

## Adopters – a special kind of love

Heather Hilf, Membership Coordinator



WOLF HAVEN hereby declares that

I AM ALWAYS DEEPLY SADDENED to lose one of our precious sanctuary residents, and in this issue of WOLF TRACKS, we have moving tributes to three of them that recently passed away. One of the first steps I take as Membership Coordinator, upon learning of the loss of a wolf-friend, is to begin the process of notifying the wolf's many Adopters. To share this sad news with the extended pack outside of Wolf Haven's 80 acres is difficult, but it brings me great comfort. It is reassuring to know that so many others care for these beings and for the future of the wolf worldwide. I would like to take a moment to share one woman's connection to our beloved Miwok.

Rhonda Harms is similar to many supporters I communicate with every day. She, like all who care for Wolf Haven wolves, is someone I always

look forward to speaking with. Rhonda had a particularly uncanny ability to sense when something changed in the daily care of Miwok. As Miwok's cancer worsened, I heard from Rhonda more and more. Despite being on the east coast, she bridged the miles between herself and Miwok easily via email to me and Animal Care staff.

After Miwok passed, her connection shifted naturally to Miwok's mate, Cherokee. Sadly, I was again faced with bringing her the news about Cherokee's sudden passing. I learned of Cherokee's death first thing Monday morning, and after sharing memories of him with my co-workers, I sat down to begin notifying his Adopters of the sad news. But before I could do so, there was an email from Rhonda asking how Cherokee was coping with the loss of his dear Miwok.

When I later asked Rhonda to share with our readers what it means to be a Wolf Haven Sponsor, here's what she had to say: "I have adopted several wolves over the course of my Wolf Haven membership and each time I have felt drawn to a particular wolf. I don't know if it's a spiritual connection. It isn't something I can easily explain. I only know that 'my' wolf in some way has called to me. Even though we may never meet in person, he or she becomes an important part of my family and remains so even after his or her spirit has left its earthly body to forever run free."

Miwok, Cherokee, Tina, my heart is lighter knowing so many humans cared for you and that you are together, running free.

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Miwok, April 2010. PHOTO BY JULIE LAWRENCE.

## Beautiful girl, Miwok

Ursula Davis, Membership Assistant

WHEN I STARTED VOLUNTEERING at Wolf Haven in 2006, I was instantly drawn to the remaining members of the Idaho pack, especially Miwok. This was partly because of their story and what they went through before finding a home here, but mostly because of their different personalities. I was in awe of the majestic Zuni, who was paired with curious Mehina. Playful Kooskia and Siri always made me smile with their little game of hide and seek and they took treats easily from my hand.

Miwok, on the other hand, was indifferent to me at first; she would watch me from her perch on the shelter sometimes, but mainly she ignored me, as if bored. I would listen to the stories that Wendy, Daniel and Erik shared with me and I tried to imagine her doing the things she was accused of. The great escape story is a tour favorite (see Wendy's tribute to Cherokee) and we could all see the evidence of her favorite past time, digging. And there was the time we tried to spruce up their enclosure with some bushes. Miwok was not very happy and as soon as we left the sanctuary, she pulled out the shrubs that Wendy and I had just planted.

During rounds she would charge the fence and try to

Continued on page 23

## MIWOK TRIBUTE

continued from page 19

take the water stick and on the days we had to scrub buckets and tubs, it took three people just to get her bucket. One of us had to stand watch while her tub was refilling, because she always tried to steal the hose. Sometimes she came up to the fence and I thought maybe she wanted to say 'Hi'. But when I knelt down to let her sniff my hand through the fence, she would bare her teeth, without making a sound – and it stopped me in my tracks.

She did warm up to me a little in the coming years; sometimes taking a treat from my hands through the fence. While Cherokee came to the fence for scratches, Miwok would stay back. Then in early 2010, it all changed when she started to get sick. At first she would readily take her pills and with all the extra treats she actually started to gain weight. I often thought to myself, the doctors must be wrong. She looked good, but I was the one that was wrong. As her health started to decline, Miwok changed her behavior toward us. She would come to the fence for her pills and take them ever so gently, even licking my fingers at times; it was as if she knew we were trying to help her. Her eyes would look right into mine. She also started to present for scratches, just for a second or so at first, but then she would linger while I told her how brave and beautiful she was.

She was such a stoic animal and I felt so privileged to have been one of the people that got to take care of her. I would sit with her on more than one occasion, just to be near her and she humbled me. I will never forget you, beautiful girl.

