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Dear Readers,

On behalf of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary, I want to start by extending a huge thank you to all of our supporters, past and present, who have contributed greatly to our mission of the sanctuary being a safe space and a peaceful home for our beloved rescues. Without your support, Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary would not and could not exist in the capacity that it does, and it would not be possible to provide all that our rescues require to be healthy and happy.

Furthermore, had Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary not been the haven for wild canids that it is, I would have never come to volunteer back in October of 2011. However, it was, and now I am sincerely grateful to the sanctuary and, of course, to the animals for all they have taught me over the years.

When I first came out to volunteer, I was young and ambitious and this was, for lack of a better term, my dream job. Being around the animals and like-minded humans was everything to me. Even after all this time, it has never stopped being my dream job even if at times it is a difficult position to carry out successfully.

So, after eight years dedicated to Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary, I am finally planning the next chapter of my life. Effective later this year, I will be stepping down as Animal Care Supervisor, and I will be moving back to the east coast to be closer to family and friends.

I recognize that it’s time for me to move on, so that I can continue to grow as a person both personally and professionally. Because of my experiences living in the rural high-desert, relatively isolated from the rest of society, and working a physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing job, I am more than ready for whatever life throws at me next. My metaphorical tool box is full. I have in me a truly wild spirit, which is the greatest gift I could have asked for.

I will certainly miss my Wild Spirit Family, and the animals tremendously, but I know the sanctuary is being left in the best hands possible in my absence. I am excited to watch how Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary continues to evolve and grow over the upcoming years.

Thank you, readers, supporters, and my fellow team members.

Cordially,

Rae McCue

www.wildspiritwolfsanctuary.org

LETTER FROM THE ANIMAL CARE SUPERVISOR

RAE MCCUE

RAE WITH AUSTRALIAN DINGO GLACIER

Rae with wolf-dog Leia

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Wolf-Dog Riot

On nights of cobalt blue,
When the moon takes on a different hue.

When cold of winter seems to reach,
Inside our bones, the warmth to reach.

Our eyes reflect the stars above,
As snow settles, like a glove.

We pull together, strength in numbers.
Lone wolf ahead, game to plunder.

To think, we use to be,
Unafraid and roaming free.

Multitudes to thin the herd,
Now scant family must pass the word.

Dependent on humans, we now rely.
With their help, we will survive.

Misunderstood, afraid but proud.
As one, a chorus, a howl so loud.

Take notice and hear our desperate plea.
We must survive, we must be free.

Lupine Plea
By Martin Naugher

Wolf-Dog Zeus

In November of 2019, Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary hosted its First Annual Howling Poetry Contest! Meant to engage and inspire, the contest provided a fun way for donors, followers, and fans of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary to support the animal rescues.

Participants of all ages and skill levels were welcomed and encouraged to submit an original poem, and the contest was available to international folks as well as those in the United States. A photo prompt was provided to the poets as a point of inspiration. In the photo, our dear elderly wolf-dog rescue named Riot was featured.

The contest opened on November 15th and closed on December 18th for judging before the winner was announced on January 1st, 2020. Submissions were judged based on the poem’s relation to and interpretation of the photo-prompt, the poem’s inclusion and representation of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary’s mission and motto, “Wild animals are not pets,” and unique flare.

By the conclusion of the contest, 41 poems were submitted, $455.49 was raised for the rescues, and an additional $77 was raised from the independent sales of the 2019 limited-edition Howling Poetry Contest apparel printed and shipped from the online company Bonfire. Poems were submitted from all over the United States as well as from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, and contestants were between the ages of 18 and 74.

All participants received the 2019 Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary Howling Poetry Contest sticker as a thank you for supporting our rescues.

The winner also received the sticker in addition to the 2019 limited-edition Howling Poetry Contest T-Shirt for free, publication on the Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary website, the poem was shared on all of our social media platforms, and it is the Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary Team’s pleasure to share the winning poem in this 2020 Spring/Summer edition of The Howling Reporter.

