

Pickles, Just Pickles

By Judith LeRoy

I am a Bearded Collie and my name is Pickles. Well, not officially. My name, as recognized by the American Kennel Club, is Pineridge Perfect Parfait. Yeah, I know ... gag me with a spoon, preferably NOT a parfait spoon. My breeder, the Lady Who Used to Feed Me, called me Tiny, because I was the smallest puppy in my litter. Actually, she said I was the smallest puppy she'd ever had, and I was such a dark brown color everyone thought I was black in my first week of life—until my nose got some color and that color was very dark chocolate. I didn't have a splash of white anywhere except a dot on the very tip of my tail, an almost imperceptible ribbon of white around my collar and another skinny blaze running down the bridge of my muzzle. So "despite being a very fine representative of the breed," my breeder let me go home with some people who were looking for a companion dog ... in other words, as a pet—a lesser model, in my breeder's eyes, than a show dog. In my estimation, though, my mostly-all-over chocolate hue was a blessing. Being mud-colored hides many sins, for, by nature, I was not (and am not) a clean-freak. I had been compared to the Charles Schultz cartoon character, Pig Pen, in my younger days, because ... well ... dust and dirt just seemed to find me. I've attempted to ameliorate this tendency recently—somedays with more success than others.

My new owners were absolute neophytes as dog owners, but very amiable people. They enjoyed my often-scruffy appearance and seemed to think I could do no wrong. Obviously, they were mistaken because I know of no Bearded Collie who would thusly misrepresent him or herself. While my behavior never reached juvenile delinquent status, I did, and I do, have some foibles. For example: I quickly learned that people food is much tastier than dog food and I've stolen people food religiously from the day I got home at eight weeks of age to the present ... I'm now almost 18 months old. This may sound like an irrelevant detail or that I'm bragging, but my thievery is a very important piece of my personal history.

Because one of my first food heists was a dill pickle.

It was just sitting on a plate on the coffee table in the family room, recklessly unguarded. I got on my hind legs, stretched way, way up—as I mentioned, I wasn't an overly large breed specimen—managed to get a paw on the pickle and swatted it to the carpet. Anyway, my owners found me behind a chair in the family room, gnawing on a sour, slimy piece of brined vegetation that was half as long as I was. Mom and Dad hilariously recall the pained expression on my face as they describe it to guests who laugh uncontrollably. Silly puppy ... and thus, my name was, and ever since has been, Pickles.

What was I thinking?? And no, I haven't snitched one since. I hated my name for a long time. But time passes, and you might say I've gotten deconditioned. Now, when someone yells "Pickles!" to call me in from the backyard, my mouth no longer puckers remembering that ugly vegetable. A good thing.

My owners and I learned to cohabit. We went to puppy classes where the instructor said, "Pickles is our star student," although every time she said "Pickles," she had to smile. I never knew if it was my scruffy appearance or my name that amused her. Anyway, I learned to sit, I learned to down, I learned to heel, I learned to wait. And I learned way, way before any other puppy in my class did. I learned that I liked to learn—something that made my owners very happy. The instructor recommended me for an adult obedience class, and I was delighted

because, it turns out, obedience employs standards and rules, and I believe in standards and rules—when applicable, of course. Some human rules are pure folly, and canines have a perfect right to disregard them. My owners soon learned the rules I wouldn't follow. They also discovered that I don't like to swim in the lake (they had bought me a doggy life preserver, so I could join them as they paddled about), that I hate kayaking, and that I refuse to sleep in on Sunday mornings.

So, time went by. I learned and I grew. I'll never be a giant of the breed, but I somehow squeaked up to the minimum height expected of a female Beardie. I maintained my scruffy demeanor to some extent—there isn't a ribbon, a barrette, or elastic band that can contain the top-knot of hair that keeps falling in my eyes—but I do try to wipe my feet after I've been digging in the back yard dirt.

When I was nine months old, Dorothy Morris, my breeder, arranged what she called “a play-date” for the puppies in my litter. Dad, Mom and I, among others, showed up on her doorstep. I was freshly bathed and brushed and Mom had made sure I stayed that way, at least until we got to Dorothy's house.

Dorothy reported being “amazed” at my growth. She told Mom and Dad that it was possible I could be a “reasonably successful” show dog, although she suggested changing my call name. Apparently, Pickles isn't a plausible name for a competition dog. Mom laughed and said she didn't know anything about showing dogs and that she and Dad were perfectly happy with Pickles as a loving companion. But Dad, an avid sports fan, is addicted to competition, and I noticed that he pricked up his ears—if those insignificant human appendages are capable of pricking.

Dorothy discussed basic grooming, training, and feeding with our owners while I reacquainted myself with my fellow littermates. Henry and Sally Ann arrived about the same time as I did, and we started to chat. Henry, my slate brother, was the biggest and smartest boy in my litter. He had always been a credible manipulator of us, his siblings, and his size assured he'd get his way even if manipulation failed. Harry was big when we were eight weeks old, but he was positively ginormous at nine months, at least compared to me. Henry's owners were Beardie people who did sheep herding as a hobby. Henry told me he even had his own little flock ... his own sheep ... and he lived with another Beardie who was showing him how to manage them.

Our breeder had called Sally Ann the “ditzzy blonde” of the litter, and we puppies sometimes called her “Silly-Sally.” Admittedly, since she's fawn, it was an easy stereotype. But Sally Ann, apart from her color, was always a bit ditsy. She'd leave her dinner, halfway through, to watch a butterfly in a bush outside the kitchen window and then wonder why another dog had eaten her kibble. That day at Dorothy's, Silly-Sally told Henry and me that her owner wants her to learn agility. Knowing Sally Ann, I'd tell them, “Lotsa luck!”

Sister Nadine arrived next. She was riding shotgun in a black BMW and had her own seat belt specially made in “her colors,” pink and white, befitting her status as “pick of the litter.” Her owners have Nadine's Westminster future charted and paid for and, according to Dorothy, she had her very own professional handler by the tender age of six months.

The rest of us puppies in the litter never held it against Nadine that most humans reached to pet her first, even when we were toddlers. And we didn't resent the “oohs” and “ahs” she elicited from Dorothy's dog breeder friends when they arrived to critique the litter. Nadine's a

picture perfect Beardie, according to Dorothy. Yeah, all the attention left her a little self-involved, maybe, but she was never obnoxious about it. Nadine was and is a unique and special member of our Beardie tribe, and we've always accepted and respected that fact.

