

## Memories of a Wild Spirit: Abraham

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On January 28, 1997, Wolf Haven lost a dear friend—Abraham. His death at age 12 was all the more tragic for being so unexpected. On January 11, a large swelling became visible on his neck, which was assumed to be an abscess as it had appeared literally overnight. Because it began to limit his mobility, our vet determined the abscess needed surgery to drain. It was a shocking blow to learn on the operating table that the swelling was in fact an aggressive, cancerous growth that had fused to his spine, making it inoperable. Abraham demonstrated in his last weeks the indomitable spirit and stoicism of the wolf, he did not show the considerable pain he must have

endured. Euthanasia was considered the kindest course of action and, so today we mourn with his companion Tahoma.

Abe, as he was more commonly called, was born in 1984, at the Bramble Zoo in South Dakota. After seven years at the Wildlife Science Center, a research facility in Minnesota, he came to join Wolf Haven with his brother, Joshua, on Valentine's Day in 1992. Here, Abe quickly became both companion and close friend to Tahoma. The two seemed a perfect match, to the point of resembling each other at a casual glance. While Tahoma had been the dominant pup in her litter, which included Gris Gris, Gyrene, and Araby, she deferred to her new companion in matters of both food and attention. Abe filled the role of alpha in their enclosure with ease, grace, and not a little apparent enjoyment. Yet Tahoma could usually cajole him into play, and visitors' first view of Wolf Haven was often these two engaged in an all-out romp.

Abe was a magnificent wolf of high spirits, boundless energy, good humor, and a generous measure of mischief. He liked the attention of human visitors—though only in small doses—but he also worked to keep us on our toes and remind us all that a wolf is wild. Clothing that brushed too close to the fence had an equal chance of getting snapped at as being sniffed, as though to drive home the message, "Don't think that you can predict what I'll do next!"

Abe always enjoyed seeing animal care staff coming by on their morning rounds. One of his favorite games was try-to-grab-the-stick, which we use to tip over and rinse out water buckets. If he got it, we might spend a brief moment playing tug-of-war before he let go with a "Ha! Gotcha!" smirk. When I first started working at Wolf Haven, of course he had to initiate me by putting all his strength into the tug...I didn't have a chance of holding on. He trotted off with the stick and gave it a good chewing before Michael got it back a few days later. But Abe did have a weakness—he was a sucker for a biscuit and could always be distracted with one. He was a good-natured wolf, though, and was more than willing to accept such subterfuge.

Dignity is a word that is frequently ascribed to wolves, and Abe filled that role superbly, especially during his last few weeks. At the time of his greatest stress, he reacted without his customary aggression, becoming quiet and affectionate. When eating became more difficult, he took chunks of hot dogs or bite-sized pieces of beef from our hands with extreme trust, care, and gentleness, truly a lesson to us all on managing adversity. Now he is free of pain, running and playing (and probably playing tricks) along the spirit path. Abraham, we howl for you and honor you for all you taught us about the spirit of the wolf.