

= Binky (polar bear) =

Binky (1975 ? July 20 , 1995) was a polar bear who lived at the Alaska Zoo in Anchorage . Found as an orphan on Alaska 's North Slope , he was taken to the zoo and quickly became one of its most popular attractions . He became a local hero and received international news coverage after mauling two zoo visitors in separate incidents in 1994 . Binky died in 1995 from sarcocystosis , a parasitic disease .

= = Early life = =

Binky was found orphaned on Cape Beaufort , North Slope , Alaska in May 1975 and was rescued by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game . He was then given to the Alaska Children 's Zoo (later the Alaska Zoo) in Anchorage , where he quickly became one of the zoo 's most popular attractions . His keeper commented in 1976 that Binky was a performer and cried in the evenings when his applauding , laughing visitors left for the day .

Binky was initially placed in a 13 foot by 20 foot oval cage , which he quickly outgrew . The prospect of raising the estimated \$ 150 @, @ 000 needed for a new , larger enclosure was uncertain , and zoo officials feared Binky would have to be sent to the Milwaukee Zoo . A fundraiser and open house were held to raise money for the effort , and a number of schools and businesses participated . Ultimately , the greatest contribution to the zoo 's effort was the city 's purchase of the zoo land for \$ 100 @, @ 000 , which the zoo agreed to buy back in 55 annual installments of \$ 2 @, @ 500 . Binky 's new enclosure opened in May 1977 . That year , Binky made an appearance as " my dog Spot " in one of Cal Worthington 's car dealership commercials .

As Binky approached sexual maturity , zoo officials negotiated for the purchase of a female polar bear named Mimi from the Tulsa Zoo in Oklahoma . As the transfer was being finalized , however , Mimi died from a viral disease in Tulsa . In February 1979 , young polar bear twins (Nuka , a female , and Siku , a male) joined Binky in his enclosure . Binky got along poorly with Siku , however , so Siku was given to a zoo in Morelia , Mexico in 1981 .

As a full @- @ grown bear , Binky weighed 1 @, @ 200 pounds . He was an aggressive bear ; in 1980 , he bit off a zoo employee 's finger . His keeper commented in 1983 , " Binky is stubborn [and] independent , and he likes to play games . When he 's really feeling obstinate , he walks halfway into his den and sits down . He knows I can 't close it . He 's a very smart bear . "

= = Maulings , celebrity , and death = =

In July 1994 , 29 @- @ year @- @ old Australian tourist Kathryn Warburton jumped over two safety rails to get a close @- @ up photograph of Binky in his cage . When Binky stuck his head through the bars and grabbed her , she suffered a broken leg and bite wounds . Another tourist caught the event on tape . Binky kept the woman 's shoe for three days before it could be retrieved by zoo officials , and the day after the attack Alaska Star photographer Rob Layman took a photo of Binky , holding the shoe in his mouth , that was printed in almost every press account of the incident . Warburton gave the other shoe to the Bird House , a bar in nearby Bird Creek that has since burned down .

Six weeks later , Binky was involved in another mauling . Drunken local teenagers approached the bear 's enclosure , apparently hoping to swim in its pool , and one 19 @- @ year @- @ old was hospitalized with leg lacerations after he was mauled . The zoo did not confirm that Binky was the attacker , but the bear had blood on his face following the incident .

After these attacks , Binky received international news coverage . Binky merchandise was created , including T @- @ shirts , mugs , and bumper stickers , often adorned with the shoe photo or with the slogan " Send another tourist , this one got away " . Local letters to the editor supported Binky during both incidents , most often arguing that polar bears ' dangerousness should be respected . The Zoo 's director , Sammye Seawell , criticized Warburton 's actions in the Anchorage Daily News , saying " [s] he violated the rules and jeopardized the bear 's life . " Though Seawell initially insisted that

the attack would not change how the zoo was run , security around Binky 's cage was upgraded to keep zoo visitors out .

In 1995 , Binky 's cagemate Nuka suddenly became sick with the parasitic disease sarcocystosis , dying from associated liver failure on July 14 , a week after her symptoms began . Shortly thereafter , Binky showed signs of the disease . On the morning of July 20 , he went into convulsions and died . Zoo visitors left bouquets of flowers outside the bears ' empty enclosure , and the zoo 's memorial service saw a high turnout despite pouring rain . The bears were buried on zoo grounds .