When she and her owners came through Dorothy's garden gate, Nadine smiled at Henry, Sally Ann, and me. She started to trot over to say hello, but the gushing from the assembled human audience and the curtsies from our breeder stopped her in her tracks. Nadine unenthusiastically walked to the owners' circle to greet Dorothy and then, upon request, sat down next to her owners. I felt kind of sorry for Nadine because I suspected she'd rather join us, but her owner kept a firm grip on her pink leash.

Ginger and Susie arrived, tumbling through the gate together. They always were a twosome. They looked alike, thought alike, and loved the same toys—which they peaceably SHARED!! They even finished each other's sentences. They ended up going home together—the lady worried that one puppy might be lonely during the half-days she worked, so she decided to get two. When she saw how well Ginger and Susie got along, it was an easy choice. I couldn't tell them apart in the puppy pen and it wasn't any easier now. Their slate coats had faded to identical shades of gray and they even barked with the same cadence.

Charlie trotted in next. Honestly, I've never seen Charlie move at a slower gait than a fast trot. He's a darn good galloper, too. Charlie's always moving, he's cute and knows it, and he considers himself quite a ladies' man—but that makes him easy to manipulate, so who's complaining? Charlie explained the reason he was late was that his owner just finished a 5K charity fun run—with Charlie, of course. Charlie and his owner are, should we say, simpatico. Both are confirmed goers-and-movers and no grass will ever grow under their paws.

So, the six of us got re-acquainted in Dorothy's back yard—six of us because Nadine remained in the owners' circle, where the humans sat on lawn chairs, chatted, ate sandwiches, and drank lemonade. Henry's mother put her sandwich on a paper plate next to her chair, and I meandered over to investigate. Our breeder hadn't stinted. Boar's Head nitrate-free ham, aged Vermont cheddar cheese, Safflower oil mayo, and some imported Dijon mustard to add a little piquant burst to the traditional ham and cheese sandwiches. Yes, I've become a bit of a gourmet. Steal enough food, and you're bound to start making some observations. If I had thumbs, I'd be a chef, though the FDA-required hairnet might be a bit of a stretch. Anyway, Henry's mom never missed the sandwich, though my Mom squinted suspiciously at me when she noticed my jaws moving. She knows my habits.

Except for food thievery and a tendency toward unkemptness, I was the litter's most rational voice. I organized things and took care of problems. I don't know why. It just came naturally to me. Sort of like the litter's cruise director, I guess. If Sally Ann wondered why the newspaper in our exercise pen tasted funny one day, she'd ask me. The answer, of course, is that Friday's paper always tasted different from Tuesday's because it had all those weekend grocery store ads. If Charlie wanted the toy that Henry had snatched from him, it was up to me to referee—usually by finding a new toy for Charlie and by convincing him that the new toy was a hundred times better than the one Henry stole, since I knew there was no chance of getting the original toy away from Henry. He was just too darn big to tangle with and too smart to cajole.

But Henry had mellowed. He seemed a totally rational fellow that afternoon at our playdate. He'll probably make an excellent shepherd because, it turns out, he's very observant.

"That was pretty nifty," Henry complimented me. "The way you snagged that sandwich. Nobody even noticed. Whenever I try something like that, my brother snitches on me. He says he's got to be my conscience since I'm too immature to have one of my own. That's what he says, but I know he just likes to expose my faults to prove he's accountable. The day will come, though," Henry's eyes sparkled, "that I will reciprocate."

I suspected he would, too. Henry seems like one cagey dude.

Sally Ann stumbled upon us, chasing a grasshopper. "Don't you love the way they jump?" she asked of no one in particular. "They almost fly! How would it feel to fly, I wonder? Birds do it. When I ask the blue jay in my backyard how it feels, he looks at me like I'm crazy and then says very rude things," Sally Ann looked pensive, pondering the rude things, I guessed. "But grasshoppers! They never say anything impolite. They're actually very sweet, though misunderstood, creatures."

"Ah," says Henry, "blue jays are crude birds. But I've never heard a grasshopper talk, Sally Ann. Have you, Pickles?" I had to agree with Henry. I've never heard of insect/mammal communication, although I don't know why it would be impossible.

"It's not because grasshoppers can't talk," said Sally Ann. "It's just that they're too busy flying." She watched her grasshopper lunge away.

"They don't taste very good, though," said Ginger.

"You ate a grasshopper?" Charlie was incredulous.

"You ATE a grasshopper??" Sally Ann was aghast. "They're harmless, delightful creatures. Why on earth would you eat one, Ginger?"

"Not on purpose, Silly. Who'd eat a grasshopper on purpose? I was running after it. It turned around and jumped right in my mouth. Really vile. I'll never chase another one."

"Did you swallow it?" Charlie was fascinated. "Was it all scratchy going down ... with those long prickly legs ..." Charlie's eyes watered at the thought, he shivered a bit and gagged.

"Did you ever see one spit?" asked Susie, Ginger's sister. "If they spit in your eye, they can blind you. That's what our neighbor dog, Jacques, says. He's a French bulldog and he talks funny. He tells me 'Bone jour!' every morning. I have no idea what kind of bones he's talking about, but he certainly has a lot of different ones ... 'bone Dieu,' 'bone appetite,' 'c'est bone.' He's from France, and he speaks French, so he must be smart. He says that grasshopper juice is really bad stuff. It can kill you!"

"Balderdash," said Henry.

"Poppycock!" I said. The other puppies look at us quizzically, probably suspecting that we, like Jacques, were speaking in a foreign language. If Susie cocked her head any further, she'd have fallen flat on the ground. But before anyone could say anything, a soft, genteel voice interrupted the conversation. Nadine had escaped the owners' circle and joined the puppy convocation. "Excuse me," she said, "has anyone seen blue bunny?" Ah, blue bunny! Blue bunny was always the most coveted toy in the box when we lived at Dorothy's house. Nadine

added, unaware of the problem her innocent words would precipitate, "I always loved blue bunny."

Susie currently had blue bunny clutched between her jaws.

Charlie, who'd always been soft on Nadine, said, "Susie's got blue bunny. Do you want it, Nadine?" and turned toward Susie.

But Susie had developed some spunk since puppy pen days, and she lowered her head and growled. Henry, a future statesman, tried to ward off a possible skirmish. "I'll get a different toy for you, Nadine." He looked at the giant box of dog toys our breeder had opened in the middle of the backyard. Squeaky toys, tennis balls, pull-ropes, and teddy bears spewed forth. "Which toy would you like?" he gallantly inquired.