Please join us in howling our congratulations to Mr. Martin Naugher, the winner of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary’s First Annual Howling Poetry Contest.
Why Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary
No Longer Brings Rescues Off-Site

BY KENDRA KAIN-WOODS

For Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary’s long-term Howling Supporters, they likely recall Leyton J. Couger and Raven, an ambassador wolf, traveling throughout the country for educational outreach events. Raven was a gorgeous, black-coated animal, and he shared an exceptional relationship with Leyton. Together they greeted the public and shared valuable information concerning persevering wild canid species, such as wolves and wolf-dogs, the cruel realities of the exotic pet trade, and the importance of respect and compassion towards all creatures, whether domestic or wild.

Leyton and Raven got the “Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary” name out there, and they began cultivating our reputation as well as sharing our mission of “Rescue, Sanctuary, and Education” with the world.

Raven has not been the only ambassador to step onto the stage or in front of an audience, however. In Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary’s 29-year history, Flurry, Storm, and Forest are other well-known names, all three having been wolf ambassadors. While our dear Arctic wolf, Storm, has passed and joined the Big Pack in the Sky, Flurry and Forest are enjoying their retirements at the sanctuary. Both gentlemen are 12 years old, quite healthy but with the aches and pains common in old age. While they still, at times, come out to greet the public on-site, they no longer travel off the sanctuary property.

In fact, Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary has moved away from bringing our rescues off-site completely, and this is for several reasons:

1. In all of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary’s history, the team has prioritized the rescues. We operate with an “Animals Come First” attitude, and we strictly enforce the rule that socialization is never forced on any animal. That means, if one of the rescues tells us, “No, I’m not coming out of my habitat,” we listen.

2. Wolves are naturally afraid of people. As an apex predator, meaning that wolves are at the top of their respective food chain, wolves do not have any natural predators. The only animal historically that has ever posed any kind of threat, has hunted and killed them, are humans. For thousands of years, humans have battled with their fears and misunderstandings concerning wolves as vicious, dangerous predators, and reacted by killing and removing them from the land. As such, wolves innately want absolutely nothing to do with people.

So, ambassador wolves tend to be the “worn-out,” and their general comfort with people, including strangers, is not normal behavior. Keeping that in mind, if we were to force our more typical wild canids to not only leave the comfort of their territories but interact with complete strangers, it would be incredibly stressful for that animal. As an organization that provides lifetime sanctuary to its residents, this is absolutely unacceptable, especially as this particular stress can be avoided.

3. The rescues of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary not only thrive on routine, but expect and require it. This fact has directed the nature of many of our animal care protocols as a result, including the strict feeding time of 9:30 AM. Because the majority of our animals are feral or wild, it is important to bring food in the same order that it would be brought to their natural prey. This will not only prevent any predators from food theft, but it will also ensure the safety of the animals. Our feeding policy is also a way to keep the animals from becoming too dependent on humans, which can lead to aggression and other behavioral issues.

4. Most of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary’s ambassador animals, especially those that would have left the property, are either in retirement or they have crossed the rainbow bridge to join the Big Pack in the Sky. Even if a team we still intend to bring animals off-site for educational programs, we currently do not have any rescues who wish to do so.

Some of our younger animals, such as Quinn, a male low-content wolf-dog, and Naia, our 10-month high-content wolf-dog female, do agree to come out on-site, but this is not a guarantee.

In fact, even with our seasoned ambassadors, at times they simply say, “No,” and there is nothing the Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary Team can do about it. If a rescue does not wish to come out and greet the public, we will not force them to do so. Each time a trained guide asks one of our ambassadors whether they would like to come out, there is always a chance they will refuse. Furthermore, even if an animal decides to come out, we cannot guarantee how long they will be comfortable remaining outside of their habitat in close proximity to the visiting public.

Finally, there have been situations where one animal out of a habitat is willing to come out as an ambassador, but by doing so it causes drama between pack members. This was the reality for our rescue, Dakota, who used to come out on-site only for meet-and-greet events. However, this greatly upset Powder, one of the Arctic wolves living in the same habitat as Dakota, and out of fear of being disciplined by Powder, Dakota started to refuse leaving the enclosure for public events.

