

## Things My Mal Told Me – Part Deux

As I had mentioned last issue, when I picked up Kelsey, my first Malamute, I really did not know what I was getting into. The breeders had filled me in on the obvious, what kind of food they recommended, how much and how often. Other than that not much else was said. I don't blame those folks, they were busy with young children a whack of Malamutes, times were economically difficult and they were glad to get another puppy off the lot. It was obvious they were struggling and it was not long afterwards that they got out of the kennel business, sold their place in the country and moved on.

From that experience I learned that as a breeder I should be prepared for any eventuality. I should be ready to handle all the puppies I produce in case no-one comes to be a forever-home for them. I should be ready to handle what to do if I were to lose my job or suffer some disability, or any other kind of circumstance that would make keeping the kennel operational at least for the ones I own. I should also be able to take back any puppy I produce no matter what the circumstance. These are all things I realised and figured out between getting my first Malamute and, ten years later, beginning my own kennel. These should do's, plus others, have become standard practice for me.

Because I believe the Alaskan Malamute to be a tremendous dog, I became an advocate of and for them and came to think, as a breeder of these grand dogs, I should be expected to be the 'authority' on this animal I am breeding and selling to the public. I should be able to ask a potential client how much research they have done with canine breeds and why they chose this one to be a part of their life. I should also be able to provide complete information about the breed as well. I should be conversant with the Standard of Origin, and any health issues, both general to the breed and specific to my line. I should also be able to direct people to places of further information, whether they are books, websites or other individuals. Also, and most importantly, I should be an active and scrupulous evaluator of potential owners of my puppies. Money should never outweigh the future life of one of my puppies. Never.

As a puppy buyer, well, the list of things to know and ask is even longer. The difficulty here is the potential buyer doesn't know about the 'list' of things to consider when they begin. I know I sure didn't. There were lots of things I should have considered, but had to learn the hard way. Some of the best examples are what to do with a six month old Malamute who has been used to playing with siblings then becoming the only animate thing in the house while I was at work. A chair, some pillows and furniture legs later I realised that poor Kelsey was lonely and bored during the day. I quickly made a kennel outside for her to stay in while I went out to work and learned from neighbours that she cried for most of the day. Another interesting effect came when I changed dog food without the knowledge of doing so, gradually leading to many small but quite 'messy' presents left on the hardwood in the hallway.

Of course, a year later I decided it would be 'good' for Kelsey to have a playmate and thus entered Mackenzie to our lives. He was the only four legged creature to ever exist in the same space and time as Kelsey. She was horribly dog aggressive and this led to many

other issues I had to contend with as we ventured out into the world. Mack, however, could calm her down and play to her maternal instincts. He suffered a couple of times by venturing where angels feared to tread, but in the end, they became inseparable. On one occasion I left Mack in the yard as I took Kelsey down to the vet who lived a mere few blocks from the house. Mack screamed like he was being slaughtered and I remember saying to Kelsey's worried looks back, "It's alright he'll quit soon." And indeed he did as we continued on our way. Some moments later I heard heavy footfalls come running from behind us and sure enough here he came at a full gallop. I looped the two together with my leash and went to the vet's office. When I returned home I found four six foot tall fence boards laying fanlike in the alley. Mack had simply put his head down and blasted through the fence. I just laughed and hugged him and went about nailing the boards back on.

Mack left us early at seven years of age. He introduced me to veterinary medicine. His life was not an easy for one so talented at making everyone love him and immediately want to embrace him. At four years of age he developed Wobblers Syndrome for which he endured cervical fusion surgery and required he be taken to my school, carried up three flights of stairs and spend the day in my classroom. Lugging 125 pounds was a bit of chore, but if I needed to leave my class for any reason he had 10 attendees at any moment to look after him. At 7 years of age he developed Hemolytic Anemia which eventually took his life. I had never seen an animal grieve before, didn't even think it was possible, and I truly learned of the bond between Kelsey and Mack as I watched her slump around the house and yard for many weeks. Many times we just sat, with Kelsey leaning on my shoulder, on the steps of the back deck. I believe we did feel each other's pain. She lived on for 4 more years.

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Oh, yes there is much to learn as both buyer and/or breeder. All breeders start off as buyers and I am sure I have left much out and that many of you can relate to some of the issues I have mentioned. Please send me your stories of things your Malamute has told you that you wish your breeder had, others would like to hear and learn from these stories. Until next time ...Frank