



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

Box 1192 - Jamestown, NY 14702

September 2018

Dave Shaw 1928-2018



David A. Shaw, Sr., age 89, of Lakewood, N.Y., passed away Monday July 16, 2018 at home. He was born in Jamestown on Nov. 13, 1928 to Arnold Shaw and Harriett Shaw Groves.

David is survived by two children; Brenda (Shaw) Mancuso (Russ) of Fredonia, N.Y. and David A. Shaw, Jr. of Lakewood, N.Y., grandchildren; Nicholas (Cathy) Vacanti of Westfield, N.Y., Heather (Greg) Sisti of Collins, N.Y., Erin (Kyle) Barthel of Forestville, N.Y. and Paul Overstreet of South Carolina; great-grandchildren; Christopher Vacanti, of Westfield, N.Y., Olivia Barthel, of Forestville, N.Y., Justin York, of Collins, N.Y., John Blynt of Dunkirk, N.Y. and A.J. Blynt of Georgia. Besides his parents, David is predeceased by his wife, Janice B. Shaw who passed away Feb. 16, 2015.

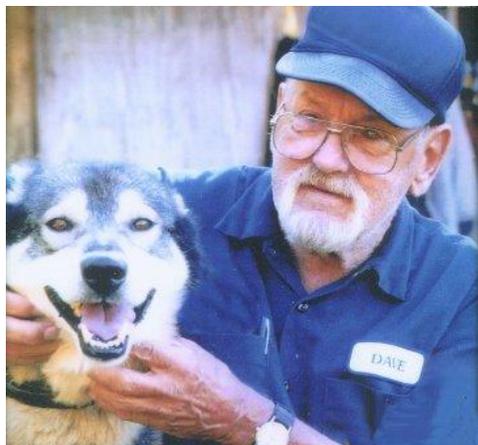


A man of many talents and interests, David raced on the beach course at Daytona Beach in 1950 and 1951. He was a musician, (drummer), a model railroader (HO) and scuba diver. An avid and accomplished dog sled racer, he was inducted into the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame for dog sled racing. He was greatly loved and will be sadly missed.

How Did It All Start?

By Dave Shaw

I never had any intention of having enough dogs to run a sled dog team, but as long as I can remember, my greatest wish was to have an Alaskan-type dog. Malamutes had impressed me the most, and still do, as the most pure bred sled dog. Even though I had worked at many sled dog races doing many different jobs, owning my own kennel was the farthest thing from my mind.



One fine day my wife suggested we answer an ad for husky puppies. As usual they were all gone when we got there. So being a little troubled at missing out on a pup, we went off the beaten path and stopped at a fellow's place and found out he was getting out of running dogs. We picked up a half-starved, sick Malamute-wolf cross. Somehow I knew that under all that matted, dirty mess of hair was the Alaskan-type dog I had always wanted. A mere ten-dollar bill exchanged hands and into the car went this awful looking mess of a dog. This was the first sign that eventually convinced my family that the old man was beyond help of any kind - the first requirement for running sled dogs.

It took me at least six months, but that furry mess turned out to be one great-looking Alaskan. Everything should have stopped at that point, but my wife and daughter just had to purchase the last pup in the litter from an old friend of mine just so the male would have a female to keep him company. The pup was out of a litter that Nancy Price had brought back from Alaska after Clyde Sturdevant had passed away. Everyone got along just great. Netka had a grown-up playmate.

My wife and I had to go out of town one weekend and left the house and the dogs with my dear mother. I have no idea what went on while we were gone, but it wasn't very long before we were blessed with a full litter of Alaskan pups. Of course, we just had to keep at least one male and two females. I don't know why. Things just happen that way sometimes. At least at my place they do.

Now we had five dogs, two adults and three puppies running all over the house. One would think that would be enough, especially IN the house. Yeah right. I made the big mistake of taking my wife along when I went to visit an old friend of mine who raced dogs. You guessed it. We came home with a black and white male pup with blue eyes that my wife just had to have. It just so happened that the new pup was the same age as the three pups at home and together they really took over the property.

Soon they were at the right age to start training as a sled dog team. But I had no harnesses, no sled, no equipment, no experience and no sense whatsoever. That situation didn't last long as some friends who had been around the sport for a long time made up a set of harnesses and an old sled that must have been on the ark with Noah.

