

The
SAMOYED
QUARTERLY



Summer 1978

\$3.50

SAMOYED PEOPLE

The Samoyed Quarterly Talks With
MEL AND MIRIAM LASKEY
Suruka Orr Kennels
Madison, Wisconsin

Interview and photographs by John and Kathy Ronald in May, 1978 at the Laskey home in Madison, Wisconsin.

How did you first get started in Samoyeds?

MIRIAM - Well, years and years ago we saw a picture of a Sammie and decided to buy one. So we borrowed some money and bought one. This was about 1946-7, somewhere in there. We were in Minneapolis and were short of funds at that time for some reason, so we borrowed \$35 from my mother to carry us until the next payday, and on the way home we stopped in to see a litter. And, we bought a pup. We lost that pup to distemper about four months later. He had had his shots, but in those days the shots were not as effective as they are today.

Then we had a Collie for 12 years. After we lost it we decided that we didn't want another Collie because the breed had changed, and we didn't like the long, narrow muzzles of the current Collies. So, we had to start considering other breeds again. We ended up owning another Samoyed.

MEL - We went to a number of shows, I think we went to Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Detroit and other shows to look at Sammies. In the meantime, we had contacted someone in one of the suburbs of Madison, here, I don't remember her name anymore, but she sent us some Samoyed Club of America bulletins and we got the name of Estalene Beckman. At the Milwaukee show we saw Joyce Cain's "Frosty" - Froststar's Tundra Star Frost. She was a big female, and because we had come from a Collie, we thought a big female was what we wanted. Most people with first dogs don't pay attention to quality. It is what you come out of, what you are familiar with, that you look for.

MIRIAM - Then, we contacted Estalene Beckman, who had a litter at that time. And, for the benefit of some of those who have mentioned that no one - no breeder, will fault a dog, Estalene Beckman sent us a letter in which she faulted the dogs of this breeding. Because she did this we felt that this might be the place to go. And when we got the dog - she had two pups there and wanted one of them shown. We wanted a dog we could show. We had been in obedience and we wanted a dog we could show sometimes, too. We didn't much care if it was a top winner, we didn't care if it won or lost. Then, of course, the usual thing happened - we won and we were hooked.

The sire and dam of the pup - Ch. Kusang of Northern Frost was the sire, and the dam was Tundra Princess Starya. The pup we got turned out to be Canadian and American Champion Froststar's Tanara.

We started showing with this bitch. Eventually, we got to the point where we decided we wanted some of her get, so we bred to a dog from California lines, from Margaret Tucker. The dog was from her breeding, owned by the Belton's in Winnipeg, Canada. The dog was American and Canadian Ch. Karzak of Encino.

Six pups resulted, and we kept one who became Canadian and American Ch. Suruka Orr's Ziru Tu, C.D. Then, later on we bred Ch. Froststar's Tanara again, this time to Canadian and American Ch. Maga Dan of Snowland, C.D., also a Canadian dog from Toronto, owned by the Bob Bremmers.

Five pups came out of that litter. From that we kept one bitch - Am. and Can. Ch. Kuei of Suruka



Orr, C.D., who is the dam of Ch. Kipperic Kandu of Suruka Orr, C.D., BIS winner, owned by the Hodges.

How many litters did you have in total?

MEL - Six total. Of these, we had nine champions; one out of the first litter, two out of the second litter, none out of the third, three out of the fourth litter. And, the fifth litter had three, the sixth none so far.

In the first litter - that was strange. There was a bitch that would have finished but she was run over. The other two males - one was never finished, but had three majors, and the other one had two majors but was never finished for various reasons.

MIRIAM - I am not sold on champions. I would breed to a dog if the dog was all there, regardless of whether he had been shown or not.

Were all of these breedings linebreedings?

MIRIAM - I don't specifically believe in linebreeding. I also do believe in outcrosses, and most of those breedings were outcrosses. Unless you have - unless your line is completely clear, I would not do any inbreeding at all.

