

"A gossamer lyricism . . . wondrous to behold"

Andy Webster, *The New York Times*

From Executive Producers

RYAN REYNOLDS

SCARLETT JOHANSSON

THE WHALE

Narrated by
**RYAN
REYNOLDS**

**CRITICS'
PICK**
New York Times
Washington
Post

Friendship is bigger than we know

TELEFILM CANADA through the Theatrical Documentary Program presents a MOUNTAINSIDE FILMS production
a film by SUZANNE CHISHOLM and MICHAEL PARFIT "THE WHALE" executive producers RYAN REYNOLDS SCARLETT JOHANSSON
and ERIC DESATNIK producer SUZANNE CHISHOLM writer and editor MICHAEL PARFIT narrator RYAN REYNOLDS
original music by DAVID PARFIT and TOBIN STOKES consulting producer DAVID SPRINGBETT commissioning editor ANDREW JOHNSON

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THE WHALE

NARRATED BY: Ryan Reynolds

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Ryan Reynolds, Scarlett Johansson, Eric Desatnik, Suzanne Chisholm

DIRECTED BY: Suzanne Chisholm and Michael Parfit

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“The nuance of [the whale’s] gestures were wondrous to behold: playful, exuberantly extending the fin of friendship.”

--Andy Webster, *The New York Times*

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THE STORY

Short synopsis

One day we humans may meet an intelligent being from another world. Hollywood tells us this stranger will come flying down in a spaceship, and will look a bit like us.

But maybe it won't be like that.

Maybe it will be like this.

*--Ryan Reynolds, in *The Whale**

An extraordinary true story of contact between species, *The Whale*, narrated by Ryan Reynolds, is a classic combination of star power and grassroots heart.

When a young male orca, nicknamed Luna, loses contact with his family in a fjord on the rugged west coast of Vancouver Island, he overthrows the established order of humans versus everything else with his determination to make friends with people. Through his life among us, he challenges all our preconceptions, from politics to science to the spirit, even making us rethink our most fundamental ideas about the nature of love and friendship.

Filled with laughter, amazement, tears, and drama, *The Whale* is a life-affirming film with demonstrated appeal to all audiences.

Long synopsis

One summer in a fjord called Nootka Sound on the remote west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, a young killer whale whom people call Luna gets separated from his pod. Like us humans, orcas are highly social and depend on their families, but Luna finds himself desperately alone. So he tries to make contact with people. He begs for attention at boats and docks. He looks soulfully into your eyes. He wants to have his tongue rubbed. When you whistle at him, he squeaks and whistles back. He follows you around like a puppy.

People fall in love with him -- a cook on an old freighter, a gruff fisheries officer, an elder and a young man from a First Nations band. But the government decides that being friendly with Luna is bad for him, and tries to keep him and people apart.

This effort becomes hilarious and baffling, because Luna refuses to give up his search for a social life. Policemen arrest people for rubbing Luna's nose. Fines are levied. But humans are social, too. When the government tells people they can't even look at Luna, people still go out to meet him, like smugglers carrying friendship through the dark.

But friendship is complicated, even among humans themselves, and does it work between species? People who love Luna don't agree on how to help him. The fisheries officer wants Luna captured and trucked away to try to force him to connect with his family. The young First Nations man thinks that's disrespectful because his band says Luna is the spirit of a chief. The elder believes Luna is

supernatural, the sea's source of wisdom and justice. The ship's cook doesn't know what to do except marvel when she looks in his eyes.

Then conflict comes to Nootka Sound. The government builds a huge net. The First Nations' members bring out their canoes. Then, suddenly, as the two sides start to fight over Luna on the wind-swept water, the young whale has all the friends he wants. As the officer tries to lead Luna into the net, the First Nations elder sings and paddles and tries to lead him away, and Luna plays among the boats like a kid out of school. To Luna this must be great, but in this human conflict above him, someone has to win and someone has to lose, and where will his friends be then?

Nothing goes as planned on Nootka Sound. Finally even the filmmakers get swept up in events that catch everyone by surprise and challenge the very nature of that special and mysterious bond we humans call friendship.

In the end, *The Whale* explores one of the greatest of mysteries: Who are these lives who share the planet with us humans, and what are the connections between us that we do not yet know?

Review quotes

Critics' Pick – *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*

“There is a gossamer lyricism to *The Whale*... The nuance of [the whale's] gestures were wondrous to behold: playful, exuberantly extending the fin of friendship... The issues surrounding the emotional lives of animals... are explored in *The Whale* with a quiet dignity and gorgeous images.” Andy Webster, *The New York Times*

“A profoundly moving story and beautiful visuals... a top notch documentary. *The Whale*... may very well change the way you feel about your relationships, both human and animal. [The filmmakers] have beautifully and unforgettably brought to life just how wondrous and awesome the relationship between man and animal can be.” Richard Propes, *The Independent Critic*

“A beautiful story... visually striking... Don't miss this rare, intimate and moving glimpse into one whale's emotional life.” 4 out of 5 stars. Samantha Ellis, *Global Animal*

“Suzanne Chisholm and Michael Parfit captured spectacular shots of both wildlife and picturesque scenery of evergreen-lined water under vibrant pink sunsets... Visually stunning and emotionally wrought. *The Whale* begs for post-movie discussion.” *Stephanie Merry, Washington Post*

