



Ramses

Wisdom is not a trait specific to humans.

Wisdom can, and will be seen in the eyes of all creatures, as long as you are wise enough to keep an open mind. Have you ever looked into the eyes of an animal and thought they are much older than the number of years that their age reflects? One animal that immediately comes to my mind when I think of the trait wisdom, is my friend Ramses.

Ramses had been moved from where he was born to Wolf Haven. This change of scenery, mates, people, etc. put him in a constant state of defense. This made it hard for him to feel safe and secure in one spot. Once he moved to Wolf Haven International on October 12, 1993 he found his home.

Ever since I met Ramses he seemed to be somewhat shy. Even his reclusive mate Kiani showed herself more than he did when I was around their home. During our first few encounters he did not come toward me when I stopped at their enclosure. He would retreat to the back of his enclosure and hide behind some of the foliage. Peering at me from the safety of cover, I could see him watching me, trying to determine whether I was friend or foe. Later I found out that he had an innate fear of men, which in my mind only widened the gap between us. This did not deter me from trying to befriend him, nor prevent him from trying to figure out my true intentions.

Since Ramses and Kiani were older animals they were fed small meals on a daily basis, unlike the other animals that are fed twice a week. This gave me an opportunity to try to earn their trust little by little. We would feed them during our morning walkthrough, and when we'd come around the corner they would both be standing there waiting. Kiani would come up to the fence for her share and Ramses would stand back and wait for us to throw his portion in. They were fed this way for some time, until one day I walked around the corner and Ramses was up at the fence with Kiani. They both stayed at the fence for their breakfast. When they were full



they would pull away from the fence to stand and look at you.

Ramses and his mate Kiani, like most older beings were accustomed to a slower pace of life, which came with their well-earned age. Wolf Haven was an ideal place to call their home during the last years of their lives. Trying to respect their slower ways, I would consciously make sure that I spoke quieter, walked slower, and moved slower around them. I think Ramses noticed that I was making a conscious effort to not disturb their long-deserved peace. If I was in a hurry I would still take the time to move slower around them so they wouldn't have to worry so much about what I was doing. Ramses eventually started to trust me more. He started to stand his ground when I would walk up, rather than retreat into the brush of his enclosure to watch me. Yet he would still watch me very closely to ensure that he was aware of what I was doing.

Their home offered peace of mind, and body. They had a large enclosure with two very large Douglas fir trees. One of which is an old growth tree that not only sheltered them from the unforgiving elements, but also gave them a safe place to hide. At the bottom of the Douglas fir there was a large den that they would frequent quite often, especially during the winter months when the ground above them was frozen solid. The summer months were more comfortable for both of them. They would lie down at the rear of their enclosure on a large grassy patch. Lying next to each other they would soak up all the day's

sun before getting up. They did not explore their surroundings too often -- they seemed to like to pick spots that would suit their needs for that particular time of the day and rest there until they stood up and walked slowly over to the next spot to rest. Kiani and Ramses weren't overly affectionate toward one another, but they did like to spend most of their time with each other.

Their health started to wane with their mounting age. Kiani started to lose her fight with sinus cancer that attacked her body

relentlessly. The disease, coupled with her age, meant there was nothing that neither she nor her caretakers could do to fight the disease. All that could be done was to make her last moments as peaceful and comfortable as possible. She left her body and transitioned from this life to the next naturally, before there was need for her friends (caretakers) to intervene.

After Kiani's passing Ramses did change, but not for the worse as some might have suspected after the loss of his mate, Kiani. He started to become much more active and exploring his enclosure, checking every little nook and cranny with a newfound energy and curiosity. He would stay out more even during bad weather. I frequently saw him looking off into the distance with a smile that made him look much younger than he actually was. Once he noticed he was being watched he would snap back into reality with a look that reflected his annoyance at being disturbed during his moment of serenity. During morning rounds Ramses would wait right next to his water bucket. He seemed to shed all of his previous concerns about his caretakers. He wasn't shying away like he used to; he would wait for his breakfast to be brought to him. He would ever so gently grasp each piece of meat with his incisors and toss it back with a throw of his head. During each bite he would look straight into your eyes. In doing so he was giving the most precious gift that he had to give, his trust.

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I believe that he knew his time was more limited than it ever was before, and that he would live it to its fullest, experiencing everything he could in the time he had left. I think he was happy, not because he was by himself, but because he was alive, and fully embracing every moment.

When you are given the honor to be responsible for someone else's life, you must always do what is best for them. You must always put their needs and wishes before your own. Euthanasia is always a hard decision at best. You are making a decision for someone that you love and respect, who cannot just tell you what they want. This requires you to be more in tune with that animal and with yourself than you might normally be. You are making a decision that will permanently alter their life. You need to make a decision that is not polluted by your human emotions – to want to keep this animal alive for selfish reasons, or for reasons that are not in the animal's best interest. You have to do what is right for that animal even if it does break your heart. They are our friends and look to us for help in their times of need, throughout their journeys with us.

Ramses, during your last night I could see misery in your eyes, something that was never seen by me prior to those last moments, something that I wish you didn't have to experience. I feel that we made the best decision for you, my friend, and that it was made with love and respect for you. I hope that I used some of the wisdom you imparted on me during your last moments here on earth, and that you know I was listening to your silent dialogue during all those mornings when we had breakfast together. I am grateful for meeting you my friend, Ramses. I hope that someday, we will have breakfast together again.

