Arthur's Legacy

A Short Oral History of Chinook Dogs and Their Owners

John Womer
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The Voices:

Peter Abrahams
: rescued the "foundation dogs" along with Neil and Marra Wollpert and Kathy Adams. He is a business executive living in Long Beach, California.

Jean Benjamin
: (formerly Jean Sukeforth) ran Sukee Kennels with Jerry Sukeforth, and was responsible for the Chinooks while they were there. She is a dog groomer and living in Rockland, Maine.

Elna Dimock
: is a retired tool designer and Chinook owner living in Bolton, Connecticut.

Martha Kalina
: is alpha dog and co-owner of the Perry Greene Kennel in Waldoboro, Maine, with her husband Rick Skoglund.

Cheryl Kubart
: is a student at the College of Wildlife, Forestry, and Range and the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho.

Joyce Maley
: is a Captain in the United States Air Force and a Chinook breeder in Elgin, South Carolina.

Rick Middleton
: is a business executive living in Seattle, Washington.

Laurel Morrissette
: operates a furniture refinishing business and breeds Chinooks with her husband Phil in Manchester, Connecticut.

Phil Morrissette
: is a retired firefighter, and operates a furniture refinishing business and breeds Chinooks with his wife Laurel in Manchester, Connecticut.

Peter Orne
: personally supported all the Chinooks at Sukee Kennels while they were there. He is a business executive living in Rockland, Maine.

Theo Orne

is a Chinook owner and businesswoman in Camden, Maine.

Rick Skoglund
is a firefighter in Manchester, Connecticut, and co-owner of the Perry Greene Kennel in Waldoboro, Maine, with his wife Martha Kalina.

Stan Victor
is a retired pharmacist and former Chinook breeder living in Bridgewater, New York. He currently runs a private kennel for older Chinooks who are too old to be adopted.

Marra Wollpert
is a former teacher, businesswoman, and Chinook breeder with her husband Neil in Kettering, Ohio.

Neil Wollpert
is a business executive and Chinook breeder with his wife Marra in Kettering, Ohio.

Preface:

In early Spring, 1987, I was flipping through a copy of Yankee when I came across the article "America's Most Typical Dog is Coming Back," a chronicle of the Chinook dog and the early success of efforts to rescue the breed from extinction. I enjoyed the story, and made a mental note to look up the breed whenever I was in the market for another dog.

Last autumn my wife Jane and I decided to get a dog as a youthful companion for our three children and our fourteen year old mongrel. After ruling out another rare breed from my childhood as unsuitable, I remembered the Chinook. Actually, I only remembered the name and that there was something good about them. That afternoon I posted a message on a CompuServe electronic bulletin board asking if anyone had ever heard of the breed. Within a few hours I was corresponding electronically with Rick Skoglund, president of one of the two national Chinook breed clubs. Within a few weeks, we were clearly "hooked" -- having made a deposit on a new Chinook puppy without seeing more than a photograph.

In the ensuing year, our interest in the Chinook has grown exponentially. We have two Chinooks and are seriously considering becoming breeders. We have purchased Arthur Walden's books through rare book dealers, and have read and enjoyed them thoroughly. Our home is decorated with Chinook memorabilia. Most important, through the dogs we have made close friendships and added a loving aspect to our home.

In talking with other owners I came to realize that my experience is typical. Chinook ownership is transforming. What follows is a first attempt at understanding the nature of that transformation.

John C. Womer
Woodbridge, Connecticut
December, 1995

A Short History of the Chinook:

Wonalancet rests in an intervale at the feet of New Hampshire's White Mountains. It remains a place where one can address a letter with just a name because, as one resident put it, "we know where everyone lives."

In 1917, Arthur Treadwell Walden, a New Hampshire native who had settled in Wonalancet after working as a dog team driver in the Klondike, crossed two mongrel sled dogs in the hope of creating a good litter. The sire, Kim, was a massive animal resembling a St. Bernard that Walden had picked up as a stray near the Canadian border. The dam, Ningo, was a delicate black and white "husky" and the daughter of Robert Peary's lead dog when he went to the North Pole in 1909.

The result was unexpected -- a litter of three large yellow pups named Rikki, Tikki, and Tavi after the Kipling story. Rikki (later renamed Chinook after a prized sled dog Walden had owned in his Alaska days) grew to quickly demonstrate an unusual and desirable combination of strength, intelligence, and gentle nature. Even more unusual and desirable, Chinook proved to be a "sport" -- like the stallion that originated the Morgan horse, he had the genetic potency to replicate himself. Thus began a line of large but gentle yellow sled dogs, then known simply as "Walden's Dogs."

In 1922, Walden and his team won the first Eastern International Sled Dog Derby besting one American and two Canadian teams. In the years following, Walden founded the New England Sled Dog Club, supplied dogs to amateur mushers, and gained fame by doing the "impossible" by driving Chinook and his team to the summit of Mount Washington in winter. Chinook was arguably the most famous dog of his time. He proved himself to be a remarkable lead dog, and his gentle nature and a special love for children made him immensely popular as he and Walden toured New England.