But Charlie had gone all macho. "Nadine wants the blue bunny, Dude!" He growled and lunged for the toy. Susie had blue bunny by one ear, and Charlie grabbed the other. Ginger leaped into the fray to protect her sister's interests, and Henry launched into Charlie.

That did it. The snarling, barking, yelping pile of fur looked rather inviting, so Sally Ann and I plunged into the heap. Because of my diminutive size, I always seemed to end up at the bottom of every puppy pile, and it was no different today. As I peeked out from under flailing legs and tails, I saw Nadine, the only non-combatant, looking perplexed at the chaos she had inadvertently created. Then, in a devil-may-care moment, she appeared poised to leap into the fray and join us. Sadly, her owner rushed up and grabbed her leash before she leapt.

After our owners sorted out the puppy pile, Dorothy decided Henry and Charlie needed time-outs in the wire exercise pens provided for just such purposes, and the day proceeded. I, for my part, had regained my normal scruffy mien. Having been at the bottom of the puppy pile, my tummy and paws were dirty, my ears were saliva-slimed, and my top knot, freed from its elastic band, flopped comfortably over my left eye.

"That's our girl," said Mom ruefully, and the other owners laughed.

That was nine months ago. Three months ago, out of the blue, we got a curious call from Dorothy Morris.

It was a cold and sleety early spring day. Mom, Dad, and I were cozily tucked inside our toasty home after a miserable walk in the elements. It had been a much longer walk than it should have been because I find it hard to poop or pee with cold, wet feet. I eventually managed to humor my humans, and we all got to go inside. After Dad briskly towed me off and he and Mom put on dry clothes, we settled in for a relaxed rainy Saturday. I wandered into Mom's study where she was studying seed catalogs on her computer. Dad had retired to the den to read about the prospects of his favorite baseball team in the upcoming season—activities probably common to a lot of suburban families waiting for spring after a long winter.

Mom's been planning and re-planning her small vegetable garden for two weeks now and it's only March 8th. What with errant frosts, she won't be able to stick a spade in the ground until mid-April, so she's a bit premature. I'm not complaining about the careful thought she puts into her garden, though. I like gardening. She gives me a corner of my own and I scritch and

scratch around in the dirt until I get a perfect little nest—one shaped precisely to my liking—and I can lie in it and watch spring happen. The birds, the bees, everybody's active and amorous.

I digress. The phone rang and Dad answered it. He knows Mom doesn't like to be disturbed when she's "gardening." After Mom moved the carrot row three times and reduced the size of the radish planting by half because, after all, none of us really like radishes, she joined Dad in the den.

"Did I hear the phone ring earlier?"

"Mmm," said Dad. "Oh, yeah."

"Who was it?"

"Pickles' breeder."

It wasn't much of a conversation. Dad, deep in a fantasy about his favorite team reaching the World Series this year, was planning the batting order for Opening Day. The Milwaukee Brewers' manager probably wasn't waiting with bated breath to hear his suggestions.

Mom got impatient. "I guess I'll go back to my computer and order that gold-plated toilet on sale for \$7,820.82 at Amazon. It's probably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." Mum turned toward her study.

"Yeah, sure. Wait, wait ... what?" Mom had Dad's attention.

Mom spoke very deliberately. "The phone call ...?"

"Oh, it was only Pickles' breeder."

"So, you said. What did she want?"

"She wants us to enter Pickles in a dog show in May. She's asking Sally Ann's owners, too. She's trying to make points for Nadine ... or something like that ... so Nadine can finish. Whatever 'making points' is, and whatever it is she wants to 'finish,' I don't know."

"Well, that's strange. Pickles isn't a show dog, and neither is Sally Ann. Dorothy knows that Pickles is in obedience classes and Sally Ann is doing agility."

Between you and me, Sally Ann "doing agility" is pretty much an overstatement. I know an Australian Shepherd in her agility class, and he told me that Sally Ann keeps getting stuck in the agility course's tunnel. "Really a hoot," he said.

Mom looked at Dad, waiting for details. "If the show is in May, why is she calling today?"

But Dad had already tuned out, he was back to the newspaper. "I don't know. Maybe Sally Ann's owner knows more about it. You could always call her, I guess."

Mom is a very gentle soul. She rarely raises her voice, but her eyes got hard and squinty when she walked across the room, leaned over Dad's newspaper to make eye contact, and said, "What did you tell her, James?"

Dead Silence.

“James? Did you say yes?”

“Well, it didn’t sound like she was asking a lot ... just going to a dog show. Pickles would probably enjoy the experience.”

“So, you said yes without consulting me??”

“I really didn’t think you’d tell her no.”

“Watch me. *Nadine* is a show dog. Pickles is NOT a show dog. That’s why Dorothy let us buy her, remember? Why would Dorothy want a dog she decided wasn’t a show dog shown? It makes no sense.” Mom was getting worked up, or as Dad sometimes says, “mounting her high horse,” though I’ve never heard any neighing or whinnying and that disappoints me.

Mom found the Dorothy’s phone number and dialed. No luck. I could hear the answering machine’s message, “Please leave a name and phone number, and we’ll return your call as soon as possible.” Mom was muttering as she found Sally Ann’s phone number and called Janice, Sally’s Ann’s owner.

“Janice, this is Liz Martin. You know ... Pickles’ Mom? We met at Dorothy Morris’s playdate? My husband James just took a call from her about ...”

“... about a dog show in May,” Janice completed Mom’s sentence. It’s nice to have sensitive dog ears to hear both sides of a telephone conversation—a lot of important dog-related stuff goes on in that funny little gadget that humans hold up to their insensitive little ears. “Dorothy just called here, too,” Janice continued. “She said that Pickles’ Dad had agreed to enter Pickles, and that she needed another girl dog from the litter entered in order to, oh, I don’t know, so that *Nadine* wins something. I really have no interest in dog showing, but since you said yes, I didn’t think I could refuse, so ...”

Mom glared at Dad. He was in deep do-do.

“We had a little misunderstanding here, Janice. Sorry about that. I don’t have any interest, either, but my husband didn’t feel he could say no to Dorothy.” That was nice of her, giving him a public excuse, but I suspected there would be a different conversation in private.

