

Wayward Whales  
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It happened 24 years ago, but Sacramento Bay Area residents still talk about when Humphrey the Humpback whale touched their lives on that 5<sup>th</sup> day of November in 1985. The wayward whale swam into the Sacramento River, attracting 10,000 people a day as whale experts tried desperately to turn it around. Humphrey went back to sea after 25 days of near-pandemonium and worldwide media attention.

Ever since that day, Humpback whales have held a special place in the hearts of Bay Area residents. Over the years Bay Area volunteers have come together a number of times to help wayward whales. One of the locals commented, "Humphrey taught people how to work together."

In 2005, a 50-foot female humpback whale was on the usual migratory route along the California coast when it became entangled in nylon ropes that link crab pots.

A crab fisherman spotted the whale and radioed for help. Within a few hours, a rescue team arrived and determined that the only way to save the whale was to dive in and untangle her - a very dangerous proposition, since one slap of the tail could kill a rescuer.

The first diver in shared that his heart sank when he saw all the lines wrapped around the whale and really didn't think they were going to be able to save it. About 20 crab-pot ropes, each about 240 feet long with weights every 60 feet, along with at least 12 crab traps weighing 90 pounds each were wrapped multiple times around the tail and the back and left front flippers, and there was a line in the whale's mouth. The combined weight was pulling the whale downward, forcing it to struggle just to keep its blow-hole out of the water.

Four divers worked over an hour with curved knives and eventually freed her. The whale floated passively the whole time. The guy who cut the rope out of her mouth said her eye was there "winking at me, watching me the whole time." He shared that it was an experience he would never forget.

When the whale realized it was free, it began swimming joyfully around in circles. She then came back to one of the divers, nuzzled him, and then swam to the next diver and nuzzled him as well. Each diver was nuzzled as if she was thanking each one personally. They said it was the most incredible experience of their lives

May all of us know the joy of giving and receiving gratitude, and may all of us be blessed with a most incredible experience in our lives. May each of us also be so blessed with people who will risk themselves to help us get untangled from the things that are binding us, and may we be so willing to do the same to help those who need us.