

MUSH WITH PRIDE News

Providing Responsible Information on a Dog's Environment - Number 30, Summer 2005



Letter from the President

Dear Fellow Mush with PRIDE Members:

If I had any doubt that PRIDE was a far reaching organization, it was brought home once again during our June meeting. In spite of relatively short notice, we had interest from Maine, California, Alaska (of course!) and our news letter editor from Brisbane Australia. Jacqueline's comment to the effect of "I hope you aren't planning too much for me to do during the next couple months because it is the heart of our winter" made me realize that the most visible part of our sport, running dogs, takes place any time of the year somewhere in the world. And it is PRIDE's job to make sure that mushers world wide have access to the information they need to make better decisions about the care they give their dogs. As we all know, there is a lot more to good dog care than running down the trail, and good dog care will make runs that much more successful and satisfying.

In that vein, I'm pleased to say that we continue to get notifications of kennels that have gone through PRIDE's inspection program, and I hope that we see even more interest because of the letter that just went out to over 150 mushing related kennels and tour operators. As mentioned many times before, the inspection program is completely voluntary, has no legal bearing what so ever, but shows that the inspected kennel is demonstrably proud of the way they keep their dogs. I sincerely hope the program always remains that voluntary.

As mushers we may have disagreements, but collectively we know sled dogs, we know their needs, we want to do right by them, and it is all too easy for agencies to create regulations that are not in the dogs' best interest. The program helps us show that we are a responsible group that can police itself in a responsible manner. I urge you to look at the program on our website and consider participating. If you see something that makes you uncomfortable, or that you feel isn't right for your situation, let us know. We did our best to make the program applicable to large and small yards, urban or rural, where ever in the world you are. And I'm sure there can be improvements. Remember, the program is designed by mushers for mushers so we can advance sled dog care.

It looks like the PRIDE "coloring book" (thanks Hilary Schwafel for the wonderful drawings!) is about to become reality. "Coloring book" really doesn't do the work justice as the art work is well beyond that, and the captions are such that younger readers will know more about proper sled dog care than they would otherwise. With luck they will

move on to the admittedly dense material in the Sleddog Care Guidelines.

In closing, I hope to tell you this is my last letter as President of PRIDE, and I thank you for the honor of serving you and doing my bit for keeping PRIDE alive and keeping PRIDE's goals of improving sled dog husbandry moving forward. To quote Dave Monson, PRIDE's president before me, "please fire me!" It is time for someone with new blood and new enthusiasm to take over.

Happy Tails and Smooth Trails in the future.

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A Cheechako in California

An Alaskan Sled Pup Brings Dreams to the Land of Dreams

Kathy Mattes, Wannabe Musher

To the eyes of most in the airport, he was just another dog. For Kathy Mattes, however, waiting anxiously for his arrival in Los Angeles, he was the symbol of a new beginning.

Kathy first fell in love with Alaska in 1972. She'd heard there was still free land available for homesteading and after writing a letter of inquiry to the powers that be, received a package of maps that showed where the available land was located. Right then and there, Kathy decided she would one day live in Alaska and, no lie, raise goats. The Iditarod wasn't even in existence at that point and Kathy was still in high school, however, so that dream had to wait. "I never thought it'd take thirty years," remembers Kathy. "In 1973, however, the Iditarod was born and my interest was piqued. I think I must have started saying 'I'm going to run the Iditarod someday' at that point because a friend wrote, 'Have a great time living in Alaska, Mush, Mush!'" in my 1973 yearbook. Kathy graduated the next year and married the next, so things were put on hold once again. Then, in 1978, she thought her dream would come true.

"My then-husband was offered a job on the pipeline," she recalls, "and I was just certain I'd soon be living in Alaska." Unfortunately, he was unwilling to move and parenthood and other responsibilities put Kathy's dreams of Alaska on the back burner once again.

Fast forward to 2002. Kathy's been a member of an active Iditarod interest group that exchanges emails regularly. She's arrived in Alaska to attend the summer musher picnic. Kathy had a skill she thought she could benefit the dogs. A massage therapist for over 15 years, she felt her knowledge of specific massage and acupressure techniques could benefit these canine athletes. She wanted to volunteer her services to the race. Unfortunately, that was a problem. An Iditarod rule stood firmly in her way. You can't provide for one or two dogs what you can't provide for all and it would be physically impossible for her to provide a massage to each and every dog as a race volunteer. Despite this, Kathy demonstrated what she had in mind to Raymie Redington, son of Joe Redington Sr., the father of the Iditarod, and continued to enjoy her visit. Raymie suggested she talk to his son, Ray Redington, Jr., the next day.

