

# Gainesville

**TODAY**

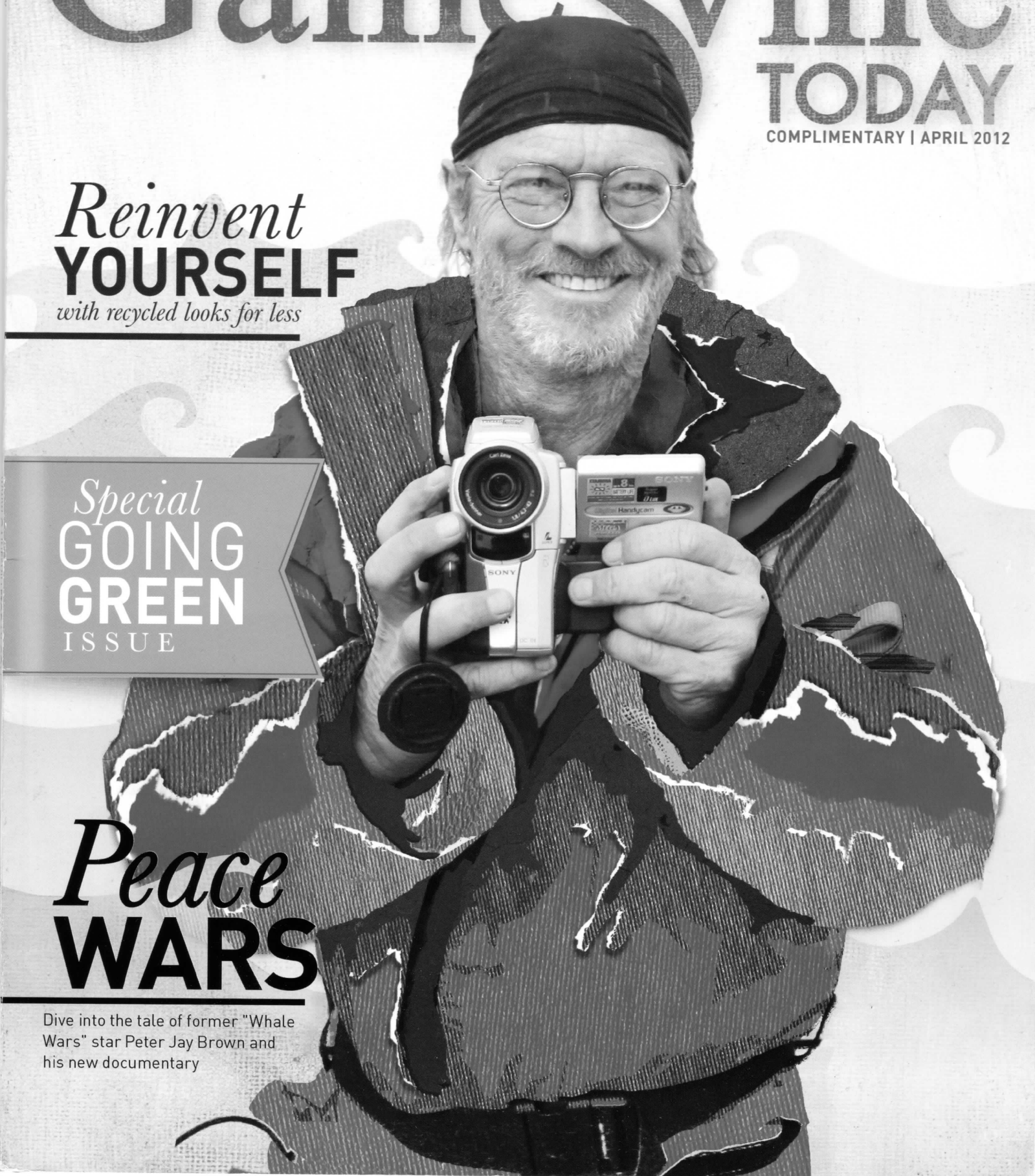
COMPLIMENTARY | APRIL 2012

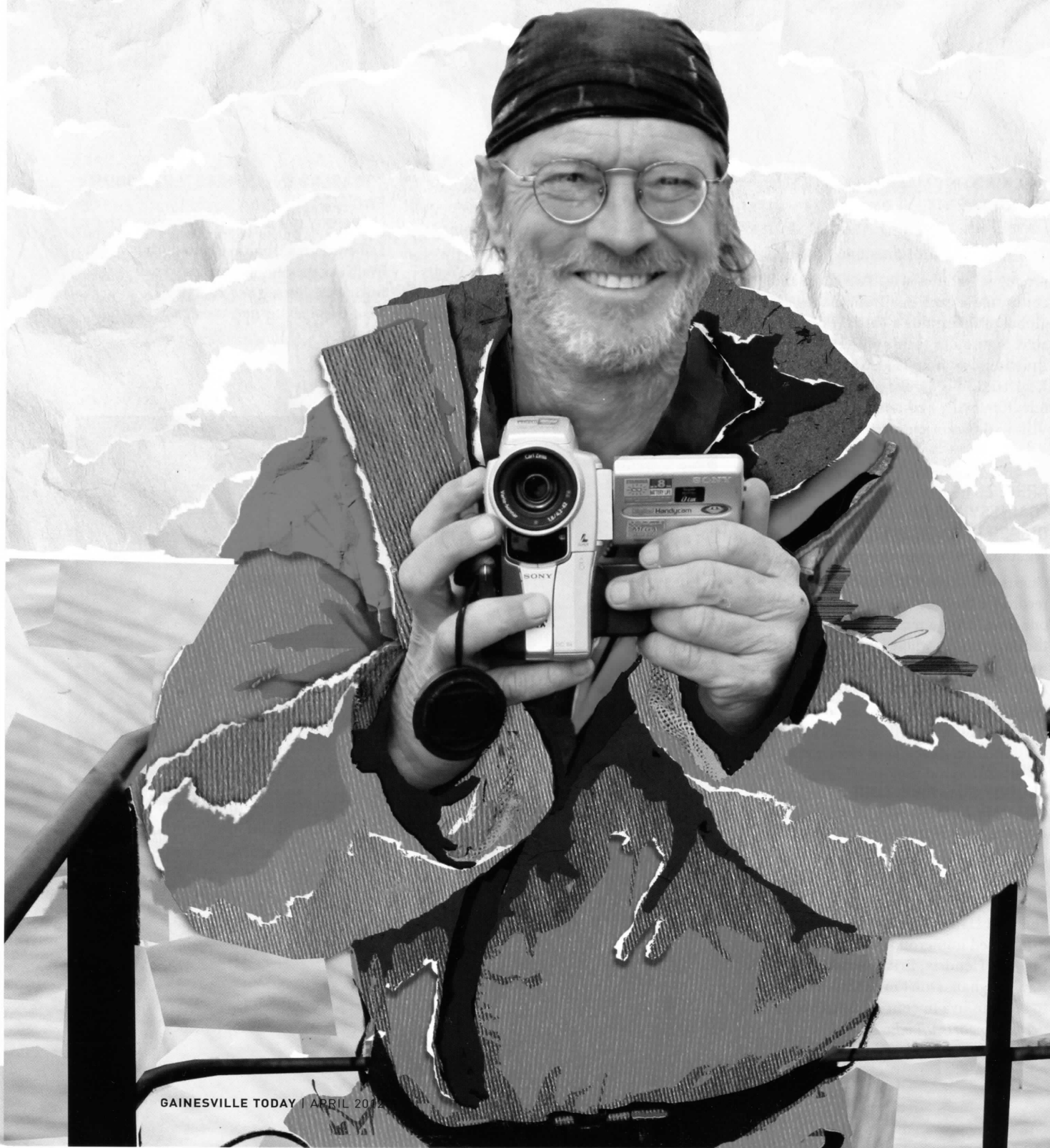
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**WARS**

Dive into the tale of former "Whale Wars" star Peter Jay Brown and his new documentary





# Peace WARS

Written by Sasha Fields Photo by Kelsey Stevens

*Peter Jay Brown, former “Whale Wars” star and member of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, is saving the world with a little wit and a lot of passion.*

Peter Brown sat in his hotel lobby dressed head-to-toe in black with his gray hair loosely tied back in a ponytail. All that’s missing from the modern-day pirate is an eye patch. He peacefully read the newspaper as people scurried past him. And while today he is a hotel guest in Gainesville, it was just months ago that he was at the center of the whale wars in Antarctica righting wrongs and giving a voice to the voiceless.