“Thoughtful and moving... [it] will appeal to animal lovers of all ages. An engaging contribution to our evolving understanding of other species' emotional lives... The power of Luna's story is as apparent as the beauty of Vancouver Island's mist-wrapped coastline.” Sheri Linden, *Los Angeles Times*

“[*The Whale*] charts the murky waters of several ethical and practical issues behind the life of a young orca named Luna... Stunning scenery, well-composed and exceptionally steady photography and Luna's sheer charisma make *The Whale* very watchable.” Todd McCarthy, *The Hollywood Reporter*

“A necessary film for 2011 documentary fans... surprisingly essential... surprisingly engrossing

entertainment. It isn't just a wildlife film... it's a film that furthers our discussion of such complex relationships." Christopher Campbell, *indieWIRE*

"Charming... a gorgeous and provocative film that consistently rises above its Flipper-ish genre." John Hartle, *Seattle Times*

"The lessons about friendship are gigantic indeed." Joe Neumaier, *New York Daily News*

"I love *The Whale*. It's an important film, but also funny and moving and unforgettable. Everyone should see this movie." Ric O'Barry, star of the Academy Award winning film, *The Cove*

"Fascinating, heartrending, and beautifully photographed... Using remarkable footage they shot over several years, [the filmmakers] do an excellent job of making little lost Luna's story compelling, inspiring and unforgettable." 4.5 out of 5 stars. James Dawson, *Film Review Online*

"An extraordinary tale of an extraordinary animal..." 4.5 out of 5 stars. Rich Juzwiak, *The Daily*

"An emotionally potent documentary about the unlikely relationships between a whale and those lucky enough to have known him." 4 out of 5 stars. Rob Humanick, *Suite101.com*

Evolution of the film

Back in early 2008, a new movie from British Columbia about a lonely whale slipped almost unnoticed into the star-studded Santa Barbara International Film Festival, hidden among 214 other fine films. It was called *Saving Luna*.

Rain poured during the nights the film was on, but people came to it anyway. Then, when the sun shone at the end of the festival, the little whale film had won the biggest award: Audience Choice.

That year the film began an extraordinary journey. It was invited to festivals all over the world. It won top audience awards at the huge Middle East Film Festival in Abu Dhabi, as well as in five other places. Elsewhere it won Best Documentary, Best Environmental Film, Best Storyline. Twenty-four awards in all. England, Japan, Bermuda, China, Spain, Africa, Australia.

Everywhere, people were falling in love with the star of the film, a young killer whale - an orca - whose determination to make friends with humans disturbed the established order of things.

But like most independent films, the movie was still almost unknown in the United States.

Then, in 2009, Eric Desatnik, founder of the Environmental Film Festival at Yale, discovered the film. He showed it to superstars Ryan Reynolds and Scarlett Johansson. They loved it. All three became executive producers, and Ryan, who grew up in British Columbia, Canada, near the place where the whale lived, became the film's narrative voice.

Together they and the original filmmakers worked to produce a new film with added footage, streamlined narrative, and its strong new voice. They built on the power of the original movie's vision to create a remarkable new theatrical film for all ages: *The Whale*.

www.TheWhaleMovie.com

Ryan Reynolds on *The Whale*

Ryan Reynolds recently talked to The Humane Society of the United States about his involvement in the film.

HSUS: As the narrator and executive producer of "The Whale," what compelled you to take such an active role in this documentary?

Ryan Reynolds: The story was so compelling. The idea that this creature challenged so much of our presumptions about wildlife. That a whale could, would and did reach across that line to connect with us is mystifying. Scientists often debunk the idea that a mammal could experience emotions and/or feelings similar to ours. Luna did this. Luna showed it's possible for a creature—even a whale—to crave connection. Not only needing this connection but demanding it.

HSUS: Had you any prior knowledge of Luna's story?

RR: My brother is a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman who works very near Nootka Sound, the harbor Luna inhabited and made so famous. I'd heard his account of the tale and read some of the headlines.

HSUS: What would you like audiences to take from "The Whale" and Luna's story?

RR: Not to get too esoteric about it, but it reminds me that we're all in this together. It reminds me that now more than ever we need to take care of each other—and this applies directly to wildlife, the environment and everything under our sun.

HSUS: Are there any other animal-related films or documentaries that have changed your perspective?

RR: Throughout the years I've been pretty blown away by David Attenborough's work on just about everything which moves, slithers or crawls across this planet.

HSUS: Do you share your life with any animals?

RR: I have a dog named Baxter who was rescued during a road trip through Texas. Got him at a Houston animal shelter. We seem to like each other, and I feel pretty confident he's gonna keep me.

Q&A about *The Whale*

By Michael Parfit and Suzanne Chisholm, co-directors of *The Whale*.

Who was Luna and where was he from?

Luna was born into the Southern Resident community of orcas, which spends summers eating salmon in the Salish Sea, at the edge of the Pacific Ocean between Canada and the US. Orcas – also called killer whales – live in all the oceans in the world, but the Southern Residents are considered a distinct population. There are fewer than 90 of them, and they are endangered. Unlike some other orcas, which are known as Transients, the Resident orcas eat only fish.

