

A Whole Lot of Liver

by Judy Harwood

Three-thirty, P.M. After all the preparation for Westminster, we could finally relax enough to see some humor in the situation.

My daughter and I sat in the stands of Madison Square Garden on Monday, February 14th, Valentine's Day. My granddaughter, Madeline, had racked up enough first place finishes in shows around the country to qualify for the Junior Showmanship competition in this prestigious show. She had selected her outfit weeks ago and bought new shoes to compliment the suit. She had kept her dog, Pete, in good condition for this event. The two of them had come to New York ready and confident.

My daughter's dog, Curt, had even won a Best In Show, on his way to being entered in the breed competition for Smooth Fox Terriers. Around 10:00 A.M., our hearts were in our throats as it looked like the judge really considered Curt for Best of Breed. However, when the ribbons had all been awarded, Curt won First Award of Merit and wouldn't be going to the Group judging. We then set our sights on the Junior Showmanship competition, later in the day.

At 3:00 P.M. we again put ourselves through the emotional meat grinder watching Madeline compete for a chance to progress to the finals of the Junior Showmanship competition. She was so smooth in her presentation of her dog, Pete, that her hard work looked effortless. The judge did bring her out to the group of four he was considering, but two other girls grabbed the coveted slots for the Tuesday, 7:30 P.M. finals. In an instant, our collective hopes and dreams vanished as Maddie left the ring. I looked at my daughter (Madeline's mom) and observed, "There's a whole lot of liver being chewed here," referring to the intense working relationships between handlers and their dogs. It broke the tension and we shared a hearty laugh.

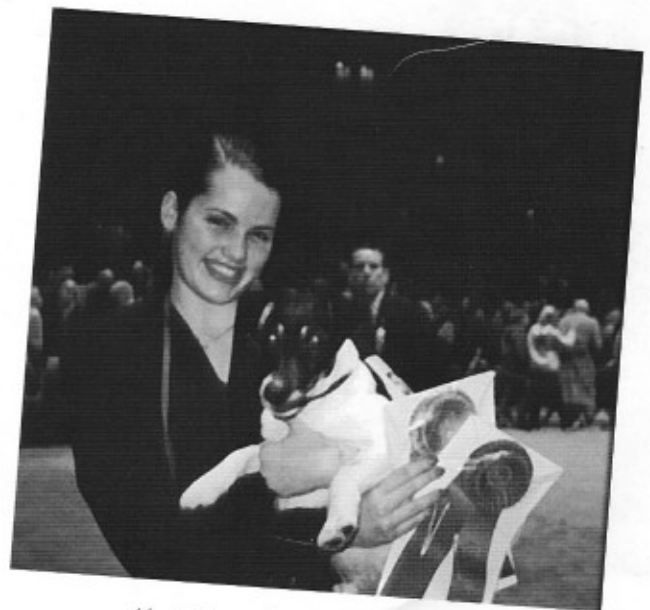
Why do we and thousands of other dog show fanciers put ourselves through the highs and lows of competition? The ribbons pile up in a basket at home and the trophies get recycled at local club functions. The plumbing leak takes a back seat to entry fees for the next show. Of course, the reputation of the winning dog or bitch is enhanced by competition. But why do owners/handlers/

breeders spend hard earned money on entry fees, equipment, travel and lodging for such meager rewards?

It's an addiction, fueled by intermittent reinforcement, one of the most powerful shapers of behavior—canine and human.

Reinforcement is a reward, like liver extended in front of the dog's nose to keep his attention. Reinforcement is intermittent when it is parceled out. The handler doesn't reward the dog every time the bait is offered, or the dog might lose interest. On an intermittent reinforcement schedule the animal keeps working because he doesn't know when the bait is going to end up in his mouth.

So it is with show people. The anticipation of winning pumps a lot of adrenaline into our bloodstream and releases endorphin into our brains, making our hearts pound, our knees wobbly and our psyches quiver with pleasure. When the judge picks our dog or our Junior Handler, we're ecstatic from powerful chemical reinforcers. It's no wonder we keep coming back for more. Like the pooch who learns to love the liver and attention of the show ring, the possibility that the next



*Madeline Aroney and Pete.
The two of them had come to New
York ready and confident*



*Another great use of rosettes -
pacify the "crazy" cat!*

show might be the big one lures us back into the ring time and time again.

Why, you may ask, doesn't losing make us feel as low as winning pumps us up? For one, we rationalize that we can do something to increase the likelihood of winning the next time: do a better grooming job, buy a new leash, wear our lucky outfit. For another, the negative consequences occur too long after the fact. The credit card statement arrives a month later. It doesn't have the impact that an exit fee for losing might.

What to do? Develop a more powerful addiction to compete with dog showing? Gambling? Sexual Roulette? Many addictions are worse than the one we have. So what's the point of my insight? To give you a response when friends and relatives ask, "Why do you do this?" It's an addiction. Just a word of advice. Don't use this article when you apply to your Employee Assistance Program for help with your addiction. It hasn't yet been recognized by the American Psychiatric Association.

Talking Back To My Mother by Annebly Harwood-Aroney

Well, duh! We all know we're addicted to the adrenalin, but my Mom missed something very important in this psycho/chemical mix. When we take a dog as far as the Garden, or the Invitational, or the National Specialty, we are validating our value system for the breed. Although I did not breed Curt, I saw him as a young puppy and thought he would turn out to be a really nice dog - I was right, I validated my earlier judgment of the dog. The same can be said for Mick, Ch. Blackthorn The Butler Did It, I didn't breed Mick, but his Brother, Ch. Chaseland's Hoke Holbert, convinced Judy Franklin to breed Edwin to her Merry. Hoke lives with me and is one of my favorite dogs. Mick was my pick from the time

the litter was born and everyone else was paying more attention to his brother Rudy. It was a pleasure to show him and succeed with a dog I believed in from his start and the fact that he is Hoke's half brother just made his career that much sweeter. I've had successes and failures in breeding and have recently bred what I consider my best dog yet, Ch. Winfield Dare Devil (now, if I could just get her to walk).

Now, I'll give on the point about Juniors - it's nothing but pure narcissism to watch one's child compete and win in Juniors. I guess validation of one's own talent could be found in the fact that the child learned from the parent how to show, condition and groom the dog; however, I've discovered that there is a point when the Junior exceeds the parental unit's talent (and woe is me when I offer constructive criticism).

Next point: Old ribbons and trophies. Yeah, I won some trophies that I then recycled, then there are those that had such a utilitarian purpose, I used them to death, there are some so pretty, they hang on the wall or sit on a shelf and make me smile when I walk by. Baskets of old ribbons? True, I have baskets filled with rosettes, but every now and then, I'll go through them and they make me smile. The way I see it, people pay money to go see a movie that will make them smile, I just need to plow through a group of old ribbons and the memories make me smile. That's positive reinforcement!

Plumbing? What's that? Oh the stuff that leaks ... or leaked. It fixed itself ... I'm not sure how.

Now, my Mom never would have known about the leak except that I left the hole in the basement ceiling so my crazy cat could climb in and observe the world going by. Another thing that is great fun, the cat will pop out at opportune times and scare my daughters' friends out of their wits. It's great fun!

Why doesn't the low feeling of losing correlate with the euphoric feel of a win? Probably because the exhibitor is mad - not sad. What a bad idea it would be to ask a mad exhibitor for an exit fee! Think how much the "collectors" of said fee would have to be paid for hazardous duty!

CORRECTION

The advertisement on page 29 of the Fall edition of SWQ incorrectly listed TES Kiss My Hot Lips as a Champion. Our apologies for any inconvenience this may have caused.