Ray Redington Jr. was at the Iditarod picnic the next day. Raymie suggested that Kathy demonstrate her massage techniques to him. If you're directly connected to one musher and not the Iditarod organization, the do-it-for-one/do-it-for-all limitation is, obviously, mute. Ray Jr. was impressed and suggested Kathy return at race time and work with his dogs.

Despite financial limitations, Kathy did return and travelled to Fairbanks with Ray's wife Julia for the restart of the 2003 race quickly dubbed the "Idita-detour" that year. Before returning home, however, she found herself on the runners of a sled. Before she could say "Hike!" she was hooked. No more talk of goats. This time it was dogs, sled dogs to be exact.

The next year found her in Nome, working in the dog lot with dropped dogs. There, she made her services available to any of the dogs needing a bit of extra attention. It was physically taxing but by the time Kathy flew home, her mind was made up. She was moving to Alaska and going to run the Iditarod.

Of course, it hasn't been an easy trail to either Alaska or the Iditarod for Kathy. Her original plans had her moving here this summer. Those plans have changed, however. Due to family commitments, she's going to have to wait one more year.

"That's why I decided to bring Chako into my life at this particular time" she says. "Since I'm not going to be able to start my mushing life in Alaska this summer, I decided I'm going to start some kind of mushing/carting life here in Los Angeles."

Thus, Chako, short for Cheechako, moved from the Alaskan kennel of Iditarod and Quest musher Doug Grilliot to Los Angeles, California. In February of this year Doug had advised members of the internet list that Kathy frequents that he had puppies available. As luck would have it, however, Kathy was unable to attend Iditarod 2005. Doug and Chako were in Willow, Alaska, and she was in Los Angeles.

Race volunteer and Los Angeles resident June Shelley picks up the story here from the Anchorage end. "It all started with an email from Kathy Mattes," remembers June. "Can anyone returning to LA from Anchorage take a 8 week old puppy from Doug Grilliot's kennel?"

June was willing but there were problems. She was leaving on Monday on a red eye flight at 1:30 AM and changing planes in Seattle. The trouble was that Doug, who's a commercial pilot, was leaving THAT night, the night they first exchanged emails. Thus, "we needed to find a puppy sitter for three days, a puppy sitter who would also be willing to bring him to the airport to connect with me, too, as I didn't have a car."

The next day, while doing her volunteer shift in the phone room at the Millennium Hotel, June mentioned her problem. The Iditarod community is a family and is known to come together quickly to solve problems. This case was no different.

"Alice Banks, an Alaskan ANGEL said she knew Doug," said June, "and even had one of his pups from last year. She said her husband wouldn't mind and the kids would enjoy a puppy for a few days."

June emailed Kathy with the information and Alice's phone number and a few hours later, on his way to the airport at 10 PM for a Mexican trip, Doug left the puppy with the Banks family.

Despite everything coming together so well, June remained worried about the long trip and the change of planes in Seattle. As a result, she set out to see what could be done about changing her reservation to make it more puppy friendly. She decided to check with the airlines early in the evening before her flight out.

"When I got to the airport in Anchorage at 11:15 PM on Sunday night, I enlisted the help of a kind Alaska Airline woman who managed to change my ticket to the direct flight that left earlier, not to mention take care of changing the dog and carrier reservation," remembers June. "She warned me, however, that we all must be checked in by 11:45 PM to catch that flight."

"At about 11:30 PM Alice and David showed up with the puppy and we managed to get everything done in about 15 minutes, including putting some twist ties on the carrier so it can't open." June remembers running through security, then "running to the gate with my shoes untied" because she had no time to tie them after removing them for the security check. She made it just as the plane was boarding.

One problem remained. Kathy had no idea that plans had changed. With no time to call LA, June asked the Banks for one last favor. They took Kathy's cell number as June hurried off and called Kathy to let her know about the schedule change.

When she got the middle-of-the-night call telling her Chako was on his way, Kathy quickly called her friend Jody. "I was too excited to go back to sleep," she admits. "As we were driving to the airport, I couldn't help thinking that Chako represented the beginning of my future life in Alaska. By committing to him, it showed I was really ready to commit to making that future a reality."

When June and Chako arrived in Los Angeles at 6am the next morning, Kathy was waiting with her friend Jody Carleton, a fellow Alaskan adventurer who'd accompanied her on previous visits.



"Chako's carrier arrived rolling down a steep ramp, and we could hear him crying as the carrier came towards us," remembers June, "but the minute Kathy opened the door and held him in her arms, he calmed down and his tail started wagging." Chako was home.

I asked Kathy what was going through her mind at that moment. "What Doug called a 'mistake litter,'" she continues, "was perfect timing for me. Then, I found out Chako was born on my late mother's birthday, so it somehow seemed just 'meant to be.'"

