

## Wild Brethren

As a child, I was obsessed with having a spiritual connection to an animal. I dreamed of befriending butterflies and birds, like my favorite Disney princesses. But as my world lost the magic of my childhood, I started to reexamine the gap and legitimacy of our relationships with animals. How wide is the emotional divide between humans and animals? Can we ever truly communicate meaningfully with one another?

While researching animal intelligence, I learned that humans are not the only animals capable of complex brain functions. In many cases, humans and animals share similar anatomy and behavioral niches, such as: language, empathy, and culture. Cutting edge research shows that Cetaceans like whales and dolphins have the potential to be more emotionally advanced than humans. Unfortunately, these creatures are still a mystery to us. Just as we may never fully unravel the human mind, we may also never fully understand our wild brethren. But while this is true, human and animals share much more than we may think.

This sculpture was inspired by the assumption that we are observing animals when, in reality, they are watching us as much as we watch them. I used clay to achieve the texture and physical aesthetic of whales, and a spiral shape to evoke a sense of unity and connection between them. The whales' bodies are woven together to create motion and to guide the viewer to the single whale eye at the center of the piece. The eye represents the emotional depth within animals that humans are so often ignorant of. Just as it is valuable to recognize other's perspectives in human relationships, it is equally important to consider relationships across species. This is especially relevant under the lens of climate change, for as we destroy the animal environment, they are aware of our actions, and of us.

Sky S.  
California

# Man and Beast: The Space Between Us

Sky S.



As a child, one of my favorite places was the California Academy of Sciences. I loved all of the exhibits, but my favorite one was and continues to be the rainforest globe, a magical orb filled with lush foliage, a river populated by giant fish, and hundreds of butterflies floating through the mist. There was nothing I wanted more than to be chosen by one of the globe's gossamer inhabitants. I wished myself to be a tropical princess, a special companion to the butterflies. On one particular trip, in an effort to attract more butterflies, I made the decision to cleanse myself of bad thoughts and intentions before I entered. As I walked through the plastic strips, focused on being "pure of heart," I squeezed my eyes shut and prayed that the butterflies would sense my affinity for their magic. I thought that if I tried hard enough, they would be drawn to my good intentions like to the flowers they loved so much. No butterfly landed on me that day, but I was still halfway convinced that I had made a connection, and that the butterflies had understood what was going on.

When I was little I loved the idea of a spiritual connection to an animal. That I could draw a butterfly to me through my own integrity. But as I learn more about myself and the animals I love, I've come to reexamine the gap between us and the legitimacy of our relationships. How wide is the emotional divide between humans and animals? And can we ever truly communicate with one another?

Can animals think and feel? And if so, how do we know that these behaviors even align with the human experience? According to scientist Carl Safina, we can examine animals' evolution, behavior, and brains to learn what they are thinking and feeling. It is important to recognize that humans evolved on the same planet as these animals and share many ancestors. We evolved with the awareness of similar dangers and benefits. Even after thousands of years, at the base level, humans and animals have the same imperatives: we "take care of our babies, find food, [and] try to stay alive"<sup>1</sup>. In fact, Safina believes that "the things that make us human are not the things that we think make us human. What makes us human is that. . .we are the most extreme. We are the most passionate, most violent, most creative, and most destructive animal that have ever been on this planet."<sup>2</sup> So while humans may be more extreme than our fellow creatures, it is possible that we are simply in different places on the same scale. Animals and humans are different, overlapping parts of the same story.