Why was a male whale called Luna?

In the Salish Sea area these orcas are so well-loved that baby orcas are usually nicknamed before scientists have been close enough to them to determine gender. When Luna was born there was a naming contest. The winner wrote that the little whale should be called Luna because orcas explore the sea the way the moon explores the Earth.

Isn't an orca actually a dolphin, not a whale?

Orcas, also called killer whales, are actually both dolphins and whales. All whales and dolphins are in the biological order of *cetacea*, and dolphins are in the sub-order *odontoceti*, also known as “toothed whales.” The toothed whales include the sperm whale, belugas, narwhals, dolphins and porpoises.

Luna was alone – but aren't orcas always together?

Orcas who belong to the Southern Resident community never leave the family group. In fact, though they separate a bit to go fishing sometimes, basically they stay within the sound of their underwater calls for life. But Luna was different. When he was less than two years old, he was somehow separated from his family, and wound up by himself in a fjord called Nootka Sound, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, more than two hundred miles away from his family.

Why and how was Luna separated from his family?

It's a mystery. Since Southern Resident males almost always stay with their mother's group for their whole lives, his separation was very unusual. And it's not likely that his family kicked him out. Nobody thinks he chose to leave, particularly since orcas have about the same lifetimes as humans, and he was just two years old. There must have been some kind of mix-up, and he just got lost. The film describes it as being like a child getting lost in a grocery store. That's a fanciful description, but it may have felt like that to Luna. Where are they? Where did they go? Silence.

A scientist in the film says he and his colleagues thought that Luna getting lost was like “laying a baby in the forest,” and they didn't think Luna could survive. But he managed to feed himself quite well. In fact, he got kind of tubby at times.

Was Luna fed by humans when he lived in Nootka Sound?

People sure tried to give him goodies. They threw him chocolate and oranges. Even vegetables. He spit out anything he couldn't play with.

Fisherman would sometimes toss Luna dead fish from their fishing lines, and he'd carry them around, sticking out the side of his mouth like cigars. But he didn't seem to eat them. He was wild, and he clearly preferred hunting for live fish. That's what made his efforts to make contact with us so unusual. It wasn't for food, so why did he do it? The only answer that seems to make sense is that without his family around he was, in some way different but perhaps in some way the same as us, lonely. Somehow maybe he thought we could be friends. And a lot of people thought the same thing.

Does this film say it's good for humans interact with all wild whales?

No. Definitely not. Whales need space to travel, space to hunt for food, and space to care for their young. We don't believe that humans should harass wildlife of any kind. The story of Luna is about friendship and respect between species, but that means contact can work only in very unusual cases. Usually it means staying away. With Luna we believe respect and friendship meant listening to what he seemed to be trying to say about needing contact. But in almost all other cases, friendship and respect for wild creatures means giving them the space they clearly want.

Sometimes humans can directly help wild animals, as happens when whales are tangled in nets or beached, and humans can cut them free or push them back to sea. But we strongly support guidelines developed by biologists to help people learn how far they should stay away from animals when they don't specifically need our help. Their lives are complete, and usually they do better without us.

Isn't it anthropomorphism to describe animals using human terms like loneliness?

Anthropomorphism means the attribution of human characteristics directly to animals. The issue of anthropomorphism is vitally important in the whole world of biology and other disciplines involving the study of animals -- and in all our relationships with other species. The way scientists approach the complex ideas of what animal emotions and awareness actually are has been changing over the last thirty years, and the problem of anthropomorphism has become the subject of learned essays in major works. We can't do that here, but this concern was critical to how we worked to tell Luna's story -- which was clearly about emotions -- of some kind.

A short answer to how to evaluate anthropomorphism was given by one of our scientific advisors, Dr. Lori Marino, a senior lecturer in neuroscience and behavioral biology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, one of the world's top researchers into the nature of the dolphin and whale brain:

"It is only anthropomorphism if you are falsely attributing a human characteristics to another animal," she said. "I think it's the difference between saying something is the same and saying something's on a par. Luna and other cetaceans really represent a significant challenge to us, because they are similar to us and different at the same time."

In the film we worked very hard to establish that distinction. You may note that the narration often refers to "this thing we call friendship." That may be a semantic gimmick, but we don't think so. We

think it helps to make it clear that though we seemed to recognize what Luna was going through, we could not say that we knew exactly what it was.

Many scientists, particularly in the new discipline of cognitive ethology, pioneered by Dr. Donald Griffin in the 1970s and practiced by highly respected scientists like Dr. Marc Bekoff, tell us that given the similar structure of many animals' brains to ours, it would be almost impossible for them not to be feeling some emotions that may resemble ours.

Observations of behaviour repeatedly support that idea, and for us to learn about how animals think and behave, sometimes we can use careful comparison to our own experience. But with each other we recognize that sometimes the worst thing we can say is: "I know exactly how you're feeling." In humans that can be an insult to another person's emotional complexity; in animals it's inevitably inaccurate. But we also know that with friends we can empathize and share emotions even when we don't understand all our friends' experiences, and it is not wrong to get somewhere near that approach with animals.

So as we try to understand where they're coming from and how they react in fear or even in something like love, the cues we get from empathy may help us at least make small steps to approach the mysteries of their undoubtedly emotional lives.

