

MISSION WOLF: EXPERIMENT IN LIVING



DISCUSSION GUIDE
www.missionwolffilm.com

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 2006, some unlikely visitors came to an assembly I attended at my children's elementary school in Boulder, Colorado. Kent Weber, the founder of Mission: Wolf, and a pair of ambassador wolves arrived in a refurbished school bus after traveling over 200 miles from their home in the Sangre de Cristo mountains in the Southwest corner of the state. Kent shared about the importance of humans coexisting with wildlife, and as I watched my children and their peers interact with the animals, I decided I must visit the refuge to learn more. The trip my kids and I made to Mission: Wolf later that summer was the first of many.

The wolves and their circumstances were certainly compelling to me. Over time I noticed my curiosity growing about the volunteers who sacrificed modern conveniences to care for the animals and the surrounding environment. I was fascinated by the personal stories volunteers shared with me about their choices to abandon more conventional lifestyles to stay at the sanctuary. An extended stay at the place to care for the wolves meant living without electricity or a nearby grocery store, coping with the unpredictable wilderness of the Rocky Mountains, and interacting with a flood of visitors to the sanctuary every summer.

The human culture at the sanctuary was also unlike anything else I had witnessed before. While Kent Weber was a steady presence at the refuge, it seemed that there was a constant ebb and flow of volunteers, whether they stayed for the long-term (say, a year or more), or were temporarily visiting for a handful of weeks. I was surprised by the eclectic backgrounds and identities among volunteer cohorts—political beliefs, socioeconomic class standings, career histories, and education levels were wide-ranging. I wanted to learn more about how individuals of different persuasions compromised for the sake of a common cause.

The decentralized nature of the sanctuary's leadership is also unconventional; Kent refers to himself as a caretaker as opposed to a director, and there isn't an official hierarchy that one accustomed to a typical office bureaucracy might expect. Addressing the unpredictable needs of the wolves are top priorities for staff and volunteers. I marveled at the flexibility of the volunteers when unexpected events occurred.

My hope is that after seeing the film, viewers will ask themselves what it means to compromise for a higher good—both in terms of physical and emotional comfort, and individual power and control. I want the story of Mission: Wolf to offer an example of how people from diverse backgrounds and personalities can come together—not for glamour, fame, or any kind of material wealth, but for a higher purpose greater than ourselves.

Thank you for watching this unique story about an experiment in living.

Gayle Nosal
Executive Director

ABOUT MISSION: WOLF REFUGE

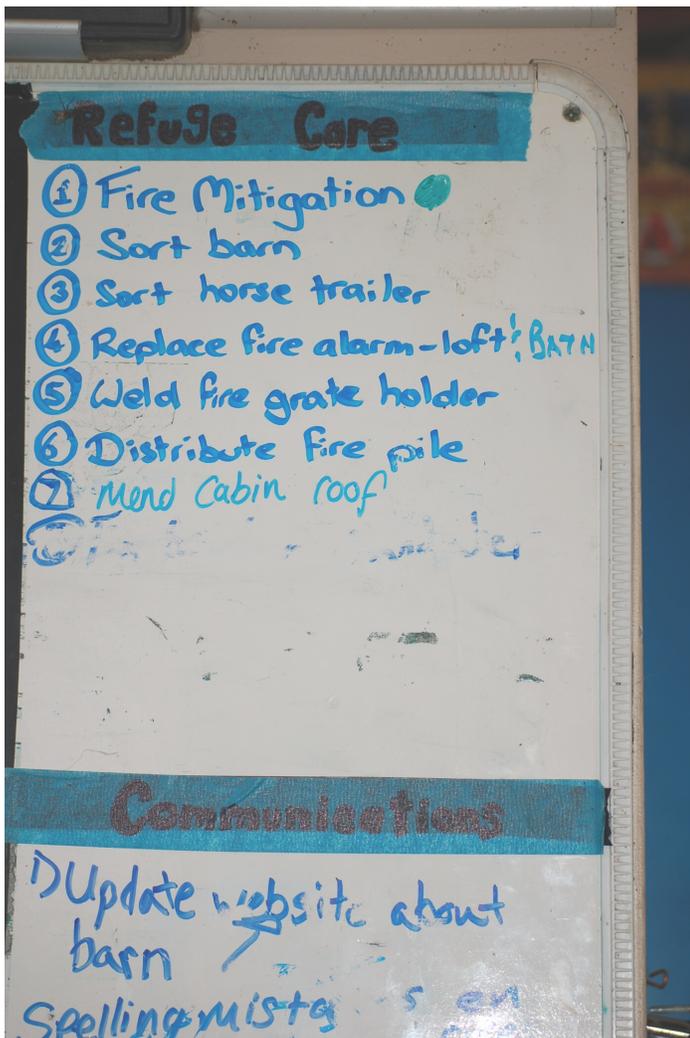
Mission: Wolf is an educational center, wolf sanctuary, and nature preserve near the Southern edge of the Rocky Mountains. Home to dozens of wolves that are unfit to be reintroduced to the wild, the refuge strives to protect the natural land surrounding the 50 acres of wolf enclosures on its property. 450 acres of the wilderness neighboring the refuge is preserved. Wolf caretakers live adjacent to the wolf enclosures, with a cluster of small buildings, several tipis, and two greenhouses comprising the community's shelter. There are five permanent staff members onsite and a rotating host of volunteers who stay anywhere from two weeks to a year. The documentary features both volunteers and long-term staff.

