

The Big Adventure: A Mostly True and Mostly Complete Account of our Journey Across the Country

Planning the Big Adventure

The idea for our recent cross-country adventure started innocently enough. After our trip to Texas in April and the wonderful time we'd had meeting folks there, Wayde suggested to me that I take a holiday back east. I could fly out and meet up with some of the people with whom I'd been corresponding.

It sounded like a great idea!

A few days later, Wayde expanded upon his initial thoughts.

"Why don't you take one of the dogs with you and go to a race meet?"

Well, sure ... why not?

A week or so later, I mentioned Wayde's idea to Lynne. She thought about it for all of a second or so and said, "I could go with you. I'd be the driver, you'd be the navigator, and we could see the country."

We talked some more and the plan began to take shape. We had a number of priorities that we wanted the trip to fulfill; we wanted to meet people that we knew from email correspondence, we wanted to see the country, and we wanted to see some of the dogs we knew from the lists and race results.

Emails went out to friends back east ... which meets would be the best to attend? We wanted to see the local countryside at its finest. And so it was decided that we would go to Vermont for their late September meet and experience the wonderful autumn colours for which the state is famous. We'd spend a week sightseeing and then attend another East Coast meet the following weekend.

Sometime in early June, Wayde said to me, "You know, there will be a meet in Texas a week after the Delaware meet. Why don't you stop in there on the way home? Kathleen and I could fly out for the weekend again, like we did in April."

Hmmmmm. Another great idea!

Lynne and I talked and we decided that this would be the perfect opportunity to return Brock to David. And, as Lynne said, "What the hell! It is on the way home!"

I began to research different routes. Should we take I-80 all the way across the country or should we try for US-50, the Loneliest Highway? More emails went out to friends ... which route would be the best?

In the end, we settled on I-80. Although it might not have the same history as US-50, it would save us at least one day of travel. In preparation for the trip, Lynne and I had asked friends who were experienced with travelling with dogs what was the best way to keep them exercised and fit. Although I knew of some people who'd made the trip with dogs in only three days or so, we were still on holiday ... we'd take our time and make sure that both the dogs and the humans were given lots of rest opportunities and walking opportunities.

Helena had the best advice for us--stop along the way, find a back road, and walk the dogs for a minimum of 30 minutes every single day.

[Travel tip to anyone making a long road trip with dogs: follow Helena's advice!]

Because of the time of year and the length of the journey, I decided that we would drive relatively short distances every day and just take longer to get there. Finally, it was decided that we'd leave on September 22nd and take six days to travel to Vermont, our first destination.

In June, I'd found a book called "The Next Exit" at a local RV shop. I'd thought it would be a compilation of sights to see along the various interstates and was slightly disappointed to find that it was simply a listing of gas stations, restaurants, and motels at each interstate exit. Little did I know how much we'd come to rely on that book!

[Travel tip to anyone making a long road trip along interstate highways: buy this book!]

At the NAWRA/NOTRA Nationals in August, we talked more with David about our plans and he was thrilled that his Brock would get to "see the country" on his way home. I plied Pam Cunningham with some wonderful Oregonian wheat beer, trying to convince her to drive to Texas from her home in Georgia for the race meet. I wanted to meet all the dogs I'd heard about for so long!

When Lynne and I travelled to Squamish in September, more advice and sightseeing tips were offered by friends. Even though we had only three weeks until our departure, I modified our return trip to take into account some of that advice. We'd mosey our way from Delaware to Texas, trying to take in as much of the countryside as we could and hoping to meet as many people as we could.

With the return route set, I began researching regional foods and where they might be found. As a bit of a foodie, one of my own personal goals of the trip was to try as many regional specialties as I could.

[Travel tip to anyone making a cross-country trip: chain restaurants can get really boring after a couple of days so it's well worthwhile to research good regional food and restaurants on the Internet before heading out.]

My trip folder began to grow with driving directions, restaurant reviews, a Motel 6 book, and (most importantly) emails from friends, giving directions to their homes and listing home, work, and cell phone numbers.

Finally, the day before our trip was to start arrived. Lynne came to Sacramento from her home in Walnut Creek. We'd leave early in the morning from my house. Pat and Deb Swank came over for a Bon Voyage dinner. Wayde cooked a rib roast on the grill, smoking it with trimmings from one of our almond trees. It was accompanied by baby potatoes, roasted in a local olive oil and kosher salt, and a huge green salad.

The next day would bring our first day of travel...

Day One

Our first day started out at 8:30. We'd risen early, packed all my gear into the van, kissed Wayde and Kathleen good-bye, and hit the road. With admonishments from both Lynne's daughter and my mum "not to talk to strangers" and to "be careful", we considered ourselves ready to roll.

