

Under-socialized and feral dogs

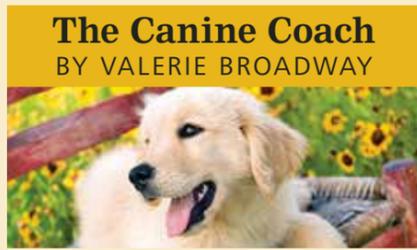
The terms “under-socialized” and “feral” describe domesticated animals that are very fearful of things and situations that occur in normal human society, especially the humans themselves. Completely feral dogs are usually born in places removed from humans; such as in the woods or abandoned buildings. While not common, it is possible for animals to be severely under-socialized and completely feral even though they are born and raised around humans. One example is when puppies are born in an animal hoarding situation. Hoarders have so many animals they are not able to handle and socialize them all.

Unfortunately, there are backyard breeders and puppy mill operators who only care about the money they obtain from selling puppies. They could care less about the psychological health of the animals or the difficulties they are setting up their buyers to face. People place their faith in the breeders believing they have done the right things for their puppies during the first formative weeks of life. It is only a matter of time before the purchasers discover they’ve been duped and have under-socialized puppies. The potential of having big problems is high and most people don’t know how to help their new furry family members.

There are some cases when dogs are bred from lines of breeding stock that are genetically skittish. Puppies are born hardwired this way and ultimately may behave similarly to wild animals. The motivation to continue to breed these lines again comes down to money. The dogs are a popular or expensive breed, or have some sort of desired color or physical feature that makes them an easy sell to the unsuspecting public. When looking at puppies it is important to meet one or both parents, if possible. If the parents appear to behave oddly, are very shy or aggressive, there’s a good chance the puppies will grow up to be just like them.

Another situation that creates fearful dogs start as puppies who have been around humans but have never been introduced to the world beyond their homes. They are kept inside the house all of the time, perhaps most of their lives in crates in a back room or even in garages. They may grow up living in the same backyard and for years never having the opportunity to venture beyond the gate; or perhaps past the end of their chain. The issue is compounded when the puppies or dogs rarely interact with people other than their owners. They will become very nervous about any new thing outside of their limited environment. They also are likely to become aggressive towards visitors since these dogs are typically very territorial because they don’t trust strangers coming from the outside world.

Those who have puppies born under their watch, and care about the pups’ mental welfare, must be responsible for taking the necessary steps to properly socialize the litters. Official socialization activities should begin by the time puppies are three weeks old. They should be picked up and touched regularly



The Canine Coach
BY VALERIE BROADWAY

by as many people as possible as well as handling their ears, paws and mouths. This is early prep work for vet visits and grooming. While they are still young, puppies have not developed a fear response, so socializing is as simple as exposing them to different people, places, and things. They should experience walking on different types of ground surfaces like rugs, hard floors, dirt, and grass.

Feral puppies or extremely under-socialized dogs should be handled with sensitivity while trying to help socialize them. Use treats if they work as motivation. A friendly dog can assist in many cases, as they can be a positive example and help provide a calming influence that brings a frightened dog out of its shell. Introduce new things at a pace the feral dog can handle. Every dog is an individual so it’s anyone’s guess as to how long socializing will take for a specific animal, but it is usually a slow process that requires a lot of patience. The older the puppy is before socialization begins the longer it will take to see major improvements. Some, usually adults, are considered “project dogs” and may take months or even years to be considered socialized. Sometimes times puppies can have a “eureka moment.” It’s like they suddenly realize the world is not as scary as they thought it was and suddenly are behaving like a dog who is comfortable in their skin and happy to investigate new things and even play. Frightened puppies and dogs will not play, so willingness to play is very telling of their mental state in that moment.

For the most severe cases of under-socialization, a veterinarian may prescribe an anti-anxiety medication. There are also many over-the-counter products that can help in calming dogs. Pheromone diffusers and collars use a mother dog’s scent as a calming agent. A popular thing these days for all kinds of dog behavior issues is the use of flower essences. They come in liquid form and a drop or two can be placed directly into the dog’s mouth, rubbed on the ear, or added to food. It is usually okay to use these things in combination.

Dogs are domesticated animals and when they are under-socialized it means a human has dropped the ball. The good news is in most cases the ball can be picked up and these animals can be helped. However, prevention is always best. There is not a minute to waste with puppies. So, whether still with their mother, or having started life in their new home, the plan should be: Socialize! Socialize! Socialize!

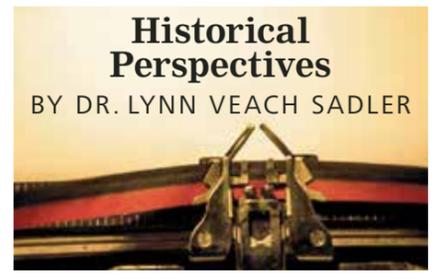
Valerie Broadway, the Canine Coach, is a dog trainer and behavioral specialist. For more information, call 919-542-4726 or visit www.caninecoachingservices.com.