MEL - Our inbred litter was probably the worst we did. We did one - half brother, half sister, breeding that was Ziru and Kuei. Two of that litter should have been shown. One of them was never shown and the other died in a freak accident. He liked to lie under cars in the driveway and one night a friend was in the driveway, started up the car and drove over him. They were going to show him as soon as he matured a little. Another pup in that litter was shown a couple of times but he wasn't show quality.

When do you think an outcross breeding should be used?

MIRIAM - I think it should be used if you can find something that will definitely compliment the dog you are trying to breed to. I believe more in breeding dog to dog than pedigree to pedigree. Oh, I like pedigree too, but if I see a very good dog, regardless of what the background is...well, not regardless of what the background is. I do need to know the background far enough back to take a chance.

How did you go about choosing a stud dog?

MIRIAM - The dog was usually something I looked





Am. & Can. Ch. Suruka Orr's Ziru Tu, C.D.



Am. & Can. Ch. Kuei of Suruka Orr, C.D.

at and liked. On our first breeding, Estalene Beckman suggested a couple of dogs and I don't remember how we came to pick out Karzak. Possibly because we had known the woman who had originally owned him in Minnesota and she had given us good advice on buying a puppy. Somewhere along the line, in the show ring, or outside, I want to see the stud. Karzak was the only one we didn't see, but Estalene recommended him.

In our breeding with Maga Dan, Estalene went with me for the breeding and that turned out well too.

MEL - When we were out west we had seen Helene Spathold and Ch. Rokandi of Drayalene, and we really liked him. When we got around to consider breeding to him, unfortunately, he was no longer around. Chief (Ch. Nachalnik of Drayalene) was the next best thing, a good dog, and not too far away.

One exhibitor at the 1967 Specialty told me that Chief had the soundest puppies around and coming from her, I figured it was a pretty good recommendation. So, the more and more we thought about it the more we liked the idea. So, we bred to Chief. After the pups were born we were very happy. That was the only litter we never had a chance to advertise. We had some people who wanted pick of the litter and wanted a female. But they decided to take a male because they were in the type of neighborhood that if the dog would run, it would be safer to have a male.

So, Don and Dorothy Hodges ended up taking a female - Kandi. It was the only breeding we did to Chief. There were two other bitches in the litter and both are champions. The males didn't do as well.

What do you do to prepare for a breeding?

MIRIAM - Well, I don't have any special preparations, except that I don't want the bitch overweight. I usually don't help the litter along, I let the bitch do the work.

In the first litter we had, though, the first puppy came breech. By breech I don't mean tail first, I mean crosswise. And, one front leg and rear leg came out and the bitch couldn't get rid of the rest of the pup. I had never had any experience with anything of this sort, but apparently nature has a way of telling you what to do. I went and got a warm towel and with each pressure I pushed the pup back in until it finally turned. I was scared!

We whelped all of our litters at home, except one. That was whelped at the boarding kennel - not intentionally. The bitch was being boarded at the time and we thought we had plenty of time. We had come home from a show and instead of calling the kennel, we thought we'd leave the dogs in one more night because we were going to a wedding the next day. About 6:00 a.m. they called and said, "Will you please

come out and get your litter?" They had Irish Setters, and came out in the morning and found four pups, and by the time we got out there, there were seven.

That was the only litter that wasn't whelped next to our bed in the bedroom. We were told before our first litter, "Don't put the whelping box in another room," because we'd be up all night checking on what each little sound means. So, we put it close by, so we could get some sleep. We whelped each litter right next to the bed so that I could just lean over and look and be sure that everything was going all right.

Fortunately, all the bitches that we have had have done their own thing all the way through the whelping. There has been no necessity to help.

We have had to help at the breeding a couple of times when the bitches wouldn't stand still.

At what age do you wean your pups?

MIRIAM - When the bitch looks like she is getting uncomfortable - usually 3 to 6 weeks. As soon as their eyes are open and they can eat, I supplement with scraped beef and milk.

How important do you think socialization of puppies is?

MIRIAM - I think socialization is important. I don't know if it affects their show ability, but I think it makes a more loving pup, a pup who will go to people. I don't want pups who are afraid. I think if you don't let people socialize with them you'll have pups that will scamper when people come around.

