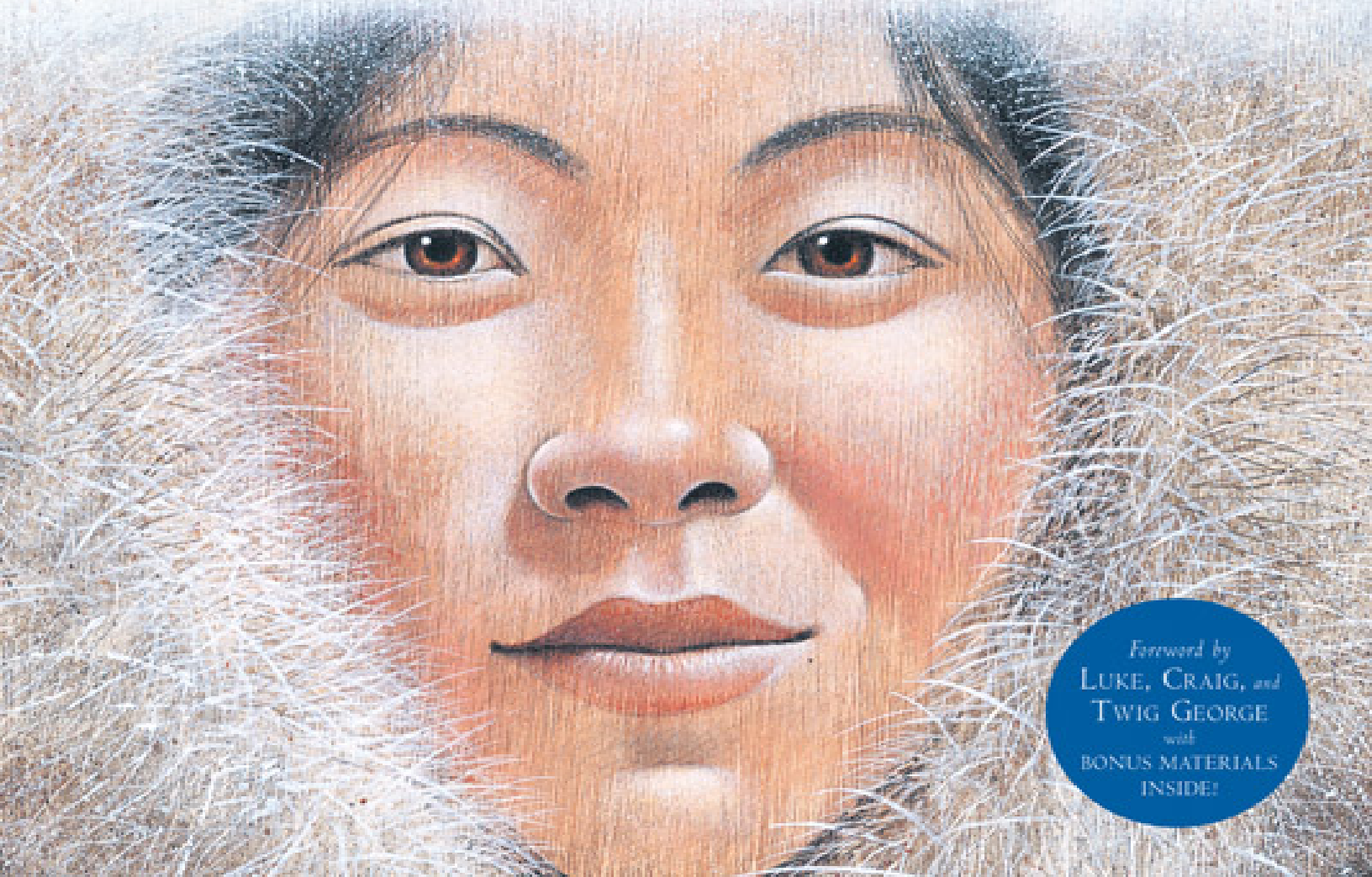
JEAN CRAIGHEAD GEORGE

JULIE *of the* WOLVES

WINNER OF THE NEWBERY MEDAL



Foreword by
LUKE, CRAIG, *and*
TWIG GEORGE
with
BONUS MATERIALS
INSIDE!

JULIE *of the* WOLVES

by

JEAN CRAIGHEAD GEORGE

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DEDICATION

To Luke George, who loves wolves and the Eskimos of Alaska

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FOREWORD

Jean Craighead George was our mother. She made us huge breakfasts each morning, helped with our Halloween costumes, and led our Scout troops. She was also an author, who by the early 1970s had written over thirty books for children, including inspirational books like *My Side of the Mountain* and many others in which she taught us that humans and wildlife could live together and learn from one another. As part of her lifelong interest in wildlife, we often received orphaned animals and lived with them in our house. So, that breakfast we ate was shared at times with a crow, a raccoon, or whatever wild pet was in residence in our home at that moment.