In 1928 and at the age of fifty-seven, Walden took Chinook and sixteen of the dog's offspring with him as Chief of the Dog Department on Admiral Richard Byrd's Antarctic Expedition. While his dogs were no longer as fast as the Greenland and Alaskan huskies that also made the trip, they were still excellent "freighting dogs." As Byrd later wrote in Little America , they were "heavy draught animals, of (Walden's) own breed -- and composed the backbone of our transport." Norman Vaughn, a member of the expedition who had dropped out of Harvard to join Byrd as a sled driver recalled nearly seventy years later that while Walden's dogs lacked the heavy coat of some of the other dogs, they were the only dogs that didn't go lame at one time or another during the expedition.

Chinook himself was eleven years old when the expedition began -- too old to lead the team full-time. Walden used him on those occasions when the team needed extra inspiration, and at other times he ran along side the sled. On January 17, 1929, his twelfth birthday, Chinook wandered off and was never seen again. The reasons for his disappearance have never been determined. He had lost a fight with three younger dogs the prior day, and a romantic legend quickly arose saying that he had wandered off to die having lost his position as a leader. It has also been said that one of Walden's fellow explorers found paw prints and claw marks on the wall of a deep crevasse, but no signs a dog. Whatever happened, the result of his disappearance was dramatic. As Nancy Cowan wrote in Yankee in 1987, "dog lovers in America mourned, flowery poetic

eulogies were penned, and a legend was born." Later, Byrd presented Walden with a copy of Little America with this inscription: "Because Chinook sacrificed his life I wish to particularly mention the record-breaking loads carried during the unloading -- under the leadership of the noble leader Chinook, the greatest dog of this age. All honor to Chinook and sincere sympathy to his best friend and master."

Upon returning to New Hampshire, Walden continued to breed his dogs. In 1931, and no doubt because of the legend surrounding Chinook's death, Lawrence Orne and his Chinook "Paugus" were named "America's Most Typical Boy and Dog" and received a $ 250 prize and congratulations from President Herbert Hoover and others. Walden promoted the breed (then called "Chinooks") by exhibiting them at sportsman's shows and fairs -- at times complete with four caribou and a real Eskimo.

In 1939, Walden sold all of his dogs to Perry Greene, a man who had made his living as a champion woodchopper at those same sportsman's shows. Greene moved the dogs to Waldoboro, Maine, and was nothing less than a marketing genius. He continued to tour the sportsman's shows, made sure his kennels were included in state tour guides and maps, took his dogs on a five hundred mile record setting and well publicized trip through Maine, and built the breed's mystique with "an unequaled line of balderdash about their exploits and history." Greene claimed that thousands of visitors came to his kennels each summer -- a claim supported by guest books that survive today. As the only Chinook breeder in the world, Greene could make extraordinary demands. He sold his puppies for as much as one thousand dollars, and required buyers to stay the night in his guest cabin so he could determine if they were suitable. Perry Greene died in 1962, and the breed began a long and perilous decline. His wife Honey, and later his grandson Peter Richards tried to keep the kennel operating and the breed viable. In 1978, dismayed by the condition of both the kennel and the dogs, Peter Orne, a Chinook owner and media executive from Connecticut, bought all of the remaining dogs and boarded them for more than three years at the Sukee Kennels in nearby Rockland, Maine. The Perry Greene Kennel was abandoned and fell into disrepair.

In 1981, the remaining Chinooks were dispersed to three families. Kathy Adams, who had worked at Sukee Kennels and lived in Warren, took two dogs. Neil and Marra Wollpert of Dayton, Ohio, who had met Kathy a few years earlier when they had traveled to Maine in search of the breed, took five dogs. Four dogs were sent to a Chinook owner, Peter Abrahams, in Ukiah, California. These dogs, later known as the "foundation dogs," were carefully bred and the "rescue" of the breed began guided by a small but growing cadre of dedicated breeders and owners.

In 1986, Harry Gray bought the Perry Greene Kennel property and began renovations, renaming it Northdown Kennels. Using dogs first supplied by other breeders, he was able to breed hundreds of dogs. In 1993, Martha Kalina, an attorney from Columbus, Ohio, moved to Maine and bought the kennels from Harry Gray. She has subsequently restored the original kennel name, and began further renovations.

Today, the Perry Greene Kennel stands much as it did in Perry Greene's time, with a steady stream of people dropping by in search of the "lost breed." At the low water mark in the early

1980's, less than forty Chinooks could be located. And though there are nearly four hundred purebred Chinooks alive today, they remain one of the world's rarest dog breeds.

Watersheds:

Early on in my interviews, I noticed that nearly every Chinook owner could remember the specifics about how and when they had learned of the breed. For each of them, it was also a defining moment.

