

Why one blackfish matters to us all



In 1970, a number of baby blackfish were captured from the [Salish Sea](#), the islanded body of water nestled into the coastlines of southern British Columbia and much of Washington State. Blackfish have language, tools, complex social organization, emotions, and memory. As the babies were lifted by helicopter out of the water, their families keened. To this day, the resident blackfish avoid Penn Cove because that's where their children were stolen.

One [blackfish](#) stolen from L-pod in Penn Cove is still alive. She is now 51 years old, and has been held in a tiny swimming pool at the Miami Seaquarium for the past 47 years. She is a revenue stream for her owner, performing twice daily for the public. Her stage name is [Lolita](#), though her trainers call her Toki, short for the Chinook name she was originally given: [Tokitae](#). Lolita/Tokitae is not only alive, she is strong and healthy. [Lummi Nation](#) has been called to bring her home.

Blackfish, along with salmon, are an iconic species of the Salish Sea. In the Lummi language, the word for blackfish (also called orca, sea wolves, and killer whales), is [Qw'e lh'ol mèchen](#). A literal translation of this is

“our relations who live underwater.” Lummi tradition acknowledges blackfish as kin. [We are family](#).

Lolita/Tokitae belongs to L-pod, she belongs to the Salish Sea, she belongs to our larger sense of family here. She belongs to herself: she has the inherent right to be home and to be free. Repatriating Tokitae is Lummi Nation's sacred duty.



Some think that one reason Lolita/Tokitae is such a survivor is because her tank is a stone's throw from the ocean. She can hear the waves, and smell the ripe ocean life. She remembers where she came from. Tokitae still sings the L-pod clan song. Like a person –or a community– that's seen hard times, she has survived because she knows who she is and she has hope.

We recognize that humans and governmental policy allowed blackfish families to be ripped apart, just as humans and governmental policy have allowed human families to be ripped apart. We realize that we must understand the truth and the past, and we must tell those stories, in order to create a healthy future. In celebrating Tokitae's resilience, we celebrate our own.

[Tokitae is an ambassador of the Salish Sea](#), and of our efforts to revitalize this sacred sea. By tradition and by treaty, Lummi is a rightful

protector of this place and the life of this place. Our effort is about more than a single blackfish, more than a single blackfish family. It's about healing in different ways.

On a practical level, our work includes restoring [salmon runs](#) and the Salish Sea so that all of us, as well as Tokitae and her kin, can live in an abundant and vibrant ecosystem. We are committed to protecting the lifeways and culture of Lummi, and honoring the larger ecosystem of which we're all a part. Lummi Nation has formally affirmed the Cultural Significance of the Salish Sea, and calls for its recognition as a cradle of life and civilization that needs to be preserved for the peoples who call it home, and for all peoples who call this earth home.

Some of our valued allies in our effort to bring Tokitae home include other Tribes, the Orca Network, the Sierra Club, the Center for Whale Research, Stand.earth, other non-profit organizations, governmental agencies, philanthropists and concerned citizens. Please join us! Your donations will directly fund a comprehensive plan for Tokitae's transport, rehabilitation, and safe home back in her natal waters. Your love will help spread our message. Hy'shqe!



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