My childhood debt to branches

My Sunday School went to White Lake (Bladen County) every summer; my family, just as religiously, to beaches. Still, an inlander growing up in southeastern North Carolina, I sought branches. I imagined them flowing into—in this [un-]order—swamps (Goshen), RIVERS, the Rio Grande (because I loved Westerns), the great Northeast Cape Fear, the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee (because I was southern Methodist if not Southern Baptist), THE WHATEVER RIVER OF CENTRAL AFRICA (navigated by Allnut and Rose, alias Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn, which I still can’t identify though I later read C. S. Forester’s *African Queen* and the whole Horatio Hornblower series, and gave my husband the floodtide of Patrick O’Brian’s Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin novels), the Neuse, the Haw, the M-I-S-S-I-S-S-I-P-P-I (because I loved spelling games), OCEANS, the Amazon, the Yangtze (because Pearl Buck was read to me as a child), the Nile, THE WORLD, the Seas of the Moon. Creeks and “cricks,” bays, bayous, Lake Pontchartrain, ponds, pocosins, inlets, sounds, Lake Mattamuskeet, backwaters, THE POTOMAC, springs... figured for me. No real map took my local branches out to the edges of the universe and certainly not back again! My “heart” never panted after the water brooks (Psalm 42.1); it panted after branches.

I wintered in branches, longing for the next spring and summer and tasting their hard chemicalness as I intoned their names and dutifully repeated Branch: Bear Marsh Branch, Bear Swamp Branch, Beaverdam Branch, Bee Gum Branch, Bee Tree Branch, Big Branch, Bloody Branch, Briary Branch, Bull Tail Branch, Buzzards Nest Branch, Cow Hole Branch, Cross Branch, Dark Branch, Fawnskin Branch, Graveyard Branch, Gum Pudding Branch, Hogg [sic] Pen Branch, Honey Pot Branch, Indian Grave Branch, Jinkepin Branch, Marl Hole Branch, Meeting Branch, Mirey Branch, Mistletoe Branch, Opossum Branch, Otter Branch, Panther Branch, Persimmon Branch, Pinchgut Branch, Pole Cat Branch, Pretty Branch, Punch Bole [sic.] Branch, Raccoon Branch, Rattlesnake Branch, Rice Ground Branch, Sallie Mathis Branch, Shot Bag Branch, Tar Kiln Branch, Tea Branch, Tickle Meadow Branch, Turkey Branch, Turtle Branch, Widow Evans Branch, Wild Cat Branch, Wolf Pit Branch, Yankee Branch... I pestered my grandmother for the titles and locations of branches and went with my uncles, all of whom were “in the logging business,” whenever I was allowed, into THE WOODS that cascading with branches and swamps. I made up stories to explain the best-named branches (Bear Marsh, Bloody, Graveyard, Gum Pudding, Widow Evans, Yankee); the rest were too easy. At that stage, I mistook “Honey Pot Branch” by a good sexual mile and understood the French Broad River only literally: why wasn’t it called the “Broad French River”? I was equally limited with regard to “Oxbow.”

I summered in branches: waded; gathered moss, ferns, bounteous branch treasures; felt stones and compared them (but never “skipped” them on the water); built dams; caught minnows, tadpoles, and terrapins



Historical Perspectives
BY DR. LYNN VEACH SADLER

(wondered if they really would not stop biting until it thundered).

I imagined myself whistling in the dark at branches, tried not to blanch in branches. “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me” (Psalm 42.7). I was an only child, a girl, and a tomboy in a community scanty of children. Southern branches test you. They are dark. Their water is hard-cold, hard-amber, the color, “sans” the viscosity, of blackstrap molasses. Their environs are cold, too, even on the hottest Southern day. They don’t gurgle and babble like brooks. They are not playful. To prove yourself, you have to go—alone—, periodically, to branches, stay there for a minimum of 30 minutes, and not shiver (once). Your reward is recording your prowess and daring, with duration and date, in your private notebook (stowed under your mattress).

Those Southern branches soured me for good. For proof, I ran the “Find” on the computer file of my first novel, Tonight I Lie with William Cullen Bryant. It found branches where secret “doin’s” take place (“hexed” drownings in under three feet of water) and secret people (The Flower Woman) live. The protagonist, Miss Deona Martindill, is identified with the branches threading her property. Major-minor character Sutie Branch gets her last name because “she ha[s] come from somewhere in the vicinity of Rooty Branch. “Miss Bird” (the narrator), whose tendency from birth was to tie off the bows on every package, was convinced that some kind member of that mysterious body known as the County Welfare Board had come to the first name through rhyme: “Rooty” had become “Sutie.” Miss Bird adapts the folklore of the branch terrapin to a parrot...

The South, perhaps more than any other region, makes one believe that birthplace is destiny. I grew up to “preach” collaboration and global interconnectedness. All those branches running into...? And The South itself has put great effort toward “enhancing” its waters. My version of Langston Hughes’ “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”? “My soul has tried to grow deep like the branches.” My version of Psalm 110.7? “He/She shall drink of the branch in the way: therefore shall he/she lift up the head.”

A longer article on this topic was published in *The Southern Writer*. I gave a Poetry Reading and talked on O’Brian at the Library of Saratoga Springs, NY, in 2004.

Dr. Lynn Veach Sadler, of Burlington’s *The Village at Brookwood*, a former college president, is widely published in academics and creative writing and works as a writer and an editor.



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