Anatomically, human brains are remarkably close to that of animals. We have the same structures, same cells, and same functions as them.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that we have the same brains as animals. While we may share the planet, different animals evolved under distinct circumstances. In the case of whales, the difference in environment explains our physiological divergence. It is commonly believed that intelligence is exclusive to humans, but this is a broad

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<sup>1</sup> Safina, C. (n.d.). What are animals thinking and feeling? Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/carl\\_safina\\_what\\_are\\_animals\\_thinking\\_and\\_feeling](https://www.ted.com/talks/carl_safina_what_are_animals_thinking_and_feeling)

<sup>2</sup> Safina, C. (n.d.). What are animals thinking and feeling? Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/carl\\_safina\\_what\\_are\\_animals\\_thinking\\_and\\_feeling](https://www.ted.com/talks/carl_safina_what_are_animals_thinking_and_feeling)

<sup>3</sup> Safina, C. (n.d.). What are animals thinking and feeling? Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/carl\\_safina\\_what\\_are\\_animals\\_thinking\\_and\\_feeling](https://www.ted.com/talks/carl_safina_what_are_animals_thinking_and_feeling)

and ignorant assumption. Often, even after separate evolutions, different animals end up in the same ecological niche. For example, while human and whale brains evolved along “different neuroanatomical trajectories,” the brains of whales provide “an example of an alternative evolutionary route to complex intelligence.”<sup>4</sup> We share “a number of complex cognitive abilities, such as self-recognition” with animals like cetaceans and apes.<sup>5</sup> For example, Orca whales know when they are being hunted and have developed techniques to deceive hunters. One captain recalls that “the Orcas had been caught before, and they knew what was going on and they knew their young ones would be taken from them. So the adults without the young went East into a cul-de-sac and the boats followed them, thinking all of them had gone that way while the mothers and the babies went North.”<sup>6</sup> The Orcas understood of the situation and used knowledge from previous encounters to inform creative decision making. In one study, elephants displayed similar intelligence. They were able to distinguish between recordings of tourists and poachers, running away from the recording of the poachers voices and were unphased by the recording of the tourists. This is proof that humans are not the only ones capable of rational behavior.

In the end, our psychology is more convergent than we may wish to think. Darwin argued that “the concept of evolutionary continuity provides a strong basis for the existence of emotions in species other than our own.”<sup>7</sup> In the opinion of one WDC researcher, “the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness.” From these shared systems, it can be inferred that we have similar experiences.

One shared experience between humans and animals is mental illness. In scientist Laurel Braitman’s TED talk, she explores how animals can develop mood disorders, coping mechanisms, and obsessive habits just like humans.<sup>8</sup> Canine units in Afghanistan often come home with canine PTSD. Similarly to their human counterparts, they become irrationally fearful of certain triggers that remind them of their time in a dangerous environment. According to Braitman, “Mood disorders, may just be the unfortunate downside of being a feeling animal.” Braitman thinks that those with close personal relationships with animals should “feel empowered to make assumptions about the creatures that you know well. If you think that they are anxious or depressed, they probably are.” While we do share these disorders with animals, Braitman makes it clear, “canine PTSD is different than human PTSD. Just like my anxiety is

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<sup>4</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>5</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>6</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>7</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>8</sup> Braitman, L. (n.d.). Depressed dogs, cats with OCD - what animal madness means for us humans. Retrieved from

[https://www.ted.com/talks/laurel\\_braitman\\_depressed\\_dogs\\_cats\\_with\\_ ocd\\_what\\_animal\\_madness\\_means\\_for\\_us\\_humans?language=en#t-760319](https://www.ted.com/talks/laurel_braitman_depressed_dogs_cats_with OCD_what_animal_madness_means_for_us_humans?language=en#t-760319)

different than your anxiety.” In her opinion, the illnesses themselves are the same between people and animals, but it is the personal experience, not the species that makes a difference.

Orca brains are one example of an animal that has the potential to be *more* emotionally intelligent than us. Neuroscientist Lori Marino asserts that, “the Orca brain just screams out intelligence,[and] awareness.”<sup>9</sup> She suggests that ““many cetacean species have achieved a level of social-emotional sophistication not achieved by other animals, including humans’.”<sup>10</sup> Under MRI examination, scientists determined that Orcas have a part of the brain that humans don’t. This section extends off of the limbic system, which processes emotions. This suggests that whales have entire emotional systems unique to them. According to one whale researcher, “The safest inference would be that these are animals that have highly elaborated emotional lives.”<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, cells responsible for “rapid intuitive choice in complex social situations” and are associated with “emotions such as empathy” were discovered in whales and dolphins.<sup>12</sup> Until these studies were conducted, it was believed that these cells were exclusive to humans and some primates. The discovery of these cells in cetaceans reveals that the pool of emotionally intelligent animals is much larger than it appears.

