



## Keiko's Story: The Timeline



**1977 or 1978:** Keiko is born in the Atlantic Ocean near Iceland.

**1979:** Keiko is captured and brought to Saedyrasfnid, an Icelandic aquarium.

**1982:** Marineland in Ontario, Canada, buys Keiko, where he begins his training and performs for the public. Skin lesions first appear.

**1985:** Marineland sells Keiko to Reino Aventura, an amusement park in Mexico City, for \$350,000.

**1992:** Warner Bros. Studios begins filming *Free Willy* on location in Mexico City. The plot involves a young boy saving a killer whale, portrayed by Keiko, from an unscrupulous marine park owner.

**1993:** *Free Willy* is a surprise hit at the theaters, especially with millions of schoolchildren around the world. That support, along with media coverage detailing Keiko's unacceptable living conditions in Mexico City, prompts the movie studio, the park, and animal protection advocates to find Keiko a new home.

**1994:** Earth Island Institute, an environmental advocacy group for marine animals, begins discussions with the Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport, Oregon. After the aquarium meets preliminary requirements, the institute begins negotiations with the aquarium. The Free Willy Foundation is formed in November with a \$4 million donation from Warner Bros., and an anonymous donor.

**1995:** The Mexico City amusement park donates Keiko to the Free Willy/Keiko Foundation. The foundation announces Keiko will live at a new, \$7.3 million rehabilitation facility at the Oregon Coast Aquarium, with the hope that he eventually will be returned to the North Atlantic. Craig McCaw is revealed as the anonymous donors of \$2 million, which helped start the Free Willy/Keiko Foundation. The Humane Society of the United States donates \$1 million to the foundation, and children around the world begin sending in money for Keiko's freedom. *Free Willy 2* is released on home video; each video carries a request for donations to the Free Willy/Keiko Foundation.

**1996:** United Parcel Service delivers Keiko to the aquarium on January 7. Weighing just 7,720 pounds, Keiko is placed in his new pool and experiences sea

water for the first time in 14 years. Keiko gains more than 1,000 pounds by year's end, and his skin lesions begin to fade.

**1997:** Keiko's staff begins introducing him to live fish in May, in an effort to teach him to hunt for food. His skin lesions have all disappeared. At first, he does not eat the fish, but brings them to his trainers. He catches and eats his first fish in August. By June, Keiko weighs 9,620 pounds. The staff of the Free Willy/Keiko Foundation sets a goal of releasing Keiko into a pen in the North Atlantic by 1998. Keiko suffers from a possible liver ailment and respiratory infection, but responds to treatment.

**1998:** A medical panel announces Keiko is healthy and exhibiting the normal behavior patterns of a killer whale. Keiko is eating live steelhead weighing from three to 12 pounds each, comprising up to half of his daily intake of food. On September 9, Keiko is lifted from his tank and transported by C-17 from Newport directly to Klettsvik Bay in Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland.

**1999:** During his first full year back in his native Icelandic waters, Keiko, now under the day-to-day care of the Ocean Futures Society, continues comprehensive physical and behavioral training to prepare him for his potential reintroduction to the wild. An essential component of his program is moving his attention from above to below the surface of the water. In doing so, Keiko depends less on his human caretakers for stimuli and develops greater interest in the surroundings of his natural environment.

**2000:** Keiko is fitted for a tracking device that will allow Ocean Futures staff to take him out of Klettsvik Bay and eventually to the open ocean. Keiko makes amazing progress during his sea "walks," even beginning to interact with wild orcas in the vicinity of his sea pen. His health improves as he comes closer to returning to his wild ways.

**2001:** Early in the year, Keiko exhibits behaviors consistent with wild predators—competing with other animals for food. He's spotted challenging sea birds for fish. This behavior is essential to Keiko's survival in the wild and is encouraging considering that Keiko has not had competition for food since his infancy. Keiko begins initiating contact with wild orcas in the vicinity and spends several days away from his human companions. The primary challenge ahead is for Keiko to begin maintaining himself on wild fish and regularly associating with wild orcas.

**2002:** Researchers continue to encourage Keiko to hunt for and eat live fish. While he makes progress, frozen fish remains his preferred food source.

In May, The Humane Society of the United States begins negotiations with the Free Willy/Keiko Foundation to take over the Keiko Project, with the hope of realizing the ultimate goal of permanently returning Keiko to the wild. At this time, the Wendy P. McCaw Foundation steps forward to fund part of the project.

In July, Keiko spends several days in the open ocean, interacting with wild whales. Upon his voluntary return to Klettsvik Bay, the Keiko team feeds him a small amount of fish and returns him to the ocean where he continues to interact with wild whales. He then begins an epic journey covering nearly 1,000 miles across the North Atlantic, by the Faroe Islands, and to the coast of Norway.

In September, Keiko follows a fishing boat into a Norwegian fjord in the Halså community. Thousands of visitors come to see the friendly whale. The Keiko Project staff works closely with the Norwegian government to put in place regulations to keep people from swimming with, feeding, or getting too close to Keiko.

The first observations of Keiko in Norway document that he is in excellent physical condition. Keiko has been on his own for close to 60 days without food from humans. His lead veterinarian, and a variety of other orca scientists, conclude that Keiko has successfully fed himself in the wild, a major milestone in his journey toward freedom.

Meanwhile, the Craig McCaw Foundation and Ocean Futures Society turn over the management of the project to the Free Willy/Keiko Foundation and The HSUS.

In December, Keiko is walked to Taknes Bay, where staff continue to work with and feed him. For the first time, Keiko is in an area where he may come and go as he chooses. The Free Willy/Keiko Foundation and The HSUS continue to care for Keiko while allowing his historic journey to the wild to move ahead.

**2003:** On December 12 Keiko dies in Taknes Bay, apparently from pneumonia