5. Ultimately, for the well-being and safety of all our rescues, the team, and the public, Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary will no longer be bringing animals off-site to events. On-site meet-and-greets may at times still be offered, but we cannot guarantee that our current residents will want to oblige.

Furthermore, it requires extensive training and specialized skills for a guide to be able to properly care for a willing ambassador animal. From the moment the ambassador is lead up to the encounter to finally returning to the habitat, the guide is watching the body language and subtle cues to how the animal is feeling and reacting to the process. Guides must keep a vigilant eye, as at any moment the animal could decide they have had enough and wish to no longer greet the public. They are not trained dogs, after all, but inherently wild. Escorting any ambassador to the public adds multiple layers of unpredictability, which in turn could lead to safety concerns.

At this time, the Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary Team only includes three trained staff as escorts for meet-and-greets, and we will be giving our farewells to all three through the remainder of the year. When 2021 rolls around, Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary may no longer be able to offer even on-site meet-and-greets.

To all of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary’s Howling Supporters, whether you have been following and supporting us since the beginning or you are new to the Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary family, we, the team, are incredibly grateful for you all. Your kindness and generosity help us pursue our mission of “Rescue, Sanctuary, and Education,” and to provide the best living situation for our rescues as possible. So, a huge howling thank you to you all!

Many changes have begun to shape the future of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary, but change is a necessity for growth. We hope you will continue to support our deserving animals, and watch as the sanctuary continues to blossom into a beautiful haven for our wild rescues.

Howls of love from the Wild Spirit Family.

Annual Report

The Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary Team is proud to share once more that the first issue of Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary’s Annual Report was published in January of 2020! Thanks to the generosity of Gérard and Cathy Yazhec who donated their time and skills to assist the team with the design of the publication, and thanks to Kendra Kain-Woods, Grant Coordinator, for gathering all the data and writing the bulk of the content. The Annual Report was successfully developed to better provide valuable information regarding the operations of the sanctuary.

In an effort to become both more transparent and accountable, this data was collected and shared for all of our dear supporters interested in learning more about the sanctuary beyond our rescue stories and the day-to-day, which we share regularly on our social media platforms as well as our website. The Annual Report highlights 2019 profits and losses, expenses, funds distribution and sources, guest testimonials, donor support, and our goals and planned projects for the upcoming year.

Want to check out the 2019-2020 Annual Report? You can access the online version at: https://wildspiritwolfsanctuary.org/annual-report/.

Because the Annual Report is meant to include sponsor and donor information, we will be moving our “Special Thanks” section normally dedicated to our supporters to the Annual Report henceforth, so make sure to stay tuned for the second issue scheduled for publication in January of 2021.
Kaya found her haven at Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary late September of 2019. A three-year-old high-content wolf-dog, Kaya is a sweet though robust character. She is certainly not to be trifled with when it comes to highly prized treats, such as her enrichment leg bones; indeed, it would be veracious to say that Kaya is a bit of a glutton.

Over the 6 months she has lived here, Kaya has grown in confidence and playfulness, especially with her caretakers. While she enjoys attention from the female animal care members, Kaya is quite smitten with some of the male personnel. In particular, Kaya demands regular visits from our Building and Maintenance Technician, Brian Adkins, as well as our Multimedia & Outreach Coordinator, Tim Waite. Perhaps she has a fondness for beards?

Before traveling to Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary, Kaya lived briefly at the Wildlife Waystation in California before the facility was voted to be shut down by the organization’s Board of Directors in August of 2019. For a couple of years prior to its closure, the Waystation’s aging facility had struggled with upkeep after extensive damage from the Creek Fire in 2017 and then flooding in 2019. The Waystation also recently had a change in leadership when founder, Marine Coates, left her position as the organization’s president. Suddenly, Kaya, as well as chimps, over 400 tigers, and other wildlife needed to find new homes, and fortunately Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary had space for the young female.

