HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN ESKIMO DOG

Where do these lovely dogs come from? I think many people who own American Eskimos are convinced that their beautiful dogs dropped from “heaven above” into their homes. I can't argue that fact, but I can supply a more practical explanation about the origin of these wonderful animals. The American Eskimo is a member of the Nordic, Spitz family of dogs that originated from Germany. It is believed that the modern Eskie dates all the way back to “canis familiaris palustris”. This was a stone age canine called the “peat bog” dog or “dog of the lake settlements”. Skeletal remains from the Stone Age found in central Europe suggest a Spitz type dog. These early ancestors appear to have served as guard dogs for developing human-kind. Such a necessary service certainly made the “peat bog” dog a valuable asset. It is interesting to note that the desirable Spitz spread to other areas of the globe in the ancient world. Spitz-like images (sometimes white in color) appear on tombs, coins, vases and other artifacts in Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultures.

The term “Spitz” was first recorded in the mid 1400's. The term means “sharp point”. German hunting lords, who owned vast properties, gifted favored tenants with the Spitz to guard the home and herd sheep. (The Spitz was not a hunting dog, so game remained plentiful for the lords.) By the 1700's, the Spitz grew to become the most common dog in Germany. From coastal regions to inland farms, they were deeply valued as guard dogs par excellence. Their loyalty was indispensable.

The Spitz dog comes in different colors and sizes, depending on the part of Germany they are indigenous to. Their coats are black, gray, chocolate, red and white. Because the Spitz was held in high esteem, they were traded with other countries that Germany interacted with. The Spitz was cultivated by those neighboring regions. For example, the Dutch developed the wolf-colored Spitz into the “Keeshond” and the Italians created the “Volpino Italiano” from the Spitz as well.

The white, Spitz dog was most popular in the Province known as Pomerania. The dogs of this Province were Spitz dogs weighing about 20 to 30 pounds. (These dogs are not to be confused with the modern, toy Pomeranian.) The white Spitz was brought to England in the 1700's by English royalty. England's Queen Charlotte, who was born in Germany, could not be parted from the beautiful dogs she knew as a child. The white Spitz was introduced to British society and their debut was a hit. Soon, everyone wanted dogs like the Queen's canine ensemble. The white Spitz became a fixture in aristocrat homes.

(Incidentally, in the late1800's, another English Queen developed a fancy for a very small Spitz with a red coat. It is this dog that spawned today's toy Pomeranians.)

The white Spitz made its way to America via German immigrants prior to the turn of the century. In 1913, the white Spitz was registered with the United Kennel Club and a description of the breed was officially filed with U.K.C. The Spitz name was changed to American Eskimo in 1917. The name change occurred partly because the ravages of WW1 brought German sentiment to an all time low. (The German Shepard's name was changed also to Alsatian to protect this breed from unwelcome hostility.) One of the most influential kennels of the day was the American Eskimo Kennel. The white Spitz was registered as the American Eskimo Dog with U.K.C.

Due to the Eskie's keen intelligence and agile physique, they were trained as circus
performers in the 1930's through the 1950's. A circus training facility named White Horse Ranch combined an act of white horses with white American Eskimos. The act was sold to small circuses and also to Hollywood. Barnum and Bailey used Eskies in their shows, too.

In 1969, 43 Eskie devotees gathered in Desota, Missouri to create the “National American Eskimo Association”. The fanciers hoped to promote the breed as well as expand showing in U.K.C. obedience and conformation competition. In 1994, the breed was registered with the American Kennel Club (the big league). Today, Eskies are shown in conformation, obedience, rally and agility with great success in both organizations.

The bright personality and famous Eskie smile has won the hearts of human companions through a long stretch of time. The American Eskimo remains a valued member in families across the U.S. They are not a common dog, but every-so-often you see the pretty, white dog in the neighborhood, protecting his home with vigor and lavishing affection on loved ones. The history of the American Eskimo is an interesting story, but it pales in comparison to the devotion an American Eskimo brings to your home. As a matter of fact, history loses all significance as your beloved Eskie snuggles warmly in your arms and you feel the soft coat against your face. Gazing into the irresistible Eskie face, you may feel, (like so many before you), that your Eskie dropped from “heaven above” into your home. This beautiful, energetic dog works its magic, adding sparkle to the lives of the families they touch.

“I care not much for a man's religion whose dog is not the better for it.”

Abraham Lincoln