



Alexandra's Echo

a documentary film

She came to the Broughton Archipelago
for the love of an animal.

Stayed for the love of a man. When he
died tragically, Alexandra Morton
remained because she'd fallen in love
again, with this place. Now, it's under
siege and Alexandra is fighting back.





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Alexandra's Echo is the story of a woman who wanted nothing from life but love, and endless pursuit of her passion for the natural world, for orcinus orca - killer whales. The love has proved endless, even across the chasm of death. But her world is now threatened by industrial aquaculture, and Alexandra finds herself at the center of the storm raging around fish farms.



Fresh out of university in California, Alexandra Morton made her way to northern Vancouver Island following the family of a killer whale she'd been studying in captivity. She found 'A pod' and began a lifetime of listening to whales, becoming a world expert in their communication.

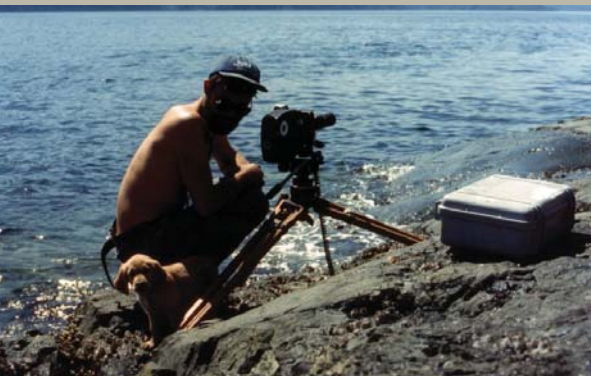
In her second year in Canada, Alex fell in love with Robin Morton, a filmmaker who shared her passion for orca. They soon had a child and life was complete - except for finding the perfect home away from civilization, near whales. Then, in the early 1980s, the whales led them into paradise.

"It is like a crystalline moment in my life now. Being young with this wonderful man and this baby and discovering this beautiful place."



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This beautiful place: Echo Bay in the Broughton Archipelago, midway up British Columbia's wild west coast -- the ideal place to pursue their life's work. Together, she and Robin would unlock the mysteries of killer whales.

If only.....

On a foggy September morning, the family heads out in their zodiac to film the members of A5 pod, an orca family led by the matriarch, Eve. Alexandra and their five-year-old son watch from the inflatable as Robin dives down. Almost immediately Eve bursts from below and races towards Alexandra, surfacing beside the zodiac. Something is wrong. Alexandra hesitates, then decides to ignore her husband's constant admonition, "Don't blow the shot!" and moves to his last position.

"... it was like time went into some sort of warp. It just felt very weird. Robin's not coming up. I look down on the bottom and he's lying down there with his arms straight up in the air, because his gloves are floating. He's got air in the hands. He's unconscious and the camera is lying, rolling down the beach, about 25, 30 feet down. "

Robin Morton's breathing apparatus failed. He drowned.

" One of the bizarre thoughts that came into my mind at that time was that it was not that unlike my son being born. There are these moments in which there are cracks in the world and there is a coming and a going. For some reason they felt the same to me. The coming of my son, when he was born and the leaving of Robin. It was a cascade of implosions from what to do in the next 10 minutes, to having lost...all of this. "



Alexandra's a documentary film Echo



After her husband's death, Alexandra was tempted to abandon her floating home at remote Echo Bay. But she stayed to listen to the whales.

For a time, Alex supported herself commercial fishing with her neighbour, Billy Proctor, the legendary wise man of Echo Bay. The two have become allies in the battle to save the Broughton Archipelago from the devastation wrought by industrial aquaculture.



Because of fish farming, Alex has been forced to switch her scientific focus from giant orca, to tiny salmon smolts, barely three inches long. Alex holds two of these dead fish in her hand and bristles with outrage.

