

Zuni and Kooskia

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This tribute is dedicated to Zuni and his brother Kooskia, who are now free from the human bonds that once held them so tightly.

SOME PEOPLE SAY that when you attach human emotions to animals you are anthropomorphizing (ascribing human form, characteristics or emotions to a non-human being). I personally think that anthropomorphization is a “twenty dollar” word that impedes the efficacy of working with a wild or domestic animal. My definition of this word is, “do not attempt to relate with animals or try to understand where they are coming from because they do not have emotions and operate solely in the capacity of predetermined instinctual responses brought about by internal or external stimulus.” I believe this is a mistake, one that I hope I never make.

That was a longwinded way of saying it’s ok to put yourself in an animal’s position, and look at a situation from their perspective. Ask yourself what would I prefer if I was in their place, how would I react in this situation with their “set of tools” at my disposal? If we try to view another’s life from their perspective, it helps us better understand why they do the things that they do and relate to them as individuals. This exercise in empathy also helps us learn about ourselves. This ideal holds truest to the animals that live in a world of nonver-

bal communication that must figure out other ways to communicate with people. This has been one of the most profound lessons that I have ever learned.

I wasn’t there for the trials and tribulations that forged the beginning of their lives, but was told a fraction of what they endured. In paying tribute to Zuni and Kooskia, I will attempt to show, through their eyes, what they went through, so that we may further appreciate the lives they lived. Before we can explore the beginning of Zuni and Kooskia’s life, we must grasp this concept of compassion that many already accept and live and yet others struggle with.

When I arrived at Wolf Haven years ago, my eyes were open to many new things, some good and some bad. I didn’t know how big a problem wolves were having in the wild; I knew even less about the battles they were fighting in some people’s backyards. I didn’t understand why anyone would take animals that belong in the wild and confine them to a life of the person’s own choosing. It saddens me that they are killed in the wild for trying to live their lives in peace, not to mention that there are people that have decided to imprison them for reasons that most likely do not coincide with the wolves’ wishes.

When you read this, please try to relate to Zuni and Kooskia (and the rest of their family). Forget that they are wolves and simply view them as individuals, as children. Attempt to put yourselves in their position, try to empathetically feel the tumultuous emotions that these little ones were immersed in. Here is a look into two individuals’ lives that were dramatically changed by the unwarranted, selfish decisions of another. This is a tribute to two little brothers who were never allowed to be two little brothers. But remember, these are the eyes of children that you are looking through.

MY EYES OPENED TO THE BEAUTIFUL sight of my mother. It was nice to finally see her after all this time. I knew her smell very well but I didn’t know she was so big and gorgeous. She was feeding my brothers and sisters while I took a break from nursing. I looked over at my dad, he also smelled familiar but I had no idea how big and strong he was. He towered above my brothers and sisters; he was even larger than mom. Our family was large, with 8 of us little ones including me who lived with mom and dad, but I knew there were a lot more out beyond where I could see, because I could hear and smell them.



Zuni.

Our home seemed huge at first, and I could almost get up to a full run with my little legs as long as no one got in my way. I always had to stop when I came to some sort of hard flat thing that had a bunch of holes in it. It was very tall and not even my dad could jump over it. This was frustrating because I could see past it and even put my little paw through to scratch the dirt on the other side of the wall, which felt different from the dirt where we lived. Ours was very wet most of the time, since there are a lot of us in our family, and we spent a lot of time marking our territory. It didn’t take long before our dirt was a muddy filthy mess, and we couldn’t help but get covered from head to toe. This bothered me because it got in the way of us playing; I always stepped in something. The dirt on the other side of the fence was so clean and dry, but we couldn’t live there because of the see-through wall that was all around us. It was ok though because this was how life was, and I was just lucky to be living.

There was some weird thing that came by sometimes, that walked on two legs and had a very odd sound to it, and an even odder smell. It smelled kind of like one of my sisters but definitely different. I think it was another neighbor because I could smell her most of the time even if she wasn’t outside of our home. She gave my mom and dad stuff that they seemed to like. My mom and dad quickly and sometimes not so nicely ate some of the things. I smelled some of it once but it didn’t smell good, not like mom’s milk. That didn’t stop mom from pushing me out of the way to get to it before dad. It wasn’t long before mom and dad were done eating the few things that the two legged one threw in. Dad usually let mom eat more than him even though he was very hungry, also maybe because she had to feed us. I didn’t know if dad let her, or if mom just took more than him. All I knew is I wouldn’t mess with mom when she was



Kooskia.
PHOTOS BY JULIE LAWRENCE.

hungry, which seemed to be all the time.

Sometimes I saw others who looked kind of like me running around on the dry dirt. They did a lot of yelling at me when they stopped by our home. My mom and dad were always there to scare them off when they were yelling at me and my family. Me and my brothers and sisters didn't know what to do so we just stood back while mom and dad talked to our neighbors. I wondered why their home was so much bigger; I wondered if I would ever find a way to get beyond the see-through wall.