There is an incredible amount of behavioral overlap between humans and animals. One basic behavior that we share with animals is tool use. As one researcher from the WDC describes, “Tool use has long been seen as a marker of intelligence, but can also be associated with social learning and culture.”<sup>13</sup> Animals like killer whales and otters have been observed teaching their young the skills required to hunt. Mother Orcas have been known to catch and release seals to help teach their young to hunt.<sup>14</sup> Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins in Australia have been observed collecting sponges to use as protection while they forage for food on the ocean floor. Dolphins along the coast of Florida have learned to use mud to trap fish. Humpback whales create bubble nets to catch krill. These distinct behaviors require “cooperation, anticipation of the action of others, social learning, understanding acoustic cues, and probably a good deal of patience whilst the technique is learnt and perfected.”<sup>15</sup> These behaviors are further confirmation of their intelligence.

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<sup>9</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>10</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>11</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>12</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>13</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>14</sup> TV, A. A. (2018, September 28). SUPER KILLER. KILLER WHALE / FULL HD - Documentary Films on Amazing Animals TV. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PDeS8y5Vqg>

<sup>15</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

In addition to tool use, animals are also capable of complex communication and language. In 1986 a study conducted by Louis Herman discovered that dolphins can learn human language. This only furthers the idea that animals are capable of complex thought. As one WDC writer states, “we humans have spent decades trying to unravel the possible languages of other species, and yet the dolphins were able to understand the syntax of a human generated language.” This study offered new data supporting the notion that non-human animals are capable of complex intelligence. In this case, the dolphins understand humans more than humans understood them.

The languages that animals use within their own species have the potential to be just as if not more intricate than our own. Scientists consider the song produced by male humpback whales as “one of the most complex non-human communications ever studied.”<sup>16</sup> It is not just the songs themselves, but how they are spread that is impressive. These detailed melodies are transmitted between groups of males across seas and seasons, from pod to pod in the same way that pop songs catch on in our culture.<sup>17</sup>

One observed case of communication between whales took place at SeaWorld when a mother whale was separated from her calf. After the separation, the generally quiet mother Orca spent days in one corner of her pool, uncharacteristically loud. When another mother Orca was separated from her calf at SeaWorld, she responded to her loss in a similar way. After the separation, she produced loud vocals that had never been heard before. SeaWorld brought in scientists to analyze them and learned that the vocals she was producing were long range vocals; the mother whale was calling for her baby. While whale vocalizations may not look or sound anything like our own vernacular, that does not invalidate them as languages. As one researcher states, “the scientific community is reluctant to say any other animal but humans uses languages, but there’s every indication that they do.”<sup>18</sup>

There are hundreds of examples of emotionally provoked behavior on the part of animals. One SeaWorld trainer who took care of the mother Orca at the time of her separation remembers the whale “shaking and crying. There was nothing that you could call that besides grief.”<sup>19</sup> Similar vocalization happens in the wild when Orca calves are captured for SeaWorld. One captain who worked catching whales for SeaWorld recalled that “the Orcas wouldn’t leave. They would sit in a line and vocalize to the young one. You understand what you’re doing. Just like kidnapping a little kid away from their mother.”<sup>20</sup> In 1990, Dr. Naomi Rose observed what she believed to be two young male Orcas grieving their mother’s death by “repeatedly visiting the

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<sup>16</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>17</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>18</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>19</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>20</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

locations that their mother had been in the last few days of her life.”<sup>21</sup> More recently, a mother Orca carried her dead calf on her head for over seventeen days.<sup>22</sup> Based off of these experiences, it is clear that animals are capable of emotion. They understand and care about loss in their own lives. Their relationships with each other in life and in death affect them deeply. As Carl Safina observes, “love is not the thing that makes us human. It’s not special to us.”<sup>23</sup>

