

Jimmy, coyote — the most unlikely of teachers

A survivor in every sense of the word, with an uncompromising spirit. From tragedy to ongoing rehabilitation, he taught us much about what it really means to live.



I cannot wrap Jimmy's essence up into a page of words and hope that you will grasp the magnitude of Jimmy. There are not many words that I can fathom that could accurately describe Jimmy. He is the strongest being that I have had the privilege of meeting. Some people would only see Jimmy's wound and

think that, this animal should not be alive. Some people would look at Jimmy's species and immediately label him and his kind as nuisance animals that don't deserve to live. I always looked at him with sympathy, respect and admiration. I feel sympathy for him, because of the hardships that he had to face, alone. I respect him for who he was and for what he had become. I admired him for how he handled his tribulations. I aspire to be even half of the "man" that little Jimmy was, for if I do I will be a good man. I hope that I write a tribute that will allow you a glimpse into an astonishing spirit that I grew to know as Jimmy the coyote.

From the beginning he had to fight in order to survive. His mother was senselessly shot by a group of teenagers right outside their family den. He and his six siblings were only three weeks old when their mother was taken from them. Not knowing how to fend for themselves, and not daring to leave the safety of their den, the puppies could only wait for their mother to return from her unusually long journey. He and his family had no chance of survival without her. It was only a matter of time until the pups succumbed to starvation.

Sometime after the horrific incident, someone found the mother and called the local Animal Control office. When Animal Control arrived they found the mother lying dead outside her den. When the ACO (Animal Control Officer) looked into what was now more of a tomb than a den, they found seven coyote puppies lying in a pile. Three of the puppies had starved to death. The other four puppies were alive, but barely. At the bottom of the pile, buried underneath his siblings, they found Jimmy, struggling to hold onto what life he still had in him. Due to the fact that they were emaciated and dehydrated and near hypothermic, there was concern that the pups wouldn't make it. There was a particular concern about the little guy that had been buried underneath his family for so long. All the puppies that had survived this appalling act of animal cruelty had been brought to a rehabilitation



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center in Camarillo, California. The goal for the coyote pups was to rehabilitate them to the point that they could be released back out into the wild.

As the owner of the rehabilitation center nurtured these four coyotes back from near death, she began to realize that one of them would not be given another chance at a wild life. The coyote would be lucky to have any sort of life at all she thought. The little coyote that was crushed underneath all his brothers and sisters had suffered an injury to his spine which allowed, at best, limited control of his hind quarters. As she watched this small coyote drag himself through his day, her heart went out to him. She contacted numerous veterinarians wondering if there was anything that could be done to help him regain his mobility. The most common answer given to

help the coyote's ailment was to euthanize him and "put him out of his misery." Fortunately for the little coyote pup the rehabilitator felt that this was not what he needed. What he needed was someone that would look past his ailment and see a young, otherwise healthy coyote that more than deserved a chance to live. He needed someone with compassion, knowledge, and the means to help him. He needed someone to fight for him.

The owner of the rehabilitation center had already built a rapport, with Wolf Haven International during the rescue of Shilo (one of Wolf Haven's hybrids). She decided to contact us to see if there was anything that we could do, or suggest for

this pup in need. We decided to take him and another unrelated coyote that was in need of a home (for other reasons). Both coyotes were then transported to Wolf Haven International.

There was another coyote residing at Wolf Haven. Os was found wandering the streets of Kirkland by himself. He was blind in his left eye, and as we found out later he was an epileptic. This meant that he would live out the rest of his life in captivity just like the other two. The goal was to mix these three month old, unrelated coyotes together so that they could have a home to call their own to live out the rest of their lives in peace. Shortly after Jimmy and Carosal arrived they were put into an enclosure with Os. They all got along really well. Os and Jim formed a remarkable friendship. Carosal kept more to herself. The three of them spent sometime in their acclimation enclosure before they were moved to the "on-tour" part of the sanctuary.

There new home was remolded with Jimmy in mind. The gravel that was once put down along the edge of the enclosure for wolves was replaced with softer top soil. There were multiple shelters that were built for the little coyotes to hide in, if they needed retreat from the public's view. The staff all contributed some money to purchase sod for as much of the enclosure that we could, so that when he

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did drag it was on something softer than just solid ground. Everything that might endanger Jimmy was taken out of the enclosure.

Jimmy would occasionally use his back legs to walk around his enclosure. As his front legs would hold his weight his back legs would "high step" him forward. Still, when he got scared he'd drop his hindquarters to the ground and draw on his stronger fore arms to get him to where he wanted to go. This dragging finally produced a large pressure sore on his left hip. Jimmy went through two operations to close the sore on his hip. Both operations involved lengthy recovery processes as well. And in turn, both times he blew it back open with use. There was nothing more that we could do to help him with that wound and eventually his body built up a thick layer of callus tissue to protect it. Jimmy also developed small sores on his hind feet from rubbing along the ground. During his first breeding season we had to separate him from the others, due to his being picked on. During that time he self mutilated his tail. Most likely this was due to his frustration of not being out with his friends. He went in for his third surgery. His tail had to be removed because of the damage that he did to it. After his tail was amputated we decided to let him back out into his enclosure with his friends. You would think that all of this would deter him from wanting to live. But instead it seemed to just give him more drive.