His new documentary, “Confessions of an Eco-Terrorist,” chronicles his 30-plus-year journey with the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, a proactive environmental conservation organization led by Paul Watson, which in recent years found fame on Animal Planet’s “Whale Wars.” In February, he brought his documentary to Gainesville for the Cinema Verde Environmental Film and Arts Festival. It is narrated by Brown, an engaging storyteller,

and incites change through his undeniably witty, sarcastic and wise commentary.

Brown will do anything to raise awareness—even if it means crashing the Cannes Film Festival. He brought a Sea Shepherd ship and showed the film in between actual festival films. It’s the documentary that he was always going to make once he retired. And although he’s far from retiring, a thumb injury took him away from the seven seas, and the hiatus proved to be the perfect time to tell his story.

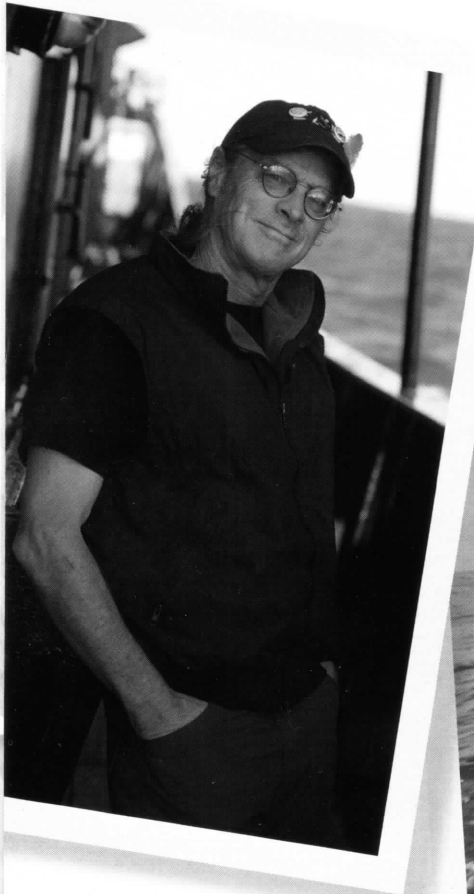
## DECADES IN THE MAKING

Born in Cape Cod, Mass., he had a boat before he ever had a bicycle. He attended Bowdoin College in the '70s at the height of the antiwar movement. It was the first time in history that the nation's youth came together for change and for peace.

"I'm a passionate person, and I believe that I can get stuff done," he said. "To tell me no is to get me interested. To say it's impossible really kind of gets me going... nothing's impossible..."

Brown was invigorated by the movement but like so many fell into the trap of radicalism. He went to London to flee the chaos but even across the pond, thousands of miles away, he couldn't escape his inner passions. He planned an antiwar demonstration for 10 Americans in London but 10,000 people showed up. It was the largest antiwar demonstration in London. He has always been an all-or-nothing, take-charge kind of guy.

Post-college, Brown worked for the Austrian Ski Federation as a snow ski instructor and was hired by the CTV Television Network to cover the 1976 Olympics. That's when his relationship with the media and television began. He realized that he could make storytelling his career, and he worked for NBC producing successful entertainment programs including the highly rated "Real People."



## PETER MEETS PAUL

In 1982, NBC sent Brown to cover Paul Watson, the founder of Sea Shepherd, as he negotiated an end to the Iki Island dolphin slaughter with the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and local fishermen. At the time, there were few people that could or would cover this kind of story.

He recalled sitting on the airplane and it dawning on him that he was flying across the world to cover Watson and he had no idea what the man even looked like. His thirst for adventure masked the fear of the unknown. Watson was easy

to spot in the airport as he was surrounded by a police escort and at 6'4" towered over the crowds.

Brown explained that although the negotiations lasted a few days, it was one question that changed his life. Someone asked what they were doing with the dolphins once they killed them. The members of the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and local fishermen explained that they weren't eating them because they were poisonous—filled with mercury.

"We feed them to the pigs," they said, matter-of-factly.

And then, in his aha moment, Brown unapologetically chimed in and asked, "So who eats the pigs?"

