

Alaskan Klee Kai History for American Kennel Club FSS Consideration

By Linda S. Spurlin – Developer of the Alaskan Klee Kai

The Alaskan Klee Kai have ancient roots descending from the numerous native dogs which have populated Alaska for thousands of years. Many of these dogs became not only loving family pets, but were crucial for survival for the tribal groups and nomadic people in the harsh environment of Alaska. They excelled at pulling sleds with heavy loads and supplies, hiking, hunting, tracking, and were early warning alerts for dangers such as wild animals or enemies approaching. Two of the largest groups of native dogs that make up the base of what became known as the Alaskan Husky type of dog are primarily from the Alaskan Interior Village dogs, and the Coastal Eskimo dogs, which appeared in multiple sizes, structures, and temperaments.

During the Alaskan gold rush mining years, they were bred to be companions, to haul supplies, and to make mail runs, with endurance, distance and speed abilities. Husky lines from Siberia, which were imported to Alaska in the early 1900's, were added to much of the Interior Alaskan village dog population as dog sled racing started to grow. In the late 1940's, with dog sled racing became a profitable occupation, the Alaskan mushers developed the little village dogs into the Alaskan Husky we know today, intelligent, vigorous, and hardworking, with a loyal and happy nature.

The Alaskan Klee Kai was developed in Alaska from these well-bred husky dogs, by Linda Spurlin and her family. In the early **1970's**, the Ken Spurlin family in Fairbanks, Alaska, started to breed a few smaller huskies after an accidental breeding between one of their sled dogs and a neighbor's unregistered small dog, thought to be an American Eskimo Dog, resulted in the best of both worlds: husky markings on a smaller dog. Most of these dogs went to friends and family who admired them, including one to his parents in Oklahoma, who bred a husky there, resulting in another perfect little husky. When Ken Spurlin's brother Richard, and his wife Linda, visited family in Oklahoma, Linda asked if she could take one of their many dogs, the little female husky, back to Alaska with them. This little gray and white husky called 'Curious' was so popular everywhere she went, with everyone that saw her, that the seed of intent was planted for the beginning of a long adventure. Soon other dogs were added into her husky breeding program to develop a smaller-sized version of the Alaskan Husky.

Before long, Ken Spurlin sold his breeding stock to Linda, adding more to her developing gene pool. Linda Spurlin carefully created the breed we see today, rigorously maintaining her own line of dogs, by carefully selecting the somewhat smaller dogs that met her high standards with a strict breeding program for good health, structure, temperament, soundness, beauty and size. This new breed, with the very distinctive contrasting symmetrical facial mask and markings, was given the name "Klee Kai", derived from Alaskan Athabaskan words meaning "little dog", which was later changed to "Alaskan Klee Kai" to denote the breed's place of origin.

When Eileen Gregory from Colorado was visiting her daughters in Alaska, she met Linda Spurlin and fell in love with her little house huskies. She started phoning regularly expressing her interest in obtaining a Klee Kai of her own. With growing interest in the breed generated from pictures she took when visiting Alaska, word of mouth, and the many visitors to see these dogs, Eileen began encouraging Linda to send some to her in the Continental United States for possible placement into carefully screened homes. In **1988** Linda and Eileen began working together with serious intentions of gaining recognition in the world of dogs for these unique little darlings. They also created what was to become the Alaskan Klee Kai Association of America (AKKAOA) to help educate others about this new breed. The Alaskan Klee Kai registry and breeding program was strictly monitored and recorded. All Alaskan Klee Kai had to undergo and pass an Adult Evaluation Exam to qualify as breeding quality.

In **1995** the Breed was recognized by the American Rare Breed Association (**ARBA**). In **1996** the Breed was recognized by the Federation of International Canines (**FIG**). Immediately after being recognized by ARBA, the dogs were being entered in the rare breed show rings, which brought them to the attention of the United Kennel Club. UKC requested Eileen to bring some of her dogs to their annual Premiere Show in Michigan so more of their judges could see and learn about them in person.

In January of **1997**, the United Kennel Club (**UKC**) gave full recognition to the Alaskan Klee Kai breed and took over ownership and responsibility for the breed's growing Registry. The breed made their UKC show ring debut at the UKC Premier Show in Kalamazoo, Michigan in June of 1997.

The Alaskan Klee Kai continually became more popular with growing interest generated in part from numerous American newspaper and magazine accounts of the new breed's progress, and a featured article in a dog magazine in England earlier in 1995. In **1997**, the first internet website for the Alaskan Klee Kai was established featuring pictures, information, and stories about the breed, creating a worldwide fascination with the breed and its history. The Alaskan Klee Kai have been 'on line' ever since in what has now become dozens of picturesque websites, chat groups, social media, and informational sites. This growing international interest has led to even more publicity, including being featured in articles in: Dog Fancy Magazine, Dog World, UKC's Bloodlines 1998, and even in a Japanese dog magazine. They were also featured in part of the National Geographic documentary entitled 'Designer Dogs'.

In the year **2000**, the first Alaskan Klee Kai was born outside of the United States, in Nottingham, England. Now, in **2020**, the breed is thriving, not only in Alaska and throughout the Continental United States, but also in Hawaii, and twenty (20) other countries around the globe.

Linda Spurlin, with the help of Eileen Gregory and many others, has successfully achieved her goal and dream to develop a beautiful, apartment-sized version of the Alaskan Husky. This new breed, much like their ancestors, is adaptable to multiple lifestyles, traveling, hiking, sports, entertainment, therapy and service, and most importantly, a loving companion dog for all ages. The Alaskan Klee Kai continues to improve, and bring love and joy to growing numbers of people around the world.

Sources: Linda S. Spurlin herself! 😊; AKKAOA history; and
A Deeper History of the Origins of The Alaskan Husky, A Study in Progress by Stephanie Little Wolf.