“Some people come for a few months and are here for the experience. Then there are people who are doing it for the wolves over themselves and stay here for years, if not a lifetime.”

Kent Weber
Director of Mission: Wolf



The wolf sanctuary got its start in 1984 when founder Kent Weber became licensed to care for a captive wolf in need of a humane shelter. Two years later, Kent and his partner began to care for additional wolves that had been pets to previous owners who could no longer care for the animals. Kent began to learn about the thousands of captive wolves who are killed each year and started to take in as many wolves as he could. Eventually, Mission: Wolf became a home for dozens of wolves.



Fast Facts

- The refuge only takes in wolves that are unfit to be reintroduced to the wild (e.g., wolves who were born in captivity).
- The sanctuary is self-sufficient: it is powered by solar energy, and all residents live off or recycled materials.
- Two greenhouses on the property allow for produce to be grown year-round.
- Residents use a communal truck that is powered by used vegetable oil donated from local restaurants
- Wolves are fed with donated meat and expired livestock from local ranchers
- Ownership of the Mission: Wolf property is in the wolves' name
- Approximately 10,000 people visit the refuge every year.

The Lifestyle of Humans at the Refuge



- Living outside with limited facilities—sleeping in tents or tipis, sharing a communal kitchen and bathroom with many other volunteers
- Cooking everything 100% from scratch—jam, bread dough, etc.
- Showering once a week or less to conserve water
- Processing wolf food, which comes in the form of donated horses and other livestock that die naturally, into edible bites for the wolves
- Carrying water to the wolves when pipes freeze. (A full water load weighs 60 lbs.+)
- Contributing to other everyday chores and maintaining the refuge, like taking out the trash/compost/recycling, cooking, cleaning, etc.
- Leading educational tours



WHO IS WHO

Kent



“You show up, take care of yourself. If you don’t scare the wolves, great. If you can help out a little bit, fine. If you can survive a longer time and dedicate to help the wolves, then we’ll dedicate our time to help take care of you.”

Kent, the founder of the refuge, prefers the term “caretaker” instead of “Executive Director.” Kent describes his childhood as growing up “in the woods.” While he was studying mechanical engineering in college, both of Kent’s parents were killed in a car crash, leaving Kent feeling alone in the world. After college, he was feeling increasingly disillusioned by the rat-race of modern society and, deciding to define life on his own terms, founded Mission: Wolf.

Rachel

Rachel is from New Castle, England. She had an unsettled childhood—after Rachel’s father died when she was young, her mother battled mental health and addiction issues, leaving Rachel to provide for herself and her brother. Rachel studied animal behavior and welfare in college, and finds working with wolves to be a healing experience. She discovers a sense of belonging and community for the first time alongside the other volunteers at Mission: Wolf.



“The wolves have been abandoned and hurt by people, so that’s how we connect.”

Will



“I didn’t know anything. I had to ask people how to help me not die.”