Martha Kalina:

I was looking to buy a boarding kennel and was talking to a friend of a friend about an upcoming trip to North Carolina to look at a kennel there. She was from Ellsworth, Maine, and had gone to high school with Harry Gray. She told Harry about me, Harry called me, and I came out for a weekend. That was the first time I had ever heard of the Chinook. Not very romantic, huh? I had never been to Maine before. I fell in love with the state, and I fell in love with the dogs -- their temperament and personality; their history. There was a romance to it, and though I usually don't believe in such things, it seemed like fate -- like the sun, the moon and the stars were all in alignment, and things just fell into place.

Peter Abrahams:

I was driving from Boston to northern Maine in 1969. We happened to pass through Waldoboro and saw the sign for Perry Greene Kennel. I had always been interested in dogs and have enjoyed breeding and raising dogs from time to time in my life. We drove in through the pine trees and here were these dogs -- and I was really struck by them. They had kind of a robust aspect to them -- they were very broad in the chest, and their legs and head looked strong, and they just about fit the kind of dog I had been looking to have as a family member. I was quite sparked by the visit, but our life-style at the time wouldn't allow us to get a Chinook. Instead, I spent time learning about them -- going back and getting old magazine articles and books to keep my interest alive until we got our first Chinook ten years later. Her name was Kima, and she was the first unspayed female that had ever been sold.

Cheryl Kubart:

I was taking my cat to the veterinarian and there was a Dog Fancy on the table. In the back was a small advertisement for a Chinook. It said something about yellow sled dogs and how they were cool in the winter. I had grown up always wanting "Old Yeller" -- the big old yellow dog. I am a winter person, so I liked the sound of a sled dog. I took out my address book and wrote down all the particulars. About six months later I moved to a place where I could have dogs, so I whipped out that little address book and called the Andersons in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. We talked from time to time for nine months before I got Bubba. That was the Christmas of 1993.

Elna Dimock:

I became interested in the Chinooks as a teenager in the 1930's when I attended a sportsman's show at the old Armory in Hartford. Perry Greene was there with his dog team. They were on an inclined board, in harness, laying down. He had them behind a large piece of glass so you couldn't touch them. He and his wife Honey would talk about the dogs. I just liked the way they looked, and I liked their personality. I promised myself that when I had a home of my own I would get one.

Neil Wollpert:

In 1946, when I was about sixteen years old, The National Geographic carried a picture and a brief mention of the Chinook, and I always remembered that dog. Many years later, about 1960 or 1961, I was living in Charleston, West Virginia, and the last of several Dobermans that I had died. I chased down the Perry Greene Kennel through the AKC historian.

Rick Middleton:

My mother saw an article in the January 11th, 1947 The Saturday Evening Post. We are a dog loving family, so she cut it out and saved it. I was at the Harvard Business School at the time, and when I graduated in 1950, I drove up to Maine.

Stan Victor:

As one would say with all stories, let's start at the beginning. For me the beginning would be a summer vacation in 1960, and Eleanor and I were going through Maine. We were driving up Route 1, and Eleanor suddenly said "Wait, we have to stop -- there's the sign my friend told me about. She said if we were ever in the area to stop in and see them -- they are magnificent." I asked her "What are you talking about? -- I didn't see anything." She said "You turn the car around and I'll show you where it is." I asked her "Are you sure you know what you're doing?" I turned the car around and this time I did see the sign -- "Perry Greene Chinook Kennels." We pulled in and got out, and no one was there except for the dogs. We looked at the dogs for a while -- I thought they were common enough -- just an ordinary animal -- so we got back in the car and continued our trip. That night we got to our hotel, and whatever grabbed me really grabbed me. I told Eleanor we had to go back to the kennels the next day. She asked me "What for?" And I said "I have to have one of those dogs."

Invitations to Stay the Night:

Perry Greene required every potential owner to stay the night in his guest cabin before he would sell them a puppy. No one knows exactly what criteria he used to judge people "acceptable" as Chinook owners. Some later believed that he did it so he would have free room and board in their homes when he toured the country.

Elna Dimock:

When we built this house after the war, I pulled out the pamphlet that I had saved and wrote Perry Greene a letter telling him I wanted a puppy. He answered and told us what weekend to come up to Waldoboro. I went up with my daughter. When we got there he took us down to see the dogs in the kennels and the guest cabin. He told us he had a male puppy he was willing to sell, but he said "I want to see what you are like first." For Saturday night dinner we had beans and franks, and my daughter was in the cabin playing with the puppy and Perry's two big dogs. We sat down to dinner and suddenly he said to me "I want tell you -- you're going to get a puppy. You didn't ask your daughter to wash her hands -- and my dogs are healthy."

Rick Middleton:

In 1950, I drove up to Maine, stayed overnight at the kennel, and was judged "acceptable." Perry Greene told me later that after two minutes he knew I was going to get a dog. When I asked him how he knew it, he said that it was because his two house dogs came right up to me, that they knew a dog lover when they saw one. That was the

test. If his dogs accepted you, you were all right. I named him Rayluk, and the next day I started home, driving from Maine to Aberdeen, on the Washington coast just south of the Olympic Peninsula. I was more loquacious then than I am now, and wrote Perry Greene each day during the trip to tell him how Rayluk was doing. (When I visited the kennel in the summer of 1995, we found my file -- Perry Greene had saved all my letters).

