

The Love of an Alaskan Malamute

by Nina Blackwood (1998.) (copyright Nina Blackwood)

When my good friend Bernadette Quercio asked me if I'd be interested in writing an article about Alaskan Malamutes, I was more than happy to commit some thoughts to paper.

For the past 11 years I have been honored with the presence and companionship of the one of a kind Malamute Chudoveshe (Chuee--for short.) I have been an animal lover all my life, and as a little girl was proud of the fact that I had practically memorized the entire "Encyclopedia of Dog Breeds" from cover to cover. I could spot a Visla or a Komondor a mile away and be able to expound on their entire history and breed standards. I couldn't wait to go to the dog shows with my parents and vowed one day that I would own one of every breed!



Nina Blackwood here photographed with Horst Kranz. Visit Nina's website!<http://angellesmusic.com/ninablackwood/index.html>

The Alaskan Malamute always intrigued me because of their wolf-life appearance and the dignity they seemed to possess. In fact the first song I ever wrote for some inexplicable reason was entitled "Malamutes Revenge."

Much later as an adult, I was staying at the home of a dear friend who had two Alaskan Malamutes. That was it!! Jenny the female was quite a talker and would constantly speak the immutable Malamute language. The very sounds by the way, which influenced George Lucas to create the special language for the "Star Wars" character Chubacca.

Having just moved back to L.A. from NYC, I was anxious to get a house and of course, a dog. I found out about Artic-Luv Kennels from several people that were in the entertainment industry. I made an appointment to go see a litter.

Well...it was love at first sight! Five roly-poly bunches of fur with legs and tails. I melted right there on the spot.

There was one who stuck out though, affectionately nick-named "the burnt hot-dog" because he was almost completely dark grayish -black. He was definitely the "alpha" male. That was the guy for me!! Homewood bound just in time for Christmas!

There are so many memorable stories and adventures that Chuee and I have shared over the years. Too many to even write about at this time. His first blue ribbon, when I found myself crying with pride like some demented Miss America contestant. Or the time that he broke out of the fence and squeezed his 110 lb. body through the neighbors miniature poodle size doggie door. Police were summoned by the 80 year old woman resident who thought he was a wolf. They arrived guns cocked, when one of the officers recognized Chuee as being the dog that he was. Turns out the patrolman was a Malamute owner himself and in fact had bought his dog from the same breeder. Fortunately no harm was done except for a few more gray hairs on the dear lady's head.

Which brings me to the issue of how often times Malamutes are erroneously mis-judged to be vicious or ill-tempered. This is due primarily to their "wolf-like" appearance and in no way because of the breed's true temperament. As we all now know, wolves themselves are not deserving of their own maligned reputation.

I have found malamutes to be great loving, intelligent, happy breed. Somewhat independent and proud and maybe not as placating as let's say Retrievers. But nonetheless a breed who respects the human bond.

Key word R-E-S-P-E-C-T!! Precisely because of the breed's degree of intelligence, a Malamute owner earns the respect of the dog. Establishing yourself both gently and firmly as the "pack leader" so to speak will assure a

rewarding and loving relationship with the animal. As one gentleman, Roger Carris put it, “there are no bad dogs, only bad owners.” I couldn’t agree with him more.

Alaskan Malamutes are strong and healthy breed. However, there is a problem which has been brought to my attention over the years, that of Chondrodysplasia or CHD, commonly referred to as “dwarfism”. This is a genetic deformity which affects the dog’s bones most noticeable the front legs creating a distinctly bowed appearance. This along with canine hip-dysplasia is heart breaking conditions which must be addressed more aggressively through research and the increased study and knowledge of genetics. Work has been carried on in this area by THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB CANINE HEALTH FOUNDATION and I sincerely support their efforts.

Sadly this past August Chuee passed away he was a victim of stomach cancer (12 years old). All of us who have ever been close to an animal are aware of the pain that goes along with losing a great companion. Despite the affection I have for my many cats and precocious Lhasa Apso, Wizard, Chuee was ultimately my best pal through thick and thin. Even during his grave illness he displayed a pride and dignity that any human being could learn from. There was a bond with him which can only be described as soul to soul. Malamutes are truly a soulful breed. Their love goes beyond the norm. He will forever live in my heart.

As I write this I have another blessed being lying at my feet. A five month old furry angel named Krsna. And yes. Of course he’s a wonderful Alaskan Malamute. He is not a replacement for Chuee, one simply does not replace animals as if they were parts of a car. He is his own beautiful soul. Once again that special bond has been established and he rarely leaves my side and is happy just being alive. Everyday I wake up and can’t wait to be greeted by his special Malamute language and his unconditional love. He brightens my spirit. He is the embodiment of Joy and Love.

The Love of a Malamute....a prize to be treasured.

Nina Blackwood is one of many celebrities who share our love for the breed and have provided support for DNA studies for the Alaskan Malamute.