



THINK LIKE A WOLF - THE UNLIKELY HERO BOOK EXCERPT

Taken from the book by Rick McIntyre and David A. Poulsen

This is the story of Wolf 8, a famous wolf that was part of the reintroduction program that brought wolves back to Yellowstone National Park in 1995. Wolf 8's life was observed most closely by biologist and wolf expert Rick McIntyre.

The young wolf and his family, his father, mother and three brothers had been captured by humans and placed in separate cages. He was the smallest of the four pups in the family and the last one to be captured. The wolves were being transported in a horse trailer from Alberta, Canada, where they had been captured, to Yellowstone National Park in the American state of Wyoming. He and his family were part of something called the Yellowstone Wolf reintroduction project. He didn't know that they were among 14 wolves— three families (or packs) and one lone male that had been captured in Canada to be moved to the United States. The wolf pup also didn't know that for almost 70 years there had been no wolves in Yellowstone National Park. The last wolves in the park had been shot and killed in 1926 by Park Rangers, at a time when humans didn't understand or trust wolves and wanted them gone. And from that time until now, in 1995, in this part of the world they had been gone. But maybe the most important thing the wolf pup didn't know was that he now had a name. To the people who had captured him and those who would watch and study him in his new home, he was known as Wolf 8. His father was Wolf 4, his mother Wolf 5, and his three brothers, Wolves 1, 2 and 6.

Because they had been released near Yellowstone's Crystal Creek, they were designated the Crystal Creek pack. Wolf 8 and his brothers had been born eight months before their long journey from Alberta to Wyoming. Except for their age, there wasn't much about them that was the same. 8's three siblings had shiny black coats, like their father. And also like their father, his brothers were tall and husky. 8 was a drab shade of gray, while his mother had a beautiful whitish coat. And he was smaller than his brothers, the runt of the litter.

The Crystal Creek wolves were not alone in the section of Yellowstone that made up their home. Many miles away from the Crystal Creek Pack's territory, at about the same time as 8's family was leaving their pen, another pack was bedding down for the night. They were the Rose Creek pack, and the mother, Wolf 9, had given birth to a litter of eight pups just a few days before. One of those pups was Wolf 21. At almost the exact same time that his mother was having her litter of pups, their father was off on a hunt about 5 miles away. Sadly, while Wolf 21's father was trying to hunt elk to



feed his family, he ventured into an area quite close to the town and was illegally shot and killed. The death of this wolf changed everything for his pack. Wolf 9 was now a widow who had eight pups to look after all by herself.

Not far away from the Rose Creek pen, a stranger was making his way up a creek drainage. 8 was wondering, as he often did, by himself. 8 approached the Rose Creek pups. They were as surprised as he was. Just as he had never seen wolves this small, these pups had never encountered an older male wolf. They'd never seen a wolf this big. 8 wagged his tail and then got down on his front paws, his rump in the air to greet the little wolves. Soon 8 and the Rose Creek pups were romping around the meadow like long lost pals. At the edge of the clearing, the pup's mother, Wolf 9, was watching carefully. At first, she was worried by the arrival of this gray stranger. But the sight of him playing with her pups reassured her that he wasn't a threat. She desperately needed an adult male in her family to help raise her pups, so she eventually came forward to meet the wolf who was clearly a big hit.

At first, she cautiously joined in the play. Then she and 8 came face-to-face for the first time, their faces and muzzles touching as they made little whining sounds of greeting. Wolf 8 would not return to his mother and father and brothers after that. He had found a new family and had been accepted into it by Wolf 9 and all of her pups. The changes 8 would be making because of that decision would be anything but easy. He was taking on a huge responsibility, especially difficult and demanding for so young a male wolf. Here he was adopting eight fatherless pups that he would raise as if they were his own. The wolf who had once been the little underdog was now the Alpha male in a 10 wolf pack!

That winter, more wolves arrived in Yellowstone National Park from the Canadian province of British Columbia as part of the repopulation program. One of the packs would come to be known as the Druid Pack. The Druid Pack settled in Lamar Valley, not far from the Crystal Creek pack, which now consisted of 8's parents and one of 8's brothers. They were also near the Rose Creek pack that had just seen 8's mate, Wolf 9, give birth to three pups, making 8 a biological father for the first time. It wasn't long before the powerful male of the Druid Pack, Wolf 38, and his family encountered the Crystal Creek pack in the den where 8's mother had just had a litter of pups. The Druids attacked the Crystal Creek wolves and killed the newborn pups. 8's father, Wolf 4, tried to protect his family, but he was no match for the massive and vicious Wolf 38, and he was killed.

Meanwhile, Wolf 8 was working hard raising three newborn pups and he seemed to enjoy being a new dad. Of course, he had adopted Wolf 9's pups the year before, but this was different. On one warm spring day, it was time for lessons to begin. 8 led charges away from the den and in search of



suitable prey. They were about to take some of the meat back to the den for 9 and the new pups when suddenly 8 stopped what he was doing. It was the Druid Wolf Pack, and they were racing down the slope directly at 8 and his yearlings. Leading the Druid's charge was Wolf 38, the wolf that had killed 8's father. Instantly, 8 was off and running at top speed, not away from the massive 38, but directly at them. This would be the most difficult challenge of 8's young life. 8 was not nearly as big as the wolf that was leading the charge down the hill. 38 wasn't just big, he was also older, and he was a skilled and ferocious fighter. If 8 knew or sensed the danger or realized that the odds were heavily stacked against him, it didn't seem to matter. He ran straight uphill at 38, ears back and teeth bared. The two alpha males crashed together in a furious frenzy of growls, snarls, and snapping jaws. Both 8 and 38 were gray, and the two wolves quickly became one mass of savage fury. The fight raged on, then as suddenly as it began, it was over. The wolf standing over his beaten enemy was 8.

