

Save the Whales—But Let the Humans

A media circus can make us care far more about two lost whales than we ever cared about millions of lost and neglected people.

by Tim Rumford

The two whales that swam into the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta in May garnered a lot of media attention and a plethora of assistance, or at least attempted assistance. In the end, the whales found their own way out of the delta's waterways, at night, without the aid of loud noises, whale calls, helicopters, banging pots and pans, or an army of people and a circus of media.

At its peak, the media attention paid to the whales in northern California far outpaced the war, health care, even Paris Hilton — let alone the G8 Summit.

One particular day, near the height of the whale rescue operation, several rescue methods were halted as the whales showed signs of stress. After three days of being chased around by boats and having every conceivable sound blasted at them, from sonar to the sounds of enemy whales, I would be more than stressed too.

We used everything we knew nothing about to coax them back into the ocean, all at taxpayers' expense — after all, they are whales. From the Coast Guard to Animal Rescue, Fish and Game, and a sea of other local agencies and volunteers — these whales were getting everything we had to throw at them.

I am all for saving the whales, but as humans, our compassion seems to be a bit convenient, media-driven, and our solutions suffer from the same problem.

Recently in Santa Cruz, I met a permanently disabled homeless man who was in a broken wheelchair waiting for someone to die, so he could get a bed in a low-income hellhole.

Like the whales, he took a wrong turn.

His plight was genuine and his predicament was visible to the public, yet no rescue attempt was made — no helicopter, no volunteers, no shelter, no press and no real health care.

No one yelled, "Man Down!" He did get to see a county doctor, who sent him

back out into the cold with his broken wheelchair and some insulin. He waited for three months as most people walked by and silently judged him. The local and mainstream media ignored it completely. He was just another homeless person.

So why is it we care more about saving two whales — and were willing to spend millions from what seemed like an unrestricted budget — than two human beings?

How many lives could we have changed with the money we spent confusing the living crap out of two helpless whales for days upon days?

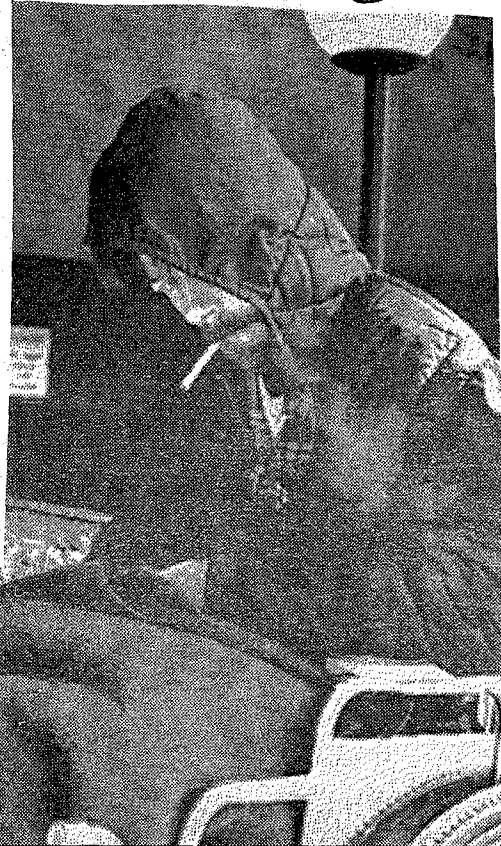
Why is it a man stranded dying in the streets never makes the mainstream media, unless they need a stereotype to blame something on?

"A homeless man was the suspect, more at 10."

"A transient is believed to have been the perpetrator."

Why do we ignore and neglect the poor, yet shower attention on two lost whales? We kill the planet with our consumer-driven society. Yet, something inside of us gets more out of feeling compassion for a whale than millions of poor

Die of Neglect



A homeless man endures a cold night in a wheelchair.

Photo by Dong Lin, from *One*

A permanently disabled homeless man in a broken wheelchair waited for three months as most people walked by and silently judged him Like the whales, he took a wrong turn.

Yet no rescue attempt was made — no helicopter, no volunteers

and homeless Americans, many of them disabled, and all our brother and sisters.

In our society, many of the homeless and poor are lumped together and seen as bums, undeserving of our help. What does your child think of when he or she sees a homeless person? Maybe you should ask.

It is convenient to feel sympathy for the whales; it is a media-driven diversion. It takes no real commitment, no guilt, no one will judge you, and it is a safe bet. You will feel good whether the whales