After graduating from Yale with a bachelor’s degree in history, Will lived and worked in New York City. He recalls his early adulthood entrenched in a culture of competition, ruthlessness, and individualism. When he arrived as a volunteer at the refuge, he had limited experience living outdoors and working with wildlife. At the beginning of the film, Will had been at the refuge for two months. He consciously makes a decision that he wants to become responsible for processing the deceased horses that feed the wolves.

Mike

Mike grew up in Southern California, where he was a child actor and model. He went to college in Orange County. Running a wolf refuge was a lifelong dream of his. He began volunteering at Mission: Wolf in 2013, and plans to stay there indefinitely.

“Humans are animals too.”



Kia

“I think it does something to the human brain to experience wild things.”

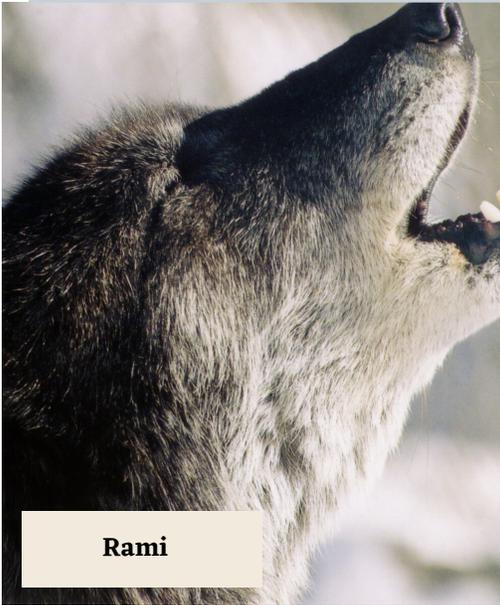
Kia is used to unconventional lifestyles. She has driven around the U.S. in a vintage camping van to take odd jobs here and there. Her idea of a romantic date is going dumpster diving. Along with the wolves she cares for, she has also worked with rescued monkeys.

Kia feels content with her life choices even though she suspects her mother doesn't view her as being on a path to success.

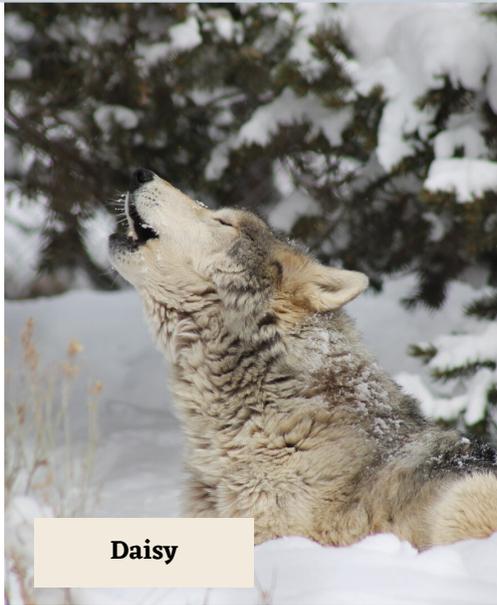


THE WOLVES

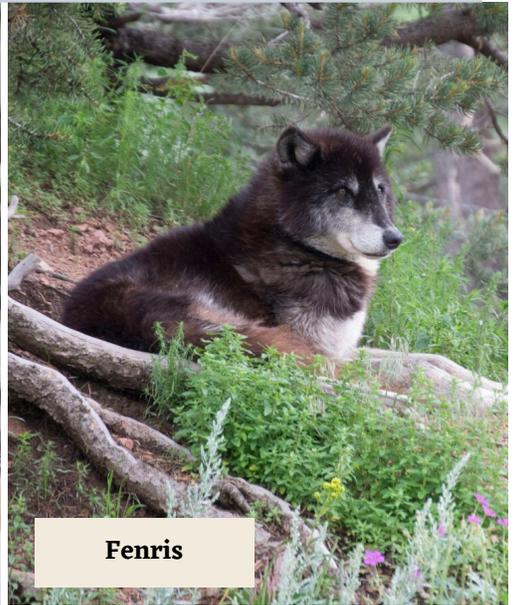
All of the wolves at Mission: Wolf were born in captivity, which means that they can never be safely or humanely released into the wild. Each wolf has a distinct background and story. Some are rescued from illegal wildlife trafficking schemes and/or horrifying abuse. Others are given away by previous owners who were unaware of the significant needs that wolves and wolf dogs require compared to domesticated canines. Mission: Wolf takes in as many wolves as the land allows for, but unfortunately their limited capacity means they have had to turn away thousands of requests to re-home other wolves in need.