Kaya’s caretakers at Wildlife Waystation reported that Kaya was extremely timid, anxious, and was not unknown to fear-snap when folks drew too close. Kaya was said to also retreat from the approach of humans, and she always lived alone. We are thrilled to report that Kaya has since bloomed into a comfortable and social individual! She is intelligent, a bit goofy, and quite the model whenever a camera is aimed her way.

While originally the hope was to pair Kaya with our senior Arctic wolf, Teton, the couple ended up being a mismatch. After about two weeks of sharing Teton’s enclosure, it became evident to the Animal Care Team that the two were not meant to be. 12-year-old Teton had always lived with family. In fact, Teton is one of five animals ever to be born on-site! Teton’s mother, Sierra, surprised the team with her pregnancy when she was brought to the veterinary hospital for her spay surgery. After all, as a sanctuary we do not breed, buy, or sell our rescues, and therefore all animals in good health are sterilized to prevent the addition of more wild animals into captivity.

On May 6th, 2007, Sierra gave birth to five puppies: Teton, Shasta, Flurry, Frost, and Trinity. Teton then proceeded to live with his family throughout his youth until Flurry and Frost were relocated to a new habitat and Sierra, Yukon, and Trinity passed away due to the rare fungal infection Cryptococcus. For the bulk of his adult years, Teton enjoyed life with his sister, Shasta; the two were considered quite the mischievous duo. Late last summer, Shasta passed away due to an infection caused by a rattlesnake bite, which she received inside of her mouth. Shasta did always fancy chasing after and harassing snakes, tarantulas, and other so-called pests...

Because Teton had only ever lived and socialized with his biological family, his social skills are questionable. While it was obvious Teton was incredibly interested in Kaya, he was unsure how to properly engage and show his keenness. Kaya did not help the situation with her flirtatious tendencies with the neighbors, which ignited jealousy in Teton. As a result, he began to bully her and thus the two were separated.

As social animals, the Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary Team continues to keep an eye and ear out for potential companions for our single lady and gentleman. We hope to pair them with new friends sometime in 2020. Fingers crossed!
Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary, as the name implies, is a sanctuary for rescued wild canid species, including but not limited to wolves, wolf-dogs, coyotes, New Guinea singing dogs, and Australian dingoes. As a sanctuary, lifetime support and care are provided to every animal, which includes species-specific diets, enrichment, medical care, and a safe habitat to enjoy for all the years they remain with us. What is not often discussed, however, is the special support provided to declining animals as they age or become ill, and inevitably near death. This is a vital component to operating a sanctuary, and it is a reality that is inescapable.

To learn more about this important element to animal caretaking, I interviewed Crystal Castellanos, Director of Operations at Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary.

Let’s dive in!

For any new readers, can you provide a brief introduction to the sanctuary, and what your role consists of as a Director?

Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary is a 501c3 nonprofit located in a rural community in New Mexico. We rescue captive-bred wolf-dogs, and other related canid species that cannot be released into the wild. Most often, our rescues come from people who purchased them to be pets only to find out that they are not “pets.” We provide lifetime sanctuary to our rescues and we educate the public about the different canids that reside here, as well as the plight of the animals involved in the exotic pet trade.

My role as a Director… I oversee the daily operations, manage the humans, and make sure that our animals are the priority. I ensure that the animals are being taken care of and are getting what they need. Our guests are happy, and our team is happy, as well. I accomplish all of this by working closely with my staff and ensuring resources are utilized efficiently. Whenever possible, I oversee that protocols and policies are implemented to ensure that our business foundation is strong so that we can move toward becoming a self-sustainable organization.

How long have you worked at Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary?

I have worked at Wild Spirit for close to 9 years. I started in 2013 as a volunteer.

How long have you provided care to animals whether domestic or wild?

I’ve been professionally taking care of domestic and wild animals for at least 10 years. I was a dog trainer before I came to Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary. Dog training was a hobby long before it became a profession.

