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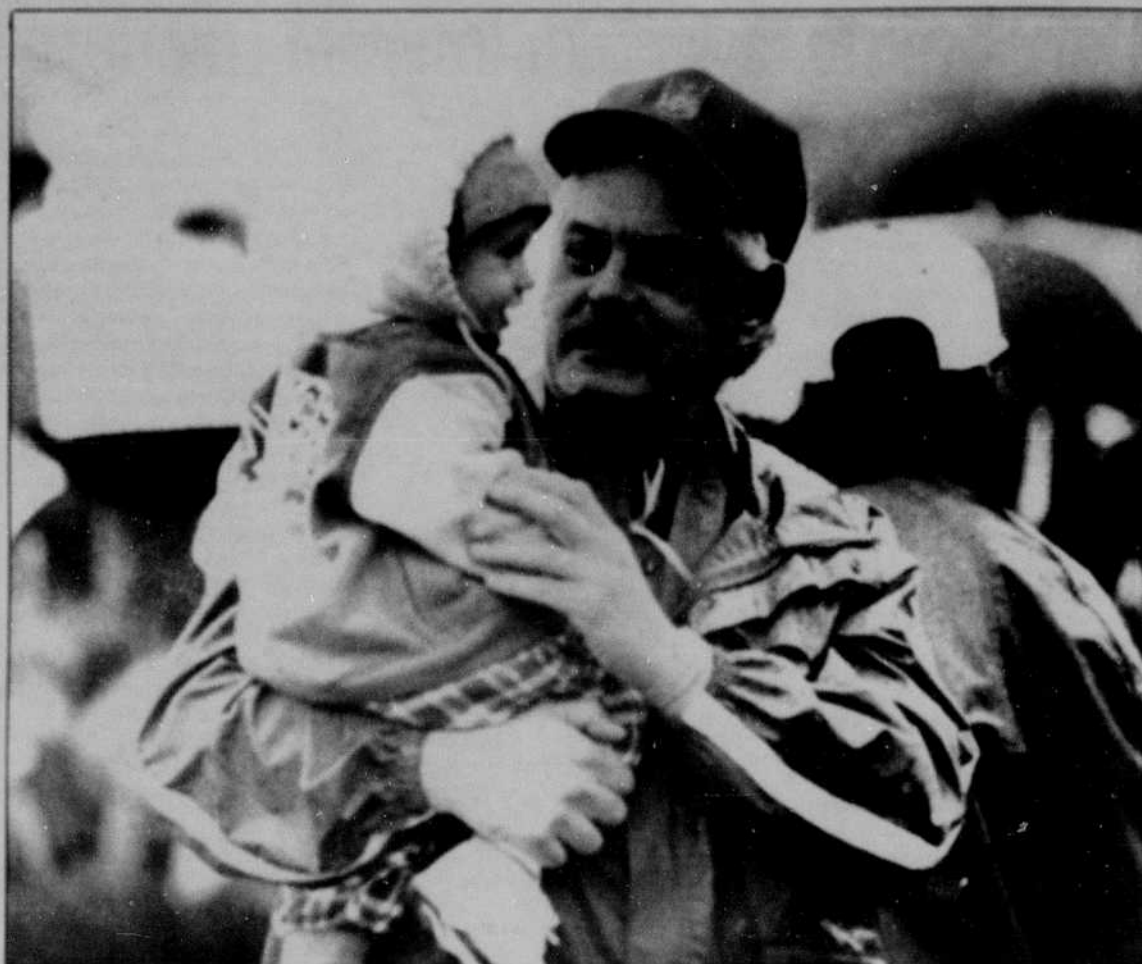
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No one could escape the excitement as they witnessed Keiko the killer whale arrive at Newport's aquarium. Keiko's veterinarians predict that he will adapt successfully to his new home.

Keiko: Should his health improve, Keiko may eventually return to the wild

Continued from Page 1A

say their goodbyes.