And in the case of Luna, in which an individual animal seemed clearly determined to make as much contact as possible with human beings -- including frequent eye contact -- it was vital to come up with some way to describe the sense of emotional engagement he seemed to need. So we reached for a way, and described it as a search for "this thing we call friendship."

That's as close as we thought we should get, but it was as true as we could get to what we saw happening every day. As Ryan Reynolds says in the film, "No one knew *how* Luna felt this connection, but he seemed to feel something, and it was strong."

Is The Whale appropriate for children, and do they like it?

Yes to both. While *The Whale* was not written or edited specifically as a children's film, it is accessible and entertaining for children.

We were initially surprised at that. We had thought it would work mainly for teenagers and up. It took a child to teach us differently. At the Santa Barbara International Film Festival, where we showed the original film, *Saving Luna*, we met a father and six-year-old child on their way into the film. We thought the child was too young, but they went on in. To our surprise the six-year-old asked a question at the Q&A and seemed very engaged. But the stunning part was that when the film was shown at the festival again three days later, the same kid was back, bringing the rest of her family! We changed our minds.

Since then both films have been shown to many children from five and up, with great success. The original film was even used in an elementary school as part of a film-festival program, and a reporter who attended the class wrote an article about how successful the program was. We have stacks of drawings by young children made because of festival showings and special showings for schools.

“Your documentary,” wrote one fifth-grade teacher, “has had one of the most positive impacts on my students in my forty-one years of teaching.”

The family-oriented website www.parentalguide.com has described the film as “heartwarming,” and “a ‘must-see’ for the entire family.” “This movie” the reviewer wrote, “will spark family conversations about right and wrong that can be teachable moments that will last a lifetime.”

We think that children particularly respond to the film because it has the emotional force of a real story rather than being lists of facts, and it does not provide answers to all the questions. Their curiosity is fed rather than ignored, and all they want to do when the film is over is talk about Luna.

What lessons do you hope people learn from this film?

This is not an advocacy movie. We made this film simply to tell Luna’s amazing story. Like all narratives, the life story of Luna has many layers of meaning, and no one knows all of them. Humans have spent generations trying to figure out the meanings of even the most simple parables in the Bible, or the symbolic works of great authors, so we cannot imagine being able to tell you what the life story of one extraordinary whale fully means. We can only tell the story, not solve its intricate puzzle.

If we have told the story well, those layers will be there and the people who watch the film will learn something special for themselves. Like any wonderful story, this is about emotions as much as about facts or information, and emotions are always hard to capture in words. And this film is even more mysterious than most, because it tries to come to terms with the emotions of a whale, and how can we have any real idea what was going on, except just to describe what we saw? This film has been described as “a complete emotional experience,” and it does have an effect on people, but when you go through something that has that kind of an effect, do you understand it? Not really. Yet you do learn something from it. So we offer the experience to you, to the audience, and we hope it’s a sign of respect for the complexity of your own emotional response, that we do not try to tell you what it all means.

Well, there is one thing we can say. Through this film maybe we can all recognize that this little whale we called Luna had emotions that were surely not like ours but may have resembled them. And that is a big thing to learn. So if our hearts are moved by Luna, maybe for now that’s all we need to know.

Orca Natural History

Orcas are the largest member of the Delphinidae (dolphin) family. Dolphins, in turn, are part of the sub-order Odontocetes, which means “toothed whales.” Odontocetes, along with baleen species categorized as Mysticetes, form the order Cetacean.

Orcas are found in all the oceans of the world, making them the most widespread of cetaceans. However, distinct populations are recognized, and some populations, like the Southern Residents, are listed as endangered. There are fewer than 90 Southern Residents left.

The Southern Residents spend about six months a year in the waters of the Salish Sea (the waters around southern Vancouver Island and the San Juan Islands of Washington state). During the winter, they leave – sometimes to California, sometimes to Alaska – but nobody knows their exact winter travel patterns.

The Southern Residents eat only fish, but other groups of orcas prey on sea mammals such as seals, dolphins, porpoises and even large whales. Meat-eating orcas are called “Transients.”

The Southern Residents are comprised of three pods: J, K, and L. Luna was from L-pod; his scientific name was L-98, which reflects his birth order within the pod. Each orca is identified by the shapes of its fin, along with the distinct patch of grey behind the fin, called a “saddle patch.”

Orcas communicate with underwater calls and whistles, and different populations have different “languages.” Researchers can recognize distinct calls from different pods.

Orcas are among the most social animals in the world. They travel together in family groups called pods, and stay together for life. Recent studies indicate that orcas have culture.

Female orcas can live about 90 years in the wild, while males typically live to about 50. Their lifespan in captivity is greatly reduced.

Orcas are often called “killer whales” – they are top predators in the ocean. However, there is no known case of an orca ever harming a human in the wild. Occasionally, orcas in captivity do hurt and even kill people. It is believed that the orcas who are forced into captive situations, and taken from their family groups, often suffer psychological disorders similar to post-traumatic stress disorder in humans.

For the past 40 years, a number of orcas have been captured from the wild and taken to aquariums and theme parks to perform. However, it is increasingly clear that the outcome for orcas in captivity is poor, and now very few nations in the world permit capture of wild orcas for display.

