



Published June 1, 2017

It's just a dog, right?

If you're a pet owner you've heard that one before, usually as a mild rebuke. Why all this fuss over how we treat a toothy mop of fur? Lose one, get another. The shaggy little things are running around everywhere these days.

Try running that notion past the ancient Natufians. When archaeologists looked into one of their graves in what is now Israel recently, they found an altogether different idea about dogs.

About 12,000 years ago, the hunter-gatherer group was on the verge of making the precarious switch to an agricultural lifestyle when they paused and held a funeral. They buried an old woman.

Obviously, they believed in some form of afterlife because they sent her into the great unknown with a companion to protect her and show her the way. Of all the animals they could have picked from their prehistoric world, which one filled the bill?

They buried her with a puppy cradled in her hands.

They expected the woman and the puppy to go on. The woman would protect the puppy and teach it. In turn, the puppy would grow, learn her ways, use its unique skills and watch over her. And they would take that bond into eternity.

Today we'd call the Natufians a primitive people. No wheels, no electricity, no computers. Questionable hygiene. A lot of silly ideas. They're long gone now.

But the dog is still with us in this, our advanced and enlightened world of the 21st Century.

Nearly 4 million dogs in the United States alone are euthanized each year because no one wants them. Yet dogs are bred litter after litter for profit and sold in pet stores or out of cardboard boxes on the roadside. Many who have dogs keep them chained outside. Others are brought home on a whim and when they fail to guess our rules, they're carted away to shelters or dumped on the roadside.

Many who do take the time to train dogs shock them with electric collars or jerk them around by their necks, shouting commands that the dogs are too traumatized and fearful to begin to comprehend. They live out their brief lives never sure what the crazy human is going to do to them next. Dogs are chattel, dogs are commodities, dogs are bling and in some places today, dogs are what's for dinner. It's just a dog, right?

Yet, the ancient way of seeing dogs still exists and still calls to us. Fortunately, some can still look at a dog today and see past the cultural misconceptions and see beyond the talking cartoon parodies of dogs and ... see the dog, the companion we choose to keep at our side through the millennia.

The Wild Stare is for you, the Dog People of the world. Sure, there'll be stories and lore about Irish wolfhounds because that's who I live with. But The Wild Stare is also for you who want the latest findings to help you understand your dog and help him fit graciously into today's hectic households. It's for you if you've ever looked into the eyes of a dog.

And, what looked back changed you forever.