

The Mariner

A Publication For Where Land Ends

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However, while the Commodore was waiting for boats to arrive, gun in hand, a concerned neighbor saw this armed man walking around the docks and called the Sheriff. Soon a very shocked Fleck was staring down the barrels of law enforcement's rifles and handguns, wondering what was going on.

"The Sheriff's boat came up in front of me, there was a guy on the foredeck with a rifle pointed at me, saying 'hands up,'" said Fleck. "I put my hands up and said, 'I've just finishing boats here.'"

The yacht club commodore explained to the Sheriff that he was simply running a sanctioned race and while the officer seemed to understand, Fleck was about to find out the wheels of law enforcement had already been set in motion. When he turned around towards the parking lot he was facing an area full of squad cars all with officers pointing guns in his direction. Fleck was given directions, handcuffed and loaded into the back of a van while authorities made sense of the details surrounding the situation.

"I didn't think I had broken any laws because we had done this before," Fleck said. "I just tried to listen carefully to what they wanted me to do."

After being detained for a substantial amount of time, local authorities released Fleck, explaining that anything involving weapons requires an immediate amount of concern. Fleck harbors no ill will and was more than understanding and cooperative.

While some felt the Sheriff's may have overreacted, considering they were informed by other club members that Fleck was a Commodore of the club, it was immediately ascertained that the gun was loaded with blanks and there was obviously a sailboat race finishing – the Sheriff department maintains that protocol needs to be carried out in events where guns are involved. However, they also concede that given the specifics, things could have probably been handled differently.

"You could probably say it was a little bit of everyone," said Marina del Rey Sheriff Sergeant Carrillo of the shared responsibility involved. "The permit was issued [for the race] but on the permit that he pulled, there was no mention of guns, cannons or any other device."

Carrillo said that the department likes to be notified about the use of cannons and/or guns in addition to the permit so they can be aware. The Sheriff pointed out that he had never been a part of anything like this since he came to MDR in 1992, but looks to learn from the event.

"Blame's happened in the past, but we're making changes for that not to happen again," Carrillo said. "We have a good rapport with all our yacht clubs, including this one, and I don't think this is going to be an issue again."

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Freedom Plea

By Dr. Maddalena Bazzoli

Reading the news about the killer whale attack at Sea World in Florida, my first reaction was sadness for the loss of a human life. My second reaction was anger. Anger for our lack of understanding that those are wild creatures that can't be confined to a tank. Anger for the prevalent human practice of caging wild animals for amusement.

I have been engaged in studying the behavioral ecology of whales and dolphins for over twenty years and, in the last



A rare photo of a Killer Whale in Southern California, photographed off the Malibu coast. Photo courtesy of Ocean Conservation Society.

decade, I've logged thousands of hours at sea, observing marine mammals in Santa Monica Bay and Southern California Bight. In the half of my lifetime spent in company of these animals in the wild, I've learned about their lives in coastal and offshore waters around the world, the complexity of their societies and communication and the strong bonds that form between them. Not surprisingly, there are many striking similarities with our own species and societies.

I have also looked into the eyes of dolphins and whales caged in aquaria and delphinaria such as Sea

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World and realized that these were not the same creatures I came to know in the field. Dolphins (killer whales are a species of *Delphinidae*) are highly adaptable to their respective environments, where they range freely in a three-dimensional medium often over hundreds, if not thousands of miles. Deprived of their natural space and social structures, they change, as we too might change if our freedom to move was taken away. What people see when they walk into an aquarium to view killer whales tossing a ball or responding to a trainer's request in exchange for a fish, has little or nothing to do with how these marine mammals behave in their own environment. Is this what we really want our children to learn about these magnificent creatures of the open oceans, many of which are already facing a dim future due to our negligence in protecting their habitats?

To tell the truth, the recent attack at Sea World does not surprise me. This wasn't the first time it happened and it won't be the last. We can never forget that these are wild animals prone to acting as wild animals do and we ought not to make the mistake of judging them by human standards. If we don't learn to respect these creatures by leaving them where they should be and making efforts to conserve and protect their environment, there won't be any of them to see in the future. In an aquarium or otherwise.

Maddalena Bearzi, Ph.D. is President of Ocean Conservation Society (www.oceanconservation.org) and co-author of the recent book "Beautiful Minds: The Parallel Lives of Great Apes and Dolphins" recently published by Harvard University Press. Dr. Bearzi has studied dolphin and whale behavioral ecology for the past twenty years and she is actively involved in marine conservation.




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