Another emotional commonality in animal behavior is empathy. More than once, Orca whales have lead lost researchers through fog to shore.<sup>24</sup> One humpback whale “saved” a diver by guarding her from a tiger shark.<sup>25</sup> Humpbacks display similar behavior around seals, trying to save them from Orcas whales.<sup>26</sup> On one occasion, two Beluga whales in captivity pushed a drowning diver to the surface in attempt to save her life.<sup>27</sup> One scientist states that “while the behavior is very interesting, (he) doesn’t find it completely surprising that a cetacean would intervene to help a member of another species” as they are emotionally intelligent animals.<sup>28</sup>

Many animal communities are built on social emotion. As one scientist asserts, whales “have a sense of self, a sense of social bonding that they have taken to another level, much stronger, much more complex than in other mammals, including humans.”<sup>29</sup> Orcas spend their lives as a part of a large family. This social connection informs and constitutes their way of life. It has even been suggested that “their whole sense of self has been distributed among the individuals in their group.”<sup>30</sup> A researcher from the WDC states that, like humans, cetaceans “tend to exhibit a high degree of social behavior, including cooperative behavior, which helps to ensure that groups are successful.”<sup>31</sup> They are “vulnerable to emotional and social stresses that

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<sup>21</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>22</sup> Center for Whale Research. (2018, August 13). Why An Orca Mourned Her Calf for 17 Days. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2018/08/orca-mourning-calf-killer-whale-northwest-news/>

<sup>23</sup> Safina, C. (n.d.). What are animals thinking and feeling? Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/carl\\_safina\\_what\\_are\\_animals\\_thinking\\_and\\_feeling](https://www.ted.com/talks/carl_safina_what_are_animals_thinking_and_feeling)

<sup>24</sup> Safina, C. (n.d.). What are animals thinking and feeling? Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/carl\\_safina\\_what\\_are\\_animals\\_thinking\\_and\\_feeling](https://www.ted.com/talks/carl_safina_what_are_animals_thinking_and_feeling)

<sup>25</sup> Geographic, N. (2018, January 12). Was This Whale Trying to Save a Diver's Life? | National Geographic. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_NBjaUGaUos](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NBjaUGaUos)

<sup>26</sup> Why Humpback Whales Protect Other Animals From Killer Whales. (2016, August 08). Retrieved from <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/08/humpback-whales-save-animals-killer-whales-explained/>

<sup>27</sup> NTDTV. (2009, July 31). Whales Rescue Diver in China. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjXPS57f7wY>

<sup>28</sup> Why Humpback Whales Protect Other Animals From Killer Whales. (2016, August 08). Retrieved from <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/08/humpback-whales-save-animals-killer-whales-explained/>

<sup>29</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>30</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>31</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

can lead to considerable harm.”<sup>32</sup> For example, much of the violence between whales at SeaWorld was caused by social differences. Whales from different pods from all around the world were thrown in together, all from communities with “completely different sets of behaviors and vocalizations. You could even call them languages.”<sup>33</sup> Their proximity to one another caused tension, violence, and even death. Carl Safina makes the point that “acknowledging that species other than our own have complex cultural structures requires us to look more closely at these populations and the way that we protect them, as species and populations, but also as cultural units and individuals.”<sup>34</sup>

While the emotional behavior of animals is harder to study and interpret, this does not invalidate it. In the opinion of one WDC writer, it is ridiculous to discredit the observations of researchers who have spent “a lifetime studying a particular species, getting to understand and recognize a range of different behaviors and their context.” Reports from such experienced individuals on emotionally motivated behavior “have considerable credibility and deserve our attention.”<sup>35</sup>

In some cases, there are no clues as to what motivated an animal’s behavior. The story of Tilikum the Orca is a rare situation in which the history of the animal’s treatment is available, providing a clear explanation for his behavior. At the start of Tilikum's career at SeaLand, everyone loved him. He was the whale that every trainer wanted to work with and was described as well behaved and eager to please. But his enthusiasm didn’t last for long; SeaLand’s head trainer used punishment and food deprivation while teaching Tilikum alongside an older, trained whale. Steve Huxter, former Director of SeaLand recalls that the food deprivation “caused a lot of frustration with the larger animal, and would in turn get frustrated with Tilikum and would rake him with his teeth.” During some seasons Tilikum would be “covered in rake marks head to toe”.