“I know,” said Janice. “Dorothy scares the pants off my husband, too. I told her I had no idea how to enter a dog show, and she said she’d fill in the forms and send them to us for signatures. *Nadine*’s owners will pay our entry fees. I think we’re stuck.”

Mom sighed. “I have no idea what goes on in a dog show, do you? I don’t want to go out and make a fool of myself. Or of Pickles.”

“I don’t think Dorothy would mind if we did. In fact, I could be cynical and say it’s probably part of the plan. She doesn’t want competition for *Nadine*, she just wants some dogs’ bodies for *Nadine* to beat.” Janice is no dummy.

Mom fussed all evening. Finally, she called a dog friend, Deanna, who she met at the Westport Kennel Club, a place where dog people meet and talk about dogs, I gather. She asked

Deanna about dog shows, and Deanna told her about “conformation classes” the local Kennel Club offered. She said that’s where “learner dogs” and “learner handlers” go to learn what to do at dog shows.

When Mom told Dad about the class, he listened, feigning (I think) interest. He’d better be supportive since he’d gotten us into this pickle. He got Pickles in a pickle. Is that what people call a pun?

While Dad is the sportsman of the family, Mom isn’t exactly a shrinking violet in the ego department. She wasn’t going to be a laughingstock, and her dog wasn’t going to be one either, by gum. She called Sally Ann’s mom and they decided to go to the conformation class together. Mom gave me a bath and admonished me to stay clean until Monday night—class night.

At the first class, Sally Ann and I discovered that being a show dog isn’t all that hard. Actually, it’s easy-peasy, lemon-squeezy. All you do is run a little here, stand a little there, let the judge see your teeth, run a little more, stand, smile and get your ribbon. A piece of cake. That’s what Sally Ann and I decided.

After class, Mom explained to our instructor that we had joined the conformation class because my breeder had entered us in a dog show in May to make points for another dog. He didn’t look surprised. “That happens,” he said. Mom told him she didn’t want to look foolish in the ring, so what would he suggest?

The instructor said, “Pickles seems to pick up things fast. She’ll need to look well-groomed (I guess I hadn’t stayed as clean as Mom had hoped) and get comfortable in the show ring. Once she does, she won’t let you down.” Then he added, “But most show Beardies are flashier than Pickles—that means they have more white markings. So, don’t be disappointed if she doesn’t win.”

Mom laughed. “We don’t expect to win anything. And as far as Pickles not being ‘flashy,’ well, we love her just the way she is ...”

“... and we wouldn’t change a thing about her,” added Dad, who’d decided to come with us to class. He was feeling a little guilty for getting us into this endeavor, probably.

Mom nodded. “As I said, we aren’t expecting to win anything, we just don’t want ...”

“... to look foolish,” Dad finished. Turns out, not looking foolish is important to both Mom and Dad. Family honor and all that stuff, I guess.

Since conformation class wasn’t as challenging as our agility and obedience activities, Sally Ann and I had time to relax and chat with the other dogs that night and in the weeks to come. So, we had fun. We particularly liked a Bloodhound whose ears were even longer than ours. He had the saddest eyes you’ve ever seen, but he had a great sense of humor. He told the raunchiest jokes ever and his jokes were even funnier because he looked so morose when he told them. His name, he said, was “Happy,” which struck Sally Ann and me as the biggest joke of all. Turns out he was entered in the show, too. His owner was a first-time Bloodhound owner, and Happy’s breeder had suggested that he enter him in some dog shows. “Kind of sounds familiar,” said Sally Ann.

May rolled around. Our Moms and Dads discussed the upcoming dog show at conformation classes and during countless phone calls between them. Mom tried out different kinds of goo to keep my head hair “under control,” hoping to improve my normal scruffy appearance, I gather, and I spent most of my time trying to rub it off on bushes, lawn, carpet, and upholstery.

Our entry confirmations had arrived in the mail along with show programs, parking permits, ring assignments, a list of prizes offered, maps to the showground and, of course, rules. Sally Ann and I laughed because our owners were truly intimidated. I guess they thought a dog show would be a simple drive-in, follow the signs to the ring, run around it, drive-home affair. Instead, it appeared to be a major event that was choreographed as painstakingly as the Emmys. Our owners studied the map to the show ground and figured that Smithfield, the scene of the crime, would be several hours away if traffic were bad.

The week before the show, my dad discovered, happily enough, he couldn’t go because of a newly scheduled business trip; Sally Ann’s dad sprained an ankle jogging, and he wasn’t terribly sad about it because if my Dad could get out of going to the show then why shouldn’t he? Our moms would have to go alone. They decided to drive to Smithfield the night before the show and get a motel room so they wouldn’t feel rushed and anxious about getting to the ring on time. Our mistresses agonized over each decision as if it were part of the D-Day invasion of Normandy. Sally Ann and I enthusiastically looked forward to a big fat adventure! Mom combed and brushed me every day and gave me a bath every other one.

After hours of gear loading, unloading, and reloading, first at Sally Ann’s house and then at ours, we were finally on the road. Sally Ann and I sat in the backseat of Janice’s Jeep with the suitcases and dog show stuff piled around us, and we talked and talked. Sally’s current worry was that she and her Mom weren’t as fast as the Jack Russell in her agility class, and she complained about getting tangled up in the weave poles. I hadn’t a clue what she was talking about, but I sympathized, since Sally Ann expected it. I told her about long sits and downs and dumbbells in my obedience class, but she said dumbbell isn’t a nice word—a snippy Border Collie in her agility class called her that after she got stuck in the tunnel the third time.

We got to the motel. Mom went to the office to register, and then she and Janice carried all our stuff into a very small room.

Where’s the living room?” Sally Ann wanted to know as we surveyed our surroundings. “Where’s the kitchen? How will we eat if there’s no kitchen??” Sally Ann panicked at the thought of possible starvation. Janice, apparently reading her mind, handed Sally Ann a Milk-Bone. “Whew!” said Silly Sally. “But I may get tired of eating only Milk-Bones for two days. I wish there was a kitchen to eat kibble in.” Sometimes explanations aren’t worth the time it takes to communicate with Sally Ann, so I didn’t try.

Finally, with all the stuff out of the car and crammed into the tiny room, Mom and Janice slumped on the small loveseat under the room’s only window. “All this because Nadine needs a five-point major win to finish her championship so she can go on to bigger and better things,” my Mom said.

"Did you see that motorhome her owners' bought just to go to dog shows?" Janice marveled.

"It's big as a Greyhound bus! I'm surprised they haven't painted it pink and white ... Nadine's colors." Mom was being sarcastic, I think.