Stan Victor:

We went back to the kennels and looked around for a while, and then I went up to the cabin and met Perry Greene. I asked him if I could buy a dog. He said "I don't know about that -- we'll see -- how about coming in an sitting down for a while?" Perry Greene was upstanding -- ramrod-like -- he was lean, he was strong, and he had a inner commitment to the animals, to Chinooks, that I cannot ever remember seeing, or feeling, in any other person. At one point he showed me a double-edged axe that he had sharpened himself. It was so well honed that he proved he could shave me with it. He told me that when he was out in the woods he would use that blade to shave himself. I wasn't that impressed with it at the time -- I didn't know what that axe had accomplished. He had used it to become a national woodcutting champion, and I think his record still stands. I read much later, after he died, that during one of those contests he cut off his toe by mistake -- but it didn't stop him from chopping -- he just continued to chop. I don't know if he won or not that day. When he made up his mind to do something, he did it. He was a great man. He lived with his wife Honey and a Swedish cook. Of course, most important, there were two huge Chinooks. They had free run of the house, and followed us wherever we went, inside and outside. To me they seemed extremely friendly, they came up to me and let me pat them, and would walk away when they wanted to -- but if I called them by name they would come back and I would pat them again. Then Mr. Greene invited us to stay overnight. I told him I appreciated the offer, but that I had only intended to stop by to discuss cost, availability and stuff like that. He said "Oh no -- we insist." We had lunch and supper with them and they put us in the guest cabin. It was summer, late July or early August, but I remember thinking thank goodness they left us with extra blankets -- because boy did it get cold! When we got up the following morning and had breakfast, Perry Greene said "Well -- I think I have a puppy for you." I asked him "You mean right now!?" He said yes, went outside somewhere, and he came back with the most lovable puppy you ever saw -- at least to me it was. He asked me "How do you like this one?" I said "Oh it'll do fine." It never dawned on me, not one moment, that I was being "interviewed." Quite the contrary, he didn't even hint at it. I just thought he was a kind person looking for some company for the night. I read magazine articles later that said he wouldn't sell you a dog if you asked to wash your hands before lunch. I'm so glad I didn't make that mistake! I didn't realize I was doing anything right or wrong -- I just don't wash my hands before lunch! God forbid if I had done it, that would have been the end of me and the Chinooks. Fists full of money or big handsome cars didn't impress Perry Greene one bit. You gotta realize that he was the only man in the world, and it was the only place in the world, selling Chinooks. Nobody else had them. He had the monopoly. You were actually interviewed by the dogs themselves. If the dogs liked you, got a puppy. If not, you went home empty-handed. I later said to myself -- well I'll be doggone. Here I was thinking that I was in control, or he was in control, when in fact neither of us was in control. The dogs were in control. We had forgotten one thing -- we had never discussed price -- and I didn't have any money. He didn't care, saying that we could trust each other.

I was surprised he would let me go off with something as precious as that puppy without a penny being involved. He told me the puppy would cost $ 550. He accepted a $50 deposit, with a promise I would send him the rest when I got back home. We cut our vacation short and drove back to Brooklyn with the puppy, and I named him "Kim."

Neil Wollpert:

I chased down the Perry Greene Kennel through the AKC historian, and called Peter Richards, Perry Greene's grandson, who was running the kennel at the time. At first he was fairly abrupt, but I told him my circumstance that I had lost my dog, hadn't been without a dog since college, and was really anxious to get a puppy. He told me there weren't any available, but if any did become available he would let me know. In two weeks he called back, saying that if I could drive up to Maine that weekend, he would decide whether or not I could have a pup. I didn't know anything of the history of the Chinook. I only remembered that picture in The National Geographic. I drove to Waldoboro, and Peter explained that he was continuing in his grandfather's footsteps by having people stay overnight. If his house dog was still identifying with the stranger the next day, then he would consider selling them a puppy. The next morning he handed me a puppy and said "That's your pup." I answered "Wait a minute -- that's kind of a cute one over there, what about him?" He just replied "Nope, that one's your pup." I didn't even know what price they were and asked him what they cost. He told me my puppy would cost one thousand dollars. I was a bit stunned. All I could say was "Whew! -- are they all a thousand dollars?" He replied "Naw, some are more and some are less." Then I asked him "How do you determine what you're going to charge?" (I suppose my brand new Cadillac convertible out in front didn't help my negotiating position.) He said he priced them by their intelligence. So I told him "Well then how about giving me the dumbest one you got!" In the end, I walked away with the pup he gave me, paid the thousand dollars, and I have never regretted it.

The Rescue:

These people, along with Kathy Adams who does not appear here, saved the Chinooks from extinction. Every Chinook owner is forever in their debt.

