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HAPPY ENDING

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Winter from the potentially spine-damaging swimming style that she adopted to compensate for the injury she suffered in 2005.

A Comeback Story

Winter has lived at the aquarium since December of that year, when a fisherman found her entangled in a crab trap near Cape Canaveral, frail and dehydrated. The trap's buoy line had cut blood flow to her tail fin, which she ended up losing.

Just three months old then, Winter was not expected to live.

She recovered and learned to swim without her tail by making shark-like side-to-side movements.

But the 6-foot, 180-pound Winter can't move as quickly as other dolphins, and her trainers worry the odd movement could damage her spine and put her in a permanent bend.

Winter is not expected to wear her new device full time. The prototype she wore Thursday likely will undergo several design changes before a final version is developed.

Still, Winter's acceptance of the device marks a milestone in her rehabilitation.

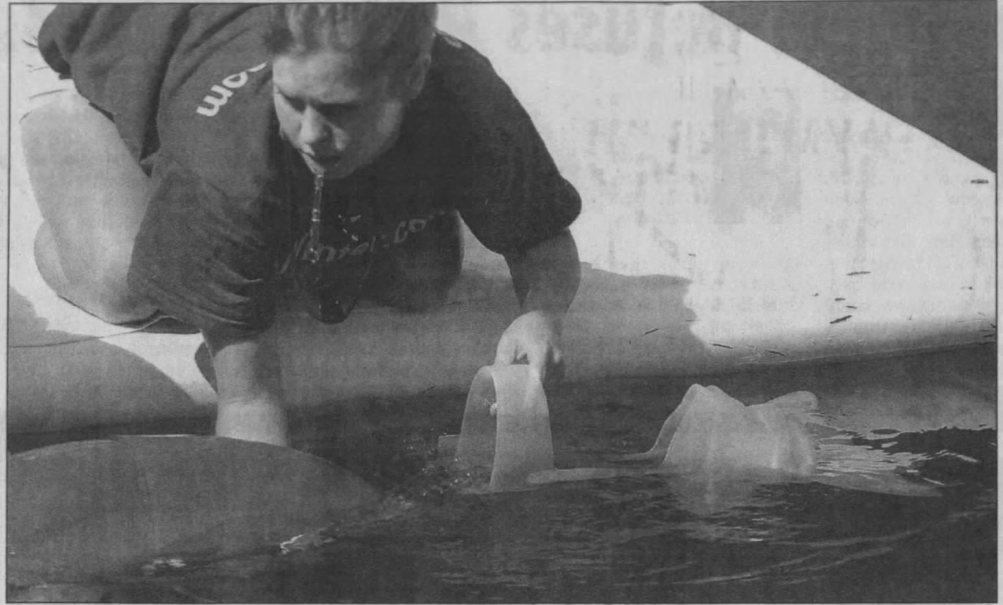
"For the first time, she's actually wearing the tail," Yates said. "It's totally on her body, which we haven't had up to now."

Free Parts And Labor

The aquarium put together a team of experts including Kevin Carroll, vice president of prosthetics at Hanger Orthopedic Group.

Carroll, an Orlando resident whose company is based in Bethesda, Md., developed the new prototype and two earlier versions. His employer is donating staff time and materials, which aquarium administrators estimate could reach more than \$100,000.

The prosthesis consists of a lubricated silicone sleeve that slips over Winter's stump and remains in place

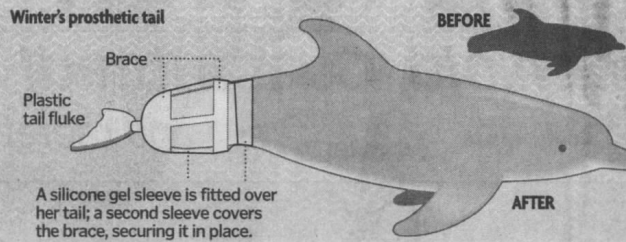


News Channel 8 photo by PAUL LAMISON

Abby Stone and Winter's other trainers were concerned that the swimming style the dolphin devised after losing her tail would injure her spine and leave her in a permanent bend. That's when experts began designing a prosthetic rear fin.

NEW TAIL CAUSES A BIG SPLASH

Experts are hoping a custom-designed prosthetic tail will help a dolphin regain its natural swimming motion. Winter, an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin, lost her tail after being tangled in a crab trap.



Graphic by The Associated Press;

Sources: Clearwater Marine Aquarium, Hanger Orthopedic Group Inc.

with suction and another sleeve to which the plastic fin is attached. Together they weigh about 10 pounds.

Only two other dolphins have received artificial tails, but they still had

parts of their tails.

Winter lost not only the flat tail flukes but part of the peduncle, or tail shaft akin to a boat losing its propeller.

"Winter is very good at improv-

ing," Yates said. "She adapts very well. She has a very laid-back personality."

The dolphin appeared to be hamming it up for television cameras Thursday while she was wearing the prosthesis, at one point floating on her back as trainers fed her herring and capelin.

Her plight has attracted worldwide media attention in recent months. The aquarium has received about 600 letters, phone calls and e-mail from people touched by Winter's story.

Many of the well-wishers are children.

One Alabama girl sent a \$3.47 money order and a drawing of herself, and penned this note: "Dear little dolphin, I hope you feel better. This money is to help you. I saved it for you."

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