Orca Culture

As a sidebar to an article in *Smithsonian* magazine about *The Whale*, Lisa Stiffler wrote an excellent article describing the recent scientific understanding of the culture of orca groups, focused on Luna’s extended family, the Southern Residents. Here is a link to that article:

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/Understanding-Orca-Culture.html>

Coverage in *Smithsonian* magazine

The July-August 2011 edition of *Smithsonian* magazine contains a major six-page layout about *The Whale*. The link is here:

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/Luna-A-Whale-to-Watch.html>

Brief stories related to the film

Whale encounter was like contact with extraterrestrial, scientist says

When humans finally get in touch with an alien from space, it might be very much like what happened a few years ago on the coast of British Columbia when a young wild whale nicknamed Luna started trying to connect with humans, says a prominent scientist who has worked with NASA on how

to approach extraterrestrial life. The extraordinary connections that the whale established with people are described in the new film *The Whale*.

"I've always seen *Luna* as a parallel to what would happen when we make contact eventually with an extraterrestrial," says Dr. Lori Marino, a senior lecturer in neuroscience and behavioral biology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Marino was one of two scientists who showed that dolphins have self-awareness in a pioneering study published in 2001. She has worked with both NASA's Astrobiology Institute and the famous Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute (SETI) in exploring ways to approach living beings from other worlds who either make contact with us, visit us, or are found by human explorers. She is one of two scientific advisors to *The Whale*.

Marino says that the lessons of the dramatic and heart-warming encounters between people and the little whale described in the film tell us that we should not simply see intelligent life, both here or in space, just as inferior animals.

"I think that the point is to shift our perspective from these animals being subjects and objects to being equals, on a par with us in terms of their individuality and autonomy," she said. "Just as with any person who comes up to us and attempts communication, there are things that we would do out of respect that we don't do with other animals, but we should."

The idea that contact with *Luna* was like encountering an extraterrestrial is an important part of the film itself.

"One day we humans may meet an intelligent being from another world," says the film's narrator, Ryan Reynolds, as *Luna* swims across the screen. "Hollywood tells us that this stranger will fly down in a spaceship, and will look a bit like us. But maybe it won't be like that. Maybe it will be like this."

Michael Parfit, co-director of the film, says his encounters with *Luna* while working near the waters in which the whale lived were just about as strange and wonderful as meeting an interplanetary visitor.

"It really felt like that," says Parfit, describing his own two-year-long experience watching the whale. "In many ways the sea is a very different planet from the one we live on, so it's not that much of a stretch. And when you were around *Luna*, it was very much as if a being from another world was trying his best to make contact."

Parfit says his encounters with *Luna* changed his whole attitude about who animals are.

"The striking thing was how aware he was," Parfit went on. "One of the scientists in the film describes the way he looked at you as 'contemplative.' And that's a hard-core scientist. I got the sense that I was just barely scratching the surface of the extraordinary mind that was trying to make some kind of contact with the minds of humans."

Marino points out that while most movies show extraterrestrials as a lot like us, it is much more likely that even creatures more intelligent than we are will seem at least as different from us as a whale is.

"That somebody can be intelligent," she says, "doesn't mean that it has to be in exactly the same way we are. They could be on a par. There are different ways of being that are on a par in terms of complexity and level of awareness, but are not synonymous."

Marino is worried that unless a super-intelligent being is brandishing recognizable technology when we meet it, we won't pay attention to its abilities and may tend to treat it badly.

"And if we can't recognize intelligence on this planet," she says, "it would have to literally land on our heads in a spaceship for it to be recognized in a being from another planet."

What's the answer? To Marino it is all about respect.

“If another human being is trying to communicate with us, we don’t ignore them,” she says. “The idea is that we should be going into their territory on their terms, respecting them for who they are and not having this sort of superior attitude.”

“Eventually,” Parfit says, “that’s the way many people who met Luna began to think about him. To be honest, it took a while. But once you had a chance to meet him face to face, it became more and more apparent that we were dealing with someone who was just as alert and present in the world as we were, and was thinking in just as complex ways -- but still was very different. At first that gave me a kind of vertigo, as if my entire location in the world had suddenly shifted. But then it became wonderful.”

World traveler finds the best story in his back yard

Michael Parfit has been to the ends of the earth writing for National Geographic and Smithsonian magazine, from the South Pole to the remote forests of the Amazon Basin, but the story that he calls the most mysterious and compelling of his career happened within two hundred miles of home. And he wasn’t even looking for it.

“It was like tripping over something alive in the dark,” Parfit says. “You don’t really know what it is at first. In a lot of ways we still don’t know.”

What Parfit, and his wife, Suzanne Chisholm, tripped over was the story of a little lonely whale, a young orca, who was trying to make friends with human beings in a remote fjord on the coast of Vancouver Island. They live near the island’s southern tip.

“We drove up there, and here was this curiosity,” Parfit says. “What was going on?”

Parfit’s other work has included writing major feature stories on Antarctica, Mexico, for Smithsonian and National Geographic, and books on coal development, nuclear weapons, aviation and Antarctica. But this curiosity captured him the way few other stories had.