Peter Orne:

In 1976 I had stopped by the kennel a couple of times and found them to be in disrepair, and the dogs not as well cared for as they should have been. I was able to buy the dogs -- twenty- three or twenty-six -- I forget the exact number -- we settled on a price of one thousand dollars -- that would allow him to pay the accumulated feed bill down at Agway. I needed a place to put the dogs, so I found Jerry Sukeforth and Jean Benjamin. They had a kennel here in Rockland, and they agreed to take the dogs at half their regular price.

I got involved because I loved the two dogs I had, and I couldn't stand to see the breed dying out. I wanted to get them into a situation where they could be professionally cared for, and if there was a chance of bringing them back, it would happen. Clearly, the environment at the time was going to lead to the disappearance of the breed forever. So it was somewhat eleemosynary I guess, but maybe not too smart -- I'd like to have all that

rental money back! I was not ever disappointed that I had did it, though, and I think it meant a lot to everyone in our family that we did what we did.

Jean Benjamin:

After we got the dogs, the first litter was born late at night on the Fourth of July. I hadn't slept the previous night because I was out delivering a litter of German Shepherds. I had also worked the whole day. The Chinook dam was restless, and as it turned out, I didn't get any sleep that night either. The only way she would settle down was to lie on my lap. That first new litter was born on my lap, with me sitting on the basement floor in the middle of the night all alone. No one even knows that. But you know something? I'm pretty proud of it.

Peter Abrahams:

When the dogs left Sukee Kennel, I took five dogs -- four of which I kept. We lived on a four hundred and twenty acre ranch in Ukiah, California, about two hours north of San Francisco at the time. I built kennels, and I started trying to breed. Our first litter was born on June 11, 1982. The dam was our first dog Kima. A fifteen year old male named Rikki was the sire. I had to brace him under the chest as he coupled, because his hind legs were weak. We had a stroke of good luck when a local reporter who was crazy about dogs came out and did a photo spread and wrote an article that was well done enough so that Associated Press picked it up. The article went around the country, and on a human interest basis it hit the front pages of some papers like the Chicago Tribune. I got fifty calls in no time at all. I carefully screened them looking for families who would participate in the breeding program and was able to place all the pups very quickly. Later we had another successful litter of a few pups from other dogs, and unfortunately, a third litter of eight pups that had serious digestive problems, so we had to put them down. When we started with the Wollpert's we could locate less than forty living Chinooks. We concentrated on just getting enough reproduced so our gene pool would be sustainable. In late 1983, I had to move back to the city, and we placed our adult dogs with the Wollperts and other families. Our contribution was to take those few foundation dogs, create a couple of litters, and get a bunch of publicity. I'm very happy that others were able to hang in there and carry on.

Neil Wollpert:

Peter Orne had passed control of the dogs onto the Sukeforths. We heard from Kathy Adams that the Jean Benjamin and Jerry Sukeforth were getting a divorce, and that Jerry was threatening to destroy the last of the dogs at the kennel out of spite because they had been his wife's project. Over a period of six weeks we talked to him. I remember our first conversation. I begged him not to destroy the animals, and in response he offered to sell me the eleven remaining dogs for fifty-thousand dollars. Over the next six weeks we negotiated, and he graciously decided that he would allow three of us to split up the animals, and he would not charge us for them. What he was going to do was charge us five thousand dollars for his breeding records. Then he had a big fire and lost all the records, so he simply charged us the cost of shipping our four dogs to Dayton. We had those eleven foundation dogs, no recent records, and in all we could only identify twenty-seven other living Chinooks.

Marra Wollpert:

When we first thought of taking the dogs, we had some really deep discussions about where we were going. We had a toddler and four other children. I thought it was too much responsibility and I didn't want to do it. It seemed like too much work, and it was. It was a lot of work. Then Neil called our veterinarian, and he said he would help us with the project. The first six years were a burden. Then Stan Victor, Joyce Maley, and T.J. and Grace Anderson got involved.

Companions:

If you call Elna Dimock in Bolton, Connecticut, she will invariably mention that her two Chinooks are "right here at my feet." Chinooks have a special relationship with people, especially children, making them life companions in the truest sense.

Elna Dimock:

Chinooks, like other animals, are very time oriented. In the 1950's one of my jobs was to dispatch the fire trucks from the station next door and manually test the fire siren at noon. I had a special button on my telephone, and would rev that siren up and down twice each day. Do you know that if I was out in my backyard or down in the cellar, Endure would come to me and tell me it was time to test the siren? He was always right on time, and he would come and get me. And not only that, he would come inside with me and as the siren went up and down, he would howl up and down with it. It was a game with him. People used to ask me "How do you remember every day?" I would tell them "I don't -- Endure does."

