

National Pet Week

MAY 1-7, 1994



Rare Klee Kai breed of dog developed in U.S.

by Susan Rust

"They're just about the right size to hold five of them on your lap at a time," says Peyton dog breeder Eileen Gregory of the objects of her affection.

FIVE!? DOGS!?

Yes, five. If they happen to be Klee Kai dogs, they fit just fine. Klee Kai, meaning "Little Dog" in Eskimo dialect, is a new breed of dog developed in Alaska just twenty years ago. The dogs look like Huskies, only smaller. Much smaller.

The Toy Klee Kai does not weigh more than ten pounds; the Miniature weighs in at 10-15 pounds, and the Standard tips the scales at 15-20 pounds.

Eileen and Greg Gregory own 25 Klee Kai dogs in all sizes, shapes and colors. In fact, the Gregoryses are the keepers of more than ten percent of all Klee Kai in existence.

"There are 304 Klee Kai on the registration," explains Eileen Gregory, "and there are 214 in existence in the world." Which means 90 of the miniature dogs are no longer living.

"Klee Kai carry most of the traits of a Husky," explains Gregory, "but they are just pint sized

eyes. And they have that beautiful mask of the Husky."

Greg and Eileen became involved in the breeding of this very special dog when they lived in Alaska.

Eileen explains, "I lived in Alaska for a long time, my kids were all born there. When Greg and I got married and moved down here, we went back up to see the kids. I used to raise regular Huskies up there. It was in 1987 that we went up for a visit, and my kids said, 'Mom, you've got to see this little dog,' and took me over to show me. Of course I fell in love. The woman who developed the breed—Linda Spurlin—wouldn't sell them then, she just didn't think they were ready yet. She gave me a picture of three of them that I carried in my billfold."

Gregory says that about a year later her kids begged and bartered for a Klee Kai and sent it to her for Christmas. The first Klee Kai arrived in the Continental United States in January of 1988.

"When we got that one down here, everybody just went crazy wanting one," said Gregory. "I kept bugging Linda until she finally said okay to breeding them. We went public in November of '88, with the Klee Kai of Alaska

Club (AKC).

Gregory explains, "The reason we've decided to retain our own registration is because if you go AKC, you have to turn over all your records, and AKC does not control breeding, they just register the dogs. AKC doesn't have anything to do with quality of puppies and production, and we want to control quality."

Klee Kai dogs sell for \$300-500, less than might be expected of such a rare breed. Gregory says the price is held down to prevent puppy mills, which breed valuable dogs for high profit.

"I'll sell a Klee Kai puppy for \$500, and if the owner voluntarily has the dog spayed or neutered within the first six months, I'll refund \$100. If the puppy does not qualify for the breeding program, I'll refund another \$100."

Eileen says most people wanting to buy a Klee Kai are people who want something that looks like a big dog but comes in a small package. "Most of the buyers are families, and they may live in an apartment. These little dogs can get enough exercise running around the house with the kids. And they can tolerate extreme temperatures like the Husky."

Though the Klee Kai has obvi-

Her kennels are immaculate, and her house does not smell of dog. She obviously takes a great deal of pride in her work and is rewarded by well-behaved, affectionate animals.

Asked if the daily workload ever gets to be overwhelming, Eileen says simply, "No. Greg and I are retired. There's nothing more that we can do; nobody else needs us. Our kids are in Alaska, our grandkids are in Alaska, my family is in Washington State, his is in New York State. We're here by ourselves. Nobody else could do with this breed what I'm doing with this breed, just like you know nobody else could raise your own children. And so I'm important again. This is my life."



photo submitted

These black and white puppies are a good example of what to look for in the facial mask of a Klee Kai.

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The Klee Kai are not currently included in the American Kennel

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Though the Klee Kai has obvious ties to the Husky, the Alaskan developer — Linda Spurlin — won't give away any details regarding the exact breeding formula.

"She kept the program under very close wraps for 15 years," said Gregory. "These dogs are not a case of downbreeding. Linda introduced other breeds, so it's not dwarfism. The recipe is on file in Alaska, but she won't give it out. The breed is so new, if she gave out how she did this, anybody else could do the same thing."

The Klee Kai is so popular these days that Eileen has a waiting list for puppies. "There's no way we can produce for the demand. So people pay \$100 down and then sign a contract telling me what they want in this dog. Then I have a year to fill their need."

If Klee Kai owners want to breed their dog, the animal must first pass a strict examination before being declared breeding quality. Should the dog fail the exam, it must be spayed or neutered and will be classified as pet quality. To name a few standards, all markings must be symmetrical in shape and color, height and weight must be within certain guidelines, the tail must curve correctly, and the teeth and jaw must be properly developed.

Eileen is on the KKA board in addition to serving as the organization's secretary. She helps conduct examinations on puppies and then sends all written material to Linda Spurlin in Alaska for a final determination. Eileen registers all puppies and keeps close track of breeding results. She keeps a duplicate set of complete records as a back-up to the originals in Alaska and updates those files daily.

And in her "spare" time, Eileen



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