While Brown was to observe and film the negotiations, he couldn't help but get involved. Revolution is in his soul. He had found his calling—a way to unite his passion for change and his intrinsic storytelling skills.

"At the time I was feeling pretty bad about working in TV," he said. "I don't come from L.A... working in TV was never a big thing for me... I wasn't proud of it. It gave me something I could do with these new skills..."

## THE MAN BEHIND THE MEDIA

Imagine Brown as a master puppeteer, with each calculated movement putting the media exactly where he wants them. He's far from a villain—the manipulation has the purest of motives. Whether the issue is drift netting or whaling, without global attention and awareness, there is no chance for change.

The documentary begins with arguably one of the most heated environmental issues—sealing. Brown explained that there is really no reason for sealing anymore as countries worldwide have banned selling them. His footage, with a ship trampling over a seal as it desperately scampers for its life and sealers bashing seals with clubs, makes you want to turn away but

it's these images that bring worldwide attention—it's footage that remains imprinted in your mind and heart.

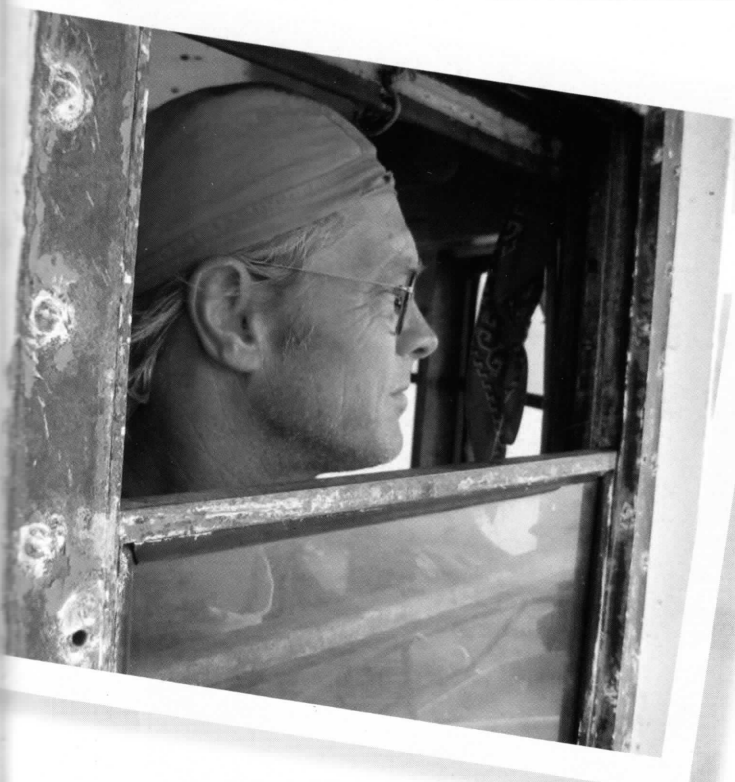
In the documentary, the Sea Shepherd crew journeys to the Faroe Islands where fishermen herd and kill thousands of pilot whales each year for sport and tradition. The needless slaughter turns the sea red.

While the Sea Shepherd ship acted as a blockade to complicate the herding, there really was no action—the media had no interest in airing footage of a ship in the middle of the ocean doing nothing. So the crew brought a submarine shaped and painted like an orca to drop in the ocean to scare off the pilot whales. They also told the media that they were playing orca sounds through underwater

speakers. The secret: The orca submarine had a hole in it and couldn't be submerged in water and there were no underwater speakers, but it made for some great photos and stories.

The propaganda did its job in the end. On that particular venture, there were several news reporters for every newsmaker. While similar environmental organizations keep footage exclusive and charge money for news organizations to use it, Brown enthusiastically gives it out.

"We [are] a very small group of individuals... who had zero power, zero money, zero political clout but we had to make everyone believe we were important... and that was what was so successful out of our little operation," he said.



*"I've been all around and it just seems to me that people everywhere are all the same when you get right down to it... When I'm hanging out with cannibals in New Guinea they're the same as hanging out with people in L.A... They are either nice or not nice—helpful or not helpful."*

## A MEMBER OF THE TRIBE

Brown has been on both sides of the Afghan War and has spent time with cannibals in New Guinea and members of the Taliban.