“I think it was the mystery of it -- and the heart, too,” he says. “Those other subjects are endlessly fascinating, but usually you know most of the facts and just have to figure out how to explain them clearly. But this single living being in need was hard to put into a category, and even harder to fully understand. And he was completely charming.”

Parfit and Chisholm were first assigned to write a magazine story on the odd situation for Smithsonian, but even when that article was finished they weren’t willing to wrap up their work.

“It was just impossible to leave,” Parfit said. “Here was this completely uncertain, mysterious, unresolved story about an animal who should have been off at sea with his family but instead was trying to hang out with people, and doing all this stuff to try to get our attention. People had different ideas about what he was up to, and what we should do about him, but there were no real answers. So we figured out ways to pay the bills and just stayed right there.”

The result, after years of work, is *The Whale*, a full-length non-fiction feature opening in a theater near you soon. Did Parfit ever find the answers to all those questions?

“No,” he says wryly. “The film describes the mystery but doesn’t solve it. But that’s part of the reason the experience was so extraordinary. It’s good to know that there are things out there that are still much grander than anything we know.”

Astonishing moments with a whale sneaked up on filmmakers

“The world doesn’t play music to us when the big things happen,” says Michael Parfit, co-director of the new documentary, *The Whale*. “Maybe that’s what the movies do to help us out.”

He's talking about the experiences he and his wife, Suzanne Chisholm, the film's producer and co-director, had while watching the efforts of a young wild killer whale, nicknamed Luna, try to befriend humans in a remote fjord in Western Canada. Luna's efforts and their unexpected, funny, intense, heart-warming, and moving results are the subjects of the film.

"I was watching all these things that Luna was doing, and running the camera at the same time," he says, "and it turned out that what I was seeing was extraordinary and mysterious, but it didn't quite feel that way at the time. You don't always get goose-bumps when you're busy."

To Parfit, the sense of astonishment and awe -- the goose-bumps -- came later, in the evenings when he looked at the footage he had shot, and recalled the events of the day, or when he just sat alone on a boat, listening to Luna's underwater calls through a hydrophone.

"I think you have to process these things," Parfit says. "You check what you've just been through against what you've seen in the rest of life and you realize -- hey, this is new. This is amazing!"

In a lot of ways, Parfit says, that sorting is what movies do for us -- in fiction, life's experiences are processed through the minds of screenwriters and directors, and in non-fiction storytelling, like *The Whale*, images and sounds from real life are sifted by an editor to find the moments of truth.

"And movies usually use music to tell us that those moments are coming," he says. "That really helps. When it works you can have an experience that is very true to life yet kind of super-focused, like a combination of what you went through and what you realized about it later."

Parfit himself edited the footage he and Chisholm, shot of Luna, along with some footage from others.

"I guess I had some advantage," he says. "I could use footage that most closely showed the experiences and emotions I felt as I both saw things happening and then tried to understand them."

In many parts, *The Whale* shows events and actions by Luna that remain mysterious in spite of all the research that has been done on orcas.

"That's one of the greatest things about documentaries," Parfit says. "Some films answer questions for you, but others help you ask them. That's just like what happened when people met Luna: He opened doors that we didn't know were there, but we still don't really know what is out there on the other side. He just gave us hope that we could someday learn."

KEY CREDITS

Narrator: Ryan Reynolds

Executive Producer: Ryan Reynolds

Executive Producer: Scarlett Johansson

Executive Producer: Eric Desatnik

Directors: Suzanne Chisholm and Michael Parfit

Producer and Executive Producer: Suzanne Chisholm

Writer and Editor: Michael Parfit

Photography: Suzanne Chisholm and Michael Parfit

Music: Tobin Stokes and David Parfit

Sound Design and Mix: David Parfit

Associate Producer: David Springbett

Commissioning Editor: Andrew Johnson

ABOUT THE TEAM

RYAN REYNOLDS, *Narrator and Executive Producer*

Ryan Reynolds has emerged as one of Hollywood's most sought after leading men. He recently starred in the Warner Brothers feature *The Green Lantern* alongside Blake Lively; the highly anticipated adaptation of the popular comic book is was released June 17, 2011.

Reynolds also recently starred in the body-switch comedy *The Change-Up*, released August 5, and in the mystery/thriller *Buried*, in which his character wakes up in a coffin buried alive after an attack by a group of Iraqis. In the cinematically challenging film, Reynolds is the only actor to appear on camera for the duration of the piece. *Buried* premiered to rave reviews at Sundance on January 23rd, 2010

Reynolds starred opposite Sandra Bullock in Disney's romantic comedy, *The Proposal*. Hilarity arises when a pushy boss forces her assistant to marry her to avoid deportation. The film opened at #1 at the box office and grossed \$315 million worldwide.

Reynolds was seen as "Deadpool" in the X-MEN spin-off, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. He starred opposite an all star cast including Hugh Jackman. *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. grossed \$365 million worldwide.

Reynolds starred in *Adventureland* opposite Kristen Stewart and was directed by *Superbad*'s Greg Mottola. This comedy takes place in the 1980's when a recent college grad takes a job at an amusement park. *Adventureland* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was nominated in the "Ensemble Performance" category at the 2009 Gotham Awards.

