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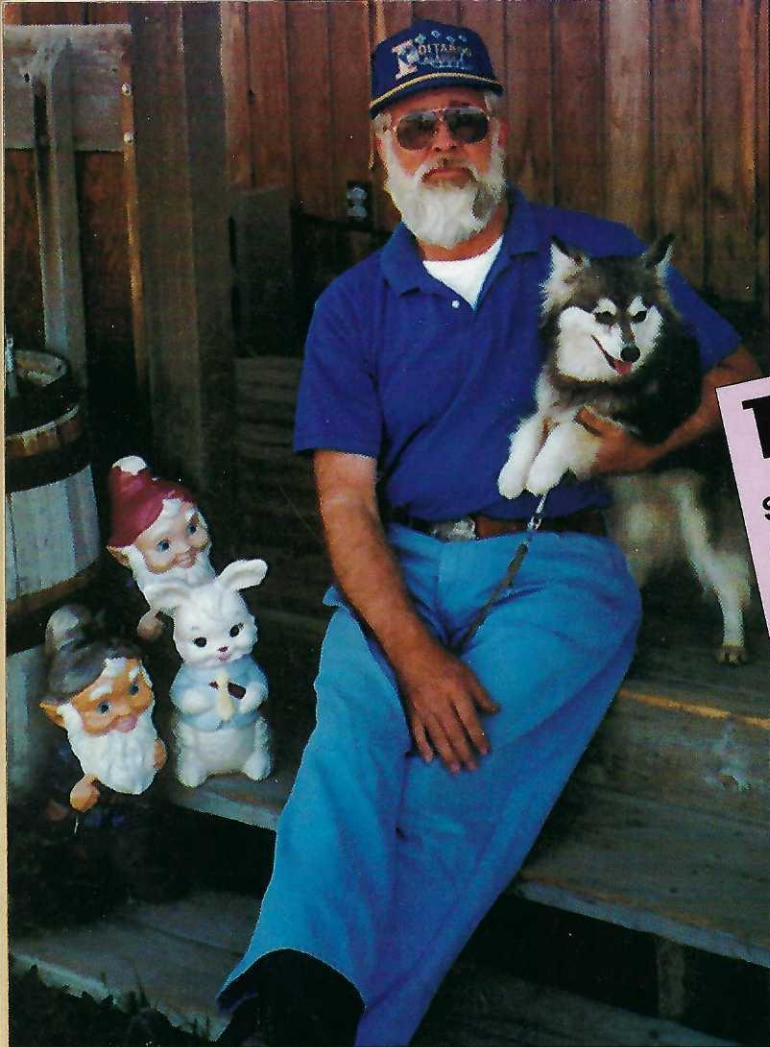


"Klee Kai"

The Legend

Somewhere, within the Great Land called Alaska, between the massive mountains, the vast oceans, the silent tundra and the endless sheets of ice, the Glacier Witch looked down and smiled at the bright-eyed tiny form in front of her. After rescuing it from the icy waters, and drying it before the fire, it appeared somewhat smaller than before, and she was pleased. For the little Husky's smaller size would make it an ideal companion. She searched the various native dialects and, deriving its name from the Eskimo words for 'little dog', she christened the masked creature, 'Klee Kai'.

L.S.



Clarence Gregory with Kivalina (adult female)



Photography: Martin White

(Above and below) Images we usually associate with the Alaskan Husky - these full-size sled-dogs were photographed by Martin White during a British Antarctic Survey expedition to Stonington island, on the western side of the Antarctic Peninsula.

Used for transporting food, fuel and equipment these strong dogs were direct descendants of Alaskan Huskies. Compare their size with the tiny Klee Kai!



Ice and Eskimos are the images we instantly associate with the Alaskan Husky: a strong, spunky sled-dog, striding swiftly through the snow - fifty pounds of fur and muscle, mushing methodically across a white, wintry wilderness.

But imagine for a moment, a 'small scale' Husky: Think of the distinctive facial mask with those alert, oval eyes of crystal blue or velvety brown. Visualise the full, loose tail, draping into a curl. Picture all such features in a SMALL dog - probably weighing ten to fifteen pounds, and measuring well under eighteen inches at the shoulder. Does such a breed exist? Yes, indeed. The Klee Kai is the Alaskan Husky in miniature.

The first time I noticed these little Huskies was whilst I was working at a busy dog-training establishment in the USA (This was at a dog-training 'co-operative' - a centre the size of a Superstore, open all day, seven days a week!) I was teaching basic obedience to a group of Colorado canines and their American owners.

Itsy bitsy Husky

The class consisted mostly of the larger breeds of dog, such as Dalmatians, Australian Shepherds

tiny Klee Kai came in, strutting smartly around the ring. A small-size dog with a great personality, this itty bitsy Husky was an obvious eye-catcher.

