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THE TRUE STORY OF KEIKO AND THE CASE FOR MORGAN THE ORCA'S RELEASE

The recent Dutch court decision involving the captive orca named Morgan has caused much consternation and discussion among marine biologists, and the public at large. In its decision, the court ruled against a proposal to rehabilitate and release Morgan and ordered her transfer to Loro Parque, an amusement park in Spain, where she will be used for captive breeding.

The court's decision was based, in part, on its erroneous belief that Morgan's rehabilitation was not possible and would endanger her life. In support of her release, attorneys and expert witnesses discussed the rehabilitation and release of the orca Keiko, the star of the 1993 hit film "Free Willy". Due to court time constraints, attorneys supporting Morgan's release were unable to present the recent documentary film, [Keiko The Untold Story](#) as evidence in support of Morgan's release.

This is unfortunate. Keiko's rehabilitation and return to the wild is cited by the marine park industry and the media as a failed project and is often given as the reason captive orcas should not be released. Factual errors regarding Keiko's return to the wild abound. Even after the court's decision, news articles about Keiko continued to mislead the public.

For example, in its November 29 article entitled, "Morgan The Killer Whale Transferred from Netherlands to Spain", the internet newspaper *HuffPost Green* (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/29/morgan-killer-whale-transferred_n_1118403.html) stated:

"Real life releases have a mixed record at best, however. Keiko, the animal that starred in "Free Willy", was released in Icelandic waters after 20 years in captivity. He died, apparently of pneumonia, after surviving two months on his own and swimming about 870 miles (1,400 kilometers) to Norway."

In fact, Keiko lived for five years in Icelandic and Norwegian waters and survived 15 months after arriving in Norway. The "two month" period was approximately how long it took him to swim from Iceland to Norway.

Likewise, *The Seattle Times*, in its November 29th article entitled, "Dutch Govt. Orders Whale Transfer to Spanish Zoo" (http://seattletimes.nsource.com/html/nationworld/2016883324_apeunetherlandsorca.html) stated:

"Orcas rarely have been successfully returned to the ocean after being in captivity...The most famous example was Keiko, the star of the 1993 "Free Willy" film who was caught at age 2 near Iceland and spent many years in Mexico City. After 20 years in various marine parks, Keiko was flown back to Iceland and released under lengthy supervision. He died in 2003 at age 26, apparently of pneumonia, after surviving two months on his own and swimming about 870 miles (1,400 kilometers) to Norway."

Such accounts of Keiko's life are misleading. Although considered an unlikely candidate for rehabilitation and release because of his length in captivity and capture at a very young age, Keiko embraced his new life in the ocean after being air-lifted from his tank at the Oregon Coast Aquarium to an ocean pen in Iceland. Over the course of five years, Keiko engaged with wild orca pods and on a number of occasions left his caretakers for days at a time. When he swam from Iceland to Norway, Keiko journeyed more than 1,000 miles on his own, showed strong evidence of having fed himself and continued to thrive for 15 months after he arrived in Norway.

To help clarify issues that surround the release of captive orcas, and learn about the true story of Keiko, the media and the marine park industry are urged to watch [Keiko The Untold Story](#) and engage in an open discussion of Keiko's life before and after captivity. Contact Filmmaker Theresa Demarest by email (theresa@theresacd.com) or phone (503-235-6072) to arrange for a media screener via ftp or DVD.

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