This was not the end of Tilikum’s abuse. At night, the whales had to be in a 20x30 steel box with the lights off. The box had worked when the whales were younger and smaller, but as they grew, it became increasingly claustrophobic. When the trainers let the whales out in the mornings, there would often be new rakes on them and sometimes even blood in the water. If the whales refused to go into the enclosure at night, they were deprived of food. In the opinion of one of Tilikum’s former trainers, “it probably led to a psychosis. He was on a hair trigger. He’d kill.”

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<sup>32</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

<sup>33</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>34</sup> Safina, C. (n.d.). What are animals thinking and feeling? Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/carl\\_safina\\_what\\_are\\_animals\\_thinking\\_and\\_feeling](https://www.ted.com/talks/carl_safina_what_are_animals_thinking_and_feeling)

<sup>35</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

In 1991, Tilikum attacked and killed Keltie Byrne, a part time worker at SeaLand. After this incident, SeaLand closed down and it was assumed that Tilikum wouldn't be performing again. SeaWorld needed a male whale for breeding and took Tilikum without question.<sup>36</sup>

When Tilikum arrived at SeaWorld in 1992, he was repeatedly attacked by the other whales, particularly the females. According to one trainer, "In the wild, it is a very matriarchal society. Male whales are kept at the perimeter. In captivity, the animals are squeezed into very close proximity." Tilikum was too big to get away from the smaller and more agile females and had "no place to run". Because he was getting beat up by the other whales, Tilikum was separated from them and only interacted with the females to mate.

It could have been because of this isolation that he tended to "bond" with the trainers. His former trainers recalled that he was "always happy to see you in the morning. Maybe because he was alone, maybe because he was hungry, maybe because he just liked you, who knows what was going on in his head." They all loved Tilikum. Because they had no knowledge of the events that had transpired at SeaLand, they only saw him as a seemingly happy and responsive partner. As one of his trainers recalls, "I never got the impression of him, while I was there, that he was a scary whale. Not at all."

As time passed, Tilikum's mental and emotional state began to collapse. From the perspective of neuroscientist Lori Marino, "All whales in captivity have a bad life. They're all emotionally destroyed. They're all psychology traumatized. They are ticking time bombs." This was most certainly the case with Tilikum. In addition to the long term abuse, a number of factors contributed to his attack of trainer Dawn Brancheau. On the day of the attack, Tilikum missed some important cues during his performance. In response to this, Brancheau withheld food from him. Tilikum could sense that the food supply was waning and became increasingly frustrated when he received little to no food. At the end of the performance, Brancheau got in the water with him, and he attacked and eventually killed her. Tilikum's attack was anything but random. According to one trainer, "He's not killing because he's crazy. He's not killing because he doesn't know what he's doing. He's killing because he's frustrated. He's got aggregations and he has no outlet for it."<sup>37</sup> so, he ended up taking his frustration out on the trainers.

