

BIG APPLE 2014--WESTMINSTER KENNEL CLUB

by Janet Richardson

Six months ago a friend in my kennel club asked if I would be interested in going to NYC with her this February for the Westminster Dog Show. Brandi Murray is a young, vibrant, 32 year old who had agreed to take five big dogs To handle there at the Westminster Dog show. She is a great handler who does a great job of handling Dewy. She said she would show him for me if I would help her with the trip and handling these other dogs at ringside if she had to juggle times. I wondered if I should say yes; I knew that I needed hand and knee surgery and was not sure if my hand would be able to walk a Labrador and two Aussies and two Finish Lapphunds. I went ahead and agreed back in November before knowing we were going to have the worst winter weather ever.

February came and plans were made to drive up, so we would have a day to spend in the City before getting set up for the dog show. We ended up leaving a day early and drove south to avoid snow in Tennessee and made it to Greensboro, N.C. for the first night. The second day we got an early start and went thru Pennsylvania which the day before had had two feet of snow, but the highways were cleared, and we ended up arriving a day earlier (than planned) at the Hotel Pennsylvania.

Unloading six dogs and their crates into our hotel room came first, then trying to get our stuff out of the van so it could be taken to their parking garage was the next step. Arriving in N.Y.C. At 6:00-7:00 p.m. was crazy. After they took Brandi's van and exercised the dogs in the hotel basement, Brandi realized she had left clothes in the van. We had decided we would leave the extra crates and grooming stuff we needed to take to the Piers on Sunday, and check the van out on Sunday to unload at the Piers. However, now we needed to find the van to get Brandi's hanging clothes so the hotel men gave us directions to find the van and our ticket. When we found the van it was illegally parked, and the owner of the area it was in had a big argument with the men in charge of our van. They said it would get moved to the correct parking spot after a certain concert in the area ended. We got Brandi's things and left the men fighting and made our way back to the Hotel.

Sleep came quickly after a light dinner and unwinding. We did spend some time, first letting the dogs have exercise in the hotel basement which had everything a park had for dogs. A separate wood shavings area with fire hydrants for the male dogs and a different side for the females. Baggies and scoopers were all available, in addition to a basement filled with six dog treadmills and various exercise and agility equipment, a dog masseuse, and acupuncture specialist. They were all set up with dog bath tubs, table and dryers. Getting the six intact males in the freight elevator down seven floors without them lifting legs was quite a challenge, but we managed by keeping them away from any tables or doors as we traveled down and back.

Friday morning we decided to eat a good breakfast at the hotel, and then walked to Times Square and Rockafella center, taking pictures and enjoying the brisk cold weather after sitting in the van for two days. Back to the hotel to exercise the dogs, and then we met with friends coming in that night for dinner at Patsy's Italian Restaurant. We took a New York taxi there and back, as by this time we had walked at least five or six miles that day. Saturday morning we made plans for the day and were able to get tickets to see the site of 9/11 and their museum. We took a few trains on the Subway to get there and found it very emotional place to visit.

After the morning there we found the correct Subway station, so we could go to Chinatown to enjoy Peking Duck for a late lunch. We didn't stay in Chinatown, and after we ate went right back to Subway and the Hotel Pennsylvania. The dogs were pleased to see us and have time in the doggie park in the basement. By this time the basement was busy as so many folk had come in that day--it was nice to visit with good friends. Plans were then made to go to dinner that night to the Carnegie Deli. It was snowing so the two taxis took us where we needed to go. Only four people were allowed in one taxi.

Sunday morning we had the hotel bring us the van, and we headed over to the Piers to unload all the crates in the benched areas assigned to us. Brandi only had three breeds for that day, so we

