



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
December 21, 2007

**“Some days everything goes just right: deep-blue sky, no wind, and a beautiful trail stretching out in front of the dogs, happy huskies trotting along in synchrony...”**

-From *Sled Dogs of Denali National Park* by Karen Fortier

The Mountain Musher's recently gave a presentation at the Albany Library. Lela and Harry Schlitz arrived with an actual sled; a 2-minute video clip of a ranger on sled patrol in Denali National Park in Alaska; various equipment, like musher gloves, snow shoes, a dog harness and booties; lots of photographs and 3 sled dogs - Pixie, Sorrel and Su. The audience was made up of people of all ages, from babies to seniors, and it was clear most people were there to see the dogs.

To start their program, they invited me to the front of the room with them. They then presented the Library with an autographed copy of *Sled Dogs of Denali National Park*, a book whose cover is graced with a close-up photograph of the Schlitz's retired sled dog Sorrel. The book itself is a wonderful combination of history, photographs and fascinating information about the dogs known as Alaskan Huskies, which are a "Variable mix of northern-breed dogs, selected for perfor-

mance rather than appearance; not a standardized breed such as Siberian Husky or Malamute."

Lela, who is a retired elementary school teacher, next gave a book talk. Out of her bag she pulled a variety of books, for toddlers to adults. Included were: *The Quiltmaker's Gift* by Jeff Brumbeau, with illustrations by Gail de Marcken; the *Three Snow Bears* by Jan Brett; *Wolf Brother*, the first book in a trilogy by Michelle Paver and Geoff Taylor; and *The Book Thief*, by Markus Zusak. For each one, she gave just enough information to entice readers - the perfect kind of book talk.

Harry then gave a brief overview of Alaskan Huskies, stressing the critical nature of their work. He emphasized the importance of caring for them gently and respectfully, never abusing them. He went over some of the equipment, pointing out, for example, that old heavy harnesses were "one size fits all," while modern lighter

*continued on page 2*

ones are each tailored for individual dogs. He took his time telling his story – he had points he wanted to make and he knew that once the dogs entered the room, the focus would be on them.

Finally, each dog was introduced and brought in. True to the description of Alaskan Huskies, each is unique. Pixie looked much like a white shepherd, Sorrel like a combination of German shepherd and Malamute, and Su, who is only a puppy, was resplendent in her winter coat. Harry had promised they wouldn’t leave until everyone had a chance to pet the dogs and he was true to his word: even people who had missed the program got their chance to touch them, talk to them and ask questions about them.

Afterwards, as I was chatting with Lela, I mentioned

-----  
*Alaskan Huskies are a ‘variable mix of northern-breed dogs, selected for performance rather than appearance’*  
-----

to her how much I appreciated the slow and thoughtful pace of their presentation. At first, I worried the audience would become impatient and possibly bored.

I realize how accustomed I have become to the idea of a fast-paced show – magicians, puppeteers, jugglers and even musicians. In fact, with the help of computer games, movies and television, there is a rapidity to everything that can affect our daily lives

and those of our children. The Mountain Musers reminded me of the importance of slowing down and trusting the experience itself. Like a good book, this was a program with a well thought-out beginning, middle and end. And the dogs were definitely worth the wait.

(Photos can be viewed at [albanylibrary.wordpress.com](http://albanylibrary.wordpress.com))