Mom approached writing as she approached life: she got up early, worked hard, and never stopped until she was done. Before she started a writing project, she spent time reading books and scientific papers about the subject to make sure she was up-to-date on the latest scientific thinking. The books in her library were filled with underlines and marginal notes attesting to the long hours she spent mastering the often complex information. She also traveled to distant locations to observe species and become familiar with ecosystems. She would pack her notebook, binoculars, magnifying lens, field guides, and backpack and spend as much time as she could hiking, camping, sketching, and getting to know the area and the species that lived there. It was these firsthand experiences—looking into the eyes of a wolf, observing a grizzly bear fish for salmon, watching a thunderstorm on the prairie—that made her books so compelling and authentic.

As a single mother, she often brought one or more of us along on her travels, and when we were grown up, she visited us where we were doing our own naturalist work. Twig went to Katmai, Alaska, to research *The Grizzly Bear with the Golden Ears* (1982) and Craig hosted Mom at his

field camp on the sea ice off Barrow, Alaska, where he was doing research on bowhead whales; that trip resulted in *Water Sky* (1987). And in 1970, Luke went to Alaska to study wolves.

Our mother was writing for *Reader's Digest* at the time. She published over 200 articles throughout the 1970s and '80s, which gave her enough dependable income to support a family and time to work on her books. In the late '60s, new research was casting wolves in a different light. Rather than the big bad wolves of fairy tales, scientists were finding that wolves were not only integral to maintaining the health of their prey populations, they showed evidence of complex social interactions, communication, and even emotions. Mom approached *Reader's Digest* with the idea of writing a piece about wolves, and in July of 1970, Luke and Mom packed their bags and set off for Barrow, Alaska.

Barrow in 1970 was a small Inupiat town with a culture that reflected the lifestyles of both the research scientists at the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory (NARL) and the native people. The Arctic tundra was to be forever one of our mother's favorite places on Earth, and the people of Barrow, some of her favorite individuals. Mom described many highlights of that trip in her Newbery speech, for though the trip had started as an assignment for *Reader's Digest*, the experience ended up inspiring *Julie of the Wolves*. One incident Luke vividly remembers was getting lost on the tundra:

> *We started out from NARL with our borrowed parkas and walked inland looking at plants, birds, and frost heaves. At one point we came across a collection of human skeletons. We learned later that the land was a makeshift graveyard from the 1918 flu epidemic. Because the ground was perennially frozen and the death toll was high, many bodies could not be buried and were just left on the tundra. After walking for a few hours we turned to head back to NARL, but a fog bank had enveloped us; the tundra looked the same in every direction. I looked at Mom and she looked at me, we pointed in opposite directions, and said, "I think we go that way." I felt my stomach sink; we were alone on the tundra, the weather was turning, and we had little food, no shelter, and no idea which way to go. At that point Mom calmly said, "Let's sit and eat some gorp and*

wait for the fog to clear." In less than an hour, the DEW stations (Defense Early Warning radar installations) located along the coast emerged from the fog and we quickly found our way back. Mom may have been thinking of that moment when she wrote, "She had been lost without food for many sleeps on the North Slope of Alaska . . . the view in every direction is exactly the same" (page 6 of Julie of the Wolves*).*

After returning from our hike, we went to the animal pens at NARL and watched a captive female wolf interact with her young, the other wolves, and the researchers. We had been invited by Dr. Michael Fox, who was an expert in wolf behavior and was studying captive wolves. Dr. Fox explained that when the female looked at Mom directly, it meant she would accept her, that Mom would be part of her pack. For days, the wolf—while calm and friendly—did not look at Mom. But during one of her last visits, the female turned and looked at her. Her golden eyes connected with my mother's, and she was accepted. It was a moment Mom never forgot.

When Mom and Luke visited Alaska that summer, the debate about drilling for oil in Prudhoe Bay was raging. The key to drilling in Prudhoe was building the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (ironically abbreviated as TAPS). Environmentalists were fighting to stop the pipeline; the state and the oil companies were pushing ahead. It was clear that the project would change Alaska forever, and once it was in place there would be no going back. Passions were high on both sides and the Inupiat people of the North Slope were conflicted. The project would generate income for the communities and provide high-paying jobs. It also would bring in outsiders and pose challenges to maintaining their traditional way of life. The conflict between old and new affected Mom deeply and became a central theme in *Julie of the Wolves*. When Mom returned home from Alaska, she got right to work and wrote an article about recent discoveries in the understanding of wolf behavior. It was one of her best, she thought, but *Reader's Digest* decided not to use it! She was truly stunned and hurt. Authors are used to having their work criticized, edited, and even rejected, but now and then there is a story that means more than most. When those are turned down it is a soul-searching moment.

