

Flipper

As you'll probably remember, there was a film and a TV series starring "Flipper." I certainly watched both when I was a kid.

Filmed in color in 1962 and released in 1963, the movie *Flipper* has several underwater sequences, along with scenes of the trained dolphin performing stunts. Flipper the dolphin was played by "Mitzi" (1958–1972), a female trained at the Santini Porpoise School (later the Dolphin Research Center), by Milton and Virginia Santini, who are credited in the film. Mitzi died in 1972 at age fourteen. She is buried at the Dolphin Research Center, where her grave is the first stop on the center's public tours.

"Flipper", the TV series, from Ivan Tors Films in association with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Television, was first broadcast on NBC from September 19, 1964, until April 15, 1967. Flipper, a bottlenose dolphin, is the companion animal of Porter Ricks, Chief Warden at fictional Coral Key Park and Marine Preserve in southern Florida, and his two young sons, Sandy and Bud. The show has been dubbed an "aquatic Lassie", and a considerable amount of children's merchandise inspired by the show was produced during its first run.

Back in the early sixties, the Dolphin Research Center was known as Santini's Porpoise School. Milton Santini, a pioneer in dolphin husbandry and training, ran it. Mitzi, who was Santini's first pupil, was picked to star as Flipper in the original movie (with "Branded" star Chuck Connors), which was filmed at the School.

Mitzi made the film and the TV series a hit, and she became a big celebrity at Grassy Key. When she eventually died of a heart attack, she was buried beneath a dolphin statue in the School's courtyard. The DRC maintains the grave, and in her honor they always make it the first stop on the tour. A small plaque reads:

Dedicated to the memory of
Mitzi
The original Flipper

