of dolphins, whales, sea lions are they are sharing the same space as us; they’re alive and deserve a happy and safe world to live in too. They are
breathing and have family and agendas. While some people disagree with animals being in small proximities because its not part of their natural habitat, its not part of their natural world. Others realize the significance and educational benefits that we gain from keeping animals in captivity. The knowledge we acquire and how imperative it is that we continue to do so. Not only are we learning how to properly care for some unique creatures, if these species were to become endangered we would as a society know what to do to keep them from becoming extinct.

We have arms and legs while dolphins have tails and fins, we live on land they live in water, as they are different they are still apart of us. In the end nature has a plan and that is for us to understand each other in all of our various forms. The value of SeaWorld and SeaWorld like places is that we are able as humans to interact with dolphins and continue that journey of understanding and education. The secret revelations of seeing dolphins and animals in captivity is that it inspires you to learn more about these creatures and acknowledge that they are so close to us in terms of social aspects, survival and friendship. Observing these behaviors gives you the feeling that creates that “wow” effect.

This is why it can be argued that the use of animals for entertainment has reached the highest level yet of human/animal interactions.
REFERENCES


