

# Arctic Survival—

## Training Huskies Is Not for a Lazy Man

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Times Editor

In my early years I was the most surprised youngster in our little sod igloo, when, after some vigorous persuasion by Aunt Mumangeena, Uncle Nayukuk consented to train our litter of young huskies for a team.

I imagined his ineptness would be so colossal that the dogs would never get trained. When one undertook such a job, he was definitely asking for trouble. Half-grown huskies when being trained for the first time have no respect for anyone or anything.

In previous articles some people have gotten somewhat acquainted with Uncle Nayukuk. They have found that he was rather lazy both in work and in hunting; that he was rather handsome with a good share of dignity. He had enough of this dignity that one would feel rather uncomfortable if he saw him knocked down just for the fun of it. On account of this no one joked or teased with him.

### Fine Potential

It was the latter part of one September that the snow had fallen in sufficient amounts for dogteams to drive on. Winter ice on the ocean had not yet formed so there was a lull in hunting.

The ice on rivers was just starting to freeze. Men had some time to do incidental things. They prepared their weapons for the winter hunt. Some trained young huskies for dogteams. Uncle Nayukuk became one of them although he was most unwilling and reluctant at first.

His wife, Mumangeena had said, "We have a fine bunch of young dogs now and it's about time we have a good team. We haven't had one for so long."

She had decided to have a good team months before when one of our dogs had a litter of pups. "Their father is one of the best dogs in the village. What a fine team they will make when they grow up."

### Fine Care

During their growing period, Aunt Mumangeena had taken fine care of the pups. It was a wonderful experience to watch her. She talked to them as if

they were children.

"Umaa, (You there) don't be so greedy. Leave some for your little brother. How can he grow up if you keep doing that?" she would reprimand.

### Complete Opposite

Aunt Mumangeena was about five feet two inches tall. For an Eskimo woman, she had a rather long face, prominent cheek bones, and a definite roman nose. She had a tattoo that ran down her chin about a half inch wide with a narrow stripe on each side. When she walked she waddled and the reason for that was that she had very bowed legs.

In spite of her physical appearance, Aunt Mumangeena was unusually sweet natured. She cooed at anything that was young, usually babies and puppies. She was sympathetic to anyone who was unfortunate. She never stopped talking, a complete opposite of Uncle Nayukuk.

Once in a while she would get annoyed at her husband's reticence. "Even a seal can say more things than you do," she would complain.

### Devout Woman

Aunt Mumangeena was a very religious woman. She was so sincere about it that it kind of rubbed off on one. When she felt a little ill she never failed to ask me to pray for her.

In the evening before I went to bed, she would ask me over to where she was lying, take my hand in hers and would make me kneel beside her to play. I would do her bidding and would concentrate as mightily as I could. The next day when she felt better, she would credit me by telling people that it was I who was responsible for her improving health.

### Named After Grandmother

Less than two weeks before I was born, my grandmother passed away. When I came along, I was promptly named after her. Ever since I could remember Aunt Mumangeena called me "mother." As I grew older, I began to resent being called that. When I was around nine years old, boys made toy boats and raced them across a little slough in the center of the village. Out of driftwood bark, I made boats all the time. They

were made so well, according to my aunt, that she would proudly say, "Ahqang, (mother) show them the boats you made today."

Full time had come upon us and people began to drive their dogs to get wood down the coast. Our young huskies were almost full grown. Aunt Mumangeena became insistent to have them trained. "We will need them this winter so you better train them right away," she told her husband.

### The Consent

After much persuasion and outright demands by Mumangeena, Uncle Nayukuk finally got ready to train the frisky young dogs. As part of the preliminary training they had been tied to posts when they got too big to run loose and had gotten used to it.

There had been nine in the litter and being out of good stock, two females had been given away to the families who wanted them. A team of huskies out of the same litter is considered to be the best, once trained. They work well together probably due to the fact that they know each other well.

However, this intimacy is a definite drawback when one starts to train them. They know each other too well. It was now time to harness the young team. First he harnessed our leader that was around six years old. This was most necessary because inexperienced huskies need a leader that will help to keep some semblance of order in the process of learning.

### "Greenhorn Team"

Then Nayukuk harnessed the first young husky. When it was on, the dog began to squirm and twist. The strange feeling of the harness was just too much. He started to bite at it, spinning round and round and it soon tangled himself with other harnesses. Uncle Nayukuk tried to calm it down. He might as well have ordered rain in January.

Mumangeena came out of the igloo to help. She held the harnessed young husky to keep it from tangling any further while her husband finished the rest. He put another of the older dogs in the team in hopes

of steadying the young ones.