When alpha males fight, the battle is often to the death. But no wolves would die on this day. 8 stepped back and allowed 38 to get up. He had won the fight and saved his family. And for 8 that was enough. One of the yearlings out on the hunt with 8 that day was Wolf 21. He watched as his adopted father defeated 38 and then spared his life.

Wolf 8 had always preferred spending time by himself. It was better than being ganged up on, bullied by his brothers, or having his food taken from him. But now that he was an adult and a father, he no longer felt quite the same way. He liked spending time with his mate. And, of course, there were new pups to raise, but now 8 had lots of help from the young adults in the family, the two-year-old he had adopted as well as the yearlings he'd fathered the previous spring. But it was one young wolf in particular that was changing 8's loner attitude—Wolf 21. Wolf 21 had become an almost inseparable companion to 8. He was two years old now and had grown to be much bigger than his adoptive father. But despite the difference in their sizes, there was never any doubt about who was in charge. Wolf 8 was the leader and 21 was a loyal, willing, and very capable apprentice.

Now it was late fall, and the time had come for 21, who was 2 1/2 years old, to leave his family, find a mate, and start raising pups of his own. Wolf 21 was about to experience the same thing that his adoptive father, Wolf 8, had experienced some years before. With the recent death of the Druid Pack's two male wolves, the Druid Pack now had seven members and no alpha. 21 and the Druid Pack spotted one another at just about the same time. 21 hung back. He wanted to show these wolves that he wasn't a threat, that he wasn't there to harm them. Wolf 8 had joined the Rose Creek



Pack after the death of their alpha male, and now his adopted son Wolf 21 was joining the Druid Pack under the same circumstances.

For a time, the Rose Creek wolves, and the Druid Pack, with 21 as their new alpha male, seemed to be getting along. There were no fights over food or territory, and there was plenty of food to go around. But that all changed in late 1990. Several young members of the Rose Creek Pack entered into Druid territory. One of those young wolves was a female, Wolf 85, who was one of 8's daughters. The Druids chased the young Rose Creek female, caught up with her, and pulled her down. Eventually, the ferocity of the bites proved to be too much, and Wolf 85 died. 21 was there with the rest of the Druid pack when the attack took place, but he did not participate.

Sometimes, 8 would travel through the area where 85 was killed, so it was inevitable that he would one day come across his daughter's remains. And when that happened, 8 would do what wolves do—he'd sniff around the site and pick up the scent of the Druid wolves, including 21. It would be natural for him to conclude that 21 has been involved in killing his daughter. He had no way of knowing that the attack had been carried out by other members of the pack, and that 21 had not participated in the killing.

Bad blood had been simmering between the two packs ever since the Druid Pack had killed the young Rose Creek female, and now it looked like the two families were finally going to fight. The Druid Pack was close by and stopped and had a big group howl. They were loudly proclaiming their right to this territory. The Rose Creek wolves howled back. It sounded like they were challenging the Druids to a fight. The Druids stopped howling and took off at top speed, heading directly for the Rose Creek wolves. They raced toward the other pack, running up a ridge to reach their opponents. Wolf 21 was in front, his normal position, when he felt his pack was in danger. He looked deadly serious and was clearly at the peak of his strength and fighting ability. From the opposite direction, also running at top speed, the Rose Creek Pack raced toward the Druids with 8 in the lead. 8 was not as large as his adopted son, and he had suffered many injuries over the years. It was a mismatch, with 8 having almost no chance of defeating the bigger and stronger 21, and yet he continued his charge straight at the younger wolf. There was one important factor that might save the day. Neither of the two warriors who were about to do battle had killed their defeated enemies. 8 had allowed 38 to live and go back to his family. 21 had seen that incident, and it appeared that he took the lesson to heart. In all his fights and all his victories, 21 had not once killed an opponent. The two packs were closing in fast, and the two Alpha males, each out in front of his pack, were about to collide. The battle was about to begin. Then, at the last possible second, the unthinkable



happened. 21 ran slightly away from 8, shot past him and the rest of the Rose Creek pack, and then continued to run. The other Druids were stunned and confused. Was their leader afraid of the enemy Rose Creek Pack? If so, maybe they should be as well. They all followed 21's example and ran past 8 and the other Rose Creek Wolves. Both packs began to split up, with wolves chasing the other wolves, but there wasn't any real fighting. What could've been a deadly battle had turned into a chasing game, and the battlefield had become an unexpected playground. The war that had never really happened was over. No wolves died or were even injured that day. The crisis appeared to be over. And it was all because 21 refused to fight 8, the wolf that had adopted and raised him.

The late spring sun was warming the woods of Yellowstone National Park. 8 decided to go off on a hunt to bring back meat to the young wolves. He was by himself and in no hurry as he patrolled the woodlands he knew so well. After searching the deep forest for elk, he lay down for a while and let the sun's soothing rays work their healing magic on the body that had taken tremendous punishment over the years. The elk saw 8 at the exact same time and immediately ran into a nearby stream. 8 didn't hesitate. As he had done many times before, he took to the water and attacked the big female elk. She fought back and kicked him off, once, then twice. She kicked at him again and again. And finally, she connected with the full power of her leg and that lethal hoof striking 8's head with deadly force. His grip loosened, and the great alpha wolf fell into the water, stunned by the repeated kicks. The small gray wolf that had to find his strength so many times had nothing left. 8 died as he had lived, serving his family. If ever a wolf had a reason to be proud of what he was, and what he had done, it was the little gray wolf that had begun his life as the runt, a victim of bullying brothers, and had grown up to be one of the greatest wolves who ever lived in Yellowstone National Park.