Twig was at Bennington that year:

> *I got a call from Mom and she sounded upset. The* Digest *had rejected her wolf article. She sounded very discouraged because she thought it was one of her best pieces. "Why don't you make it into a book?" I asked. She paused, and with her Jean George determination she said, "I will!" Mom had more in mind than just the wolves; she brought together all that she had seen, read, and experienced in Alaska—*Julie of the Wolves *was on the way. At that moment no one knew what the book would mean to her, her readers, and even to the wolves.*

The book won the Newbery Medal in 1973.

Mom's relationship with the people of Barrow and with the animals of the tundra and ocean did not end with that trip. She returned to Barrow many times after that initial visit. Craig moved there in 1981 and with his wife, Cyd, stayed and raised a family. Our mother visited often.

Barrow lacks big, snow-covered mountains and scenic rivers, but the seemingly endless tundra surrounding it has an awesome subtle beauty. It's a place one loves or strongly dislikes. On her first visit, Mom was charmed by the tundra and fascinated by the Inupiat people who have lived in the region for thousands of years. Her fascination would grow into deep friendships and a love of the people of Barrow and Arctic Alaska over the next forty years.

Her interest in Eskimo life may have started with her close friendship with Bob and Ellen Young in Chappaqua, New York. In the 1960s Bob had spent months in the Canadian Arctic filming the Netsilik Eskimos in one of their last traditional winter seal camps as a nomadic people. The result was the stunning film *The Eskimo: Fight for Life*. Craig still recalls previewing the film in his teens: "We watched Bob Young's raw footage at his home and no one moved a muscle for hours. It left us all speechless." None of us knew at that moment how important Barrow and the Arctic would become to our family. Andrew Young, Bob's son, is now working on developing a new film based on *Julie of the Wolves*.

When Mom connected with someone, she maintained a strong friendship throughout her life. Mom always liked "real people" without

pretense, and she identified with the North Slope Inupiat, which makes sense because *Inupiaq* literally means "real or genuine people" (*inuk* 'person' plus -*piaq* 'real, genuine') in the Inupiaq language. Julie's stalwart personality in *Julie of the Wolves* is clearly a tribute to those friendships and the people of Barrow.

Our mother was greatly influenced by the people and culture in Barrow, and she, in turn, influenced them. Julie's conflict was felt by many people who grew up in Barrow. One girl, Mayak, was moved to write the following letter about what *Julie of the Wolves* meant to her:

> *Dear Mrs. Jean Craighead George,*
>
> *More than ten years before I was born, you wrote a story that resonates within me forty years later.* Julie of the Wolves *is more than a book to me; it is a girl that has broken the trail for me.*
>
> *Inupiaq names are links to ancestral spirits that lived before us. My family gave me the Inupiaq name of Mayak (or Miyax) in 1985 and raised me in Julie's hometown of Barrow, Alaska. Much like me, Julie imagines a life beyond Barrow. She is running both from and to something at the same time. Julie is strong enough to risk everything she knows for the chance of a better world, but she is also humble enough to find strength in her Inupiaq heritage and the lessons of her ancestors.*
>
> *I opened your book at a moment in my life when I was struggling to release the grasp my family and community had on my soul. I yearned for more than Barrow, but I needed someone to share the heartache of leaving home behind. I found it in your words and my namesake. Our creator used you to remind me that I am not alone, and I am thankful to you both.*
>
> *Most sincerely,*
> *Mayak*

Mayak is not alone; people throughout the world are thankful for *Julie of the Wolves*. From Barrow to Connecticut to Korea, people have identified with Julie (Miyax)—her strength, her struggles.

Mom also contributed to the movement to shed the "big bad wolf " reputation. In *The Wolves Are Back* (2008), she sums up the role that wolves

play in natural communities and the changes that occur when they are returned to the wilderness.

In many ways Julie did what many of us dream of; she connected with another species and lived as part of them. Julie helped us see ourselves in the wolves. They are our furred counterparts in the wild—our wilder, better selves.

Our mother, Jean Craighead George, passed away on May 15, 2012. But she left behind her best self: her words and her vision of a world where nature and humans coexist—understanding and supporting one another.

—Luke, Twig, and Craig