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*Aurora. Photos by  
Julie Lawrence.*



# AURORA

**Aurora's life-journey began** at the Minnesota Zoological Garden on April 11, 1989. At a young age, she was transferred to Northwest Trek Wildlife Park in Eatonville, Washington along with her mother, Mom; brother, Akela; and sister, Kiani. After many years at the park, Aurora and her family were brought to Wolf Haven on November 16, 1999 to retire from the "zoo" atmosphere and live a more quiet peaceful life.

front of it, granting visitors a very close-up look at an exceptionally beautiful wolf. Yet in early 2005 Aurora faced what was probably the most traumatic experience in her life – the loss of her brother, Akela. Following his death, Aurora became immediately withdrawn and cautious of people and the decision to move Aurora off-tour became evident. She was moved to a more private enclosure to help alleviate some of the stress she'd undergone as a result of the loss, and as her caretakers had anticipated, the new enclosure fit Aurora's altered personality very well. It was located at the back of the sanctuary, nestled in a group of large Douglas fir trees right next to her sister, Kiani. Aurora now had plenty of privacy, shade and room to roam. Better still, the enclosure was not just new to her... She was the first wolf to have the pleasure of making it a home.

The now cautious Aurora was very cute to watch as she would hide from her caretakers and then slowly slink out of her hiding spot (her wooden shelter or behind her favorite tree) to insure that the coast was absolutely clear. At times she would come out to see whether her caretaker was

Throughout much of her life here at Wolf Haven, Aurora was very comfortable with tour groups stopping at her enclosure, and would lay at the

# GREY

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Grey

In the wild, howling is used as a tool for communication among wolves for a variety of reasons. Here at Wolf Haven, wolves still use howling as a tool for communication but also as a form of expression, I believe. In stating that, I want to acknowledge a friend of mine who passed away in December. Her name is Grey. She and her Sister Brita were what I called the Singing Sisters.


When all the wolves in the sanctuary would begin to howl, Grey and Brita would join in together and sing. They would harmonize so perfectly, at times it was difficult to distinguish them as two separate individuals – their melodic harmonies intertwining so beautifully as to create a chorus to be heard by all throughout the sanctuary. With that greeting came a feeling of warmth that would radiate through your entire being. That is what I call "animal art."

with the morning came no improvement... In fact, she appeared worse. The sense of helplessness was palpable, for Natasha was slipping away before our very eyes. We consulted with Dr. Brown early that morning and gave him the disappointing news. He in turn had some disappointing news for us: because of her continued decline, he was growing increasingly suspicious that cancer (perhaps intestinal) was the primary cause and Addison's was only secondary.

We had a difficult decision to make. Further exploratory procedures would perhaps confirm Dr. Brown's suspicions, but at what cost to Natasha? Because she was so ill, the anesthesia alone would be very risky. And if it turned out to be cancer what, if anything, would we be able to do? The thought of losing Natasha was unbearable, but at the same time we had to keep in mind that even though she remained tractable, this whole process had undoubtedly caused her great stress (which in turn further exacerbated her Addison's). As her caretakers, we needed to be mindful of what was best for her, rather than what might be best for us. After much discussion, we came to the painful realization that prolonging Natasha's life would do her no justice.


**On Saturday, January 21, 2006**, Natasha's ordeal peacefully ended. A post-mortem examination revealed little, and tissue samples sent to the laboratory for further analysis offered nothing conclusive. As Dr. Brown wrote in the necropsy report "...a very difficult case to tie together."

Because of her young age, Natasha's passing was all the more poignant. I try hard not to remember her as she was in those final days, but rather remember her romping around her enclosure with her brother, Rocco, engaging in a game of canine "tag" or biting at his ear, head or tail – doing whatever she could to foil his attempts at hogging all the attention or treats from Animal Care. To Animal Care staff, she became our surrogate little sister and we too would conspire with Natasha to occupy the gregarious Rocco in order for her to sneak a little something extra on the side.

Beautiful Natasha... though your journey through this lifetime was brief, Little Sister, I hope there were days of joy and I wish you a better life in spirit. 

still present and tending to her needs, and then quickly go back to into hiding. When the coast was clear, she would sneak to the front of her enclosure, stand upon her little hill, and survey the sanctuary to locate the whereabouts of her "pesky" keeper. At other times, when one of us would approach from the opposite direction from where she was surveying, we would try to let her know by calling out her name. But with her increasing age Aurora's hearing was beginning to wane, so she would start to descend her little observational knob in order to go about her business and suddenly realize that there was one of those pesky keepers in her midst. She would then gallop to the back of her enclosure to hide once again. Occasionally she would remain while we were at her enclosure, but always with her all-seeing eye upon us.

**On Sunday March 12**, I was doing morning rounds as usual when I approached Aurora's enclosure and could not see her. At first I thought maybe she was just up to her usual fun and games, but something about this morning didn't feel like fun at all. I decided to go into her enclosure to see if I could catch a glimpse of the elusive lady. I found Aurora inside her shelter that morning, and it appeared that our little friend had passed away in her sleep during the night, just shy of her 17th birthday.

I'll miss playing hide-and-seek with you my little friend, but until I find you again, please know that you were, and still are, deeply loved. 

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I know that what they were doing was intentional not just instinctual. Like any human duo, on occasion they would break harmony on accident and immediately tune right back into one another again, without breaking focus. Their songs drew from many inspirations: their neighbors howling, sirens, trains, etc... At times it seemed they would sing for no apparent reason other than to hear their own beautiful song carry across the crisp air of their sanctuary.

One of the most heart wrenching songs I have ever heard was Brita's first solo. Her song encompassed her pain and sent it soaring throughout the sanctuary. It was hard for Brita to cope with the loss of her sister and I personally think that Brita's song was cathartic for her, helping her deal with that loss. I also think that Brita was honoring Grey with the songs they were so fond of singing together.

You will be missed by all who knew you Grey. Your gentle mystique will live on in every spirit you've ever touched and in every song your sister sings... I only hope that her chorus reaches you so that you both may sing together once again. 