### Unheeded Commands

Finally the team was ready to go. Aunt Mumangeena untied the anchor line and as soon as she did, Uncle Nayukuk commanded, "Mush!" At the command the two experienced dogs lunged forward. His order fell on deaf ears as far as the young huskies were concerned.

They did not have any idea what "mush" meant, nor did they make any attempt to go forward. They were much too busy squirming in their harnesses, rolling on the snow, yelping and nipping at each other, turning around to play with the ones behind, and trying vigorously to pull their heads out of their collars. The sled moved forward for about five feet.

In about 15 minutes time, Uncle Nayukuk traveled about 300 feet. Most of the distance was taken up untangling the overactive young dogs that nipped at each other and got into frequent tussles. He constantly hollered "Mush!" which the leader and the other older dog faithfully obeyed while the half grown dogs wanted to go in all directions.

One of the young dogs somehow got his leg tangled in the harness of the one in front of it and started a wild commotion. While he was trying to extricate it, a dogteam approached from behind and to the right which Uncle Nayukuk did not notice.

### Wild Chase

One of the young huskies spied the team and suddenly swung around from behind catching Nayukuk on the calves of his legs with its trace pulling them out from under him. He fell on his rear on the thinly snow-covered frozen ground. At that moment his right foot tangled among the traces.

The frisky and over-anxious young huskies made a mad dash toward the passing team dragging the driver, the leader, and the other older dog. Uncle Nayukuk kept hollering "whoa", but it didn't do any good.

The dash did not stop until the disorganized team covered about 500 feet dragging and bouncing Uncle Nayukuk over the hard ground. They slowed and stopped when the dogteam outdistanced them. The 500 feet was quite an improvement from the previous 300 and they made the distance in about a minute.

The driver extricated himself wearily, rested a minute and resumed the training, which at that moment seemed hopeless. By now, Uncle Nayukuk was getting quite an audience among the villagers who snickered and laughed in a muffled manner.

### Small Progress

The strenuous effort by the young team calmed them down somewhat. They were panting heavily and a little bit tired after dragging Uncle Nayukuk unceremoniously with a leader that kept trying to go the other direction.

After this, the trainer began to make better progress. The team moved in spurts and stops but it was moving forward. In an hour's time, Uncle Nayukuk and his team could be seen about a mile from the village. The farther he got the better the performance of his team seem to be. It would be speeding up now and then, especially when there was another team somewhere near it.

### Slow Going

Another hour passed and the

team was just a pinpoint in the distance. Soon afterwards, it started coming back toward the village. The speed of it was erratic with frequent stops. Nayukuk could be seen working with the dogs, apparently untangling them. Once the team got away from him and he ran with great speed after it. He caught up with the young team due to its erratic behavior.

The trainer approached the village. His team was moving rather slowly but it was going something like a dogteam. A loose dog came running close to it and the young huskies responded by wanting to chase it, which they did in a half-hearted manner.

At last the team reached our igloo. Every member of it looked as if it had gone through a rough 70-mile trip. Nayukuk looked tired. He had been sweating. The leader was spent.

The additional strain of trying to lead a bunch of erratic young huskies was almost too much. The other older dog had fared better. Along the way it had apparently lost its patience and sharply mauled the young husky next to it because it had a bloody ear.

### Hard Training

As soon as the team stopped at the igloo, a great change had taken place in the young huskies. They were utterly exhausted. There was no frisking around. Instead they laid flat on their sides and panted heavily. They hardly moved a muscle when their harnesses were taken off. The first day of training had taken a heavy toll but in doing it they had made mincing steps towards becoming a team. The next training session would be somewhat easier and there would be several days of it.

Surprisingly, and with unexplained determination, Uncle Nayukuk kept on training the young huskies for the next two weeks. Aunt Mumangeena was elated. I was allowed to go along on the training sessions. I rode in the sled while Nayukuk rode the runners and directed the team.

### Remarkable Progress

As the days went by, the fledgling team began to show remarkable improvement. They relished the drive, tails curled, and they yipped happily as they went. They still tried but time would take care of that. Later on, they were actually yipping anxiously as soon as they saw the harnesses taken out for the hitching. Yes, the young team had plenty of spirit, a definite indication of a fine team in the future.

Aunt Mumangeena was a picture of happiness with the result of the training. She complimented her husband freely. There was hardly any sign of acknowledgment from Nayukuk. He neither looked pleased nor was he saying anything.

### Fine Team

In spite of his aversion to work, it would seem reasonable that Uncle Nayukuk saw the real need for a good team — that of its need in survival. Once he started, his determination to train the difficult young huskies was indeed another one of the surprises that one would not have expected of Uncle Nayukuk. During the process his reputation of being lazy fell by the way side and as a result, he wound up with one of the best dog teams in his village.

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