Reynolds appeared in *Paperman*, a comedy that centers on a man struggling to recapture the spark that made him a successful novelist and happily married. Reynolds plays the role of Captain Excellent, the imaginary superhero friend of the struggling man who tries to deter him from establishing an unlikely friendship with a Long Island teen. Reynolds will soon be starring in *Fireflies in the Garden*, opposite Julia Roberts, Carrie-Ann Moss and Emily Watson. This film follows a family torn apart when faced with an unexpected tragedy.

Reynolds starred in the Working Title film *Definitely, Maybe* for Universal Pictures. He portrayed a soon-to-be divorced political consultant and parent with a questionable sexual past in this romantic comedy that co-stars Rachel Weisz, Isla Fisher, Abigail Breslin, Elizabeth Banks and Kevin Kline. The film was a critical darling and fan favorite.

Reynolds also starred in the complex drama *Chaos Theory* co-starring Emily Mortimer for Warner Independent Pictures. In the Marcos Siega directed film, Reynolds stars as a man experiencing a crisis after he finds out he is sterile and his child is not his own.

Reynolds was seen in writer/director John August's *The Nines*, which premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. The film, which also stars Hope Davis, has received much critical acclaim. Following Sundance *The Nines* opened in theaters in New York, Los Angeles and Austin.

Reynolds other credits include director Joe Carnahan's *Smokin' Aces* for Working Title and Universal Pictures and *The Amityville Horror*, a remake of the classic cult film. *The Amityville Horror* opened #1 at the box office opening weekend and made \$107 million worldwide.

In addition to his numerous leading roles, Reynolds also serves on the board of directors for the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research. In November of 2007, Reynolds ran the New York City Marathon in honor of his father - who has long suffered from ravages of Parkinson's disease. Reynolds marathon run raised over \$100,000 for the Michael J Fox Foundation.

Reynolds currently resides in New York City.

SCARLETT JOHANSSON, Executive Producer

Four-time Golden Globe nominee and BAFTA and Tony winner, Scarlett Johansson has proven to be one of Hollywood's most talented young actresses. Recently, she won critical acclaim and a Tony for her Broadway debut in the Arthur Miller play *A View from the Bridge* opposite Liev Schreiber. She was recently seen in the box office hit *Iron Man 2* playing the role of 'Black Widow,' and will soon be filming the Marvel Film *The Avengers*.

Johansson received rave reviews and a Best Actress Award at the Venice Film Festival for her starring role opposite Bill Murray in *Lost in Translation*, the critically-acclaimed second film by director Sofia Coppola. She was recently seen in the box office hit *He's Just Not That Into You*. Prior she starred in the Woody Allen film *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* and played 'Mary Boleyn' in *The Other Boleyn Girl*.

In 2009, Johansson released her second studio album of duets with Pete Dinklage called "Break Up" which has received multi-platinum status. Prior she released the album, "Anywhere I Lay My Head," a collection of Tom Waits covers featuring one original song.

At the age of 12, Johansson attained worldwide recognition for her performance as Grace Maclean, the teen traumatized by a riding accident in Robert Redford's *The Horse Whisperer*. She went on to star in Terry Zwigoff's *Ghost World*, garnering a Best Supporting Actress award from the Toronto Film Critics Circle. Johansson was also featured in the Coen Brothers' dark drama *The Man Who Wasn't There*, opposite Billy Bob Thornton and Frances McDormand.

Her other film credits include the critically acclaimed Weitz brothers' film *In Good Company*, as well as opposite John Travolta in *A Love Song for Bobby Long*, which garnered her a Golden Globe nomination (her third in two years.) and Woody Allen's *Match Point*, which garnered her 4th consecutive Golden Globe nominee in three years. Other film credits include *The Spirit*, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* opposite Colin Firth, *The Island* opposite Ewan McGregor, Brian DePalma's *The Black Dahlia*, Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* and *The Nanny Diaries*.

Her additional credits include Rob Reiner's comedy *North*; the thriller *Just Cause*, with Sean Connery and Laurence Fishburne; and a breakthrough role at the age of 10 in the critically-praised *Manny & Lo*, which earned her an Independent Spirit Award nomination for "Best Female Lead."

A New York native, Johansson made her professional acting debut at the age of eight in the off-Broadway production of *Sophistry*, with Ethan Hawke, at New York's Playwright's Horizons.

Johansson currently divides her time between New York and Los Angeles.

ERIC DESATNIK, Executive Producer

With a solid academic and professional background in both the entertainment industry and environmental advocacy, Eric Desatnik has carved a niche at the intersection of the two fields. Eric founded and programmed the Environmental Film Festival at Yale, which has since grown to become one of the leading environmental film festivals. For his work on this, Eric was named one of Variety's "Standout Students" of 2010.

Eric's background in the entertainment industry includes positions at *George Magazine*, Management 360, and BWR Public Relations, where he coordinated publicity campaigns for clients such as Brad Pitt and Adam Sandler. Eric holds a Master of Environmental Management degree from Yale and is certified as a LEED Accredited Professional by the U.S. Green Building Council.

