



Howling With the Wolves

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The Stories

There are a few stories about feral children who have been living completely isolated from human contact from a very young age on. Consequently they had little or no experience of human care, behavior, or, crucially, of human language. Some wild children were abandoned or ran away. Feral children are sometimes the subjects of folklore and legends, typically portrayed as having been raised by animals.

One of those stories, *The Jungle Book*, tells the adventures of young Mowgli a member of the Seeonee Wolf Pack. A cruel tiger named Shere Khan plots against Mowgli and the leader of his pack, Akela. When Mowgli grows up, he realizes that he must rejoin the ranks of men. Published in 1894, Rudyard Kipling's story proved to be a hit with young and old alike.

However attractive stories like that may be, there is little scientific knowledge about feral children. One of the best-documented but possibly fraudulent cases is that of the sisters Amala and Kamala, described by Reverend J. A. L. Singh in 1926 as having been 'raised by wolves' in a forest in India. But there exist other scientific studies of feral children.

About Wilk

One fairly unknown story is that of the human wolf named Wilk found in the old Białowieża Forest near the small settlement of Pogorzelce, Poland. The reason that it slipped almost into oblivion is that it paints a rather dark picture of the flexibility and adaptability of the human species. Thanks to the discovery in 2013 of the papers of the 19th century amateur-scientist Pietro Niedowierzanie and a forensic examination of the wolf pack's territory, a team of psychologists, forensic anthropologists and biologists were able to reconstruct the life of Wilk.

Let me take you back to 1859 the year a farmer shot an old white-grey wolf in the vicinity of the Polish village Pogorzelce near the now Białowieża Park Narodowy¹. At first sight there was nothing special with this old leader of the pack, but back home the farmer found the animal a bit strange looking. He had a suspicion that the animal was something else than a common wolf, but he didn't have the knowledge nor the tools to find out what it was.

Through his friends he contacted Piotr Niedowierzanie the nearest person who had studied science. A few weeks later Piotr started his investigation. His first theory was that the animal was a new kind of wolf, but soon he realized that it was something strangely familiar. The corpse had the likes of a wolf: a very dark skin, long hooked fingernails, matted hair and calluses on his palms, elbows and knees, sharpened teeth. The corpse had too many humanoid characteristics to contribute it to

¹ The Białowieża Park Narodowy is one of the last and largest remaining parts of the immense primeval forest that once stretched across the European Plain. The forest is home to 800 European bison, Europe's heaviest land animal.

coincidence mutation. He soon postulated that the animal was nothing less than an old man. He started collecting related information and stories explaining what could have happened in support of his findings.

He paid the farmer for the corpse and rode back home. Unfortunately, on his trip he came in dire straits, lost his horse and had to abandon the corpse but not before taking notes on the whereabouts. Because other scientists did not believe him and said it was a fraud, he returned to the place. Although he searched for days, he did not find the corpse. Finally, he had to accept it was gone.

With the ultimate proof vanished, he lost all credibility. With his death also died his discovery. Until, in 2013 his grave had to be removed. After opening his small tomb, his papers were discovered. He had taken them to his grave to prevent embarrassment of his family while hoping one day people would discover the truth.

A year later, a special team found, by accident, the corpse of the old wolf not far from the place described by Piotr. The scientists were surprised and the result of their study was too shocking to be widely published. Thanks to their effort we now have a good idea of what most probably have happened.

The story starts around 1900 during late winter when a farmer family travelling through the woods had an accident with their wagon. For some reason they slipped into a deep ditch killing horse and both parents. The place of their misfortune was at the border of the territory of a wolf pack. The wolves were attracted by the opportunity of an easy meal and approached the family. Although they fear humans and are sometimes aggressive towards people, it is not abnormal that do no harm to small kids. So, the twins must have survived the accident and been taken away.

The two boys were raised like cubs receiving warmth and giving milk from a she-wolf, maybe even more than one. Having no humans to copy the children started to adopt typical wolf-like behaviors and reactions. Both, the pack and the kids, must have felt that something was not right, so, although they were near-perfect there must have been a confrontation between human and animal nature. No doubt that one of the boys lost his life in exchange for his brother's valuable lesson: conform or get killed.

Wanting to survive and knowing no other way than to stay with the pack, Wilk fully embraced the life of a wolf. His behavior and social interactions were a copy-paste of the members of the pack. The truly amazing thing was that through his behavior and posture, his body also started to adapt. These adaptations were more than the result of the lack of normal human hygiene, he really morphologically evolved towards the features of a wolf. His canines became elongated, his eyes started to shine in the dark, hair appeared all over his body ... After many years, he walked, behaved and looked like a real wolf. Because of his intelligence and long-lividity he became a natural leader of the pack. Although he must have been powerful, he was certainly not the strongest amongst them, but his brain gave him the upper hand.

Epilogue

Why is the study of the life of Wilk that dangerous? The conclusion goes against common belief and does not paint a nice picture of evolution. The human body and mind are very flexible, but that is not

always for the better. Most people implicitly think that humankind evolves to something better and that we cannot degenerate into something worse. According to the general belief a human being cannot evolve back into an animal, but Wilk proves they are wrong. We tend to adapt behaviorally and physically to whatever environment in a much faster way than Darwin predicted.

If a person can turn almost completely into a wolf by staying with a pack, how long can somebody stay unaffected by a corporate culture? How long can you howl with the wolves of your organization without turning into one?