A long standing assumption within the scientific community is that you should never project human thoughts and emotions onto animals. According to scientist Carl Safina, this idea is silly because anthropomorphizing animals is the "best first guess about what they are doing and how they are feeling". Laurel Braitman maintains a similar perspective, saying, "I don't think that we cannot anthropomorphize. We will always be one animal wondering about the emotional experience of another animal. So the question becomes, 'how do you anthropomorphize well?'" Examples of poor anthropomorphizing include throwing your dog a wedding or getting too close to exotic wildlife because you believe you have a spiritual connection. But there are ways to anthropomorphize rationally. In Braitman's opinion, this

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<sup>36</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>37</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

means “accepting our animal similarities with other species and using them to make informed assumptions about other animals’ minds and experiences.”<sup>38</sup>

Our society relies on anthropomorphizing animals to make our medications. Animal testing for behavioral changes and toxicity caused by medication is based on the assumption that humans will react similarly. We believe in this overlap enough to “give animals these drugs not just as test subjects, but as patients.” SeaWorld gives mother Orcas anti-anxiety medication when their calves are taken away.<sup>39</sup> Dogs, cats, and even crawdads respond to anti-anxiety medication. One massive similarity between us and other social animals across species is that time with other social animals works as an effective healing treatment. This provides a scientific reasoning behind the countless instances of “unlikely animal friendships”. Braitman believes that these relationships are not “hopelessly sentimental” or “anthropomorphic in the wrong ways”. She argues that these are legitimate relationships. Studies around the bonding hormone oxytocin, have shown an increase in the hormone around humans and dogs that care about each other. Further studies have found the same phenomenon in friendships between different animal species, so it is not so far-fetched to believe that human and animals could have real connections.

Everyone wants to be friends with animals. So much of our culture around animals is built off of this idea of having a spiritual connection or friendship with one. Movies like “Free Willy”, “Babe”, and “Lassie” feature remarkable friendships between humans and animals. Almost every Disney princess is accompanied by some sort of wild companion. It is common and natural to love the idea of befriending an animal. This cultural fantasy provides a strong justification for the trainers at SeaWorld and other similar establishments. These companies capitalize on the hope that this dream is possible. In the documentary “Blackfish”, former trainers at Seaworld said that they joined out of a shared fascination and love for whales. As one trainer described, “That’s the joy I got out of it, it was a relationship like I’d never had”.<sup>40</sup>

The greatest danger of romanticizing animal emotion is that we put ourselves in danger. One insight into this extreme is the story of the Grizzly Man. Timothy Treadwell, or the “Grizzly Man” lived with grizzly bears in Alaska for 13 summers. He romanticized the bears and believed that he had a magical connection to them. Treadwell saw the animals as his friends, but how did the bears see him?

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<sup>38</sup> Braitman, L. (n.d.). Depressed dogs, cats with OCD - what animal madness means for us humans. Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/laurel\\_braitman\\_depressed\\_dogs\\_cats\\_with\\_ ocd\\_what\\_animal\\_madness\\_means\\_for\\_us\\_humans?language=en#t-760319](https://www.ted.com/talks/laurel_braitman_depressed_dogs_cats_with OCD_what_animal_madness_means_for_us_humans?language=en#t-760319)

<sup>39</sup> Braitman, L. (n.d.). Depressed dogs, cats with OCD - what animal madness means for us humans. Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/laurel\\_braitman\\_depressed\\_dogs\\_cats\\_with\\_ ocd\\_what\\_animal\\_madness\\_means\\_for\\_us\\_humans?language=en#t-760319](https://www.ted.com/talks/laurel_braitman_depressed_dogs_cats_with_ ocd_what_animal_madness_means_for_us_humans?language=en#t-760319)

<sup>40</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

It is a common misconception that Treadwell was a idiot, completely unaware of the risks associated with interacting with the bears. This was not the case. Over the course of his many tapes, Treadwell openly acknowledges the bears' ability to hurt or even kill him. But he was confident in his bond with them. He was convinced that he could communicate with the bears well enough to protect himself. On his thirteenth summer, he was killed and eaten by one of the bears he loved.

