

I decided to add the article I wrote for the Alaskan Malamute Club Of America, on my website. It's an article that was written about a genetic problem this breed has. It's called Polyneuropathy or PN for short. Included is my article, another article by Todd McGuire from Australia. He wrote about his experience of owning a pet with PN. Todd has given me permission to include his article on my website. Todd started a page on Facebook about PN and I found him. Much to my surprise after viewing his pedigree, I found some of the same dogs in Todd's pedigree that are in mine. PN is becoming a problem in this breed. My hope is that by me writing this, others will start coming forward. A link will be provided to AMCA website where there is information about research that is going on now with PN.

Last a great piece written by Dr. Marc Kent, DVM, DACVIM who serves as one of three full-time veterinary neurologists on staff at the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine, considered to be the leading veterinary college in the US for neurology. Dr. Kent is the veterinarian who tested my litter of PN and did the study on them.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

By Edie Thomas- Breeder, Lawrenceville KC member since 1998, AMCA member since 1999

I was invited and encouraged to write about my experience with Polyneuropathy (PN) from a breeder's point of view. Let me first say that I don't think anyone plans a breeding expecting to get a serious health problem. I didn't even know what PN was until I experienced this devastating condition with my very first Alaskan malamute litter.

I purchased my first show quality Alaskan malamute in early 1998. Her name was Ch Wild Wind's Royal Diamond, aka Hope. I finished Hope myself at ten months of age from the puppy class. She went on to become the 1998 AMCA National Specialty Winners Bitch, a multiple group placer, Top 20 contender, and Best of Opposite Sex winner at the 2001 Eukanuba Classic. Needless to say, she was everything I wanted in a show dog and I adored her. Hope was bred only once in her life, to her half-brother BIS BISS Ch Wild Wind's Goin' Great Gunz, ROM, and a litter of seven puppies was born on June 24, 2000. At that time, I had no idea what would happen as those puppies matured.

From that litter, I kept a male named Ben, Ch WindStar's Royal Guns Salute. Ben finished his championship at the age of ten months, but by 12 months of age, I noticed that he was limping and would "bunny hop" when he ran. My veterinarian thought Ben might have panosteitis, an inflammation of the bones that is seen in fast-growing large-breed dogs. As the months went by, Ben kept getting worse, and my vet recommended I take him to the University of Georgia Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Athens for further diagnostics. On September 11, 2001, we went to UGA. The neurologists did a hands-on examination, performing various reflex tests on Ben's feet. Due to his slow responses, they explained that they suspected PN but would need to run more extensive tests for a positive diagnosis. After doing electromyography, nerve conduction velocities, and muscle and nerve biopsies, the doctors confirmed that Ben did indeed have idiopathic PN.

As the weeks continued, Ben lost the use of his legs and could not stand at all for

periods of time. I spoke to another malamute breeder, who advised me that Ben would stand again and to just “hang on” for awhile. Ben did finally stand again, but his legs would tremble the entire time, similar to someone with Parkinson’s disease. Ben also developed mega-esophagus, which is common in PN dogs. Megaesophagus affects the eating and drinking abilities of dogs and makes them sound like they have been debarked. Ben could not run or jump and was very unsteady on his feet. In many cases of PN, dogs will get better for periods of time, but unfortunately Ben had a very severe case and was never able to move and be a normal dog. By the age of three, the mega-esophagus was much worse, and I could not watch my dog waste away. I decided to euthanize Ben on November 26, 2003.

Shortly after I first took Ben to UGA, his brother Lightning, aka WindStar’s Fury, started showing signs of PN. While at my home for show training, I noticed the same “bunny hopping” gait that I had seen in Ben. I told Lightning’s owner about Ben’s PN and offered to take him to UGA for testing. When I contacted veterinary neurologist Dr. Marc Kent at UGA and told him I suspected another dog in the litter had PN, he asked to do a study on my litter at no charge to me. This was a major financial offer, as Ben’s PN tests had cost over \$2,000. Lightning was tested and diagnosed with a severe case of idiopathic PN. His owners did not respond to my offers to replace him, and I doubt very much that he lived long, considering how severe his case was.

It was February of 2002, just four months after Lightning had started showing symptoms of PN, when another brother, Petey (WindStar’s Pistol Pete), began stumbling occasionally. Because I had told his owners about the PN and what symptoms to look for, they contacted me immediately with their concerns. I called Dr. Kent and arranged for Petey to be tested at UGA. He was diagnosed with a mild form of idiopathic PN. Petey was the only one of the boys to survive to an older age, as he lived a normal life without any issues until he was ten years old.

Petey is an example of the scary variability of PN. His form was so mild that, unless a person knew what to look for, you would not think anything was wrong with him. He was tested and diagnosed with PN only due to his littermates having PN. Even in the mild cases, PN symptoms do reoccur, normally with the addition of megaesophagus. At that point, dogs have to be euthanized or they suffer greatly. Petey developed mega-esophagus at nine-and-a-half years old and was put to rest on November 23, 2010. I am very grateful that his owners contacted me before they lost him, as we were able to save DNA from Petey to be sent to Canine Health Information Center. His body was donated to Auburn University.

After Petey was diagnosed, we thought we were clear of any others in the litter developing PN, but unfortunately, that would not prove to be the case. Magnum, WindStar’s High Calibur Gunz, started showing symptoms in May of 2002, at 23 months of age. Magnum was tested at UGA and diagnosed with a moderate form of idiopathic PN. Magnum needed hip

surgery but never truly recovered from it due to his PN. Some say there is no pain with PN, but I disagree. I believe Magnum was in a lot of pain. He was euthanized on May 13, 2004 - just shy of his fourth birthday.

Since four of the seven littermates were positively diagnosed with PN, Dr. Kent asked to test the rest of the litter to complete the study. I agreed to have my girl Annie, Ch WindStar's Annie Getcha Gun, ROM, tested even though she showed no signs of having the disease. The tests proved that she was not affected with PN, nor did she ever produce it. The owners of the other two littermates declined testing on their dogs.

After some time, I decided that Annie's offspring should be taken out of the gene pool, and I never bred her again. After doing extensive research, I felt this was what I wanted and needed to do. It was not worth the chance of passing PN on to future generations if Annie could be a carrier.

This was the most heartbreaking experience in my short time of showing and breeding dogs. I hope that writing this article about the health problem I experienced helps others not be afraid to speak out. I share this information with my puppy buyers and try my best to educate them about PN and what I did to remove it from my breeding program. I believe many breeders think that if they speak out about a health problem, it will hurt puppy sales. I can speak from experience about that. It has not hurt me. In fact, most buyers appreciate my honesty. As breeders, we must look beyond individual dogs and concentrate on our love for the breed as a whole. Sometimes we have to make those tough decisions for the sake of the breed's future. If we don't, the Alaskan malamute will suffer in the long run.