The reality of operating a wildlife sanctuary means witnessing the decline of animals as they age or become ill, and inevitably near death—can you speak to your experience concerning this?

It’s difficult to watch an animal deteriorate in age or illness, especially when you’ve watched that animal for years and knew them as young, spry chickens! As for witnessing animals near death, I’ve grown accustomed to the experience in my years here, as each animal that has passed away in its own time has taught me that death is nothing to be afraid of. These animals live in the present, and those lessons of being in the present have been strongest when their age begins to wear on them, when they become ill, or when they near death.

What has been the most challenging aspect for you when caring for declining animals? Would you feel comfortable sharing a particular experience?

The most challenging aspect for me when caring for declining animals is keeping my emotions intact and not projecting my own stuff onto the animals. It’s hard… It’s hard to see an animal go from vibrant, healthy, having an I-can-do-anything-attitude to, “I can barely move.” Due to my own vulnerabilities, I’d easily fall into the mental trap of, “Poor animal. Poor animal. Poor animal.” If they were in the wild, they’d have the option to pass away alone and wouldn’t have anyone projecting onto that. Since they’re in captivity and under our care, I know we do everything we can to keep that animal comfortable in their decline, but watching an animal have a difficult time getting up is hard, despite knowing you’re giving them the best care. It’s especially difficult when I feel my team members’ sadness around the same situation.

A particular experience… I’ll use Storm. Essentially, I mourned Storm’s inevitable passing for a whole year. Any time he stumbled harder than any other day, or when I saw glimpses of him having potential lapses in almost Alzheimer-type moments… It hit me to my core. It was like, “Oh no!” And I would leave the enclosure and just bawl. Towards the end of his life, while I interacted with him, there were a few times that I would feel myself. “I know it’s going to happen. I know he’s going to go.” I would collect myself, get out of the enclosure, and then cry. I probably annoyed my husband (laughs) many times, by crying so much before he passed. You know it’s going to happen, and even if you know it will it doesn’t get any easier, especially if you’re attached to a rescue.

Wild Spirit operates with an attitude of “Animals Come First,” and that extends to a rescue’s last few months, weeks, and days. Team members would often state, “The animal said, ‘No, they are not ready to be helped.’” Can you expand upon this statement?

So up until recently, I wouldn’t have called it animal communication. Now I’m becoming much more comfortable around this topic… around the actual ability to be able to communicate with non-human animals. Before this, it was just the visual answers from the animal. For example, I’ve heard of stories where volunteers would press staff to assist an animal that was “suffering.” Leyton, (Executive Director at the time), would walk up to aid the animal with euthanasia in hand and the animal, which couldn’t or wouldn’t walk, would rub all of its energy and strength to move far away from him. That was a clear, “No.”

I’ve seen similar instances in my own experience at Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary. The best example I have in mind is with Lucian’s last day.

In Lucian’s last days, he laid in the animal spot I had opened for him, if I’m not mistaken, he refused food in the last day or two. We all knew that his time was coming and he was showing signs of weakness he displayed. Lucian was diagnosed with tumors in his lungs shortly before his decline. We didn’t know whether it was going to be days or whether it was going to be weeks, but obviously he was deteriorating. We had the euthanasia on-hand, as he wasn’t given a positive prognosis. In these last days, I would walk up to... …and I would collect myself to talk to him as I’m talking to you now. “Hey, so, I can help you along by…” I was literally visualizing myself euthanizing him with one of his front legs. I would go straight up to him. I would talk to him from the fence, and he literally growled at me each time I asked him. His energy was so diminished in those last few days, but when I asked him, twice each day, he would murr in all of his energy captive of meagre growth. Those were obvious “Nos” to me.

By the third day, everyone’s emotions were heightened; I could feel all of them, and I was tired, and I wanted Lucian to pass away quickly. That sounds so wrong. I wanted him to pass away to end his suffering, but really I wanted him to pass so we could all stop suffering on his behalf.