"It's like a rock group's tour bus," Janice giggled. "After they paint it pink and white, they'll write 'Pineridge Naughty Nadine' in big letters across the side."

Mom looked around our dingy room. "Still," she said. "Who'd want to spend every weekend in a dump room like this? I think I'd opt for the motorhome, too."

Mom had brought old bedsheets from home and she spread them on the two beds so Sally Ann and I could jump on them without getting the motel bedspreads dirty. The beds were less than three feet apart, and the bed farthest from the door was only about two feet from the wall. On that wall, curiously enough, was a giant, wall-sized mirror—possibly with the mistaken notion it would make the room seem larger?

Sally Ann was lying on the bed closest to the door, I was on the one by the mirror. Sally Ann was gnawing on a tennis ball—peeling it, she said. "People peel oranges and they find something good to eat inside. I'm sure there must be something like that in a tennis ball's middle."

"There's nothing inside tennis balls, Sally Ann. That's why they bounce so high and they're so light and easy to carry."

"I don't believe that, Pickles," Sally Ann said, "I'm an optimist, a glass half-full kind of girl. I choose to believe there's chicken liver inside each tennis ball."

"And where's the rest of the chicken," I inquired.

Sally frowned. "That's just so you, Pickles. You never chase grasshoppers, and you don't talk to robins or blue jays. There's no magic, no whimsy in your life."

And I never get stuck in agility tunnels, either.

Sally Ann's tennis ball scooted out from between her paws, rolled off the bed, and bounced on the floor.

Sally Ann leapt off the bed to chase it. I made the three-foot jump to the bed Sally Ann vacated so I could watch her chase the ball. She'd pounce on it, the ball would squirt from beneath her paws, and she'd pounce again. Rather amusing.

Sally Ann looked up, surprised and intrigued. "How did you get on my bed, Pickles?"

"Just a little hop." I jumped across the gap back to my original spot on the bed next to the mirrored wall. Sally Ann hopped on the bed I'd just left and looked at me.

"C'mon Sally, jump over here! It's really fun." I jumped back beside her, spun around and jumped back to the other bed.

Sally looked apprehensive. “I don’t like jumping over empty spaces,” she said, peering into the shallow crevice that separated the beds.

Hmm. Not much of an abyss. I decided I’d appeal to her sense of whimsy to encourage her—that very same whimsy she’d accused me of lacking. “Imagine a huge striped tiger is chasing you and to get away, you have to jump over a roaring river full of hungry crocodiles to get to the other side. Better jump now, Sally Ann, before the tiger gets you!”

I woefully misjudged the potential impact of my invented scenario. Sally Ann cast a panicky glance over her shoulder and made a giant leap to the bed I was on. But Sally Ann didn’t stop there. She took another huge leap off our bed toward the mirrored wall, crashed into it and slithered down into the space between the bed and the wall.

Mom and Janice, gossiping and not watching our activities, heard the crash. They leaped to their feet and fished Sally Ann out from the gap. “What happened, Sally Ann? Did you fall off the bed again?” Janice said to Mom, “Sally Ann does that a lot—she gets on the sofa or bed to snooze, rolls on her side or back and falls off. She really has no spatial awareness.”

Oh, this dog is certainly NOT meant for agility, I thought.

Sally Ann, recovering, staggered to her feet and gasped, “Where’d the tiger go?”

“Sally Ann, the tiger was just pretend. I made him up to show you that jumping from one bed to another isn’t hard.”

“No, no, Pickles! The tiger was there. I saw him!” She crawled up beside me on the bed closest to the door and looked warily around the room.

There was a knock on the door. When Mom opened it, we were amazed to see our Bloodhound friend from conformation class with his Mom, Jenny. They were in the room next door and recognized Janice’s Jeep parked out front. Mom invited them in.

“Hey, Beardie ladies,” said Happy jovially, his eyes sadder than ever. “Did you ever hear the joke about the Chihuahua and the parrot? Well, seems that they walked into a bar and ...”

Sally Ann interrupted Happy’s bad joke to warn him about the tiger. Happy looked around the room—it’s hard to read the expression on a Bloodhound’s face, but I thought he looked doubtful. Tigers don’t randomly invade motel rooms in the middle of America. Then, too, Sally Ann had previously told him some wild tales, so Happy knew she fell victim to flights of fancy.

So Happy was skeptical. It didn’t take him long to conclude that Sally Ann’s tale was highly improbable. He shook his head and rumbled, “That’s a whack-a-doodle story, Sally Ann. There are no tigers in Smithfield. Probably not a one in the whole state of Tennessee.”

Sally Ann got all indignant and was ready to argue for her tiger. I knew it was time to change the subject before Sally Ann wandered any further on her fantasy safari, so I said the first thing that popped into my head.

“Sally Ann just crashed into the wall, Happy. It was amazing she didn’t get seriously hurt.”

“Why did you crash into the wall, Sally Ann?” Happy was curious.

Oh, oh. Sally Ann’s explanation led right back to the jungle.

“Well, the tiger jumped over the river right behind me and there were more crocodiles on the riverbank ... and I had to jump over them, too. Then I saw the third bed and thought that if I could reach that bed, I’d be safe ... so I jumped onto it, but I never got there ... I crash-landed instead.

“Ahem,” said Happy. “There is no riverbank. And there are no crocodiles. And there is no third bed in this room. There are only two.”

“You’re wrong, Happy. There are four beds. Count ‘em!” she nodded her head toward the mirrored wall and, yes, there were two more beds reflected in the mirror. Sally Ann stared at them. “Oh my God!” she wailed as she saw the two of us on one of the beds in the mirror, “... and there are two dogs on that bed!”

“Ah ... Sally Ann ... don’t those dogs look familiar?” I asked. Maybe a Socratic approach could reach the Twilight Zone.

“Holy cow!” said Sally Ann. “Those two dogs look a lot like us!! They shouldn’t be here. This is our room.” An aggrieved growl began deep in Sally Ann’s throat. Happy was alarmed. His Bloodhound face, usually unreadable, looked thoroughly perplexed.

I suspected there was trouble ahead.

Yes, there certainly was. Sally Ann glared into the mirror and jumped across the gap to the bed next to the mirror. She yelped, “The blonde one’s getting closer!! I’ll chase her away ...” took another leap and crashed, once more, into the mirror, sliding again between the bed and the wall.

