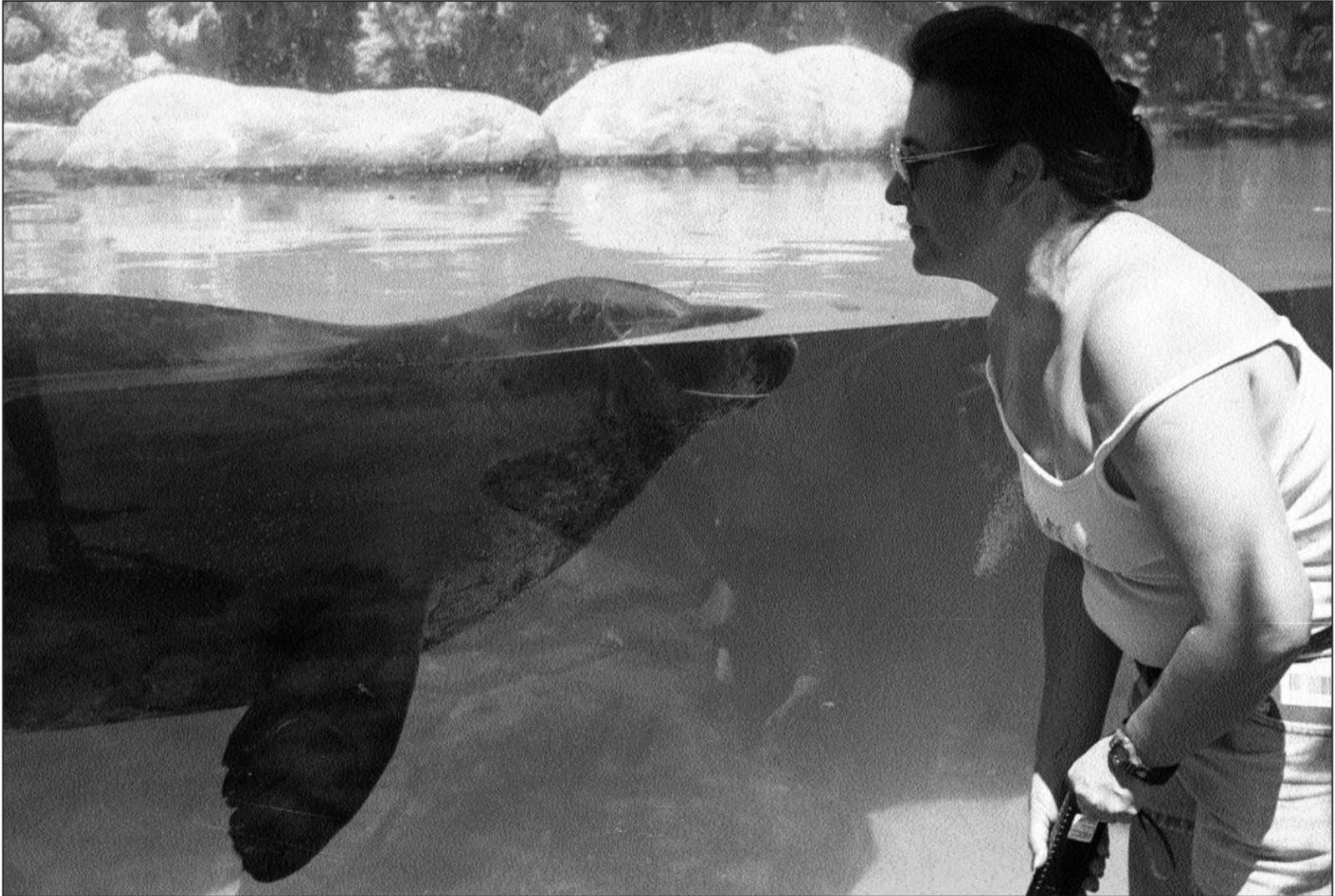


LIBERTY CALL

Up close:

The Waikiki Aquarium



A resident Monk Seal takes a good look at a curious creature visiting its home at the Waikiki Aquarium. The aquarium was recently designated as a member of the American Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center in the Coastal America Partnership. The partnership joins the aquarium with government agencies, including the Navy, in the effort of conducting research, educating the public and providing information on how to be better stewards of the fragile reef environment. The Hawaiian Island chain is home to 85 percent of America's reefs.