"I've been all around and it just seems to me that people everywhere are all the same when you get right down to it," he said. "When I'm hanging out with cannibals in New Guinea they're the same as hanging out with people in L.A... They are either nice or not nice—helpful or not helpful."

Brown also spent time with sealers in Newfoundland, Canada. Though they are monsters to most of the world, he sees it as a lack of education. He explained that the sealers used to be cod fishermen before the government destroyed the fisheries and subsequently banned cod fishing for local fishermen—eliminating their source of income. As compensation the government gave the fishermen permission to seal.

At the very heart of Peter Brown is a problem solver. Instead of seeing cold-blooded killers, he sees all of these elements adding up to a misunderstood issue. The true culprit is a lack of employment and purpose for the fishermen. So, he suggested, what if during the few months a year that sealing takes place the government gives these fishermen a different job.

"The way I look at it I think has a better chance of success than others," he said. "I see a place for everybody."

While his initial proposal of renting out a bar and giving out free drinks for the sealers was not well received, he also suggested having the sealers build something for the community—a skating rink for children.

"There's a lot of innate anger," he said. "It's a bigger problem than just seals. Seals are not the issue."

His ability to adapt to any culture and see the solution instead of the problem has produced the kind of footage that elevates awareness. He is just not the behind-the-scenes type. Throughout the documentary, he willingly goes to the front lines to "get stuff done." With two children and a wife to come home to, there's no time for nonsense.

He recalled sitting around a table with the sealers while filming a documentary about them and trying to gain acceptance by eating the seal meat. In between pretending to swallow it, Brown casually told them that it reminded him a bit of elephant meat. The sealers, who spend months each year bashing helpless seals, were outraged. They couldn't believe that Brown had done something as inhumane as trying elephant meat. He became the monster.

"They're not real barbarians," he said. "If they were real barbarians, they'd go out and whack anything. That to me is an education issue."



**THE HUMAN RACE**

“Confessions of an Eco-Terrorist” will certainly not be his last film. His next documentary will focus on one of his most defining contributions to the environmental movement: building human relationships and not demonizing the other side.

While we’re not quite there yet, he said that the Earth is near its tipping point. He compared it to the Titanic sinking and people dancing in the ballroom while the animals that are being killed off are trying to plug up the hole. The planet is dangerously close to sinking.

Brown said that each month there are more kids signed up for World of Warcraft, an online video game, than involved in the environmental groups worldwide—they choose fantasy over reality. He hasn’t forgotten the power of numbers and youth in the 1970s antiwar movement.

“I want to get them outside to see what it is that’s important and to let them know that if they all get together they can do something about it, and that’s the important thing,” he said. “You don’t have to just be doom and gloom.”

He has dedicated the majority of his life to saving animals lives but he explained that he is a conservationist not an animal-rights activist. He believes that it is not up to us to give animals rights but everything that is here is here for a reason and toying with the Earth is a dangerous game.

“I am most proud of the fact that I did things because they were right for them to do—not because I financially made any money from them, not because I did it for a favor,” he said. “I did them just because they were the right thing to do and at the time there weren’t a lot of people doing them.”

“Confessions of an Eco-Terrorist” will be released on Earth Day, April 22, on video on demand, iTunes, Amazon, Hulu Plus and Netflix. For more information, visit [www.confessionsoffilm.com](http://www.confessionsoffilm.com)

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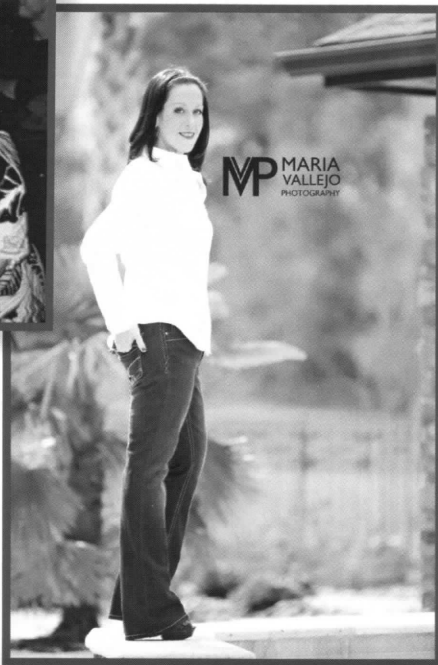
—Peter Brown

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