I sadly walked up to his habitat, expecting him to go and I asked when I asked the question. Except, when he didn’t respond, I shouted, “Hey, Lucian!” He just growled at me by crying so much before he passed. You know it’s going to happen, and even if you know it will it doesn’t get any easier, especially if you’re attached to a rescue.

A licensed Euthanasia Technician and/or Veterinarian will sedate the animal, ensure the animal is fully sedated, and then find a viable vein to inject the euthanasia solution into the bloodstream. Once the thick solution has been injected, the animal takes its last breath.

As for how we use an euthanasia to decline, each animal is different so it’s always going to be a case-by-case basis when it comes to that step. As a rescue begins to weaken, we’ll observe all the changes in that animal. For example, I mentioned that we watch the animal, as we note the changes in their appetite, stool, energy level, etc. Often times, a veterinarian will be consulted and/or visited and we’ll give the animal supportive care based off of the veterinarian’s recommendations, if necessary. When quality of life diminishes for that rescue, staff supports the animal with euthanasia, if it is ok with that assistance. However, each animal is different, so quality of life diminishing could look different for each.

“The howling reporter” Springfield illinois

Crystal Castellanos

I have worked at Wild Spirit for close to 9 years. I started in 2013 as a volunteer.

How long have you provided care to animals whether domestic or wild?

I’ve been professionally taking care of domestic and wild animals for at least 10 years. I was a dog trainer before I came to Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary. Dog training was a hobby long before it became a profession.

There have been a few animals who have stuck around longer than we, we would have liked, but [then] finally passed away during the night. And then there are other animals that have held on for

longer than we would have liked, but finally in the end said, “OK,” and they’ve given us the physical, “Yes, go ahead and do this,” like Lucian. But other times, if we’re listening, it comes down to the animal letting you know that it’s time.

For readers who may be unfamiliar with the process of euthanasia, can you discuss the steps, details, and how—when it is used to help some of the declining rescues?

Director of Operations at Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary. For readers who may be unfamiliar with the process of euthanasia, can you discuss the steps, details, and how—when it is used to help some of the declining rescues?
enclosure or walking it to another habitat entirely if it’s possible. If it isn’t possible, we may need to consider having an extra person watching the backs of the technicians focused on performing the procedure.

A lot of our animal caretaking job is done whether it’s raining, snowing, or the sun is beaming on us. Death doesn’t come on a perfectly scheduled day, so we’ll need to consider how we can assist the animals as comfortably as possible in those situations. It doesn’t deter us; it’s just a factor to consider.

If an animal needs to be helped but has a history of being too fussy during tempest, we’ll need to consider sedating the animal with a tranquilizer gun. Thankfully, we rarely have to use this method, but we have one and trained staff to use it should we need it.

The point is to always make those last moments as peaceful as possible. Once again, most non-human animals prefer to wander off and pass away alone, but in captivity they rarely get that chance, so it’s up to us to give them the next best thing: A peaceful, completely pain-free and stress-free way of slipping away.

Obviously, there is a huge difference in aiding a domestic animal versus a wild animal—can you expose upon this? What are the key elements to note?

Well, in general, our domestic animals have been a part of our lives and have been acclimated to our routines, other people, and hopefully to the routines of visiting a veterinary clinic. Veterinarians and technicians are trained on the proper handling and restraint of a variety of domestic animals and have different methods or tools to do so safely. It is important to recognize that most that get pointing to the idea of aiding a domestic animal is fairly low-stress and uneventful.

Wild animals don’t have the same lifestyle as our domestic animals do. In our case, our wild-spirited rescue comes from different backgrounds—from backyard breeding situations, hoarding situations, owner-surrender, and many neighborhoods. Some may arrive fearful, and some may come from a social history. Regardless of the time and patience to build relationships with them, even still, it’s not guaranteed we’ll ever get to interact with a rescue in its lifetime at Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary. Trying to put hands, much less restraint, on a wild animal like you would a domestic dog could lead to unsafe conditions for the humans and animal involved.

