

Lifestyle Changes

This chapter needed to be written in the first person, so the full flavor of wolf-dog hybrid ownership could be imparted.

I have been involved with animals my entire life, including the family dogs and cats, rescuing and rehabilitating small wild mammals, and even volunteering in zoos and animal shelters. Having longed for a wolf-dog hybrid of my own, in preparation for ownership I not only volunteered to assist the predator zookeeper at the local zoo but I also fostered a number of dogs for the animal shelter and local rescues.

The time finally came when I thought I was prepared for ownership and I kept a four week old rescued pup, whose breeder was going to kill her because he couldn't sell her. At this time I was living in a small town that was relatively wolf-dog hybrid friendly. I had what I thought to be adequate fencing. My children were teenagers, and as manager of a multi-million dollar health care facility I felt I had an adequate income to care for a high maintenance canine.

Life changed, literally overnight, when that pup came home. The first night Sioux was here, I decided she should sleep in the puppy crate that had been used for all the foster pups. Sioux went into the crate willingly and didn't make a sound. I thought perhaps since she was so young, crate training would be easy. At two a.m. that first morning I woke up to a puppy on my face, after she broke out of the crate that had held so many others. This was a four-week-old wolf-dog hybrid pup.

So I bought a new, heavier crate and tried again to crate train her. She did crate train, but insisted that she would only stay in the crate when she wanted—any other time she would either chew out or break out of it.

Within the first month, Sioux had completely terrorized the adult Sheltie, ripped up the carpeting while I was in the bathroom for a moment, eaten the houseplants, and totally rearranged my life. She was still under ten weeks of age. When she was twelve weeks, I came home from work in a \$300 business suit only to have her jump on me with muddy paws—she had chewed the pipe that housed the outdoor faucet and made a super swimming hole.

In no time, our \$1000 sofa was ruined, the carpet was torn beyond repair, she'd gone through numerous crates, and several of my business suits were ruined. When she began visiting the neighbors after chewing through the fence, we decided to move to a more rural setting on the outskirts of town on a half acre.

Again we faced fencing problems, but this time we reinforced the fencing before we moved in. Just when we began to let our guard down, Sioux would find a way

out! More than once I came home to find her sitting on the front porch. How did she do it? She had learned to climb a tree that was about five feet from the fence, jump onto a window air conditioner unit, and hop the fence. Did we mention intelligent?

Since house training had been difficult, I decided to provide a doggy door. I believe wolf-dog hybrids, like any family canine, need to be with their human families. Big mistake! Out through the doggy door went my Grandmother's quilt, the blender, sofa cushions, books too numerous to count, and even a stereo component. I was still fostering rescued dogs, so Sioux had plenty of canine companionship—to whom she promptly taught the tricks of the trade.

It was in this house that Sioux learned to open the refrigerator and the cabinets—everything had to be moved out of her reach and a padlock installed on the refrigerator.

The stress of coming home daily to the next unknown disaster took its toll on my job as well as my marriage. I ended up quitting my high-pressure job for one that paid significantly less, but which was much less stressful and provided me part-time hours so I could supervise this incredible but strange animal more closely.

Small children were no longer allowed at the house, as Sioux would knock them down to sniff them all over and neither their parents nor I found that tolerable. The cats had to go after she disemboweled a squirrel on the down comforter. The expensive sofa was soon beyond repair and was replaced with another, this time from Good Will.

Sioux was enrolled in training classes and performed wonderfully during obedience sessions. She obeyed when she was at home too, if she wanted to. If not, she just didn't. There was neither rhyme nor reason for her obedience, or lack thereof.

Twice a year Sioux "blows" her coat. In the spring she sheds massive amounts of undercoat for up to four weeks. During this time I begin to think that fur is another food group. We call it blowing coat because the fur is everywhere. In the fall her coat blows again, not as massively and usually restricted to about three weeks duration—it's not unusual to have fur in my coffee, on my clothes, and up my nose.

By the time Sioux reached three years, we had replaced all furnishings in the house and the house itself. Yes, we sold and moved again, this time as far out in the country as we could go. Currently we live twenty-seven miles from the closest city on one hundred acres that is shared with our neighbor, a Gundog trainer. Our fencing is near zoo quality, our carpeting is commercial quality and glued to the floor (not the expensive Berber that had been shredded so many times). I work where I can wear blue jeans. We don't take vacations because

there is no one to watch Sioux and her canine companions and there isn't a kennel within a one hundred mile radius that could hold her. We have few visitors, because most people either can't find our house, or choose not to visit because wolf-dog hybrid howls and other pack antics constantly interrupt us.

So many material items have I lost over the years—the only picture I had of my deceased parents was found shredded in the yard. More books than I care to think about have been destroyed. The original loan documents on the property were soaked with urine. The list goes on, ad infinitum.

Has my lifestyle changed in the six years that Sioux has shared my life? Will yours? I went from a great paying upwardly mobile position, to a job with mediocre pay that allows me to wear jeans. Business suits are unacceptable with muddy paw prints or massive amounts of fur on them. We live so far out in the country that I only go to town once a week, often less. I haven't had a vacation in years, haven't been to the opera or a show in eons, and currently live with Good Will furnishings.

It could have been different... Sioux could have been chained outside and forced to live her life alone with limited human and canine interaction. We could have penned her and visited once daily at feeding time. She could have been dumped at the shelter after everyone gave up on her. But instead I chose to live with her. And provide her with appropriate companions. That adds up to an immense lifestyle change. Changes I sometimes regret, but I made a commitment to her—I honor my commitments.

Under such conditions would you honor the commitment you made to the animal? If not, a wolf-dog hybrid will probably not be the companion animal for you.