



THE TRAGIC STORY OF TILIKUM IS COMING TO AN END: HE IS DYING



Image: Tinseltown shutterstock.com

Tere Albanese gives her take on the story

In the early 1900s, few people understood the fact that all animals are intelligent, thinking, feeling beings. This was the era that gave rise to marine parks. The biggest and most popular was, and still is, SeaWorld. The first marine parks started in the 1960s and killer whales have been starring in them since 1965.

We now understand so much more about non-human animals. Of all the amazing aspects of animals we have learned, and probably the most meaningful, is that animals have the same emotional feelings of fear, love, and loss of a loved one, that we do. They suffer from the same mental disorders brought on by the same toxic environments of loneliness, deprivation of mental stimuli and loss of freedom and family. When they are taken out of their habitat, yanked away from their families, and put in an inhumane container, no matter how big or small they are, they are petrified, just as any human being would be, and long to go back to where they came from, a place they call home, as we do.

Many of us certainly sensed this, but now we have documented proof. Some of that proof came at a high cost and those who paid the highest price were the animals themselves.

One of the best-witnessed examples of what happens to a wild animal who suffers from all of the above is Tilikum, the star killer whale of SeaWorld for 25 years, who has so far been held captive for 33 years.

Reports have emerged that Tilikum is dying: prompting reflection on his tragic life. Tilikum became the poster child for all animals who are taken away from their natural habitat and families and made to perform tricks for a paying public. They obey their commands so they are not punished, have their meals withheld and can be put in a holding tank, just big enough to hold one of them, alone.

SeaWorld was the first worldwide franchise of marine animal parks. SeaWorld, and those fisherman who were among the first to capture killer whales, as well as other seafaring animals, filmed what they did, and how they did it, as historical data. They had no idea the retelling of that data, when viewed in the exposé, *Blackfish*, would cause the negative wave of outcry that would change the very core of marine parks. This film changed everything. It revealed the truth to the much more learned individuals of today. Even many of those involved with the capturing of orcas, when interviewed for *Blackfish*, admitted what they were doing was wrong and many truly do regret what they did, but not all of them. Unfortunately, many people will never understand what we have learned, nor do they want to.