Cheryl Kubart:

Bubba just turned three and had his own birthday party. I used it as a good excuse to have a barbecue for all of my dog-deprived friends. They came over and brought him rawhides. We had all the gifts laid out and he picked out which he wanted to open. I held one end while he tore open the paper. Then he would carry the present all around the house showing it to everybody, then set it down and pick another present. I had read somewhere that one of Walden's favorite tricks with the original Chinook was to have him pat out a lit match. I had taught Bubba to sneeze on a candle, so I made him a hamburger cake with mashed potato and gravy frosting, and he blew out his own candles. It went over really well.

Rick Middleton:

If Rayluk wanted to go out he would just put his head on the bed. He wouldn't bark -- he'd just leave it there and look at you. Our front door had a handle on the outside instead of a knob. I trained Rayluk to push the handle down and let himself in. Come to think of it, he learned to push the door shut after he entered.

Rick Skoglund:

My uncle always told me, take care of the dogs and they will take care of you. Through some bad times my family has faced, the dogs have always been something to turn to. They are an intelligent, thinking breed, and very sensitive. I've always felt that these dogs are incredibly intuitive -- that they can sense things in people that maybe you and I can't. One of my daughters was seriously ill for quite some time, and throughout, we had dogs who would not leave her side.

Theo Orne:

At one point a few years ago I had a long telephone conversation very late at night. Some of the things that the other person was saying were really upsetting me. Bear was right there for me the whole time -- and as funny as it sounds, I think he was trying to make me laugh. He kept getting toys from his toy box and throwing them on my lap and doing other funny things that night which he had never done before. He was definitely trying to cheer me up. I just couldn't help laughing. I don't think the person on the other end of the phone appreciated it the way I did.

Elna Dimock:

Deserve was a good dog -- very protective of my kids. I could leave my two boys on the front lawn. If they went near the road, he would push them back by creeping. When we would go to our island at Mashapaug Lake and the kids went swimming, he would swim around them in a big circle and prevent them from getting into deep water.

Laurel Morrissette:

They love to pull. One time we brought MacKenzie and Valentine to the boat club with us. We had to pull our dingy up out of the water, and it's heavy. So we tied the two dogs to the painter line. I acted like the lead dog and Phil acted like the tail dog. They just pulled the dingy right up the ramp and over the hill. A crowd had gathered to watch and couldn't stop laughing when they saw that.

Joyce Maley:

Chinooks do seem to have a special relationship with, or a special sensitivity toward children. I had read a lot of stories about them that I had taken with a grain of salt. I thought the people telling those stories were just trying to promote their breed --that is, until I had my Chinook Eva at a friend's house and his grandchildren were there. We were in the kitchen, and we didn't know that one of the kids had become really upset about something and was sitting on the living room couch pouting. Eva, who had never been around kids before, just stood at the kitchen doorway barking at us and looking at the living room. She wouldn't stop until we went to see what was wrong. I never believed it until I actually saw it -- she confirmed that trait real quick.

Cheryl Kubart:

He goes everywhere with me and sits upright in the passenger seat. At one point I was working at a catalog warehouse called Northwest River Supplies. I started taking him to work with me. I had a large cart to pick orders, so I made a bed on the bottom of the cart for him. He grew up sleeping while riding on that cart -- and underneath my packing table.

Rick Skoglund:

The dogs were always very protective of my kids. If strangers came over when the kids were young, the dogs wouldn't necessarily growl or bark -- they would simply stand between them and the kids until the adults came out and they could hand off the situation.

Laurel Morrissette:

They're not jealous of each other. They'll share their food and let the cat eat with them. We had two of our dams nursing at the same time, and they nursed each other's puppies. It's not typical dog behavior. Most dogs are very possessive with their puppies, but they aren't. They'll even allow strangers with their puppies.

Theo Orne:

When we were kids we'd strap on plastic skis and my brother and I would put the dogs on leashes and they would pull us.

Elna Dimock:

They have a tremendous memory, and God help you if anything goes wrong. When my third child was born, my brother Howard came up, and he was in one of the back bedrooms. Howard came through the house and surprised Endure. The dog stood up on his hind legs and my brother picked up a chair and clipped him with him. After that, every Christmas Eve my brother would sit in the same chair, and Endure would sit across him about two feet away. If Howard would so much as move his hand to touch anything on the table, he would quietly growl. Howard was also on the school board. When he would pull up across the street at the school for a meeting, Endure would go to the kitchen window, growl, and watch him go in. No matter what time he came out of the meeting, and sometimes it was one-thirty in the morning, I'd know it because Endure would be back at the kitchen window growling and watching Howard's car driving away.

Theo Orne:

Bear is not necessarily protective, but he so aware of what I am feeling. He hates it when I'm angry. If I'm having a conflict with another person, he is immediately by my side. He is not trying to fend off the other person; he is completely focused on me to see what is going on. I think if anything serious were to happen he would stick up for me and be right there.

Cheryl Kubart:

I had just started a new semester at school, and he had a habit of chewing through our wood fence. I started to take him to school with me and tuck him under the seat and he would sleep there just fine. They were usually big lecture classes so no one minded. There were a lot of dogs at school, but he was usually the only dog in his class.