MICHAEL PARFIT Director, Writer, Editor

Until this film came along, Michael was best known as a writer for National Geographic and Smithsonian magazines. He has worked on all seven continents. He was born in London, England. He graduated from University of Southern California with a degree in journalism. He has written four books as well as numerous magazine articles. He co-wrote the script for the IMAX film, *Antarctica*, and wrote the script for the award-winning IMAX film *Ocean Oasis*, which premiered at the Smithsonian. He also co-wrote the script for *Under Antarctic Ice*, a WNET/Nature production. He is a private pilot with about 6,500 hours flown in North America, South America, Greenland, New Zealand and Australia.

Together with his wife, Suzanne Chisholm, and Michael directed, produced and filmed over 20 stories for the National Geographic Channel-US, on subjects as diverse as puffins, melting ice in Greenland, the Inuit of Nunavut, Newfoundland fisheries, rising sea levels in the Netherlands, ecological hotspots in the South Pacific, and minorities in Europe. They also directed and produced *The Search for the Never Never*, a one-hour documentary about the Australian environment, which was distributed internationally. Their first film was *Letters from the Forgotten People*, a story about refugees in Tanzania. Their work has been shown on National Geographic Channel, CNN, PBS, BBC, NHK, France 2 and CBC, and in film festivals worldwide.

SUZANNE CHISHOLM, *Producer, Director, Executive Producer*

Suzanne is an award-winning film producer and director, currently living in British Columbia. She was born in Quebec and raised in Nova Scotia. She has produced and filmed news stories and documentaries in Europe, South America, Africa, Australia, the South Pacific and throughout North America.

Together with her husband, Michael Parfit, Suzanne directed, produced and filmed over 20 stories for the National Geographic Channel-US, on a variety of environmental, wildlife, cultural and human-interest stories around the world. They also directed and produced *The Search for the Never Never*, a one-hour documentary about the Australian environment, which was distributed internationally. Their first film was *Letters from the Forgotten People*, a story about refugees in Tanzania. Her work has been shown on National Geographic Channel, CNN, PBS, BBC, NHK, France 2, CBC, Al-Jazeera, and in film festivals around the world.

She received a Bachelor of Arts in economics and history from University of Toronto, and a Master of Development Economics from Dalhousie University in Halifax. She taught English in Prague in the early 1990s, and did her graduate thesis research in the Baltic states. She co-authored the US version of *Blame it on the Weather* and a chapter in a National Geographic book, *Last Wild Places*. She has served on film juries for the Gemini Awards, Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival, International Wildlife Film Festival, and Bermuda International Film Festival. She has also spoken on numerous panels at film festivals around the world.

DAVID PARFIT, *Composer*

David holds a B.S. in computer science from the University of Montana and a M.Mus. in music technology from New York University. He studied digital signal processing, composition, and film scoring with Dr. Robert Rowe, Dr. Richard Boulanger, Dr. Ron Sadoff, Dr. Charles Nichols, and Dr. Kenneth Peacock. As a technologist and former software engineer, David embraces the modern resources available to composers. Yet he understands the essential organic musicality of living, breathing musicians.

Among the programs for which he has composed music and, in many cases, done sound design, are:

Roll Over Beethoven: (audio post production) a one-hour documentary produced by Hg80Media for broadcast on BRAVO!, 2008.

Primal Quest: (composer) five part adventure race television series, broadcast on ESPN and ABC. Produced by Barrett Productions, 2006.

Inuit Dreams: (composer, audio post production) 24-minute documentary, for broadcast on the National Geographic Channel. Produced by Mountainside Films, 2004.

From 2001 to 2004 he composed and performed music for over a dozen news-feature films broadcast by the National Geographic Channel, USA.

In addition to writing music, David is a sound designer and editor. He has an extensive sound effects

library and regularly records custom sounds and ambiences.

TOBIN STOKES, *Composer*

Tobin is a Canadian music composer and songwriter who has worked in Vancouver and Victoria for over 15 years. Versatile, easy going and prolific, he writes music for television, film, ballet, opera, orchestra, choirs, large events, and theatre.

He has scored television shows and series for most major television and cable stations and networks in Canada, with rebroadcasts in many other countries. Recent work includes music for the feature film *Saving Luna* and the docu/drama series, *Darwin's Brave New World* for CBC and ABC (Australia).

Music for large events includes the opening ceremonies of the XV Commonwealth Games, the BC Summer Games, and contracts for the 2010 Olympics including the Olympic Bid, the Canada Pavilion in Beijing, the Torch Relay, the 2008, 2009, and 2010 Cultural Olympiads and the Aboriginal Pavilion.

Past orchestral residencies include a three-year position with the Victoria Symphony, the International Choral Kathaumixw Festival and the Symphony Orchestra Academy of the Pacific. Tobin's choral music has premiered in Australia, Sweden, Venezuela, England, France, Mexico, United States, Japan, and Canada.

DAVID SPRINGBETT, *Associate Producer*

David Springbett has worked in the Canadian film and video industry for over forty years as a producer, director, and editor. With his partner Heather MacAndrew, he has combined decades of social documentary experience with science, environment and natural history programs. Whether exploring the mysterious thousand mile voyage of the monarch butterfly, or the success of community forestry in the Honduran jungle, the perspective is holistic: "You can't separate science from nature; you can't separate nature from people; and you can't separate people from social problems - they all impact each other."

CONTACT INFORMATION

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