

Wild Kids



Puppies...What Will They Be When They Grow Up?

by Nancy jo Tubbs

Wolf pups and dog puppies may look alike, and in fact, they are cousins. But while the dog will grow up to be fed, worked or pampered by humans, the wolf sleeps outside, hunts for a living, endures harsh weather and struggles for its place in the pack. Wolf pups and dog puppies act differently from each other because they are in training for lives as different as a house cat and a mountain lion.

"In the beginning, Malik and Shadow would run to me for security, but all that changed when they reached four weeks of age", said Nancy Gibson, who helped raise the Center's two arctic pups. "Dog puppies are interested in getting attention, affection and food from people. Wolf pups want food, period!"

Dogs have been fed by their human families since they were tamed and selectively bred from wild

wolves beginning 14,000 to 100,000 years ago. On the other hand, wild wolves have to hunt and kill their own food. Nearly half of wild wolf pups in some populations die of starvation their first year.

Malik and Shadow "wolfed" their meals this summer. They snarled and snapped at each other while gulping up to seven pounds of beef in about a minute. In the wild, wolves may go days or weeks without a kill, so they gorge when food is available. Getting enough to eat is a life or death matter for them.

Besides having impolite table manners, wolf pups can't be house trained. They would chew your sofa into a rubble of foam and splinters. They mark their territory too, peeing on every available surface. They may come when called if food is involved.

Dogs have been bred and trained to meet human needs: they herd



Claire and Hannah Anderson hold their Cockapoo puppy, who demonstrates one very clear difference between dog puppies and wolf pups: dog puppies want affection from humans!

Paul Anderson

sheep, sniff out drugs, retrieve ducks and guide the blind. The wolf isn't interested in pleasing humans. In fact, wolf pups that are not socialized by humans beginning when they open their eyes will remain shy of people for life.

In play, wolf pups are learning the pack roles of dominance and submission. When stalking a beetle on a stump, they show a deep focus, intensity and intelligence that will serve them as adults on the hunt. As they fight for every scrap of food, they are building strength and size to run with the pack in the fall. Everything young wolves do has a purpose: survival. ■

Nancy jo Tubbs is chair of the International Wolf Center Board of Directors.



Dave Welch