The day I made it past the wall surrounding us was the worst day I can remember. I hoped getting to the other side of the wall would be a happy occasion for my family and me, but not this day. The two-legged girl came in and took me and my brothers and sisters, leaving my mother and father in our home. Mother and father did not like this one bit and were unable to stop the two-legged girl no matter how they tried, but they didn't stop fighting for us. I could see a deep rooted fear in my parents' eyes, accompanied by an overwhelming sense of sadness that seemed to swallow them whole. I wanted them to know I'd be fine, that I wasn't scared, and that we'd see each other again, once the girl was done with us. But I just didn't know what was going to happen.

Months went by after that terrible day and I understood that back when I saw that fear and pain in their eyes, it was there because they knew we'd never see one another again, and they would die without seeing their children grow up.

It was just me and my siblings in a much smaller enclosure now. Without my parents to keep order, disorder broke out and ruined the bonds of what little family we had left. We started fighting for no apparent reason, but now there was no one to break up the fights that were once playful banter. We not only lost our family, we were starting to lose our minds. In a fit of unfettered rage we went too far and killed one of my brothers because we had no one to set boundaries for us, and there wasn't enough room for everyone to have their own space. I often regret wanting to see the other side of that see-through wall. At least back then I had my family.

The second time we made it past the see-

through wall was the best day of our lives, but one of the saddest as well. It all started when we saw a bunch of people we'd never seen before. When we met these people they seemed to also have a profound sadness in their eyes, but for different reasons. Almost immediately they started pulling me and my siblings out of our home. The last time this happened our lives got much worse, so we were all very scared. But once again there was something different about these people who seemed to be kind and sensitive to our situation. I felt it might actually get better, even though the other experiences we had with people had been horrible.

We had to put faith in their kind intentions and hope things would change for the better. What made me realize things were going to be better was that as I was being carried away from my home I saw my mother and father again, only this time I saw happiness and hope in their eyes. They were happy their children were being taken from this despondent place and given a better chance at finding peace in their lives. They had hope that our lives would be better than theirs had been. I was really sad to leave my parents again, but I knew they would want me to be strong like my father and brave like my mother. I know now that was the last time I would ever look into their eyes.

WHEN ZUNI AND KOOSKIA and the rest of their family were brought to Wolf Haven it was the first time they had ever put their feet on grass, or broken into a wide open sprint across nearly three acres. It was the first time they had ever seen trees and shrubs. At night instead of seeing plywood above their heads they could see the stars. Instead of despair and sadness in the howls of their neighbors they heard happiness. They now lived without the misery that once accompanied every day of their lives. They were no longer living in filth or being forced to eat rotten food; they could drink fresh water whenever they wanted to. They were given a new chance at a good life.

Recently, I was blessed with the chance to assist in another rescue operation, bringing Zuni and Kooskia's mother and older brother to their rightful home (see 'Idaho, revisited' on page 12). The rescue brought us back to the same property that Zuni, Kooskia, and family were once forced to call home. When I arrived

at the woman's compound, tucked back on a few acres in rural Idaho, I was immediately emotionally debilitated and overwhelmed. The sights, smells, and noises were horrifying and the bodies of dead animals littered the landscape.

Zuni and Kooskia's mother had a small enclosure muddled with trash, rotten food, and carcasses of animals since passed. Their older brother was housed separately, alone in a very small enclosure consisting of nothing but dirt and rotten food for substrate. There was no available water for either of them unless it rained, and then they were forced to drink from whatever debris collected water. As I looked around, I kept thinking "How

can this be? How can we, as a self-appointed 'superior' species, let this happen?" This kind of action is excused all the time, all over the world because animals are "just animals." If a human family had been forced to live in such horrible conditions, there would have been an immediate intervention to put a stop to it, and those responsible for such atrocious acts of malevolence would have been imprisoned. Yet the people responsible for such evil acts against Zuni, Kooskia, and family (and so many other animals) met no consequences or punishment of any sort.

Zuni and Kooskia, my goal was to show you that not all humans are bad; that there are a lot of us who see the beautiful spirits that dwell inside of all living creatures. I always admired how strong you were – mentally, physically and emotionally. I saw you both as pillars of strength that, in my mind, would never fall. I have to remind myself that just because you've left your bodies, it doesn't mean you've "fallen"; and those pillars I became so used to seeing *still* stand, just in a different sense. I'll always remember you and cherish the memories I was fortunate enough to build with you. I am sorry we could not defeat the unfamiliar cancer that was attacking you. I hope you know that we won't stop fighting for you, either. With this article, and the many other tools we have, we'll continue the fight at preventing this from happening to other animals. But when it does happen, we will be there with our pure intentions to help those who are in need to stand strong.

You were both exceptionally strong and not many of us could have handled the hardships you faced. I can only speak for myself when I say: *Know that you are loved and respected as individual spirits.* I am thankful you can now run free, unchained by humans. I hope that in your passing you've found the peace you could not find in life that would allow you to walk side-by-side as brothers. You deserve to know that bond. Until we meet again, Zuni and Kooskia, rest in peace my friends.



WOLF TRACKS file photo, Fall 2000 – The first Idaho rescue mission. A Wolf Haven animal care specialist is about to rescue the wolves (including Zuni and Kooskia) before him.