Happy was amazed. He squinted at the mirrored wall and then back at me. He gathered his thoughts and offered an appropriate summary of my feelings. “Holy poop-knuckles!” he muttered. “Holy roly-poly poop-knuckles!!!” Amen.

Sally Ann’s Mom took it in stride. She got a little concerned when she realized her dog had not only fallen into the gap, she had then wedged herself under the bed, and it was a really tight fit.

“Why are you under the bed, Sally Ann?” I asked.

“To get away from the crocodiles,” she whispered. “There goes one now ...”

Good thing Happy and Jennifer were there, because it took three humans to lift the bed high enough so Sally Ann could crawl out, which she did only after Happy assured her that his Bloodhound nose detected no more tigers or crocodiles in the room. The truth of the matter, though I declined to remind Sally Ann, is that Happy flunked his tracking class because he can’t

smell a thing. A Bloodhound with deficient olfactory functioning? Happy says it may be a sinus condition or allergies, but since it gets him out of tracking classes, he's not complaining.

Janice said, "Once Sally Ann gets an idea, she's positively obsessed. The only solution is to remove the stimulus or remove Sally Ann. I think I'll have to cover the mirror, or she'll probably smash into it all night."

Mom and Jenny helped. The impact of another collision might break the mirror, and we'd have to sleep in the Jeep. Janice took the sheet from one of the beds, and our Moms duct-taped it over the mirrored wall. Sally Ann and I watched awhile, but Sally Ann, who has an extraordinarily short attention span, got bored and resumed peeling her tennis ball.

The evening passed without further incident, though Sally Ann cast malevolent glares at the sheet-covered mirrored wall from time to time. I kept our conversation light. No more tigers, no crocodiles, no roaring rivers, no unfamiliar dogs. I'd learned my lesson.

All things considered; it was nice to have the companionship of another dog that night. We chatted, giggled and whispered until our mothers scolded. "Be quiet girls, we're trying to sleep. Sally Ann, Pickles, go to sleep!" Then Janice laughed. "This is like one of my daughter's pajama parties years ago. At least we won't wake up to popcorn and potato chip wrappers all over the floor."

"Don't we wish!" said Sally Ann, and we giggled some more.

Dawn. It was a beautiful day. Mom and Janice fed us and walked us. As we passed the motorhome parking area, we saw Nadine already up on her grooming table, yawning sleepily. Her owners and our breeder, Dorothy, watched as a groomer, Nadine's handler, and the handler's assistant feverishly worked, combing, brushing, trimming, and primping. Our owners exchanged pleasantries, but I detected some underlying ambivalence.

"I didn't know that dogs wore powder," Sally Ann whispered to me. She sneezed as a big poof of cornstarch enveloped Nadine's already pristine paws and drifted down in a little cloud.

"I wonder when they'll put on her lipstick and mascara?" I whispered back. Sally Ann answered, "... and how about nail polish?" We both howled with glee. Yes, we were being awfully snide, and it was really unfair. This cosmetic drama wasn't Nadine's doing. I bet she'd rather leave the table and party with us. She coughed as a burst of hairspray wandered off course and struck her full on the muzzle. Nadine was probably envying our carefree ways.

Our breeder looked at us quizzically. "The girls certainly are having a good time," she said, nodding at Sally Ann and me. "And they look very nice."

Nadine's handler and his assistants looked at us dismissively.

Ringside! Mom and Janice had brushed and combed us and, if I might say so myself, Sally Ann and I looked rather respectable. True, no powder and no, not any nail polish, but we

were presentable. Even my topknot was under reasonable control, although I couldn't guarantee it would stay that way if I accelerated to more than a slow trot.

Our breeder told Mom and Janice that she had entered Sally Ann and me in different classes, so we didn't have to compete against each other. Sally Ann and I were disappointed because we thought half the fun would be running around the ring together. Nadine was in yet another class—the one for serious contenders, I suspected.

After some aimless wandering, Mom and Janice located our ring. Nadine's grooming table had been moved to a spot a short distance away from the ring—far enough from the bustle and commotion but close enough to watch proceedings. Sally Ann and I sat at ringside, getting our butts grassy and paws dusty, peons that we were.

We watched the boy dogs compete. The little puppies were a hoot. Five of them galloped and frolicked their way around the ring. The one who came closest to a trot was the one who eventually won the class. That's how it went through the dog classes, though the boys got progressively bigger and better-behaved. Not surprisingly, when the class winners went back in the ring, the guy from the last class—a very handsome dude with a very common name, Barney—won the first-place, Winners Dog ribbon.

Our breeder came by and said, "Time for the girls!" and she hauled out a brush and started vigorously applying it to Sally Ann. "We want you to look your best, Sally! Be a credit to my name."

"Just as long as I don't win," giggled Sally Ann. I gave her credit. Ditz she might be, but she's sure not a clueless ditz. Sally Ann had the situation sussed out.

A man who our breeder called a "Ring Steward" stood up and said, "Bitches to the ring, please." Sally Ann was mortified. "Isn't that a bad word?" she whispered. "Should he be saying it in front of all these puppies?" I didn't have an intelligent response, so I just kept quiet. I remember when Dad called a lady who rear-ended our car while texting "a careless bitch" (not to her face, of course), Mum chastised him sorely. So, I, along with Sally Ann, considered the B word a pretty scurrilous one.

Girl puppies went in. I noticed that they were less audacious than their male counterparts. And most of them trotted nicely around the ring, so it was harder for the judge to pick a winner. By this time of morning, the sun was getting high in the sky, and the lady judge went to her table and got a hat with a rather wide brim to shade her eyes. She came back to the ring, and one of the young pups threw a fit because the judge's hatted head brushed close when she was examining the pup's tooth alignment. I don't know why judges are so obsessed with dog's teeth. As Sally Ann says, "As long as they can chew the kibble, what's the big deal?"

Sally Ann, who worries about grasshoppers' feelings, empathized with the pup. "Poor little thing. She probably never saw a big red hat before. That judge is ... is ... "

"... insensitive of the puppy's tender feelings?" I finished.

"Exactly!" Said Sally Ann and tsk, tsked a few times. "That judge is being totally insensitive. Someone should tell her to remove that hat!"

The judge should have harkened to Sally's words.

After the puppy classes, it was Sally Ann's turn in the ring. Our breeder came back with the brush, tidied Sally Ann's head hair and started to give Janice ring advice. Sally Ann vigorously shook her head, undoing all Dorothy's fixing, and Janice said, "Relax, Dorothy," and ignored the advice.