It may not be as easy to put a muzzle on an animal such as Nikki, as it would be to put a muzzle onto my domestic dog, Pandora. Wild animals usually want nothing to do with us humans, so that makes it more difficult for a stranger to restrain an animal like that in order to assist it.

However, I’d like to use this opportunity to mention that, when first certified to become an euthanasia technician, I knew going in that this was an act of kindness. I knew the act of service I could provide to our rescues.

They don’t have to go to a foreign environment and be handled by people they don’t know, and they’re not being taken out of their home to have to deal with stress for the last five minutes or last couple of hours of their lives. So, I was actually kind of happy that I was going through with it.

I was naive. (Laughs) I went into a few days of process after my training, and I had to really think about whether I wanted to take this kind of responsibility. I wondered whether it was ethical and humane. It was important for me to truly think about the ramifications of this service.

In the end, I was happy that I was certified. The first animal I handled along with Junior. Junior was the first wolf-dog I was ever introduced to and he and I had become quite close. Being a part of his last day, helping him along with peace and ending his pain, really solidified the act of kindness.

The decision to assist an animal is never made lightly, so when it’s made, I do my best to keep my emotions away from (the) whole situation until after it has been completed. After it’s all said and done. In my opinion, it’s best that I arrive to that animal in a neutral space, of “Ok, I will help you,” and have nothing else there. There’s been a couple of times where as soon as the euthanasia has entered the blood system, or as soon as the animal has taken its last breath, that’s when the tears come pouring out. It’s like holding my breath until as soon as either of those things happen, then it’s like, “Ok, Now I can finally exhale. Now I can finally tell the emotions.”

I’m a steward, and I’m a steward until their very last breath. So, I guess the process really has just been when a decision is made, I just do what’s necessary, then I make the space to feel all the feels.

In summary, I’ve had to make my peace around being the ‘angry’ one. I have a very soft heart for the last five minutes or last couple of hours. Still, we’re not treating them like a dog, or a cat, and we wouldn’t approach them as such.

If you feel comfortable sharing with our readers, you can speak to your personal experience and process, once the decision to help an animal is made, to prepare yourself for that act of kindness?

What advice, if any, would you offer to someone who is considering taking on this particular responsibility?

There is such a thing as compassion fatigue. If this is going to be a part of your life, I definitely would talk about it to a trusted friend who can hold you in a safe space and…cry it out. Your feelings are valid. I’ve been lucky. I have a loving partner who can help me through it. Whether he understands it or not, I’ve been able to really speak to my feelings around it. For me, writing a long post afterwards has helped in a lot of ways to honor that animal’s memory, or writing in my journal.

But this responsibility is definitely not for just anyone. You really do want to come with the intention of you’re doing it for them. That death is part of life… Keep the human heart, keep the human emotions out of it as much as possible until you can take care of what that animal needs, and then process your emotions afterwards.

It’s not so easy to come into it thinking that it’s going to be easy or painless. It may be even more painful in ways that we are not accustomed to… Getting different perspectives cause our society doesn’t really provide a healthy perspective on death itself, so that might be very helpful if you are going to be taking on this particular responsibility.

Breathe. Breathe big time. (Laughs)

Thank you so much, Crystal!

We, the Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary Team, recognize the immense weight, perhaps even the fear or repulsion, as it applies to the subject of death. Nevertheless, this is a very important topic, and it is an inscrutable aspect to providing quality lifetime care to our well-deserving rescues.

The other reality pressing harder in 2020 is that about 70% of our current rescue population are elderly, meaning that they are eight-years or older. We currently care for 56 animals, and of that total 39 are seniors. Unsurprisingly, many of the aging animals mean as they begin to slow down, displaying signs of arthritis discomfort, or, for a few, symptoms of other conditions. As a team, we recognize that mortality is an inescapable aspect to the process your emotions afterwards.

It’s not easy. So don’t come into it thinking that it’s going to be easy or painless. It may be even more painful in ways that we are not accustomed to… Getting different perspectives cause our society doesn’t really provide a healthy perspective on death itself, so that might be very helpful if you are going to be taking on this particular responsibility.

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Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary
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