

Thisa and Thata

Dog Shows Can Be Dangerous

by Norma Hansburg

These days, I often think of my father – who has been gone for almost 20 years – but his wisdom has granted me a great deal of peace when things got bad. One of his favorite poems was The Shooting of Dan McGrew, by Robert W. Service. As a kid I learned it by heart from hearing it so often. The opening verse goes something like this:

*“A Bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon
The kid who handles the Music Box was playing a Ragtime tune.
In back of the bar in his usual spot was Dangerous Dan McGrew.
And next to him was his lady love the lady known as Lou.”*

That might not be the exact words, but its pretty close; it's a long time since I read it. When I taught seventh grade English, I always read it to my classes when we had a few minutes left at the end of a period. I liked it so much I named two of my dogs for it. One in 1971: DANGEROUS DAN (who was a litter brother to CH Dark Star); and the other in 1986: LOUISVILLE LOU (who was my first homebred OFA and was litter sister to LAST LEAF, owned by Bud Drew).

Having lived through the riots of the 60s, when two dog shows were thrown out of the Armories because the National Guard was called out; through Hurricane Katrina when they had to cancel the Louisiana shows; and, most recently, through the bathroom blackout at nearby Saratoga. Having been badly bitten at ringside at the shows in Raleigh. Having seen terrible fights between dogs in the ring at dog shows. (I particularly remember the Alaskan Malamute National, when Mike Billings was judging and two select dogs got into such a bad fight that one of the handlers ended up in the hospital.)

Having seen dog shows where the aisles were so crowded and dirty that the place was obviously in violation of the Fire Laws. And having seen the AKC turn its back on the violations, the bites the dangerous tent ropes that stuck out into rings all over the place. Having been to shows with no handicapped parking near the obedience rings - a direct violation of THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT. I know that Dog shows can be dangerous and unhealthy for both us and our dogs.

Something needs to be done about it. If it doesn't get done then the SPORT will be on the road to extinction. As it is Shepherd entries have dropped so far that what used to be worth one point in the sixties and seventies is now worth five. Talk about lowering the bar.!

I thought I would tell you what happened at Saratoga since I was there and I stayed on the show grounds for two nights. I stayed in Linda Selmon's small motor home, which was parked right next to the Federovs' camper. The company was good and our gang was having a really fine time. The dogs certainly were enjoying it.

But on Tuesday night there were no lights on in the bathrooms or shower rooms. Linda and I drove around to several of them and finally went back to the motor home because none of them had any lights.

That night I walked to the nearest one in the dark, washed up and went to bed. The next morning, the stories were all over the place. There was a rape; there was a child molested in one of the bathrooms. This was after show hours and was not a concern of the AKC any more then the suicide of a famous exhibitor, Anton Korbelt, at one of the motels during the early 1960s. I suspect that the people who run the campgrounds were trying to save energy but it was a dumb call. And lately there have been two many dumb calls.

Having been to shows all over this country I can tell you that it's worse in the Northeast than in the Southwest. And it gets worse all the time.

Something has to be done about it. Perhaps it calls for a special department of AKC to manage and supervise the physical conditions of All shows before there is a really major lawsuit that is so big it will shut the sport down completely. Someone has to lead the way. And that reminds me of one of one of my favorite songs: It's from the show *Guys and Dolls*.

"Follow The Fold and stray no more
stray no more, stray no more
Put down the bottle and we'll say no more
Follow, follow the fold."

I would like to dedicate this column to my late friend EJ Murphy of Grapevine, Texas. EJ, I miss you.