There were only three bitches (excuse me, Sally Ann, "girl dogs") in Sally Ann's class, and Sally Ann was the oldest, meaning she had more coat than the others. And she did a credible job running around the ring, too.

But Sally Ann is Sally Ann. I figured she had blown her advantage when, as the judge leaned over to examine her teeth, she gently reached out, grasped the offending hat brim, and carefully lifted it from the judge's head. She held it well above the ground until a startled Janice said, "Give," and Sally Ann relinquished the hat.

"Sorry," Janice murmured as the crowd around the ring tittered and a couple of people applauded. When the judge placed her first in line, Sally self-righteously trotted out of the ring, pleased with her one-dog protest in the cause of No Hats On Judges.

So, it was time for my class and, as it turned out, I was the only one entered in it. Dorothy came by with her brush. "This judge likes flashy bitches—bitches with lots of white markings—" she explained to my novice owner, "but since Pickles," she frowned as she said my name, "is the only bitch in the class, you have nothing to worry about."

"I'd have nothing to worry about if there were five bitches in the class," said Mom, all persnickety-like. "Pickles knows what to do."

Which was true. I told you I like to learn, and I remembered everything my conformation instructor had told me. And I'd watched umpty-nine classes today ... I had it all down pat. I'd show Dorothy what we lacked in white markings, we made up in talent and determination.

Earlier, I noticed that the boy dogs who won their classes had something in common. They not only trotted nicely with their tails level, but each one seemed to have a confident air. A kind of 'Here I Am' way of standing. Head up and focus, focus, focus. Like I said before, I might not have much flash, but I've got some smarts. A bit of showboating and a little pizzazz wouldn't hurt my cause.

The steward told us to go in the ring, Mom smoothed down my head hair one more time, and I trotted in. The judge said, "Once around, please." So, I took off and Mom followed me. I kept my head up, my tail level, and I reached out with my front feet as far as they'd go. After we stopped, the judge came to look at my teeth and pat my shoulders and butt. I stood perfectly still with my head up, looking at Mom like she was a giant hunk of chicken liver.

The judge asked me to run to the corner and back, and I trotted there as straight as an arrow. I nimbly turned around Mom at the corner and ramrodded right back to the judge. I ended with a rather dramatic little hop and my feet came down right on the money in front of the judge. I stretched out enough but not too much and stood like the Statue of Liberty on a sunny day. In other words, I was awesome. The judge told us to go around the ring, and after we did, she gave Mom a ribbon. The judge looked at me rather appraisingly. Like I had surprised her or something.

I sure had surprised Mom. “Wow, Pickles. Whatever got into you?” she said as we left the ring.

“Wow!” said Janice. “Pickles looked like ... well, she looked like a show dog!”

Mom asked, “What did Dorothy think?”

“Oh, she was helping fix Nadine’s hair. She wasn’t watching Pickles.”

I didn’t care. Mom told Dad she just didn’t want us to look like fools in the ring, and we didn’t. Mom’s happy, I’m happy. That’s the recipe for good canine-owner relations.

After the next class was over, Nadine went into the ring with three other bitches. (I feel so risqué when I say that B word, though only Sally Ann and I seem shocked by its casual use at dog shows.) Nadine did a fine job. She has perfect markings, she’s got a pretty face and, as it turns out, she’s a fine trotter, too. Nadine was born self-assured. She expected—no, she knew, from her very first staggering steps, from the moment that her gorgeous dark eyes opened—that the world was her oyster. Her confident air sometimes annoyed us when we were young pups, but as I watched her in the ring, I realized it perfectly suited her future as a show dog. Or show bitch, should I say?

Her handler was equally adept. He posed her whenever he thought the judge might look her way. When the bitches lined up so the judge could see them from the middle of the ring, he and Nadine were always a foot closer to the judge than the other dogs. I wondered how he managed that?

Nadine won the class, of course. Dorothy and Nadine’s owners applauded loudly after the judge made her selection. A threesome near us discussed the outcome, and Mom and I—I’m embarrassed to admit—strained our ears to listen. One of them said, “Well, we knew the contest would be between Gwendolyn’s and Dorothy’s bitches ... Sadie and Nadine. Gwendolyn’s bitch looked pretty good out there today in the Bred-by class. Tough competition. Dorothy better watch out.”

“Gwendolyn and Dorothy hate each other’s guts,” laughed the man beside her. “Should be a real battle of the bitches and the bitches.”

I was askance, admittedly, but I forgot my askance-ness when I noticed that Happy and his owner, Jenny, had just joined the onlookers. Happy must have finished showing already because he looked tired, flopping down at Jenny’s feet. But did you ever see a Bloodhound who didn’t look tired? I haven’t. I didn’t ask him how he did, but Jenny showed Mom and Janice his ribbons and she seemed mighty proud of them.

The steward called all the bitches who’d won their classes back into the ring. Mom licked her palm and smoothed down my head hair. Maybe human saliva would do what Dippity-Do couldn’t manage?

“Here we go again,” said Janice. “C’mon, Sally Ann.”

Sally Ann was squinting at a spot in the ring. “There!” she said to me. “Do you see her, Pickles?”

Her? See who? I didn't have a clue what Sally Ann was talking about. And I was trying to focus on the job that lay ahead. But Sally Ann's mind was elsewhere.

"A grasshopper, Pickles! I saw her jump into the ring, and she landed right ... there." She pointed with her paw. "We've got to be careful, so we don't step on her."

"Right, Sally Ann. I'll watch out for her." It was weird enough that Sally Ann noticed a hopping insect so far away, but how she knew its gender was even more bizarre. If the darn grasshopper knew what was good for "her," she'd get outta Dodge before we bitches thundered through.

In we went. A moment of posing while the ring steward checked the numbers on our handler's arm bands. I saw that Janice's was on upside down. The steward stopped all proceedings until she righted it. Maybe Silly Sally isn't the only ditz in that family.

Then came the usual stuff. We all ran around the ring together. The littlest puppy, despite doing everything on cue during her class, was having a meltdown. First, she didn't want to run, then she wanted to gallop, and she chased the slightly bigger puppy in front of her. Sally Ann, just ahead of slightly bigger puppy, was stepping very carefully, her nose only inches from the ground. She was, of course, looking for the grasshopper. Janice tried to get her to lift her head, to no avail. I, personally, was astonished that Sally Ann could move so fast in that unorthodox trotting posture. Thankfully, I was some distance from her, following Nadine and Sadie around the ring.