Thank goodness Candid Camera or Totally Hidden Video wasn't around back then. I still can't believe all this happened because some idiot wanted to train a team of sled dogs that had never

seen a harness before and that same dummy who was about to take on the job was not about to seek any help from people who had an idea what to do. All I knew about running sled dogs was what I had seen at the races and in movies - you simply harnessed the dogs, hooked them to a sled, jumped on the runners and went happily down the trail. I knew what was supposed to happen, but no one informed the dogs. They did not have the slightest notion of what was expected of them and they acted accordingly.

One sat down. One went left. A couple went right. All the rest decided to come visit me, standing like a dummy on the sled runners. This was the grand start of a chain of events of what not to do if you want to run a team of sled dogs. I never considered getting help or giving up. I just spent hours and hours pulling, tugging, and begging, not to mention learning a whole new bunch of words.



I even tried the show-and-tell method - me running out of the driveway time after time - but that didn't work either. However the dogs sure seemed to enjoy my antics. Have you ever seen a husky grin? They do, you know - I've seen it.

I have no idea how long this went on - longer than I would like to admit - but long enough that the neighbors, my wife and kids were ready to call for the guys in the white coats carrying the funny-looking jacket with straps.

But after what seemed like forever, it finally happened - my proudest moment as a musher. I hooked up all the dogs one more time in the driveway headed for the road. I should mention that my driveway was a short one and the whole team barely fit. To this day I don't know why it happened - maybe the dogs up front saw a bird or mouse - but when I yelled a mighty HIKE, the whole team took off at the same time. In an instant they were at full speed, heading out the driveway and across the road towards the ditch on the other side. Naturally, the sled and I followed. What a mess! It's a good thing the dogs were all friends and had spent many hours roughing it up because the sled, driver and dogs all wound up in one big ball. But I was proud! We had gotten out of the driveway as a team! As a musher, I was on my way, but I'm quite sure that pile of dogs did not share my opinion.

In spite of all this, someone up there must have taken pity on me or more likely, on the dogs, for the same friend that sold me the female pup, had an old wheel dog that needed a new home. The dog was quite old and didn't have much time left. As it turned out, this was the best move I ever made, taking in this lovable old wheel dog. It was the turning point for this musher and the team. I had no idea what would happen if I hooked up this old wheel dog in the lead. He had never been in that position on any team, but I knew he had many, many miles working on a team and knew how to run. This was what was so great about not knowing anything about how it should be done. Common sense had nothing to do with it.

So I hooked up the old boy in the lead beside the mother of the team. She was there only because she seemed to have the most tolerance for my training program or better yet, the lack of it. I know this old dog had no idea of what he was supposed to do in the lead position, but he did know that when the nut on the back of the sled was ready to go, the team should go. I released the sled and away we went. He had no idea where we were going, but the team was willing to go, so away we

went. I have no real reason why except maybe they were bored with all my carryings on and they sure didn't want any part of that ditch again.

So, for some strange reason up the road we went acting like a real sled dog team. The old boy was just going - he didn't know where- but he seemed to know that the road was the best place to be. Somehow he knew not to get off the road with this bunch of rookies. Up the road we went, turned right and started down a small hill. It was then that I woke up to the fact that we were headed for the main highway and much heavy traffic. Someone was sure with us that day as I got the team turned around and headed back without so much as a hint of a tangle. To this day I still remember that moment.

The next time I tried a turn, I had dogs sideways, backwards, upside-down and in just one heck of a tangled mess. After what seemed like a couple of hours, we got the mess undone and headed for home. I will say that old wheel dog sure knew where home was.

All in all we had only covered a couple of blocks but I felt like I had just run the Yukon Quest and was just as proud of the gang. We couldn't be stopped now. The old wheel dog was no leader, but with him taking the team down the road a few times, it gave his rookie partner an idea of what was supposed to happen and we were now on our way with the start of a training program.

Believe it or not, after all of these negative happenings, the team did very well from then on with a minimum of trouble. It must have been in the breeding for I sure was no help. After that, the old dog got to retire and the only running he did was around the fenced yard. He seemed happy to stay behind when the team was loaded into the truck for a session. I have often wondered if the rookie team and its driver had anything to do with him accepting his retirement readily without even a whimper. As a matter of fact, I swear he grinned at me every time the team and I left for a run.

I was a very lucky person that everything turned out well in the end. The dogs all survived and turned out to be a very good and competitive team. I tell all would be mushers to seek help from someone with experience. I was lucky, but the next dummy to come along might not be and those that will suffer the most will be the dogs.

I might add that the old fellow had many happy days of retirement and passed on peacefully in his sleep one evening, a reward from up above, no doubt, for giving this old guy and his fellow dogs a helping hand when they really needed it. Thanks O'Kannagan.