In the beginning Jimmy asserted himself to be the pack leader. His friend Os would actively submit to the surprisingly dominant Jimmy. He was the man in charge for quite some time. Eventually the group dynamics changed to where Os was the Alpha and Jimmy was subordinate. Carosal always remained static in her position on the social "totem pole." The switch in dynamics could be attributed to the fact that Jimmy had to be pulled from the group for his surgical procedures and his recoveries. This didn't slow Jimmy down in the slightest though, nor affect him and Os' special bond.

Eventually Carosal started to pick on Jimmy, most likely because she viewed him as the weak link to their pack. Jimmy was no easy target however. He would back up against something solid and defend himself. Carosal would try to assert her dominance with Jimmy, almost to let him know that she could do him in if she wanted. Jimmy would answer back by showing her that he was not afraid in the slightest. Os did not take kindly to her picking on his friend. On many occasions Carosal would corner Jimmy and while she was showing him her arsenal of teeth she did not notice Jimmy's best friend running to his side. Os would run up on her and quickly bite her in the rump and then put himself between the two. Though there was this contempt between Carosal and Jimmy that did not stop them from being friends. They all would join together when it was time to howl, and they would often play with one another. Sometimes Jimmy would have to sit on the side lines while his friends chased each other at top speeds around their home. This did not hinder Jimmy from having good time. He would just find something to entertain himself until he was able to join in again.

Some people, when they saw Jimmy, would say "why do you keep this coyote alive – he's suffering." Those were the people who



Jimmy as a young pup, eager to play with his new friends Os and Carosal.



Above: There were times when Jimmy would have to sit on the side lines while his friends chased each other at top speeds around their home. PHOTOS BY JULIE LAWRENCE.

would look at Jimmy's sore, or look at the fact that he had to drag himself sometimes instead of walking around like Os or Carosal. They never took the time to look at Jimmy, before looking at Jimmy's problems. They didn't see the young little coyote that would vigorously play with his friends. They didn't know that Jimmy held the title of Alpha leader for some time, amongst his little group of so called outcasts. They didn't know that Jimmy would try to mate with Carosal. They didn't watch as Jimmy would devour his share of food, or have a refreshing drink from his water bucket. They didn't hear the powerful howl, which exploded from his mouth with a piercing beauty. They didn't see how striking he was. They didn't look into his eyes and know that he was thankful for every minute of his life. They didn't know Jimmy they just saw a coyote that should be put out of his misery. I wish all "misery" was as beautiful as Jimmy's life. We have to be careful when we look into another's life and make such rash judgments – it is not our life that we are looking into. I believe that Jimmy lived more during his short stay on this planet than most do during their long lives.

I am sorry for those who viewed Jimmy's life as miserable, for they did not know Jimmy the coyote. Jimmy taught me many things during the time we shared together. He has taught me what happens when animals become the victims of cruelty. He has taught me to see and recognize the being first and the ailment second. He has shown me that your body doesn't have to be in perfect condition in order to have an amazing life. He has made it clear to me that while you may have problems in your life, the problems are not the things that define you as a being. It is how you handle your problems that forge you into the being you are. There are no unique problems in this world, there are only unique individuals who bear these problems.

I hope that by telling you what happened to Jim, and imparting

what I learned from this little coyote, that in turn it will help you appreciate Jim and all life on this planet a little bit more. If we can stop needless cruelty maybe another animal or person won't have to go through what Jimmy did. I don't believe that there are many beings that are as strong as he was and I thank you for reading about my friend.

Dear friend when I found you lying in your deckpen I saw a look of peace that graced your beautiful face, not anguish. I pray that your face reflected your last moments on this planet. I thank you for teaching me the lessons I could have only learned from you. I thank you for finally trusting me. I hope that you grew to think fondly of me. I am sorry for all the times that we had to poke and prod you. I hope you know that our intentions were good, and that they were only filled with love and respect. I hope that when people read this they will see some of the beauty that I had the privilege of seeing on a daily basis. In exchange I hope it will help open their hearts to the many facets of beauty that surround them, that they might not be aware of. I am thankful that you left your body while you were doing so well. I am thankful that we were put into each other's paths, for I learned so much from you. I hope that in turn you learned that humans can show love, compassion, and respect for animals. Mostly I am thankful that you got a chance to live your life, and that no one took that opportunity away from you. I hope that I can pick up at least some of your traits. For I truly feel that they would make me a better person. I cannot wait until we meet again, my little friend Jim. 🐾