Phil Morrissette:

I used to go to the back yard to feed some chickens. I'd carry down a large water bucket, and Akita would almost insist on carrying the bucket back up for me. She was so proud of herself as she carried it back by the handle.

Rick Skoglund:

One afternoon during lunch we heard Tavi whimpering which was unusual. We quickly went into the living room to find my daughter laying on Tavi's head with an ear in each tiny fist, tugging with all the power she could muster. Tavi tolerated this behavior, looking at us, his eyes pleading for relief. Tavi would never have tolerated this treatment from an adult. As we pried her hands from his large ears, he gently licked Jennifer's face as if to acknowledge that she was not responsible for her actions.

Cheryl Kubart:

We were in a picnic area near Mt. Ranier one morning. There was a really thick Northwestern fog -- clear visibility was about six feet and if you looked really low to the ground, you might be able to see fifty yards. I was starting breakfast on a camp stove, and Bubba and my friend's lab were playing . Suddenly, Bubba stopped playing and just stood there. I watched his hackles raise literally from his tail up to between his ears. He started walking really slowly towards the north. I called him back, and he just stopped and growled. The lab didn't do anything -- just sat there like she didn't know what he was doing either. I stared where he was staring for about two minutes. Then we saw a huge black bear. I immediately cued the dogs to get in the truck and packed up all my camp gear. I put the dogs on a "no bark" command and they were pretty quiet. They sat in the back of the truck and I was standing in the drivers door until it got about thirty feet away.

I started honking the horn and the dogs were growling. The bear was standing up sniffing the air --it was pretty creepy. I got ticked off and I yelled "Dammit -- you're ruining my breakfast!" The bear just stared at me for a minute, and then he walked away. If Bubba hadn't warned me there was a bear coming, I would not have had enough time to get everything back in the truck.

Rick Skoglund:

Many years ago I was blowing leaves in my back yard. Suddenly, two of my dogs, Umiak and Aleut, charged at me barking wildly. When I turned off the leaf blower, the dogs calmed down. When I restarted the blower, they started barking again and sat down blocking my path. I again shut down the blower and asked aloud "What is wrong with you two?" At that moment my young boy Ricky jumped out of the leaf pile a few feet in front of me. The dogs had sensed the danger and were protecting him.

Cheryl Kubart:

I think when it comes to other animals the Chinooks are very protective. I've never had somebody attack me, so I don't know how he would react -- but if someone wanted to get into my house and steal my computer, all they would have to do is toss a pizza on the floor. My experience is that they love everybody -- anyone bearing food, especially pizza, is immediately considered a friend and allowed in the front door.

Martha Kalina:

It's really neat to watch them hooked to a sled -- to see a dog working and doing what it wants to do. We took a nine year old dog, Victors Kobuk, who had never seen a harness or a sled and put him on the team for the first time this year, and he is a whole new dog. Before he would never get into a truck -- he had to be dragged and picked up. Now, he'll run and jump in because he knows he's going sledding. It's pretty wild. He seems perkier, and watching him on the team -- his tail is up, he's smiling, he's happy, and when he is done he is jumpin' up and down barkin'. It's really kinda cool.

Neil Wollpert:

They are exceptionally gentle with children. Recently we had some neighbor children in to play with our new pups. The dam came in from outside and didn't like what one little girl was doing. She didn't nip her or growl, but simply went up to her cheek and pushed her away with her muzzle. That's kind of the typical Chinook. The other example I can give you is a bit raw. Years ago I was downstairs watching television, and my son who was two years old at the time, was on the floor next to me and next to our first dog Rikki. I heard Rikki start whining and I told him to be quiet and went back to the program I was watching. He kept whining, and finally I looked over and my son had one of those vice-grip holds on the dog's genitals and was squeezing for all he was worth. Rikki never even raised his head -- he just whined to get my attention as if to say "Hey -- help me!" I think most dogs would have taken some action on their own.

Peter Abrahams:

Our first Chinook, Kima, fastened herself to me. She was quite sweet. Unlike other dogs that don't particularly like direct eye contact, she would happily just sit there and stare at me. She was very unhappy if she wasn't with me one hundred percent of the time I was awake. In some ways it was charming and wonderful, and in others ways it was a pain in the ass.

Cheryl Kubart:

He doesn't like it when I'm gone. The first time I left him home, I was living with an older woman. She had fallen asleep watching the television. She woke up and he was holding my jogging shorts in his mouth. She took them away from him. Then he went back to may room and started pulling out the rest of my clothes, and pretty soon had pulled out the bedsheets. Finally, he brought out my backpack which contained my running shoes and the rest of my running stuff, and presented it to he as if he were saying "O.K -- this is her stuff, where's the rest of her?"

Bitten By the Wolf:

He saw the wolf. He felt the wolf bite into his heart.
When he woke up, he was all in one piece.
That's how the wolf became his helping spirit.