Since then, Kathy's been busy helping Chako adapt to being a California dog. It started with the basics. "He sleeps with me," she admits, "and at first it was the 'new baby' syndrome and I was getting virtually no sleep because he kept waking me up to go outside."

Kathy admits that she's far more accustomed to senior dogs. "My Ruffler is going to be twelve soon and Misty, my late mom's dog, is ten. They're both extremely mellow, couch-potato dogs." She admits they're easier and far less demanding.

"Chako, on the other hand," she says, "is the smartest animal I've ever lived with. He's a problem solver. I see him look at something and he's figuring out how to do 'something with it.'" (Needless to say, depending on what that "something" is, the intelligence of sled dogs can be a problem -- but that's something we'll be taking a look at in a later story, one in which you'll get to know Chako and some other retired or re-homed sled dogs. Stay tuned.)

In the meantime, Chako's adapting well to life in California. Doug Grillot was able to visit for a few hours in mid-April. "We met at a park and had a Mexican picnic," says Kathy, noting they were joined by June Shelley and a few other friends, too. "There were lots of dogs in the park for agility classes and I wasn't sure at first if Chako recognized Doug or not." Chako took a few sniffs, however, and seemed to remember his original owner. Plans are in the works for Chako to revisit Alaska this fall, even if Kathy won't be able to tag along. Doug's offered to pick up Chako and take him home with him for some basic training with Doug's other dogs.

"We joked that Chako would come home looking totally buff," laughed Kathy. She turns serious, however, when asked again about her dreams of Alaska.

"For over 30 years, moving to Alaska has eluded me," she muses, "but the dream has always kept me going. Alaska, mushing and now Chako are definitely in my life for good. In the near future, I plan to take Chako back home to live in Alaska and that's when I'll get to be the Cheechako in the family!"

Mush with PRIDE Order Form

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\$15/Individual; \$20/Family or Club; \$5/youth under 18; \$10/associate; \$100/Business; quarterly newsletter & a copy of Sled dog Care Guidelines & Equipment Guidelines, First Aid Manual are included with membership. PRIDE membership year starts October 1st. Those received on or after June 1st are good through the following membership year.

Sled Dog Care Guidelines

Quantity _____

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Basic Sled dog care and training advice from dozens of the most respected mushers. Includes information on dog yards, feeding and watering, training, husbandry, puppies and more. A 36 page book \$5 each or \$3.50 each for 10 or more.

Equipment Safety Guidelines

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Based on a survey of experienced mushers, covers the basics of safe equipment choices and use. Includes chapters on dog gear, lines, sleds, rigs, skijoring, dog yards, travelling etc. A 36 page book \$5 each or \$3.50 each for 10 or more.

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Sled Dog First-Aid Manual. A guide for On-the-Troil Emergency Care, \$5 each.

Mush with PRIDE Patch

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Questions? Call 1-800-507-7433 or e-mail info@mushwithpride.org

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

PRIDE Website Update

The new web address for MUSH WITH P.R.I.D.E. is www.mushwithpride.org. We ask our members if you see the old web address of www.ptialaska.net/~pridel that you contact PRIDE's business manager at info@mushwithpride.org, so it can be looked at.

Junior Liaison Hilary Schwafel

My name is Hilary Schwafel, and I am working on the Mush With P.R.I.D.E. Coloring Book. My goal is to make a coloring book that is informative and correct, as well as fun and aesthetically pleasing. To date, I have 11 drawings completed, with the captions for each being edited. I have several more drawings in the works. Although I am a sprint musher myself, I am trying to portray a variety of different kinds of mushing, including, but not limited to, sprint, distance, recreational, skijoring, and scootering/dry land.

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Membership in Mush with PRIDE is open to all. Rates are \$15/Individual, \$20/Family or Club, \$10/Nonvoting associate member, \$5/Youth under 18, \$100/Business (includes four business card ads in the newsletter. Members receive the newsletter, 36 page Sled Dog Care Guidelines and a ballot for elections. Memberships begin on October 1 each year. Those received on or after June 1 are good through the following membership year. Your continued support is much appreciated.

PRIDE stands for "Providing Responsible Information on a Dog's Environment." Mush with PRIDE provides information to mushers, the public and the media about the proper care and training of sled dogs. We believe that modern sled dog owners are proud of their dogs as canine athletes that are bred and trained to do what they love - run as part of a team. Mush with PRIDE aims to keep them doing what they love and doing it well. The organization includes a wide variety of mushers - recreationalists and professionals, long-distance and sprint racers, weight puller, skijorers, freight haulers - as well as sled dog veterinarians and other concerned citizens.

Officers and Directors: Ken Severin-President, Blake Freking-Vice President, Secretary-Jessica Larsen, Treasurer-Scott Faulkner
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