

Dear Mr. Pietsch,

We are a group of concerned individuals who need to present our concerns about abuse of park animals. Unfortunately, we have to remain anonymous to prevent repercussions. We have chosen to present the matter directly to you because Marlee is unapproachable and lower management will not handle this in a fair manner. The supervisors seem always to be above reproach, even when they are blatantly wrong. It has been a year that Marlee has been curator and due to the unfair handling of animals and people, the climate of the training department has deteriorated drastically. We have lost good people and there is a strong possibility that we will lose more.

Marlee can be very protective ²⁴ with animals she favors but if any animal defies her, she retaliates by physically hitting them or hits them with an object, especially during tank cleaning in the training department where she has beaten Amiko with a pole because he would not move. Another type of animal abuse is the form of favoritism in regards to care of an animal. There have been instances where an animal receives inadequate care or facilities due only to personal negative feelings toward that animal. Food deprivation is another form of abuse. The worst part is that it does not work. Animals that are slow or are not willing to perform may displaying a prelude to illness. Withholding food as a punishment is not the type we endorse. Anger and frustration should never affect how you treat an animal. Discipline can be maintained without violence or punishment. Animals do not learn anything by depriving them of food. They cannot associate their hunger pangs of today with what was not accomplished yesterday. And yet, Marlee has advised trainers to cut their animals rations, using food deprivation as a punishment or a training tool. One example is when we had a large shipment of sardines come in and some animals ate them while others refused. To get rid of them faster, she insisted that the animals not be fed at all until they had eaten the sardines first. They could have been fed to those who preferred them as we were not introducing this type of food into their diets permanently. One sea lion has nothing to eat for over a week and had lost a considerable amount of weight before he was allowed to be fed again. Many other animals had drastic ration reductions as a result.

These are not isolated incidents but examples of the type of abuse that occurs regularly. These allegations need to be investigated by someone for the sake of the animals, the staff and for Sea Life Park. What kind of image would this project for the Park if these things became public knowledge? Sea Life Park has an outstanding reputation among oceanariums worldwide. We have always supported humane treatment and animal rights throughout the world. Shouldn't we start at home?

The normal procedure for forcefeeding our monk seal pups is as follows: a fish is placed at the end of a plastic tube and gently pushed into the throat. The tube is then withdrawn and the fish remains. About 20% of the time, the fish comes up again.

When this occurs, it makes more work for those involved. At these times, Marlee becomes frustrated, shoves the tube and fish carelessly and painfully down their little throats. She does this as fast as possible and in anger. If it keeps happening, she throws the equipment down and leaves, depriving the animal of food. The internal organs can easily be damaged by such rough abusive behaviour. This happens on an almost daily basis with at least one of the pups. The people involved with this hate to work with her in the feeding but are also afraid to speak up publicly.

In another incident, blood was being taken from an adult sea lion in the feeding pool and a three year old imprinted sea lion was watching the procedure. She was not in the way or disturbing the process but Marlee approached her to try to pet her and when the sea lion barked threateningly Marlee punched her in the face as hard as she could.

A two year old female sea lion was being trained to go up and down the stairs at HOT (Hawaii Ocean Theater) and to eventually perform in the show. It is inevitable during the course of training that sea lions jump into the dolphin tanks and sometimes the tank has to be drained and the animal caught and taken out. This is normal in the training process and part of the job. Marlee did not want this to happen and when it did she became so angry that when the tank was drained and the animal wrapped in a net, it was dragged roughly down the steel stairs bumping off every stair. It was a miracle the animal was not badly hurt. When she reached the bottom, she was thrown into the holding tank and Marlee repeatedly kicked her while she was wrapped in the net until she was able to get free and run into the water. Everyone involved was horrified but again afraid to speak up.

On Sunday, August 9, 1990, an eight week old sea lion was taken from the training area to the seal pool, this pup was being bottle fed as her mother was not lactating. In an effort to get the pup to eat, Marlee held her down with one hand around her neck, forcing her to the ground and with her knee in her back, attempted to force the bottle into her mouth. The natural reaction was to try and get away by turning her head to bite. Marlee slapped the pup with all her strength across the face several times and then dragged her to the grassy area adjacent to the seal pool and attempted it again. The same thing occurred three more times and each time was followed by several very hard punches in the face. Marlee did receive several small bites in the process.

This incident happened during park hours but since a Whalers Cove show was going on at the same time, the majority of the public was not in the area but several guests ---six to be exact---as well as five employees from various departments, one being reef tank, witnessed this brutal display.

We have always been made to understand that physical abuse of the animals will not be tolerated and anyone caught abusing an animal will be dismissed immediately. That there is no tolerance for

animal abuse in our profession. We all know there are more effective ways to accomplish our goals than negative reinforcement. In lectures, tours and narratives it has been conveyed to the public that we only use positive means of training. Our education department stresses this. Most visitor school groups and educators will hear this at least once before they leave our park.

This kind of abuse has been common knowledge within the training staff as well as some other departments for years, yet now, the employee who is the abuser has become our curator and is supposed to set an example for over 25 employees. New, young impressionable trainers are forming the opinion that this behavior is acceptable. They will one day pass this on to others. This is a very dangerous situation. ²⁶

How can an animal get proper care when subjected to this inhumane treatment? When anger replaces compassion and knowledge, it puts the animals in a serious, vulnerable position. Sea Like Park has a reputation to uphold. What each of us does during working hours reflects heavily on the park as a whole. How much more so for the curator of Marine Mammals, who represents us all?? Who evaluates her?

She is short tempered, explosive and sets a very poor example for the Junior staff. But more important, the sad abuse of the animals is betraying a trust we have been given.

We as individuals who devote our lives to the care and conservation of these special animals can no longer stand by and look the other way when they are abused. The abuse carries over to those who work for her. They are singled out for favoritism, abuse, degraded and punished just as the animals are. And mostly, without any logical reason and with no recourse. Supervisors should be level headed, impartial and able to deal with a variety of personalities. This is not the case. As a result, there is resentment among the staff that discourages the spirit of growth and cooperation.

We realize that these allegations against Marlee are serious and there could be serious repercussions for all of us.

But it could be far worse if you heard of these things from a visitor to the park who either wrote to you or even called the authorities or the media.

This letter was purposely written while Marlee is out of town so if you talk to people at the Park on an individual basis, they would not be so intimidated. We have done what we felt we must: it is up to you.

A collaborative effort of concerned people.