MEL - We didn't do a good job on this last litter, and it showed on the two males that we have. We didn't get them out. The little female, either we got her out more, or she has enough spunk in her. As a matter of fact, that is why Miriam wanted to keep her. She reminded her of her great grandmother, Tana. She was an arrogant bitch, a bitchy bitch.

How do you place puppies in homes?

MIRIAM - I am a nasty seller when it comes to puppies. Breed magazines in those days were not what they are today. We advertised mostly in the paper. We used the Chicago papers, we didn't have too much luck advertising in Madison or Milwaukee. We advertised in Minneapolis and sold some pups there.

We ask the buyers what kind of area they have for the dogs. Have they ever had dogs before? Do they follow instructions? All kinds of nasty questions.

We still made mistakes. Everyone has that problem. People come across better than they really are. Some people can talk a great story without having any back-up.

When do you start evaluating the puppies?

I'm a little like Lila Weir. I pick a favorite out of the litter from the beginning. Then I have someone come in and help me evaluate.

I look for strong puppies right straight through: good head, good formation, good rear, good front, good everything if you can get it all in one pup. But, you can't, so you have to take what you think is most important at the time.

I want to be sure that they aren't undershot or overshot. That would be very important because you wouldn't want problems of that kind. I think if I had a pup like that I probably could cull it, although I have never been called upon to do that. But, that means that the pup wouldn't really eat properly, and a lot of other things could happen and I wouldn't want that.

We lift the pup up...I don't know how to describe it...to see how they come down on their feet. What the tail set is, that's important, but not too important.

In just about everything I've bred I've tried to breed for small ears and have never gotten them. Our dogs have fairly good sized ears. Maga Dan had the most beautiful little ears you ever saw in your life. I didn't get one pup like that. But, maybe it is just as well, because maybe I would have taken the pup with the small ears whether he or she was good, bad or indifferent, as far as the rest of him was concerned.

What kind of guarantee do you have on your pups?

MIRIAM - Verbally we guarantee against hip dysplasia, and of course, PRA was not one of the factors when we were breeding. At least, it was a factor we didn't know about.

We don't believe in co-ownerships. If there is anything wrong with the pup I'll take it back and give their money back in full. I want no part of it. If there is a co-ownership I don't go along with it. There are too many pitfalls. We've seen a few of them and, of course, years ago they didn't write the contracts they write today. Maybe today I would do it differently. But, I don't think so. I try to keep in touch with people who have bought puppies from me. I want to know how those puppies are doing later on.

If I sold a pup to a show home and the people did not want to show, I might try to get a dog back again, but I think that is pretty difficult. I don't think the breeder has any rights to a dog as far as real rights after the buyer has learned to love the dog and have purchased the dog. The only things you

Am. & Can. Ch. Frostar's Tanara, "Tana"



Misty and Suruka, Sled Dogs at 7 weeks (Feb. 1963)



Am. & Can. Ch. Frostar's Tanara - Am. & Can. Ch. Suruka Orr's Ziru Tu, C.D.

can do are to use as much influence as possible with them.

What if you placed a pet puppy and the owners decide to show?

MIRIAM - In most cases where that had happened, and it has happened with a dog that was a Champion and is a stud dog for many of the dogs in the Minneapolis area. I tried to discourage them from showing because that dog, in my opinion, was too big. The dog really went to town. It wasn't one of our puppies, but it was by one of our studs. They went ahead and showed, and it turned out beautifully.

Has Hip Dysplasia or PRA affected your breeding program?

MIRIAM - Well, we have always asked for x-rays. We have had hip dysplasia. I think it has touched most everyone who has been around awhile.

MEL - On PRA, I guess we've been a little bit negligent because we have never had any eye problems that we have come across and because we haven't been doing much breeding, none at all lately, we haven't checked on it.

MIRIAM - I do feel that if a dog is affected with HD, the owners should be allowed to show the dog. I don't think they should be restricted.

What do you feel is most important in structure? What would you give the most prominence?