Some short pauses between the 'sits' and 'stays' gave me a chance to chat with Eileen Gregory, the Klee Kai breeder. She started to explain the origins and the history of the 'Husky in miniature':

Back in 1986, Eileen had made a journey to Wasilla, Alaska to visit her daughters, who introduced her to Linda Spurlin and the 'little Huskies'.

Finding the formula

Eileen explained: "I learnt that Linda had started working on the development of this breed after an accidental mating between a Husky and a neighbour's dog. Linda had been so pleased with this diminutive line that she had then studied everything possible to find out how to produce a consistently small size of Husky."

Eventually Linda found her formula, and then it was a task of spending a quiet fifteen years in a concentrated effort to establish a foundation stock. She was reluctant to allow any strangers to own her animals in case a less-devoted person might not enhance the breed.

Kai”

- the Alaskan Husky in miniature

BY MARIAN EVERLY



(Above) Williwaw (adult male Klee Kai Toy), weighs 9 ½ lbs

(Below) Kaiana and Juneau - both miniature Klee Kai's



her concerns,” said Eileen, “but I was also convinced that these canine creatures were worthy of being recognised in the world of dogs.”

Meanwhile the search was on for a suitable name for the new breed. Linda had discovered some delightful words amongst the native Eskimo dialects, resulting in the title, ‘Klee Kai’, which is a loose translation of ‘little dog’.

Eileen added: “I was so impressed with the Klee Kai that upon my return to Colorado, I presented Linda with some different ideas as to how she could allow the dogs to be amongst the public, yet continue to maintain a control over the production and quality of the puppies. I phoned her frequently. I wrote to her often and I asked my daughters to do the ‘local attack’. I felt honoured when Linda finally decided I was so dedicated to her dogs that she would allow me to own one.”

A future favourite

Known by the pet name of ‘Nikishka’, Eileen’s first Klee Kai made an immediate impression on the people of Colorado. Eileen was now more convinced than ever that here was one of the most popular breeds of tomorrow.

Eventually, in 1988, Eileen obtained Linda’s agreement that a Klee Kai club could be formed. Local veterinarians became very interested and enthusiastic about these little dogs, especially because of the genetic factor, with the strict rules governing which dogs were to be allowed into the breeding programme.

Our conversation continued with Eileen elaborating on the Buyer’s Agreement, which is included in the sale of every Klee Kai. The signed contract means that the Spurlin’s breeding techniques are carried through: “When a puppy reaches eight months of age, it must undergo various examinations. The resultant adult papers show which of the Klee Kai are suitable for breeding, whilst the pet quality puppies are ultimately neutered. We also request that the Klee Kai owners advise us of any medical worries with their dogs, or possible genetic faults that develop at a later age.”

There are currently several hundred Klee Kai in existence, with the majority living in Alaska or Colorado. Eileen Gregory now owns more Klee Kai than anyone else in the world.

Klee Kai characteristics

The Klee Kai is categorised into three sizes: under 10lbs for Toy, 10 - 15lbs for miniature, and 15 - 20lbs for Standard. These loyal, active little dogs are happy either indoors or outside. They seem to survive well in all types of weather - from Rocky Mountain rainshowers to sleet, snow and sunshine!

I had many opportunities to teach and watch the Klee Kai at the dog training school. They are attractive and intelligent. The temperament is similar to some Shelties - that is to say, friendly amongst their family, but rather reserved towards strangers, with a tendency to be territorial. The restriction of the breeding

programme has resulted in the Klee Kai continuing to be a very rare breed, but also extremely healthy.

Eileen’s records indicate that an average litter is three or four puppies. She recalled, “Only three Klee Kai have been known to whelp the largest litter size of six, and it is not uncommon for a bitch to produce only one or two pups.”

Dogged devotion

In recent years the Klee Kai Registry, the New Board of Directors, the Parent Club and all the records have been moved to Colorado. This “lightened the load” from Linda Spurlin following a few health problems. Eileen remarked: “I am now the Registrar, which means a lot more volunteer-work, but I have the time and the necessary devotion to the breed, so I don’t mind at all.”

Summarising, Eileen concluded, “It is our goal to continue with the top quality

breeding programme. Having very good co-operation from the owners, such as feed-back of any occasional problems, we hope to keep the Klee Kai at its current high standard, and maybe even improve upon the breed as time goes by.”

So, have you, too, always longed for an Alaskan Husky? Have you hesitated because the extent of the Frozen North makes your own home seem as small as a doll’s house? Do you lack the energy to live in harmony with a bigger breed? Would a large dog leap over all of your fences? Whatever the reason, if you are in love with the sled-dog look, but you would prefer a ‘half-pint’ size, then a cute Klee Kai just might be the right dog for you!

If you would like a contact address for Eileen Gregory: please send a SAE to Marian Everly, c/o PetDogs Magazine, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS