

# MY THIRTEEN YEARS AT PMMC

by Jennifer Saitz

Dear Friends and Members,

I have spent the last thirteen years volunteering at Pacific Marine Mammal Center which I still think of affectionately as Friends of the Sea Lion. When I started as an animal care volunteer, the only thing I knew about marine mammals was that seals and sea lions ate fish and squid. Over the years I became more involved with the Center and learned more about these special animals for which I cared. I initiated the formal education program in 1994 and joined the Board of Directors in 1998. For the past four years I have served as the President of the Board. Now, having completed my term of service, I am pleased to hand over my office to the capable and dedicated board members that will continue to govern this wonderful organization. It has been an honor to have served PMMC for so long and I am planning to return as an animal care volunteer in 2005.



During the past thirteen years, I have had two children, gone back to school for my teaching credential and am now changing careers to become an elementary school teacher. Throughout all of the changes in my personal life, PMMC has been a constant. I have been there for floods, mudslides, fires, rescues and releases. I have made life-long friends, some of whom have moved onto other careers as veterinarians and teachers. I have worked harder and longer hours than I could imagine working in a paid position. On the surface the rewards are few. I have driven home many times exhausted, smelling like fish, thinking about how I got one elephant seal out of sixteen to finally eat a fish on its own. Doesn't volunteering at PMMC sound glamorous? These are a few of the things I've learned over the years.

1. Seal poop is really slippery.
2. Elephant seals bite hard.
3. Harbor seals are cute, but nasty.
4. Sea lions are really fast.
5. If you don't put the lid on the blender while making a fish smoothie, you get fish pieces on the ceiling.
6. It is possible to scale a four-foot fence while 7 months pregnant (to escape from an animal).
7. To bear it when an animal you cared for dies despite everyone's best efforts.
8. Not to curse when an animal bites you in front of 20 children.
9. The surest way to volunteers' and board members' hearts is through their stomachs.
10. Sea lions do not like canned tuna fish or saltines. Both of these things have been offered to sick animals on the beach by well-meaning people.



The thing I am most proud of during my tenure on the board was assisting in the hiring of our three full-time staff members, Michele Hunter (Director of Operations/Animal Care), Beate Litz (Education Director) and Emily Wing (Director of Development/Marketing). They, along with our part-time staff and dedicated volunteers, are the heart and soul of this organization. Our staff consistently ensures that we achieve our mission to aid marine mammals and to educate the public. Under the direction of the staff, our volunteers perform the daily activities, such as scrubbing pens, preparing food, washing piles of laundry and teaching children, that are necessary to the smooth operation of our Center. Our members, through their support, allow PMMC to continue to care for these marine mammals that share our coastline.

In the last 3 years, we have had a 500% increase in the number of animals we have treated and, after 30 years, our facility is beginning to show some wear. In the next couple of years, we have some very exciting things in store. We will be making enhancements to our classroom area and renovations to our outdoor pools and enclosures in order to maintain the high quality of our education and animal care programs. We have come a long way since I started in 1991 and I can't wait to see what the next thirteen years bring.

I thank you all for your support and dedication through the years. I have loved every minute!

Best wishes for the New Year,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Saitz".

Jennifer Saitz