MIRIAM - I think movement is the most important. Certainly not coat! We both agree that there is an over-emphasis on coat in the show ring. I don't like it hanging and dripping. I think a proper coat is the coat that a working dog, a dog in harness, would have.

As far as head is concerned, I'm just like the rest of them, I like a pretty head. And, as far as type is concerned, I also go along with the fact that there is no specific type. Some of our heads are longer and some are shorter. And the same is true with the dog. I don't like a real pushed-in face.

MEL - We didn't like the "bear" type until we got some. In other words, we like what we've got. I think that's more or less true.

MIRIAM - We're satisfied with what we've got as far as head is concerned, except for the ears and I was very disappointed as far as that.

What do you consider an ideal front and rear?

MIRIAM - Well, certainly not wide in front, and I don't like the rear too wide either. It should conform to the pulling power of the dog. The dog has to be able to pull and if his legs are way out, he can't do that.

What about height? Do you think the Standard should have a height disqualification?

MIRIAM - No. Not to me. Not to what work I think the dog is bred to do.

MEL - At one time I was promoting the idea of increasing the height tolerance, because it was wider in some other breeds. I figured that there was no reason why Sammies couldn't have the same minimum or maximum as some other breeds - another half-inch or inch. Because they do vary, and I don't think it makes much difference whether a dog is smaller or larger, if it is good and well-balanced.

MIRIAM - I can't say I was indifferent to size because we started off liking the bigger dog. Coming from a Collie, naturally, we would. Tarma, the bitch we have now, I think is a bit of a throwback. I don't know where she came from because I never had one that small before. And, when we were out in the Northwest a few years ago, one of the real old breeders said that she thought she could trace the reason for her being small, a throwback, and somehow we were short of time and never got there to find out. She is much smaller than anything else...she is the smallest thing we have ever bred. She is middle of the bitch Standard, but looks tiny.

I don't like oversize bone. Not too much, but not too little either. Both are bad because the dog can't do the job he was intended to do.

Do you see any particular serious faults in Samoyeds today?

MIRIAM - This is really going to throw somebody, but I think overgrooming. To the tune of making some enemies, I think that when coats are cut too much it is bad. I don't think that the judges in the show ring should be encouraged to like a dog where the paw and foot are cut, where the foot is bald even though the foot is not actually bald on that dog. I don't care for that. The reason we got into Samoyeds was because we didn't have to do much grooming. We didn't have to do the cutting. I don't like tipped ears. I like a natural dog. Too much hair is not good either, but I don't like clipping. I don't clip whiskers on my dogs either. I only trim the pads to keep them from slipping. If you are good at it, you could give a different look to a dog.

Structure wise, I don't think there is much difference from the dogs of 10 or 15 years ago. They are pretty much the same as now, much more so than in other breeds.

One thing I see that I don't like is round eyes.

MEL - There are such a variety of faults. They run the gamut and you see them here and there over the years. So, you just say, this dog has that fault, that one has a different one.

MIRIAM - Ever since we saw a prick-eared Collie go up to its Championship in Canada, I figured that there are different kinds of faults. The dog was beautiful except for the prick ears, which Collies are not supposed to have. I think those things are kind of trivial if most of the dog is correct.

Did you attend many Canadian shows?

MIRIAM - We lived in Duluth for some years, and, of course, Canadian shows were closer to us. When we bred, we bred to dogs in Canada. It just happened that the dogs I wanted to breed to lived up there. We belong to the kennel club up there. We are charter members of the Duluth club and still belong.

MEL - We had been to some of the Canadian shows long before we had anything to show. Just because it was fun. When we first started showing Tana, we

weren't thinking about a Canadian Championship, but after we were successful and bred her to a Canadian dog, we got interested.

So, we went up to Winnipeg to show and she was the only bitch. Even at the Winnipeg show, which is big. It was a two-day show and we only stayed for one day.

At that time they didn't hold shows on Sunday, so a two-day show was a Friday and Saturday which meant you had to take off a couple of days from work to get there.