" These babies are covered in sea lice. On one fish alone, I counted 68 sea lice. We are not just talking about a few fish. We are talking about the deaths of millions of wild migrating salmon and all the life that depends on them. "

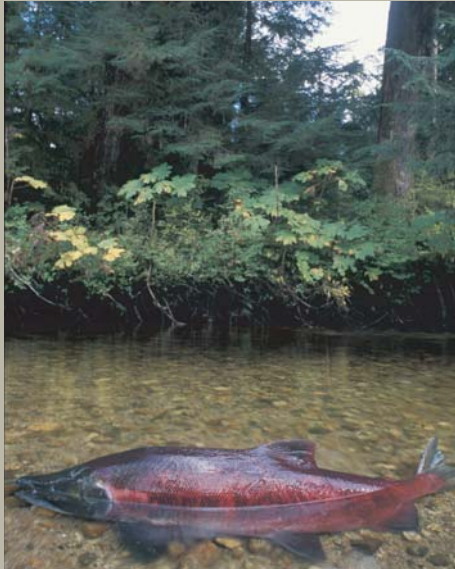
Alex is certain the lice are coming from the farms. Farming Atlantic salmon in BC waters is killing the wild Pacific salmon.





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In the fall of 2002, the pink salmon run in the Broughton crashed. An estimated 3.6 million salmon failed to return from their migration to the sea, the largest single collapse of a British Columbia fishery ever recorded. Industry and governments ignored Alexandra's scientific study pointing to the likely culprit - sea lice from fish farms located on wild Pacific salmon migration routes throughout the Archipelago.

Sea lice are external parasites that feed on the skin and mucous membranes of fish. Crowded fish farms are ideal breeding grounds for the lice, which attach to the young wild salmon as they swim past the farms on their way to sea. The wild fish are too small to survive the parasite.



This is no abstract discussion about losing another species. There are as yet uncalculated effects on human health, since wild Pacific salmon are among the cleanest proteins left on earth.

And the pink salmon, because of their abundance, are a foundation fish - supporting all other species in the Broughton. We could lose the largest tract of coastal temperate rainforest left in the world.



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" Salmon are the life-blood of this coast. Without the wild fish, we lose the entire coast. The whales, the bears, the forest, the local people, all depend on the wild salmon. If people really knew the real cost of cheap farmed fish, would they be willing to pay it? "

Alexandra's Echo follows Alexandra Morton through a season in her urgent drive to prove the real and awful cost of industrial aquaculture.



The Broughton Archipelago supports 28 fish farms, one of the highest concentrations in the world. Almost 100 farms now operate in British Columbia coastal waters, and the provincial government wants to see many, many more. That angers the state of Alaska, which has banned fish farming - and fears its wild salmon runs will be lost if forced to migrate past the BC farms. (Ironically, it's Americans who eat the lion's share of farmed salmon from BC. Fully 80 per cent is sold between Seattle and Los Angeles.)



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In the spring of 2003, Alexandra Morton's research prompted a public outcry, and the BC government fallowed 11 farms in the Archipelago during the wild pink salmon migration back to the sea. Alex's subsequent research proves that emptying the farms helped - there were many fewer lice on the smolts that spring. Yet the government has not moved to fallow again in the spring of 2004.

Canadian politicians seem deaf to the warnings coming from Norway, Scotland and Ireland: the simple equation that where fish farms exist, wild fish runs are destroyed.

Documenting the damage, getting the word out about the dangers of fish farming, consumes Alexandra Morton. Since 1987, Alex has fired off more than 10 thousand pages of letters to companies and governments. She has painstakingly plied these waters, collecting smolts riddled with sea lice, gathering the evidence to convince authorities to act.

This woman who is happiest alone in a boat listening to whales has become an activist, a thorn in the side of neighbouring fish farmers and of politicians.

After her husband's death, her family wanted Alex to leave the Archipelago. She stayed then for her whales. She stays now to protect the home she loves.

"It would be like walking away from my life's work. From killer whale families I know by name. It would mean leaving Robin, who has never really left me."

Eighteen years after his death, Robin Morton remains Alex's guardian angel. She needed him to raise their son alone in the wilderness. She needs him now for the battle ahead.