From the 1983 film "NEVER CRY WOLF"

Stan Victor:

If I had one dog I had to have at least twenty in my lifetime, of all different breeds -- mixed breeds, purebreds -- I loved them all -- but whatever possessed me to act or become what I became the minute I saw a Chinook, to this day I cannot answer that, I don't know. I have no idea -- but whatever it was, it grabbed me so bad that it is still with me. That was thirty-five years ago, and I don't think it will ever leave me.

Something went from them into me that has never left me. I still love other dogs, I love my cats, but there is no dog in the world that has ever done what these dogs have done for me. I have become -- and have changed my purpose in life -- I don't even know if I really had a purpose prior to them. Twenty-five years ago I knew I would have to have my own place for these dogs. I knew I had to take care of them -- those Chinooks that would need a home for whatever reason. I don't even have to hear the reason -- if you can't take care of your dog you let me have him and I'll take care of him.

Rick Skoglund:

When people get a Chinook, in many ways they get the dog they've always wanted. Maybe they have had other dogs that were aggressive, wouldn't come when they were called, didn't like to go for a ride in a car. Chinooks are so eager to please, people oriented, and adaptable that they fit into any life-style. If you're willing to spend time with them -- if you like to sail or canoe they'll gladly do it -- unlike other breeds that, for example, will always be hunting dogs and will and won't do certain things.

Theo Orne:

I have the dog that I pictured I would have.

Cheryl Kubart:

I never had a dog like him -- not with his personality and how close we are. It has really changed how I live my life. I live my life for my dogs. When I go to buy something exciting, it's a dog toy. I sew my own dog collars and am trying to make my own harnesses. I actually sell them, and am thinking that I could do it for a living. Before I wanted to live out in the woods, maybe raising horses, maybe working as a wildlife researcher with wild horses or wolves. Now there's not much else but the dogs. I am a

dog person. Everything I do revolves around them. In many ways Bubba is my child. I have devoted my life to my dogs and to Chinooks.

Marra Wollpert:

I think it's that their history has grown to mythical proportions, and I think it is also the personality of the dog. The people who really invest some time with their pet, they all say that the Chinook is different than any dog they've ever had or been around. I can't put my finger on what it is that makes them different, but they are. When I'm in a home with a Chinook and a Chinook comes up to me, it's just different than any other dog coming up to me. Every Chinook I've ever been around, and we've made trips around the country to meet Chinook owners, every one of them had the same characteristics and mannerisms that made them Chinooks. It doesn't have to do with their look, because the looks can vary and they aren't unique. You can get a dog that looks like a Chinook in any dog pound. It's something in their behavior that endears them to their owners.

Neil Wollpert:

Marra and I have never sold the Chinook as having special attributes except for their being the most marvelous dog we've ever know. You want to believe in what the dog represents -- the history and the lore -- then he represents what you want to believe, and then you're really hooked. We could all take marketing lessons from Perry Greene. He added a mystique to the animal where maybe that mystique didn't exist. He created such lore about the dogs, building on what Arthur Walden had done, that we all like to read that lore into our dogs and it becomes a cycle of belief and reality. People who want a Chinook have usually done research on the breed, and Chinook breeders are selective about the people with whom they placed the dogs.

Peter Abrahams:

I was sparked by their combination of vigor and ruggedness -- they just didn't look like a highly civilized dog. I think they sparked a lot of romantic notions that I carried from my childhood. I was a voracious reader from the time I was quite young. I had read all of the horse and dog books I could get my hands on, and had some wonderful experiences with both horses and dogs as I grew up. I was always looking for this romantic ideal of a dog, and these dogs -- just the way they were put together and seeing them for the first time as I did in the pine woods -- it just hit me.

Peter Orne:

It is a cult kind of relationship

Phil Morrissette:

They just love you so much -- it's the affection they give you, and they love everyone in the family equally. I've never seen a dog that gets so excited when you get back home. They miss you terribly. If you're reading, they'll come by every ten minutes or so and just give you a quick lick on the hand -- just to check in with you. Kima even seems to appreciate that we feed her. She'll go over, eat a mouthful (crunch crunch crunch), come over and give me a lick, go back over and eat another mouthful, (crunch crunch crunch), come back over and give me another lick. By the time she's done I've got a frosted coating on my hand.

Martha Kalina:

I looked at thirteen kennels, and this was the only kennel where I cried when I left. I cried not only because I didn't want to leave, I also knew that this wasn't the right kennel. I wanted the dogs, but the kennel was more work than I wanted to take on. I had promised

myself that I would make my decision with my head and not my heart, and the kennel in North Carolina was a better business decision. Buying that kennel didn't work out. I took that as some kind of sign, and bought Perry Greene Kennel. Within a few weeks I was able to sell my farmhouse in Ohio. It all fell into place. It really seemed fated. It really seemed like I was being pulled here. And then to make the friends I have made in this short time -- there is really magic in these dogs.

Cheryl Kubart:

One of the strongest traits that has been passed down the last eighty years is their personality. It's a good personality. They're goofy, happy, friendly dogs -- and a big yellow dog that loves winter to boot. How could you ask for more?

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