

Newsletter Vol. 8 No. 2
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WELCOME FRIENDS

Welcome friends and sponsors of **SUOMI HILLS KENNEL**. Once again, I wish to say **Thank You** so much to all of you who have been so supportive of **SUOMI HILLS KENNEL** these past years. Your support is greatly appreciated.

This will be the last *SUOMI HILLS TRAIL NOTES* available in hard copy. The newsletter will be available on the website www.sleddogmn.com. If you want to receive this newsletter in your email inbox each Spring and Fall, you need to send me your email address and I will email you the newsletter.

The dogs and I are in good health and busy preparing for another busy winter of dog sledding in Minnesota. The forecast is talking of more snow so riding the sled might not be far away. Again, we spent our summer giving dog sled rides to many, many cruise ship passengers in Alaska. We enjoyed our summer and hope you did also.

A few changes are in the works for SUOMI HILLS KENNEL, including the possibility of doing cart rides in the future if we do not have adequate snow to use the sled. This summer I brought a dog cart back from Alaska and am still working on getting it going and doing a few test rides. The cart would be especially suitable for large groups getting short rides. It most likely will work well on a relatively flat circular trail and should be able to accommodate a lot of people.

I am also working on establishing some land trails for folks who would like to experience dog sledding through the woods instead of across a lake. Going through the woods does create some problems in avoiding sharp turns and going too fast down hills, so it will take some time to find a good trail. But in the future, I hope to provide some safe and scenic wooded trails to ride on. Stay tuned for more on this adventure!

Happy Trails to You, Joel

SLED DOG MAGIC

Many of you probably know what I am talking about when I say Sled Dog Magic. Maybe the fact that I don't believe in magic is why I have such a hard time explaining it. I have been running dogs for over 15 years now and still get a really deep sense of peace and satisfaction from the experience.

I have been taking flying lessons recently and the magic of flying is similar in ways to running sled dogs. An airplane is mechanical though, and a dog team is a living community.

A dog team is made up of many individuals, all independent souls working together to make a team. The team aspect is definitely part of the magic. I think running my own team that I have raised and trained from day one makes the experience all that much more gratifying. When 14 individual sled dogs come together as one with me (I am part of the team also) it is truly mesmerizing.



Alaskan cruise ship passengers enjoy the magic of sled dogs

It's also magical to see the dogs come together after so much training and effort. What makes the experience so rewarding is watching the dogs respond instantly to my every command. I say "gee" and the dogs go right; I say "haw" and the dogs go left. I say "ready" and they all quiet down and wait for me to say "alright" at which time they all slam into their harnesses at the same instant and start us moving down the trail. It's simply magical. Their loyalty and love of their work is obvious. And it is obvious to me that they and I are doing what we are meant to be doing.

It is said the dogs are able to run through walls when everything is right. Confidence is a big part of this. With enough confidence the dogs are able to do things they really should not be able to do. Working as a team with confidence overflowing, it seems there is no wall too thick for the dogs to run right through.

Perhaps the dogs have a lesson to teach us here. What could we accomplish if we all worked together as a team for one common goal the way the dogs do? Maybe there is no problem too big for us to conquer if we all work together with confidence and hope. When the team is really clicking and working together it is obvious everything is right with the world. And then to flow through the beautiful wintry landscape makes it the ultimate experience. All the problems of the world disappear.

If you have not yet found the **magic of sled dogs**, I sincerely hope you do.

MEET TONGA

Tonga is the off-spring of Sky and Amos. He is an average sized dog and predominately gray in color. His litter mate Polar is predominately white.

In 2004, the first summer I went up to work in Alaska, Tonga's litter was very young and I left them in Minnesota with my friends, the Leonard family, to raise while I was gone. When I got home the puppies were all named with Alaskan names. Tonga is named for the Tongass National Forest, the largest national forest in the country which encompasses much of southeast Alaska.

Tonga is 4 years old and has been a very happy and enthusiastic dog all his life. He always wants to please and loves his job. With all of his enthusiasm, I was pretty sure Tonga would become a lead dog. He has been leading for less than 2 years but has already become one of my most reliable and confident leaders. At only 4 years of age, I expect to enjoy having Tonga lead my team for many years to come.



Tonga knows when to work and when to sleep!