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THE MAG WITH A WAG!

**THAT WILL DO!**  
SHEEPDOG TRIALS  
PHOTO FEATURE

THE SIBERCAAN DOG

**OOPS,  
HE DID  
IT AGAIN!**

EMBARRASSING  
HABITS OF DOGS,  
YOU'VE BEEN TOO  
ASHAMED TO ASK  
ANYONE ABOUT

INTRODUCING  
TWO DOGS

BREED:  
**THE BOXER**



# TROPICAL S

Lisa McCluskey details the effort it takes to train and live with a

**J**une,” a Sibercaan (Siberian Husky/Canaan Dog cross breed) entered our lives about two years ago. She was named after the famous American musician June Carter who was married to the legendary Johnny Cash for thirty-five years. June Carter Cash was well-known for her stubbornness, perseverance, and

commitment to her family. Like the folk-lore presence of a white wolf in a nocturnal dream, June is believed to be the guiding force that appeared in the life of Johnny Cash during his emotional, tumultuous, challenging, and complicated career.

My husband and I became the owners of the dog better known as “Tropical Storm June” after behaviour clients of my business



PHOTOGRAPHS: LISA MCCLUSKEY

# STORM JUNE

Sibercaan dog

decided that relinquishing her to a professional canine trainer would be in her best interest. At four months of age, she had already spent quite a bit of her life practising inappropriate and undesirable behaviours, typical of a Spitz type dog. In the United States, the month of June is the beginning of hurricane season, and I can honestly say the arrival of June the Sibercaan into our lives (metaphorically speaking) was no exception.

What would be my plan to train this problematic puppy up to a recognised community standard of safety and social skills? My full time job involved assisting owners daily with this exact dilemma of acquiring a dream dog. Pet owners would often ask me for ideas or tips on something problematic in their pups, and I quickly began to realise with my new dog June (a creative escape artist from confinement like most Siberian Husky types), success was going to entail a much longer list than my typical “crates, gates, leashes, and tethers” answer!

As is true in most every dog, Siberian Huskies and Canaan Dogs do need a good amount of assistance in their training and socialisation. The Sibercaan mixed breed (also known as the Native American Indian Dog crossed with the Pariah Canaan Dog type) is certainly no exception.

## TAMING THE STORM

**1)** June was enrolled in four classes per week with four different handlers, one of them being myself. Each class was a different discipline, i.e. obedience, beginner dog training, agility, and sniffer/detection. Why? Sibercaans are estimated to weigh from 45 to 115 pounds and can be up to 24 inches at the shoulder. June is currently at least this tall and although she is a lean dog, her general size and presence can be quite overwhelming to people.

If her socialisation had not been addressed in a variety of ways at a young age, the general predisposition of her breeds would be that of an independent, less than biddable dog that can be suspiciously wary of human and environmental unknowns.

**2)** June was conditioned to wear a head collar regularly, no matter who was handling





instinctual nature of June's breed type, she needed lots of neutral exposure to all aspects of the human race.

**4)** We visited the forest preserve and utilised a long line so June could sniff and swim in between exploring and behaving with us and others on the trail.

Instinctually, there is a chase drive in both Siberian Huskies and Canaan Dogs. Farm stock (horses, cattle, sheep, etc.), birds, and small mammals pose training and obedience challenges for the Sibercaan.

Working with June in the practical environment of the woods helped as did the regular number of other visiting humans present. I felt it was a good situation to gradually habituate and train

June to the expected behaviour I desired in a "real life" challenging environment.

**5)** We took June every place we could on the weekends and for family outings/trips. Our previous dogs were homebodies and are even known to be a bit lazy at times, so June's "innocent enthusiasm" and high exercise requirement was an extreme departure for us as dog owners. The real challenge was incorporating an active dog into our already busy lifestyles and this took quite a bit of practice for us and still does to this day.

**6)** I was very careful about her vet care and having a slow progression of exams for June. Philosophically, this topic can be quite heated among trainers and veterinarians. In the long run, I am happy with my decision to take more time in getting all of June's basic medical needs accomplished as at six months of age, it was

or training her - so as to teach her an important human handling/control concept. Many dogs are trained famously on collars only, so what was the reason we elected to additionally use such a tool? June lost her first home based on her extreme issues with puppy biting. It had contributed to her lack of building a strong emotional working relationship with her previous owners and their children; therefore, I literally had a bit of an uphill battle on my hands. I wanted June to be an ambassador with humans she met when out and about. Genetically, her breed types can appear as "not very obedient" and that is not what I thought was best for this strong and agile dog in the long run.