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Bios

- **Helen Slinger** is a west coast journalist whose most recent documentary writer/director credit is for *Leaving Bountiful*, the story of a woman breaking free from a fundamentalist Mormon polygamous colony. Before that she wrote & directed *Shadow Warrior*, the biography of Greenpeace International Founder David McTaggart. With McTaggart, she wrote his memoirs - published by Orion Books in the UK. Slinger's written a legion of documentaries, including: *Stranger in Our Home*, about internet predators; *Walls of Silence*, about child abuse inside a school for the deaf; *O.com*, about internet sex addiction. She's currently series producer of the archaeology series, *Ancient Clues*, produced by Omni Films for Discovery Channel. Her projects have won *RTNDA* (Radio & Television News Directors) awards, a *Gracie Allen* (Foundation of American Women In Radio & TV), and several *Columbus International Film & Television Awards*.
- **Maureen Palmer** is a Vancouver independent television producer/director/writer, concentrating primarily on documentary. She co-produced *Leaving Bountiful* with Helen Slinger. Palmer has two projects airing Spring 2004 on the Global Television Network. *Alexandra's Echo* and *Mountain Biking: A Bumpy History*, the story of four men who majored in partying in high school, yet went on to found a multi-million dollar mountain biking industry in British Columbia. Maureen is series producer of *Making It Big*, a new Force Four Entertainment reality show. Her work has earned bronze and silver medals at the *New York Festival*, the *B'nai Brith League of Human Rights Award*, and best documentary awards from the *Canadian Association of Journalists* and the *Montana International Wildlife Mountain Film Festival*.
- **Natalie Southworth** is an independent, west coast journalist who, until co-producing *Alexandra's Echo*, worked mostly in print media. She began researching the fish farm controversy when working as the British Columbia communications director for Greenpeace Canada, during a short hiatus from writing and reporting. Natalie has worked as both a reporter and editor for several publications, from the *Hamilton Spectator* to *Shift Magazine* to the *Globe & Mail*. As a fulltime reporter for the *Globe & Mail*, Natalie was nominated, at 25, for a National Newspaper Award for spot news.



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Credits

- Written and Directed by: Helen Slinger
- Executive Producer: Maureen Palmer
- Producers: Maureen Palmer, Helen Slinger
Natalie Southworth
- Director of Photography: Steve Rendall
- Additional Footage: Robin Morton
- Editor: Tim Wanlin
- Story Editor: Maureen Palmer
- Composers: Michael Friedman &
Charles Huntley
- Sound Design: Headroom Studios
- Narrator: Jim Byrnes





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A Fish Farm Primer

- Fish farms are a series of underwater pens, their waters separated from the ocean by nets.
- About 80 percent of BC farm raised salmon is sold to the United States (BC Salmon Farmers Association).
- In 2000, BC fish farms produced 43,500 tonnes of salmon worth \$310 million. (BC Salmon Farmers Association)
- BC salmon farming accounts for 15 per cent of the total value of BC's agricultural production. (BC Salmon Farmers Association)
- A report published in the January, 2004 edition of Science Magazine says farmed salmon contain 10 times more PCBs than wild salmon.
- Farmed Atlantic salmon is 200 per cent higher in saturated fat than pink salmon (US Food and Drug Administration)
- Synthetic color is added to fish feed to give the farmed salmon their pink hue. Without it farmed salmon flesh would be gray. Wild salmon normally get their color from eating pink krill. Hoffman-LaRoche, the pharmaceutical company, has created its SalmoFan so fish farms can choose the color of pink they'd like their fish to be.
- Farms can hold up to 90,000 fish into a pen about 30 metres by 30 metres. To keep costly infections from spreading rapidly through these crowded quarters, farmed fish are fed a steady diet of antibiotics.
- The BC Salmon Farmers Association (BCSFA) hired the multinational public relations firm Hill and Knowlton in 2003 to provide "a whole range of communication services and media relations."
- It takes 3 to 4 kilograms of wild fish, such as herring and anchovy, to produce one kilogram of farmed salmon (Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform).
- About one million farmed Atlantic salmon have escaped through holes in nets after storms wreaked havoc on Pacific Northwest fish farms.
- The BC government issues large predator licenses, which give fish farms permission to shoot sea lions and seals that try to break through their nets to eat farmed fish.