Then, later on, we kept going to a few Winnipeg shows. We had friends up there and went to what is now Thunder Bay. Those are nice shows.

For many years we had the only Samoyeds entered and the show's total entry would be a little over 100 dogs, all breeds. So, they were sort of relaxed and informal. There wasn't much pressure. We really enjoyed it.

MIRIAM - When we finished Kuei though, we ran into something rather interesting. They brought a whole bunch of Samoyeds over from Winnipeg because they all thought it would be a small show. We were just going to start Kuei up there. It is a long trip up there from here. We went and kind of scuttled the show. Three shows in three days and Kuei was a Champion. She was about 6. The people were not very happy.

We went to the Toronto show - the Sportsman's shows, and were told up there by someone who will be nameless that, in her opinion, we didn't have Samoyeds. I was very flippant and I turned around and said that we didn't like lap dogs where we come from. Their dogs were so much smaller.

This same little dog also was at the show in Thunder Bay when Kuei finished, and, of course, they didn't like that.

As you come west in Canada, the dogs seem to get a little bigger. On the whole, the dogs are as good as in the U.S. They used to go by the English Standard and they measure a little differently.

The Hodges were over in England, and they didn't think the dogs were appreciably smaller than the ones here.

Maga Dan wasn't a big dog. He was about - just as big as Tana - top of the bitch Standard.

Did you always handle your own dogs?

MEL - Most of the time. Sometimes Don Hodges showed our dogs. I'm a lousy handler.

MIRIAM - And, I won't get in the ring.

MEL - In one show in Duluth, Tana took the breed and was pulled out for additional consideration in the Group. She didn't make it and a friend of ours said to me, "Whatever she does she does for herself, you don't do a thing for her." But, she couldn't tell me what to do differently, except run her on a loose lead.

When she was behaving she would show herself. When she wasn't behaving I couldn't do anything. She was a little bitch, when she wasn't in the mood, I could hardly handle her. There were times when we'd go past the gate of the ring, and she'd be laying practically on her side, pawing, trying to get out of the ring. The first time we showed her she turned over on her back and pawed the air when the judge came up to examine her.

Has handling changed since you first got into dogs?

MEL - There were quite a few professional handlers but not in Sammies. We very seldom saw any. The sporting dogs and terriers had the most handlers. We had no handling classes. You go in the ring and tried it on your own.

MIRIAM - That is why I prefer obedience.

MEL - We had done stewarding and I could tell somebody else what to do when I saw them, but when I got in the ring none of those suggestions seemed to work out for me.

MIRIAM - When Mel walks, he has a bouncy gait and that doesn't show the dog off very well. You tend to look at him. I think people are much more finished in the ring now. When people go into the ring, they are not the novices that we saw. I'm not sure that that is good.

For a while there was a suggestion that handlers that had dogs should have a different show or class than novices, or people that are breeding and showing their own dogs. Nowadays so many of the breeders go in and are so much better than some of the pro handlers were years ago.

We're not in that class, incidentally.

I can see the judge's point of view that when a person gets into the ring a dog should be well handled. But I do think that the judges should pay more attention to the dog, irrespective of the handler.

Do you remember your first show?

MEL - The first show we entered Tana in was here in Madison. She took Reserve. In those days you put everything you had into a show, trying to boost the entry. And, there were more trophies given in those days by people trying to get the entry up.

You were also glad to see your competitors, even though they might beat you, because, heck, you didn't want to be the only one in that sex, or class.

MIRIAM - We used to do a lot of entertaining for people who would come up with Sammies because we didn't have much of a show for Sams. Then I heard after we won one day, "Well, of course, they probably knew the judge." I thought, "No way. From now on we don't show here."

Then the show built up so we didn't really have to support the entry so we don't show locally.

MEL - I looked up the point scale last night. When we started showing Tana, 2 dogs made 1 point. Four dogs made a 3-point major. On the west side of the Mississippi a 5-point major was 7 dogs and 6 bitches. On this side, it was 9 dogs and 7 bitches. And, it was hard to find majors.