**3)** Friends and family were enrolled to help take care of June on a daily basis. This helped ensure that June would respect and be friendly towards everyone later in life. Given the

determined that June had a hernia that would require extensive repair at her spay surgery. For six weeks, she was unable to participate in activities at her usual pace. As a result, her confinement training became more challenging as did meeting her social development requirements. I was grateful that June had months of exposure in dog classes and in public before her surgery. Also, contrary to a popular belief that mix breeds are not subject to inherited genetic disorders, all dogs need to be checked regularly for medical and physical issues. Good behaviour and skills at the vet make things easier on everyone.

**7)** I was cautious about the speed I introduced grooming, restraint, and handling to June. This

became important due to the immense coat of the Spitz type dog. June's medium length hair (with a dense, heavy undercoat) "blows" at least once a year and requires regular care to minimise daily fur throughout the home. Additionally, when her coat sheds out completely, it was helpful that I had been working on her skills in the bathing tub and the use of a high powered groomer's blow dryer. Sibercaans can come in any combination of colours, but June's white hair is a certain challenge to keep swept up and out of the carpets.

**8)** I played with June every night possible in our large fenced field for 25-45 minutes, no matter what the weather was; incorporating games of



fetch, retrieve, recall, and obedience. This type of dog is versatile, quick, energetic, athletic, and highly adjustable to all changes in weather. They will not understand why their day does not involve outdoor adventures if you opt to “stay in”. Additionally, from my experience, if you get away with convincing them to only play games in the house or to spend quite a bit of time resting for most of the day, the following day will be more work to satiate their exercise requirement. In my region, temperatures can vary from zero to one hundred degrees (Fahrenheit) depending on the season, so you will need to be prepared for this adaptable breed type’s outdoor exercise needs along with the dirt they bring into your home.

**9)** I taught other people to play games with June and her toys. The innate tendency of a Siberian husky is to be easily distracted in their hunt for entertainment while Canaan Dogs can struggle with a desire to possess items. Therefore, teaching proper human-dog play is a challenge to be met by a creative, patient, insightful, and intelligent owner. Games should involve athletics, nose work, obedience, and proper social skills to reinforce good daily behaviour. Most dogs love to dig outdoors (and chew many things) and from my



experience, the Sibercaan is no exception, especially if you skip any daily exercise and training sessions!

**10)** I tried to maintain the concept of, “Keep Calm and Carry On” whenever working with June using emotions in a controlled way (at each end of the spectrum) and attempted to limit my own personal right brained-ness when things went pear-shaped. Mindless repetition can be an invitation for human manipulation in this type of dog. Harshness, erratic tempers, and cruelty are not a way to communicate with any canine and most certainly not the sensitive Spitz-type Sibercaan. You and your dog are a team. Use respect and kindness in all your interactions in order to garner and maintain mutual respect.

**11)** I taught June to be tethered everywhere in our home and on our land and to find it a neutral or good experience. I am happy that



June tends to be more like a Siberian Husky in welcoming people on our property in a demonstratively inquisitive, curious way. Canaan Dogs are well-known to have territorial, sentry tendencies and instincts. No matter how experienced and well-versed you are in dog-keeping, these types of guarding behaviours involve committed management in the course of your dog's life to prevent extroverted suspiciousness and safety challenges.

**12)** I trained June to play with me while wearing a leash so that fun time could take place anywhere. Both Siberian Huskies and Canaan Dogs are well known to be using 100% of their five senses at all times. Since dogs' instincts are finely tuned for survival, they have many more things on their radar at any given time than us humans. This means that even the most perfectly well-behaved dog will still act like a canine given a specific set of parameters. I wanted June to be able to enjoy life everywhere we went without having to worry about distractions that would inhibit off-lead reliability. Plus, I felt it wrong to infringe on the rights of others by disobeying the leash laws that most communities maintain to prevent canine neighborhood nuisances.

*June is truly my best canine friend and I enjoy taking her everywhere I possibly can in society. She makes me laugh, cry, and gets me out of bed every morning while making sure I sleep quite soundly each night from our daily level of activity. Like her name sake, I believe her maturation process has provided me with much guidance in this lifetime. I appreciate her sensitive, insightful, and instinctual nature and strive to understand her more at every opportunity. Always up for an adventure, she is a*



*popular dog in our community being the orientation dog for our training classes (since ten months of age) and working in private lessons (since puppy hood). Her "childhood" has been very challenging for me personally and emotionally, but given the opportunity, I would certainly own a Spitz-type dog over and over again!*

Lisa R. McCluskey has been training animals for the past 13 years. She is a member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT), and was the first Certified Pet Dog Trainer (CPDT) in the state of Illinois. Visit Lisa at [www.moongazer.com](http://www.moongazer.com)