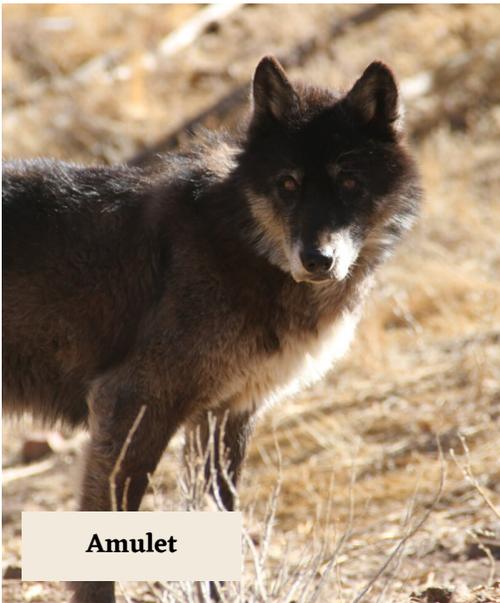
Rami



Daisy



Fenris



Amulet



Orion



Soleil

Photos courtesy of missionwolf.org

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the parallels between the wolves and the volunteer community.
2. Kia says, *"I think it does something to the human brain to experience wild things."* What does she mean by this? In what ways do you feel connected or disconnected from wildness? What is the difference between wildness and wilderness?
3. The Mission: Wolf refuge operates cooperatively, with no formal hierarchy. *"I don't think it would work if there were leaders,"* says Kia. Is it possible to have a community that is purely cooperative? Why or why not?
4. Mike says, *"The day that we're successful is the day we take those cages down and watch wolves in the wild."* What do you understand to be the most significant barriers to that vision?
5. Rachel and Kia both raise questions about what people need to survive. How did their stories change your perspective on what it means to be fulfilled and live a meaningful life?
6. The film examines the relationship between life and death and our human proximity to these natural processes. Discuss your reaction to confronting these cycles.
7. In describing the wolves to visitors, Rachel observes, *"At a young age, we are taught that wolves are bad."* Discuss something you learned at a young age but have since had a change of perspective. What caused that change?
8. *"I feel like I relate to animals better than I relate to humans,"* says Kia. Do you relate to this statement? Why or why not?
9. Will and Kia's relationship represents people of very different backgrounds and beliefs, working together, and building a friendship.

Will says that through the process of being exposed to others, *"You realize there is a third route between winning and losing, and that's jointly growing."* What applications does this theory have in our increasingly polarized society? How might it look in other communities outside of the refuge? Offer some ideas and examples.

10. How is the film relevant to wider issues in our society today?

MISSION WOLF: EXPERIMENT IN LIVING

SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLSET

TIPS FOR INSPIRATION

Join the conversation with the hashtag #MissionWolfFilm

Tag us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @NeeNeeProductions

What did this film make you think about? What surprised you about it? Answer these questions in two sentences and share on social media.

Copy and paste the examples below, or rephrase them into your own words



EXAMPLES

#MissionWolfFilm introduces you to the volunteers who leave their former lives behind to care for Colorado's endangered wolves. missionwolffilm.org/watch

What happens when you intermix wilderness, wolves, and people? #MissionWolfFilm explores. Learn how to see the documentary at missionwolffilm.org/watch



EXAMPLES

I just saw a screening of an uncommon documentary called Mission Wolf: Experiment in Living. I enjoyed the story because _____ and it left the movie thinking about _____. Learn more at missionwolffilm.com @intheneenee

People and nature are not separate from one another. #MissionWolfFilm shows us what is left of wildness in the American West, and how an experiment in living impacts youth who strive to leave mainstream urban life behind. missionwolffilm.com @intheneenee



IDEAS

Upload the film's trailer (link below) it to your Instagram stories.

Visit missionwolffilm.com/socialmedia to discover and share insta-worthy quotes from the film

USEFUL LINKS

Downloadable Trailer:

vimeo.com/neeneeproductions/missionwolfftrailer

missionwolffilm.com
neeneeproductions.com

YouTube Trailer:

youtube.com/watch?v=PvUIEmCloll

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