couldn't be benched with the handlers. We had the Finnish Lapphund's at the far end of Pier 92, and Corgis and Aussies were a row apart close to where the competition was in Pier 94. Fortunately the owner of one of the Lapphunds had flown in for the show, so was able to stay guarding the two of them all day. They were shown early in the morning at 8:30, so we groomed them first. The Aussies then went to spend the day at the far end of the Pier 94. Brandi took Best of Breed with one of the Lappies, so when 3:00 p.m. came she had to leave the Piers and take it to Madison Square Garden ready for the evening groups. Poor Brandi was running back and forth to the Lappy area from the Aussies all day long! You could pay to have a guard with your dog if you could not stay with them, so I was told to stay with Dewy and the corgis. I was set up by the Saviolis lovely bitch Rebecca who ended up taking the breed. Sherry Hurst, the handler, was telling me the previous year the Cardigan she was showing suddenly got deadly ill right before ring time, and she had to run five blocks to a vet to save her life; that it taught her you do not take your eyes off the dogs at any time. We would take turns if we had to leave the corgis. Of course to add to the confusion, Pembroke Corgis and Australian Shepherds were on at 10:00 a.m., four rings apart. As there were not as many Pem's, Brandi was able to handle Dewy in the ring first; we moved Flynt the Aussie to the end of the line as they had three times as big an entry. Dewy had wonderful competition and Judge Donald Sturtz had quite a job picking the winners. We were thrilled when Dewy won an Award Of Merit. Unfortunately we had to rush to the Aussies, and I was unable to get a photo of Dewy, Brandi and the judge.

The rest of the day was spent visiting with old corgi friends and showing off the dogs as they enjoyed being on their grooming tables and getting attention from all the visitors. Purina had lunch for everyone, so we took turns to go there grab a plate and bring it back to our set ups.

At 5:00 p.m. they let people leave the site to take their dogs and equipment back to the hotels. Regular buses were brought in to carry folks; they only had room for two or three people who had dolly's and crates, so it took hours to get out of the Piers. Brandi had left at 3:00 p.m. with the winning Lappy Smoke, together with one dolly and crate. I was left with the owners of the winning Lappy and Aussie Flynt and Corgi Dewy. We had a big dolly with three crates, two tables--all grooming equipment. Because Brandi had the Labrador to show on Tuesday, we needed to leave a crate and grooming stuff for him. At 8:00 p.m. they gave us the place to set up, so after an hour we piled crates and tables on the dolly in the Aussies benching area and took just the dryers, hand luggage, Flynt, and Dewy. We got on a regular coach they brought for folk who didn't have dollies. We figured we would take all the stuff back to the hotel mid day on Tuesday leaving Brandi to bench with Jag the Labrador and only have to bring him back that night when they let everyone out at 5:00 p.m. I was able to let the dogs have time on the treadmills in the basement after they pottied, and I started packing and rested a bit to ready for the evenings activities. Both of us were really stressed and ended up going with friends to the Irish pub across the street for dinner, watched the Groups on their TV. We then finished packing, so we could leave the hotel by 5:00 a.m. to try to beat the next snow storm that was heading East. We were able to get dogs and luggage loaded by 4:30 a.m. and out of the city by 5:00 a.m.

Driving was easy going until we got as far as Roanoke, Virginia on Highway 81 when snow began. We stayed behind a snow plough a good part of the way. We kept driving slowly, as we knew it was going to get worse; there were periods when the snow stopped altogether. Tennessee was free of snow and we made up time there, but between Knoxville and Chattanooga snow started getting heavy. We stopped for the night in Athens, had a good meal at the Cracker Barrel, then walked dogs in the thick snow and all had an early night.

Northern Alabama had been hit badly with snow, and we knew they would not be prepared with snow ploughs like up North to clear roads. We waited a while to leave in the morning. It was beautiful driving with the trees covered in fresh snow and ice, and the drive through Chattanooga was beautiful too. I could not help taking pictures constantly while Brandi drove carefully. Fortunately, there was very limited traffic on the road. Most of the drive home from Chattanooga was easy and slow. We stayed behind a truck doing 20-30 mph. When he suddenly put on his brakes about fifteen minutes

before Gadsden, we had to go in the outside lane where we hit ice and slid off the road. This scared us both, but the dogs were all secured safely and only Jag was stressed enough to poop in his crate. He was in the back which was against the cliff so we had to wait until AAA came to pull us out, so Brandi could get in the back to clean. Back on the road and only thirty more minutes of snow--the roads were clear. Poor Brandi was really stressed by this point, and we were ever so glad to get to her house! I loaded my stuff into my van, and Dewy and me headed back to my lake home. After arriving, I let Dewy loose and I sat in the van, just taking in the tranquility of Star Lake. New York City you were a great place to visit! But! Home Sweet Home Alabama.