After we stopped, the judge walked around the ring, looking at each of us. She held on to her hat when she got near Sally Ann. Then she asked each of us to run to the corner again. When it was my turn, I remembered to be sparkling, effervescent and full of what Happy cheerfully calls "piss and vinegar." In other words, I was totally out of character. But the judge seemed to appreciate it. She smiled at Mom and me after I gave my little hop-strut-pose at the end of my corner-and-back.

The judge, who hadn't suffered any indecisive moments previously, slowed down considerably for this class. Finally, she told the puppies to step back and asked Nadine, Sadie, me, and Sally Ann to run around the ring twice.

The rest of the event I didn't personally witness. Remember, I was in front of Sally Ann, and my attention was focused on Nadine and Sadie. Happy, the Bloodhound, and his mistress had first-row seats, so they had an excellent view of the action, and Happy regaled us with the whole sordid tale later. His mistress verified Happy's story with footage from her Smartphone, much to Mom's and Janice's delight.

Nadine and her handler took off like bats out of Hell, and Sadie and her breeder-owner followed suit. I launched more gradually so Mom could get up some momentum. Sally Ann and Janice followed me. Again, I pretended to be a Beauty Queen contestant waiting to claim her tiara. I pulled out all the stops. Not a foot wrong, if I might say so myself.

By the end of the first lap, Nadine and Sadie had gotten far ahead of me and Sally Ann. Mom's legs aren't as long as Nadine's handler's and her level of determination wasn't equal to Sadie's breeder-owner's. I didn't want Mom to overexert, so I slowed down and aimed for moderation. Sally Ann was moving at an even slower pace behind me. Happy said, "Sally Ann didn't give a rat's ass about what was going on in that ring. The only thing on her brain was the

damn grasshopper!” According to Happy, when Sally Ann got to the far side of the ring where she thought she had seen the grasshopper, she slowed down to snail’s pace. Nadine and Sadie, spurred on by adrenaline and their handlers, were already well into their second lap.

They came around the corner just as Sally Ann stopped dead and yelled, “There she is!” A grasshopper jumped up, way up, right over Sally Ann’s head, and it landed right smack on Nadine’s nose as she hurtled toward the stalled Sally Ann. Startled, Nadine shook her head, trying to dislodge it. Her head hair flopped forward, obscuring her eyes. At this point in the story, Happy was laughing hard.

“Nadine couldn’t see where she was going,” Happy chortled, “and she plowed right into Sally Ann’s butt. Her handler tried to jump over Nadine, got his foot tangled in her lead and fell flat on his face in the grass.” Happy was laughing so hard he had tears in his eyes and could barely continue the story.

Jenny’s Smartphone footage showed Sadie and Gwendolyn veering after Nadine’s handler fell, but it was too late, because Gwendolyn tripped over Nadine’s sprawled handler and went down on her knees. Nadine, Sadie, and Sally Ann, alarmed at the human casualties, stood stock-still looking at the carnage.

I had finished my second circle alone, in great style, though I highly doubt anyone noticed. Janice, still on her feet, got her wits about her. She and Sally Ann finished their circuit of the ring and stood behind me and Mom while Nadine’s and Sadie’s humans struggled upright, grabbed their dogs’ leashes, and hobbled the shortest route to the head of the line. The two puppies and their owners gaped. Is this what to expect at future dog shows?

By this time, Nadine, Sadie, and Sally Ann were a little unkempt, so maybe it wasn’t an altogether level playing field. Whatever the case, the judge pointed to me as the winner and the crowd around the ring applauded, yelled, and laughed loudly—they hadn’t had that much entertainment at a dog show before, presumably. And Sally Ann ended up with a ribbon, too—second to me. Something called Reserve Winner. That left Nadine and Sadie ribbon-less and, in Nadine’s case, maybe handler-less. He flung down the lead as he left the ring and said to Nadine’s owners, “Expect a bill for new trousers along with my handling fees.” And yes, he’d need them because Happy saw bloody knees through his torn pant legs when he limped away from the ring.

It turns out, if you’re the winning bitch, you go back in the ring for something called “Best of Breed” competition. That made Mom a little flustered, because she never expected to get anywhere near that level of competition, or so she told Dad later. But the professional handlers in the ring with the “Specials”—dogs who were already champions—were very helpful. They told Mom where to stand and all that stuff. They really seemed to like us. Or maybe, after watching the bitch competition, they got apprehensive about the pandemonium we amateurs can create without parental or professional supervision and decided it was in their own self-interest to help us out.

When it was all over, Mom held all my ribbons next to me while Jenny and Happy took a cell phone picture to send to Dad. Dorothy, bemused, came over to congratulate Mom, me, Sally Ann, and Janice. She looked at me a long time. At least that’s what Janice and Jenny thought.

While we were loading up the Jeep to go home, Janice heard Dorothy talking with a friend. Dorothy said, “The judge’s ring steward, John Atkins—you know John, he’s got Aussies—he said the judge told him the plain brown bitch was a wonderful representative of the breed—correct in every way—and had fantastic ring presence. A real champion.” (Ah, that Miss America act can take a girl a long way, can’t it?) Then Dorothy said, according to Janice, “Can you imagine, just imagine ... can you think of the future she’d have if she had a white collar and head markings?!”

No, Dorothy. Not meaning to quibble, but let’s be realistic. It would take a lot more than “a white collar and head markings” to make me an ideal show dog. And since I’m in a contrary mood, let’s consider the future. My idea of a successful future is quite different from yours, Dorothy.

Just think. If I’d had more white on me, I might have gone home with Nadine’s owners. That would have been a disaster. I’m a renaissance sort of Bearded Collie. I like dog shows well enough, and from the sound of Mom and Janice’s conversation on the drive home, we’ll probably go to some more. But I like obedience and probably agility too. And maybe some sheepherding, like Henry. I want to get my paws dirty, and, to be honest, I really like being a little scruffy. Nadine’s owners don’t seem to be the scruffy type.

But, mostly, I love my Mom and Dad, and I wouldn’t want to trade them ... or Happy and Sally Ann ... for any Westminster future. It’ll be a great life for Nadine, she’ll be perfect at it. But not me. I’m right where I want to be.

Anyway, it really wouldn’t have worked. My name, “Pickles,” would NOT look good painted in big pink letters on a show dog party bus.