Waikiki Aquarium:

Hawaii's window on the sea

Island life almost requires locals and visitors to spend time at land's end. Some just go to the beach while others pole fish, net fish or spear fish for tropical delights. Locals also harvest delicacies - like the mollusk Opahi (pronounced 'Oh-pee-hee'). Opahi is similar to a clam, but has an open-ended, cone-shaped shell likened to a 'Chinaman's hat', the name also given to Mokoli'i Island - a natural rock formation on Oahu's northwestern shore. Other delicacies that find their way onto restaurant menus include the popular fish Ahi, Ono and Parrotfish.

While the sea has many utilitarian uses, much is still not known about underwater life. Tropical sea life is very different from that found in mainland waters and, like the colorful greenery and scenery in tropical latitudes; the creatures below the water line are equally as colorful.

For those who would like see and admire sea life instead consuming it there's the Waikiki Aquarium.

It's the nation's third oldest public aquarium and is a haven for those curious about sea life. Located at the foot of Diamond Head visitors can find out a great deal about sea creatures and their habitats. The aquarium is home to more than 2,000 animals representing more than 350 species of marine life.

To its credit, the Waikiki Aquarium was recently designated - along with 11 other aquariums nationwide - as an American Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center in the Coastal

America Partnership. That partnership, between federal agencies and the aquarium, makes research and education funding available for better and continued ocean stewardship.

One reason the designation is important locally is that the Hawaiian Island chain is home to 85 percent of the nation's reef areas. The designation will augment funding for reef research, information database sharing and education sharing programs.

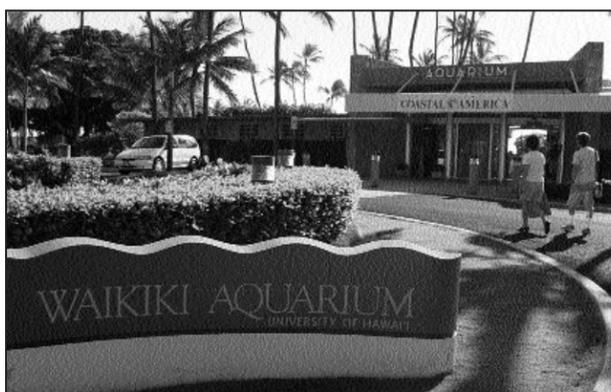
Taking a closer look, the Waikiki Aquarium is 'user friendly.' It offers a personal self-guided discovery tour, special activities, an aquarium shop full of educational books and gift ideas and an intimate environment to learn more about the diversity of local marine animals.

According to Waikiki Aquarium officials, their facility is considered the best small aquarium in the world.

Because of its size, patrons get to come face to face with many varieties of Pacific sea life. The aquarium's exhibits give visitors a close up view of living corals, reef fishes, the chambered Nautilus, jelly fish, giant clams, reef sharks and playful Monk Seals.

Feeding time for the seals is one of the highlights of a visit to the aquarium. Though the seal pen is large, it's designed so visitors can get a close up look at them as their trainers continue the process of education through close contact.

The Waikiki Aquarium is administered by the University of Hawaii, Manoa and is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visitors should call ahead to check on the availability of activities for adults, families and children. Some of the activities include field trips, overnight programs and summer concerts.



(Above) The Waikiki Aquarium is designed as a user friendly environment allowing visitors to get up close and personal with tropical sea life. (Left) The Waikiki Aquarium entrance.

Story and photos by JO2 Greg Cleghorne