Treadwell did not doubt his ability to communicate emotions with animals. He used speech and body language as ways to communicate with them, speaking to them as you would a human. At least from his perspective, he had complex emotional relationships with the animals. Treadwell declared again and again that he loved and would die for the bears. When interacting with the them, he would talk with them as if they were human, saying, "I love you" and "I'm sorry". He gave all of the bears names and claimed that they each had distinct personalities. Treadwell had a particularly unique relationship with the romanticization of animals because he valued them at the same level, if not higher, than humans. He rejected society in favor of the bears, even going so far as to say that he would had to "mutate into a wild animal to live out there" and that he was "one of them". In all of his years with the bears, he never carried a gun, and was deeply against the killing of bears, even in self-defense. Treadwell was recorded many times saying that he would not kill a bear if it attacked him. In one of his tapes he repeats over and over again, "I will die for these animals" as proof of his dedication to them. After the discovery of his bones, Treadwell's long time pilot and friend remarked, "The tough thing is that Tim would have never wanted to see any bears killed. He would have been happy if no one had found him."

After his death, the validity of his relationship with the bears came into question. Many people disagreed with Treadwell's "children of the universe" ideology and labeled his behavior as idiotic romanticization. In the opinion of one pilot who helped gather Treadwell's remains, "He was acting like he was working with people wearing bear costumes instead of wild animals. Those animals are big and ferocious and they come equipped to kill and eat you. That's just what Timothy Treadwell was asking for." Some even argued that Treadwell's relationship with the bears was so illusionary that, "the bears thought he was retarded or something. The bear that killed him either decided that he had had enough of Tim Treadwell or had realize that he might be good to eat."

Beyond whether or not it was smart to live with bears, many considered it a breach of the "invisible borderline" between man and beast. This line had always been respected by the native communities of Alaska. And when asked, native Sven Haakanson, Curator of Kodiak's Alutiiq museum stated, "For him to act like a bear disrespected bears and what they represents." According to him, Timothy Treadwell crossed the "unspoken boundary" between people and animals that had been in place in the native community for more than seven thousand years. In the documentary "Blackfish", one researcher outlined the same boundary concerning the issue of capturing Orcas for SeaWorld: "The First Nations people and the old fishermen on the coast call them "blackfish." They're an animal that possesses great spiritual power and they're not to be

meddled with.” In his experience, “The whales are always in charge. I never get out of the boat, I never mess with them.”<sup>41</sup>

Treadwell was not entirely oblivious. One of his closest friends remarked, “He was a lot smarter than people give him credit for. He made it for a long time before they caught up with him. The bear that ended up killing him was a dirty rotten bear that he didn’t like anyway. He wanted to be friends with but it never happened.” Perhaps Treadwell *had* established authentic relationships with the regular bears of the region. There is even a possibility that these relationships kept them attacking or eating him. Treadwell would have certainly thought so. But whether the Grizzly Man’s bears would or wouldn’t have attacked him, we will never fully know. As biologist Larry Van Daele says, “There’s a desire to get into the bears’ world but the reality is that we never can because we are very different.”

The personal experience of these animals is the greatest mystery. It is one thing that, as with human experience, cannot be quantified or examined with full, objective clarity. As one SeaWorld trainer recalls, “At the time, I think I could have convinced myself that the relationships that we had were built on something stronger than the fact that I’m giving them fish. I like to think that. But I don’t know that that’s the truth.”<sup>42</sup> Carl Safina points out that, “much of this material is based on inference, since it is very difficult for us to know definitively how a whale or dolphin ‘feels’ about a certain situation.”<sup>43</sup> We don’t know exactly why the hero Belugas pulled the drowning diver to the surface. We interpret it as an act of altruism, but the Belugas’ actions could have also been motivated by cruelty, curiosity, confusion, or even emotion that we as humans cannot describe. There is a belief that animals feel the same way we do and act in response to the same emotions. Despite the science that proves our many striking similarities, their personal experiences are still largely undiscovered. So much of their world and their relationship to us is a mystery. Just as we can never fully unravel the human mind, we will never be able to fully understand our wild brethren. Humans may never fully understand animals’ perspectives, but they are closer to us than we think.

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<sup>41</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>42</sup> Blackfish. (2016, December 12). Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/70267802>

<sup>43</sup> Scientific Evidence for Whale and Dolphin Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://us.whales.org/wdc-in-action/scientific-evidence-for-whale-and-dolphin-rights>

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