

# FOR WHALES' SAKE

By Jackie Hildering



This is the story of one whale – T2. She is approximately 57-years-old and is known to have had at least 3 surviving calves and 3 grand-calves. She is a whale of the type we branded as “killer.”

T2 and 4 other killer whales were netted in Pedder Bay in March 1970. In this era, many were caught with the intent of sale to aquariums. It also continued to be commonplace to shoot killer whales since the perception was there were thousands of “blackfish” in BC waters and that they seriously threatened our salmon stocks.

Two of the five whales caught were immediately shipped to Sealand in Victoria. This left T2 in the net pen with her presumed juvenile son (T1) and another adult female (T3). After 75 days, T3 died of starvation. T2 and her son also continued to refuse the fish offered to them.

What we didn't know then but became clear

through the identification work of Dr. Michael Bigg is that not all BC's killer whales eat salmon and killer whales surely are not abundant. There are 3 eco-types in our waters – all of them at risk. The 3 types do not mate with one another. They have different diets and therefore must have different lifestyles.



**T2 swimming free**

T2 and the rest of the group we now know are “transients”; mammal eating killer whales. With mammals such as harbour seals being intelligent prey that can hear the calls of killer whales, it stands to reason that the culture of the transients would be all about stealth.

Transients don't have a culture of eating fish! Remarkably though T2 and T1 survived because, after 79 days in captivity, they began eating the

## *One Whale - “T2”*

salmon presented to them. And then, after 5 months of the whales being penned, someone enabled their escape by weighing down a corner of the net.

Into the wild they went and wild they be! I assure you, T2 is not eating salmon now! Her culture intact, I've not only witnessed her pursuing a variety of marine mammals, but also appearing to teach her grand-calves how to hunt, transient style.

I am always left in awe when I see her. One whale surviving our mistakes of the past – our culls, captures, presumptions and ignorance.

But will her kind survive our modern-day impacts? There's a limit to resilience and a limit to what we can claim are “mistakes.”

For sources, whale and conservation related information, see [www.econauts.org](http://www.econauts.org).

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