

Who's afraid of the Big Good Wolf?

Local school children aren't, once they've met pretty Nahanni

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Beth Duman's knowledge of wolf sociology came in handy 1½ years ago when she gave birth to daughter Katherine.

Bob and Beth Duman's wolf, Nahanni, was elated. Beth recalled, "but I had to watch her because I definitely did not want her carrying the baby around by the head."

"So I growled at her the way the alpha female in a pack would growl at a subordinate female," and Nahanni accepted me as a mother wolf taking care of her puppy."

Besides being a member of the Duman "pack" in Oakland County's rural White Lake Township, Nahanni has another distinction. The three-year-old grey timber wolf is probably the most famous animal among kids in the metropolitan area since Jo Mendi, the chimp at the zoo.

In the company of Mrs. Duman, Nahanni has visited more than 200 schools in this area and 80 in Grand Rapids, and has been petted by tens of thousands of youngsters. So if you take your youngster to hear "Peter and the Wolf" and find him cheering for the wolf, it may be because of Nahanni.

"SHE'S GENERALLY submissive to people," says Mrs. Duman, who tells everyone not to show fear around Nahanni because "she picks out submissive kids—maybe it's the adrenalin—and growsl."

A former teacher, Mrs. Duman takes the 64-pound *Canis lupus lycaon* to schools to give children these messages.

"Wolves are predators, animals that kill other animals for their food. But there is not one authenticated case of a healthy wolf or pack of wolves ever attacking and killing a person in all of North America."

"Wolves generally can catch only old or diseased animals and some unprotected young. Wolves play an important role in preventing over-pop-

ulation in game animals by continual culling of the diseased and weak animals." (Man, it could be added, does the opposite: seeking out the trophy animals and thus weakening the species.)

"Wolves kill only to eat. They have a highly developed social order in the pack. Unlike dogs, wolves rarely fight with each other."

Nevertheless, the Michigan Deer Hunters Association still insists that wolves slaughter herds of deer and often don't bother to eat their kills. Friends of the wolves, however, say that if wolves could outrun healthy deer, the wolves would eliminate their own food supply and exterminate themselves—a clear absurdity.

IN A SCHOOL hallway, Nahanni looks like, and is sometimes mistaken for, a big dog. "Wolves and dogs can interbreed. They're genetically the same species," says Beth, a former Southfield girl with a background in biology.

But dogs have had wolfish character traits—as distinguished from biological traits—bred out of them, she adds, and so wolves have different personalities.

As her husband Bob and daughter Katherine played with Nahanni on the floor of their home, Beth told what makes wolves different.

"She can't be kept in a house long," Beth said frankly, "because she scent-marks everything by urinating on it." Male dogs retain some of that trait by scent-marking their territories but Nahanni's scent-marking is extreme in comparison.

So Nahanni has a pair of large, tree-shaded pens with a sign that says "Beware of the Dog." They don't manufacture "Beware of the Wolf" signs you know.

Dogs can be taught to obey commands. Nahanni is untrainable.

"Nahanni is social-climbing. Bob is obviously head of the pack," and she is especially submissive to him," Beth added.

In wolf sociology, the head male is

called "alpha wolf." In the Duman household, alpha is Wolfgang, a deaf, neutered male Dalmatian. Nahanni lays back her ears and curls under her rump in his presence.

In turn, Nahanni dominates little Cricket, the small black female dog in the household.

DOGS LIKE to play "fetch" and "tug." Nahanni's game is "stalk and pounce."

"She's much more active than a dog. She tears around the place. When you're on the phone, she knows your attention is diverted, and she chews things," Beth said.

Nahanni uses her mouth for social contact far more than a dog would, although she's very gentle about it.

"She has cow-hocked legs," Beth went on. "That's been bred out of dogs because people want their pets to have nice, straight legs. And she has coarse fur, but dogs have been bred to have soft fur."

Whereas female dogs come into season for about two weeks twice a year, Nahanni has one four-week season in February. Apparently her ready-to-mate scent is weaker than a dog's.

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NAHANNI WAS born in Aqualand, a commercial zoo in northeastern Wis-



consin which has provided such animals as otters for Walt Disney movies. She dominated her litter of three.

At nine days, she began nursing on a human-held bottle and so became so civilized to people. If socializing isn't done immediately, Beth said, a wolf never becomes accustomed to humans.

The Dumans bought her there, naming her for a wild Canadian River, and vowed she would have "maximum social contacts—at least 30 people a day," Beth said.

Nahanni's two brothers were less lucky. Within a year, their purchasers had sold them back to zoos, which Beth says is the pattern. Once wolves have been around humans, they cannot be returned to the wild.

SHORTLY AFTER the Dumans brought Nahanni to Michigan in 1972, the state imposed tough new restrictions on the issuance of wolf permits. They will be issued for educational and research purposes only—and very sparingly. A private individual today can forget about having a wolf for a pet.

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Battle Creek. Beth cautions against going to breeders who advertise animals as half- or three-quarters wolf. "Ask the breeder to show you the parent wolf," she advises. "Usually they can't."

MILDLY KOOKY, though in the pleasantest possible way, Beth went to Grace School and Southfield High School and earned a degree in biology at Wayne State University.

She taught biology at St. Andrew High School in Detroit but was fired for being too friendly with a nun who was considering leaving the convent. Beth then taught at Bishop Foley High in Madison Heights "but retired to have the wolf."

Husband Bob, once a Benedictine monk, studied biology in order to get a job. He came here from Pennsylvania in the late '60s to work for the University of Detroit on a much-publicized but ultimately inconclusive bacteriology study of the Huron River. He's now a technical analyst in computers with Michigan Bell Telephone Co.

A school can schedule Beth and Nahanni by contacting the North American Wildlife Park Foundation, Inc., Battle Ground, Ind. 47301.

NAWPF handles their exhibition permit, pays their liability insurance, does their booking, provides inexpensive books on wolves that Beth sells, and gives the Dumans access to wolf research.

The modest fee covers expenses and mileage.

AT HOME, Nahanni is loose only in her pen and during her occasional visits to the house, occupied by the Dumans, the dogs, two cats, tropical fish, and a box turtle.

Nahanni eats dog food. "The first time she ran loose and someone found a dead chicken, we'd have a legal suit on our hands," Beth said.

"Nahanni has never really barked," she said. Barking is something dogs have picked up in their contacts with humans, it seems.

Instead, Nahanni prefers to howl. Wolves howl to bring the pack together, and members of the pack recognize each other.

To show what she meant, Beth began their pack howl in a clear coloratura. Bob joined in with a sound punctuated by yips, and Nahanni had to work hard to be heard.

"Everybody howl," Beth hollered between howls. "C'mon, Tim, you have to howl too."



Despite fairy tales, children learn not to fear Nahanni in Livonia's Kennedy School.



Wolf communication involves a lot of mouth work. Beth and Katherine find.



Nahanni affectionately acknowledges Bob Duman as her "pack" leader.



A pack howl is let loose by Katherine, Beth, Nahanni and Bob. Wolfgang the Dalmatian (on couch at left) fails to join because he is deaf.