



Killing Keiko: The True Story of Free Willy's Return to the Wild

Mark Simmons

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In 1978, a young killer whale “Keiko” was collected off the east coast of Iceland and spent the next 18 years in human care. At Reino Aventura Park in Mexico, his home was not conducive to good health, and over time his condition deteriorated. In 1993, Keiko became the star of *Free Willy*, a Warner Bros. blockbuster movie, that enchanted the public and led children and adults to believe that a whale, long-held in the care of man, could successfully make its way in the wild.

Animal rights organizations lobbied for a real-life release program for Keiko, similar to his fictitious counterpart, and millions of dollars were raised to return the orca back to his home waters.

Author Mark Simmons was leader of the team of animal behaviorists brought to Iceland as part of the release project. But the program was doomed to failure from the start; plagued by hidden agendas and an organization unable to recognize that Keiko needed to learn to *be* wild before any chance at survival could exist.

(Mark A. Simmons)

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