

It all began with “the Search”

It all began 31 years ago, the decision to begin the search for our first Bernese Mountain Dog. At the time we could have never imagined the journey we were about to embark upon. The Bernese Mountain Dog was the driving force behind how our lives were designed. There was no pattern as to how to do this but only the knowledge that this breed just “fit”, it fit perfectly for how we wanted to start our family and raise our children with ethically sound beliefs. Through all the pleasures and sorrows the Bernese Mountain Dog was always the spark in our home that kept us motivated and forward thinking. It is through the love of this breed that our life story was created. We as a family have had many experiences with our Bernese Mountain Dogs under the Canadian Kennel Club Registered name of “Vinland”. Vinland is the name the Vikings gave Newfoundland when they discovered her shores around the year 1000. We name our dogs with the Viking theme in mind to honor this land and all of its rugged beauty. Our activities with the Bernese began in the conformation ring, and included competitive junior handling for our children, competition in the open, specials, group and veteran rings and at a Speciality and Sieger show. The joy and frolicking of a baby puppy prancing around the ring, the competition in breed and group ring, and the experience and wisdom of a veteran who knew their job has given us an appreciation and instilled the importance of the Bernese Mountain Dog breed standard. We learned what we had to do to become ambassadors for this breed by helping improve health and longevity and becoming ethically sound breeders. The training world quickly became a love of ours as well, We trialed our dogs in obedience, rally obedience, agility, Canine Good Citizen and Canine Good Neighbour testing. These disciplines taught us that this breed is incredibly smart and could also maintain their fun-loving goofy demeanour and still bring home the ribbons! We trained our dogs as draft animals utilizing various wagons, carts, sleds, and slides. Over the years this has given us much joy as our children grew up riding in the dog vehicles as babies and toddlers during our various family outings and around the farm. They were partners at our sides and enjoyed any task asked of them. Carting and draft training came easy to us as we are horse women/men who also bred and used the Newfoundland Pony for work and pleasure and it was therefore easy to cross train our Bernese. The equipment and harness needed for the dog was also easy for us because Gary my husband is a harness maker who could make the traditional Newfoundland style dog harness which is also perfect for Berners. The Bernese laid the path for our family’s lifestyle.

Our philosophy about this breed, their versatility, our belief that they can be a good healthy and sound working dog and our desire to foster and preserve the “working” drive in this breed led us into the world of K9 Search and Rescue. The adaptability of this breed is amazing; they have proven this to us repeatedly. Not only a pretty face, they are intelligent with a kind disposition and possess a great working drive with a stable temperament. Their love for the human is undoubtedly their strongest trait. Their endurance, soundness, mental stability, loyalty, and desire to please and their food drive are the traits that were needed for K9 search and rescue. This new chapter of our life with the Bernese would include not only dedication to train our dogs

to a very high standard but also ourselves. And so it began the task of certifying our dogs and ourselves as an operational wilderness /urban air scent K9 SAR team.

It is a very humbling experience to work with a dog that complements you, and you them. The strengths of the team are enhanced to create harmony and all of the skills gained over thousands of hours of training are tuned to make teams who can benefit humankind, "So that others may live". At Vinland we are proud to say that five of our female Bernese have successfully passed all certification requirements and have earned the title of Certified Search and Rescue K9's with the Newfoundland Search Dogs Inc. Our Vinland Bernese SAR teams consist of, myself (Bobbi) & K9 Bo, Gary & K9 Loki, Melanie & K9 Ella, Jordan & K9 Ambi and Andrea & K9 Odi. At the time of certification their ages ranged from 18 months to five years; the eldest dog being certified twice previously at ages 2 and 3 years old, and again at 5. It is very humbling to think that we are the first kennel to have five female certified BMD's in Canada and maybe the world!

To become a successful K9 SAR team requires a very large commitment to the cause; a lifestyle dedicated to search and rescue, and steadfast to the training process even with the ups and downs that come with training a dog. The end result being to safely perform SAR tasks for you, your dog and your team mates in an ongoing professional and skillful manner. This volunteer training requires one to be mission ready for a time that you may be called upon, when needed.

The process of becoming a Certified K9 SAR dog with the Newfoundland Search Dogs Inc. begins with the completion of a Beginners Search and Rescue course which allows you to begin to understand the training theory on which a SAR dog is encouraged and nurtured. Both dog and handler develop an understanding of K9 SAR basics, scent theory and search techniques. The Newfoundland Search Dogs welcome many types of dogs into training. From purebreds to mixed breeds. From here our teams train many hours per week as a group to gain required knowledge. This knowledge is acquired locally from experienced peers and instructors brought in from various K9 SAR groups in Canada such as the Alberta Search Dog Association, Valley Search and Recue and also local well known K9 experts. These resources allow us to enhance our skills using the developed repertoire and knowledge base of those people who have been through the same process and are actively being deployed on K9 SAR missions. As part of the Certification process dogs must be successfully tested in various areas to show they have the skill required for this work which includes; temperament tests, agility, group and individual obedience, urban and wilderness search tests which include article detection, gridding, tracking, live finds and human remains detection. It is not only the dogs who must gain SAR knowledge and skills and execute them proficiently but the handlers must also must gain a vast amount of human SAR skills and become proficient and capable. This includes things such as wilderness first aid, navigation, wilderness survival, lost person behaviour, search scene preservation, search call out protocol and procedures, scent theory, search technique, evidence handling, chain of command, critical incident debriefing, working with the public, radio use, media relations, how to properly hide and act as a K9 training subject and weather and wind conditions. These are but a few among many

other skills necessary to become a certified K9 team. One of the most important talents that cannot be taught to any K9 team but must be learned by the handler alone is “to trust your dog” as the dog is the expert and the only one who can “read the wind”. A handler must learn to “read the dog” and it is through this new artistry that a handler develops which makes the difference on whether it is a positive and rewarding “find” or not! These mastered abilities merge to create a skillful and confident K9 SAR team who may apply for certification testing with the Newfoundland Search Dogs. In total, this can take approximately two years if the handler is dedicated to the cause and the process at which time, qualified testers who are experts in the field of SAR and K9 SAR are brought in to complete the certification testing for each K9 team. A team must pass all components to be certified.

Currently some of our Bernese and handlers at Vinland are broadening their skillset and working on a new scent profile, “Human Remains Detection”. All five of them are currently certified Search and Rescue dog teams in the profiles wilderness/urban air scenting and have begun to cross train in HRD, due to the increased demand for the use of dogs trained to assist in the location of human remains. As a dog handler, it is important that we keep our dogs motivated and happy and that the bond is strong and rewarding. Working on new goals and ideas allows us to continually evolve and learn. We are here as a team to help our community when needed, our Vinland Bernese, as members of the Newfoundland Search Dogs, will continue to train and learn all that we can so that we may be able to help when called upon. Since the beginning of Vinland Reg. in 1989, right up to today the greatest honor is what this breed has given us so selflessly. We as humans think we are doing for them but in retrospect it is they who are doing for us. Without all of the dogs who have been in our lives, our story would not be as richly told. “Berners Bumps”, training fails and successes, the Barnes/Vinland family can say with self assurance, the Bernese Mountain Dogs who have graced our lives are our faithful companions and soul mates, and who through their love sustain and preserve the bond as a family member and a K9 SAR partner. We will therefore alongside our Bernese remain mission ready and be there to help “So that others may live.”