

Daniel Curry, *Animal Care Specialist*

Zuni and Kooskia



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 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 nonverbal 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



Zuni.

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.

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

Kooskia.
PHOTOS BY JULIE LAWRENCE.

continued on page 14

fence was so clean and dry, but we couldn't live there because of the stupid 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 hungry, which seemed to be all the time, poor mom.

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 stupid see-through wall.