

Finding Julie

Miyax--called *Julie* by the gussacks, or non-native people, in her life--begins her fateful journey in Barrow, Alaska. Barrow is also where the idea for Julie's story began. According to her children, Jean Craighead George was visiting her son Luke, a research biologist, in Barrow, where he was studying gray wolves at the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory. By observing wolves in captivity during her visit, George learned how they interacted with each other and, once they got to know you, with humans.

At the time of George's visit to Alaska, scientists were beginning to realize that wolf behavior was much more complex than originally thought, and to see that the animals were essential to the ecosystems in which they lived and hunted. The author of *Julie of the Wolves* witnessed and was fascinated by some of the earliest research done on the subject of gray wolves--research that eventually led to their being listed as endangered species and protected from the over-hunting that drastically reduced their numbers.

While visiting Luke, Jean Craighead George fell in love with the tundra, and she returned to visit many times after Luke settled in Barrow and began raising his own family there. Once, Luke and his mother got lost on the tundra while they were hiking. A fog had settled in suddenly, obscuring any landmarks they needed to return to camp. They were able to find their way back to the research center after the fog lifted--a matter of hours, not days. Still, the experience made them both consider how it would feel to be really lost on the tundra, and how someone would be able to survive.

Besides the scientists at the research laboratory, Barrow was home to many Inupiat, members of one of North America's Eskimo tribes. Jean Craighead George grew close to several Inuit families and learned to admire many aspects of their culture. When she wrote Miyax's story, she probably had some of these friends in mind, along with the stories of grit, wisdom, and survival they had shared with her.

Not all of the author's knowledge of wolves and the tundra came from personal experience. George's children explain that their mother also read extensively before beginning any writing project. She collected both books and scientific papers on the topics that would appear in her novels, underlining key passages and jotting down notes in the margins.

George also performed other types of "field research"--she traveled to the setting for each new novel and spent time closely observing the animal species who lived there. She would even camp out in those areas, to experience firsthand what a human might need to survive there. Another of George's most beloved books, *My Side of the Mountain*, describes the experience of a 15-year-old New York City boy who runs away to the rural mountains of the state and lives in a hollowed-out tree for a year--fishing, eating acorns, and training a falcon to hunt for him.