Keiko traveled aboard a C-130 Hercules aircraft. During the flight, a team of Mexican and American veterinarians and Keiko's two trainers attended to him.

From Mexico City, Keiko's trip to Oregon included two stops. President for the aquarium, Phyllis Bell, said the trip went along without any expected delays but that the need for fuel and a stop in Phoenix was necessary to clear customs.

While stopping in Phoenix, Bell said the water for Keiko's custom-built tank was changed and ice was added to his tank. The list of paperwork to clear Keiko for immigration to the United States included the Customs Service, immigration, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

An aquarium employee, Pat Dordan, first mentioned that there was a transportation dilemma and United Parcel Service officials quickly offered their services by providing the C-130. To transport the 21-foot Keiko, the aircraft carried a custom-built, water tight, fiberglass, steel and plywood box weighing more than 40,000 pounds.

Keiko was born in the Atlantic Ocean off Iceland and captured in 1979 where he lived at an Icelandic aquarium. Keiko, now 17, is a sub-adult male orca whose growth is nearly complete.

After the release of Free Willy, a November 1993 magazine story revealed that Keiko lived in an inadequate facility. Consequently, appeals for action to ensure Keiko's survival arrived at Warner Bros. studios.

Marine biologists said he suffers from various ailments including skin lesions at the base of his pectoral flippers and tail flukes, a drooping dorsal fin, worn teeth, a potentially compromised immune system and weight loss.

Response to Keiko's poor health began a two-year cam-

"
It was a thrill to see him swim off and start eating and start squeaking and talking like a real killer whale.

— Dr. Lanny Cornell
 Keiko's Veterinarian

paign to find Keiko a new home and construct a mammoth pool that is four times larger than his former home.

The two million gallon pool at the aquarium is colder and filled with fresh seawater pumped directly from Yaquina Bay. Keiko's new home has a submerged rubbing beach and he'll eat high-nutrition foods that should enable him to gain more weight, aquarium officials said.

The aquarium was closed on Sunday due to Keiko's arrival but reopens to the general public at 10 a.m.

Aquarium officials said attendance, which has been more than 1 million visitors since the aquarium opened two years ago, is expected to rise considerably.

For those wanting to visit Keiko, from Eugene the drive is approximately two hours on Highway 99 heading east to Corvallis. Then from Corvallis, follow signs to Highway 20 West. Highway 20 ends in Newport at Highway 101 and the Aquarium is south across the Yaquina Bay Bridge. The aquarium is the second right on Ferry Slip Road and then turn left into the parking lots.

Visitors to the aquarium can view Keiko from large underwater windows. Panels provide information about the world of orcas.

For those who are not yet able to make it to the aquarium, The Discovery Channel, one of the five largest cable television networks in the U.S., is producing Keiko's Story, which will premiere early in 1997.

Keiko arrived in good health and began eating within five

minutes of being put in the water, Dr. Cornell said.

For now, the thousands of school children who brought jars of money to the aquarium and for countless other donors, all can be proud.

Bell, the aquarium president, said seeing Keiko enter the water of his new tank created an "overwhelming feeling, it's fantastic having him here."

Cornell said everyone is excited to have him here.

"It was a thrill to see him swim off and start eating and start squeaking and talking like a real killer whale. Things he wasn't able to do in Mexico City because his tank was too small," Cornell said.

In Oregon, Keiko may regain his health and eventually return to the wild but only time will tell. Aquarium spokesperson Diane Hammond said, "If Keiko's health and other hurdles can be overcome, he will be released back to the wild — a project never before undertaken with an orca."

Cornell summed up the feeling shared by all involved in bringing Keiko to Oregon.

"The fact that people got together and built a facility for him shows what people can do when they really care," Cornell said.

Can Keiko Be Free?

The factors involving Keiko's release back to his original home in the waters off Iceland depend upon:

- His medical progress
- His ability to hunt for food
- Whether or not his original family can be found
- Whether or not his pod takes him in
- Government approval from the U.S. and Iceland

Source: The Oregon Coast Aquarium