MIRIAM - There weren't as many shows either. We went quite a way to shows and were told a couple of times that we were out of our territory.

MEL - There are a lot more shows now. When we started, we had Milwaukee and Madison and Lake Geneva. Now there are a lot, almost every weekend.

There weren't many people showing Sammies when we started. Half a dozen or so Samoyeds was a pretty good show.

Some of the people we competed with were Bernice Heagy, Juliet Goodrich, Ethel Smith of Milwaukee. Ethel had King of Walin - he was 12½ years old when he won his last Best of Breed at a show.

MIRIAM - Juliet Goodrich didn't get into the ring. Most times she used Virginia Hardin as a handler. She was hard to beat. Juliet was a wonderful person.

MEL - One thing that I regret was that I never had a show picture taken. I figured that I could take my own pictures, all I wanted, which I did. I used to take a lot of pictures at shows and, as a matter of fact, at one of the Canadian shows a photographer said that if his camera broke he would come to me for pictures.

Which of your dogs was your biggest winner?

MEL - Tana was our best, I'm sure. Actually, we didn't realize how good she was. We didn't know enough about it. Miriam never could see the point in campaigning a bitch, so after she finished we seldom showed her.

That is interesting considering that you bred a bitch - Kandi, who was Top Winning Samoyed...

MIRIAM - Yes, fortunately the Hodges didn't listen to me when I tried to discourage them. During the time she was winning to her championship, I was thrilled, but when they started campaigning I thought,

"Why?" Because she was a bitch. I figured a male should be campaigned for stud service and advertising. But what is the point of advertising a bitch?

MEL - I didn't agree with her there.

Do you think diet is important in raising a dog? What did you feed your dogs?

MEL - Yes, it is important. We have fed different foods at different times. At one time we used one of the lesser-known brands because a friend of ours was selling it and it seemed to be a good food. We have changed from brand to brand.

We do supplement the dog's food with meat. It is either meat that we buy at a slaughter house or butcher shop or canned meat. And, we have always fed some hard boiled eggs.

The puppies, of course, had their special diet.

Have you worked your dogs in obedience, or in sledding?

MEL - We both did obedience work with the dogs. Lately, Miriam doesn't work with the dogs between classes, I usually do. I am now working with Sarmik. He is stubborn and is developing faults in his obedience work. Sams are considered to be hard to train and generally I've found that.

Now, Ziru was easy. He was trained mostly at classes and went through to his title in three trials with good scores.

I think Sams are intelligent, they can figure out how to do all the obedience things a different way each time. They are original.

MIRIAM - We have also worked our dogs in harness. We have three lakes here in Madison, and we would go out with friends and work the dogs with sleds. I have a friend that offered to buy some reindeer if I would give him a Sam, but I have never tried herding.

What do you think is the ideal Samoyed temperament?

MIRIAM - Beautiful! I think it is very important that temperament be maintained in the Samoyed. Overbreeding and inbreeding can spoil that good temperament. We have seen two Sams lately that have had bad temperaments.

What advice would you have to offer people just starting out in Samoyeds?

MIRIAM - Buy a good dog to start with. You have to take the word of the breeder, and that always isn't the best word in the world, unfortunately.

MEL - I would check with other breeders about a line that I was interested in, if I didn't know myself. You probably wouldn't get everyone to agree but you could try to analyze the answers that you got, and try to figure out which are sour grapes and which are friends or relatives. And, at least if you were able to ask several people, you could get a pretty good idea.

If you decide to show, don't get mad. Sportsmanship is very important.

You now have four Samoyeds?

MIRIAM - Yes, three of them were from the same litter, Ch. Kipperic Kandu and our Ziru. We leased Kandi back for the breeding. We wanted one more litter out of Ziru. KoKo, Sarmik and Tarma are all out of this litter. They are 6 years of age. Neko is our other dog, and he is 11.

How long have you lived here, and what do you do for a living?

We have lived here 20 years. Mel is from St. Paul and I am from Milwaukee.

Mel has spent about a third of a century in broadcasting as a radio and TV engineer. I manage a stationery department.

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