

Bonnie Norton

Growing up my best friends were a variety of pets and farm animals. As an adult I trained horses and taught people how to ride and show horses. In 1996, I became aware that we are all born with the ability to communicate with animals, but in childhood we usually shut down our gift when told by adults that it is not possible to talk with the animals. Some animal communicators teach workshops so others can learn to redevelop their natural ability. During the mid-late 1990's, I studied with several of the most respected animal communicators in the U.S.

I first visited "Keiko" at the Oregon Coast Aquarium in 1997 and later began writing this screenplay as a way to help Keiko's wishes be known. The story continually grew and changed to accurately follow the events of his life. I also participated in screenwriting classes and writer's conferences to continually develop the script.

In 2004, I wrote the book, "Keiko Speaks – Keiko's True Story Based On His Communications With Bonnie Norton" which is specifically written about Keiko's life after his starring role in "Free Willy." The screenplay is different because it provides for an A-list actor, a variety of other animals, and a more in-depth view of animal communication.

I promised Keiko many times that I would never give up on helping him and telling his story for him. I accomplished part of that by writing his book, but today people are more inclined to watch a two-hour movie than read a book. Unfortunately, with the economic downturn several years ago and the usual challenges for a first-time writer, I pretty much gave up on making Keiko's movie.

Lately though I've been doing a sort of life review and my only major regret is that I failed Keiko. I know that what I learned about Keiko through our communications was absolutely unique to me, so if I don't speak for Keiko now his story will never be told, and people worldwide will never hear about Keiko's life from his perspective.

In spring 2022, the script was submitted to four screenplay contests and made the Quarter-Final cut in two. According to Coverfly.com, at that time those two selections combined with a reader's evaluation score on requested feedback notes, this screenplay ranked "in the top 25% of discoverable projects" on their website.

The script has since been submitted to more screenplay contests. As of mid-April 2023, it has been "Selected" once, chosen as a "Quarter-Finalist" two more times, "Nominated" four times, and was awarded Honorable Mention: Feature Screenplay at the Los Angeles Film Awards.

It was also awarded Winner for Best Screenplay at the March LA Indies Film Festival, and is currently nominated at the Beverly Hills Film Festival, whose results will soon be announced at their Gala Awards Dinner.