Our destination for today was Wendover, Utah. Both of us had in the past driven along I-80 as far as Salt Lake City so the road was somewhat familiar. We'd talked about finding stickers from each state to put on the dogs' crates ... the doggy version of bumper

stickers. Our first stop for gas in Boomtown, just west of Reno, yielded no stickers. Apparently, bumper stickers of states were no longer in vogue!

Eventually, we were able to locate a window decal for Nevada at a Flying J Plaza. It's true ... Flying J has everything!

[Travel tip: sign up for a Flying J discount card before heading out on a road trip. Even without the discount card, the gas prices are great and the stores have everything you could possibly want.]

We'd decided to stop in Winnemucca for lunch and, even though we weren't quite in the land of BBQ, the sign for DJ's Flying Pig Restaurant drew me in. Alas, the bbq pork sandwich was pretty much what one might expect from a bbq joint in Nevada. Next time, we'll give it a pass.

We carried on, arriving in Wendover shortly before 6:00 pm, local time. Wendover is an interesting town in that it is situated immediately east of the Nevada-Utah state line. Although our motel was in Utah, Nevada casinos were only two blocks up the street!

We settled into our room, fed the dogs, and then took them out on their first 'on the road' walk. We found a small residential neighbourhood only a block or two off the main strip and wandered it, zig-zagging our way throughout the streets. We came upon a beautiful community ball diamond, fully fenced and with working gates. Wouldn't it be great to turn the dogs out in there for a good stretch?

We circumnavigated the block, inspecting each and every entrance to the field. Unfortunately, it was (to borrow one of my dad's phrases) "locked up tighter than a bull's arse". The hounds had to content themselves with a lengthy walk on-lead.

Back at the motel, Lynne took the ice bucket down to the ice machine. When she returned, she had not only ice but also a greyhound fancier! A woman from Arizona had seen us taking the dogs out for a walk and, when she then saw Lynne on her way back from the ice machine, came flying out of her room to ask if she were the 'woman with the whippets'.

She joined us in our room for a chat about the dogs, the dog scene, and people that she and Lynne knew in common. Apparently, "talking to strangers" was not the horrible experience we'd been warned about!

After she left, we decided to head out for dinner. In keeping with my desire for 'regional food', we walked up the street to dine at one of the casino's "all-you-can-keep-down-for-a-buck" buffets. We weren't disappointed; the food was all that one might want from a buffet. Although not gourmet or fine dining by any standards, there is a certain charm to a massive casino meal.

I'd warned Lynne to bring some extra cash, as we'd be stopping at a casino. With our bellies full, we strolled towards the exit doors, stopping at slot machines here and there. Neither of us were big winners though and we lost our entire wagers (\$2.00 for Lynne and \$4.00 for me ... I'm much more adventuresome than Lynne when it comes to gambling).

We returned to our room and headed to bed. Tomorrow's drive would be a little bit longer and we both wanted a good night's sleep for it.

The Land of Cowboys

Day 2 started with a quick Motel 6 coffee before heading out. Our goal was to drive across Utah and most of Wyoming today. Once we passed Salt Lake City, we'd be on "new road" and we were looking forward to it!

Once the salt flats of western Utah were behind us, Lynne and I were quite literally in awe of the landscape. We wound our way through the mountains of eastern Utah, all the while struck by the beauty of our surroundings.

Eventually, the mountains gave way to plains and, after a short while, we were in Wyoming. As we drove, we started to see the most interesting fences. They were at odd and diverse angles to the road and we couldn't help but wonder what they were for. Our first thought was that they were snow fences. After looking at the four foot snow stakes along the roadside and remembering the ten foot snow stakes found along the Haines Road near Haines Junction in the Yukon, where I'd lived in my early 20s, I thought they probably didn't get enough snow there to warrant snow fences. Perhaps they were game fences; we'd seen many herds of antelope as we drove by. Lynne thought she saw one with some solar panels atop them.

Eventually, we stopped at the Wagon Hound Rest Area. As we were about to leave, a clean cut fellow passed the van on his way back to his own vehicle. Given our good luck "talking to strangers" at the motel in Wendover, Lynne rolled down her window and hailed him over. She asked him about the fences and he told her that they were indeed snow fences. They prevented snow from drifting across the highway; the angle at which they were built was dependent on the direction of the prevailing winds.

Finally, an answer!

However, this time the answer came at a cost. Before we could leave, the clean cut fellow launched into a saga of woe and despair, the likes of which would be right at home in a Dickens novel. He'd spent all his time and money helping a poor stranded motorist repair his thermostat.

A half-used tube of liquid gasket material was waved under Lynne's nose as proof.

He'd done this because of his faith in Jesus and his commitment to living his life as a Christian. Out came the large crucifix from under his shirt.

At last, he got down to the nitty-gritty. If we could just give him fifty cents, he could get the gas he needed to drive home to Salt Lake City, some 300-plus miles to the west.

Lynne shoved a couple of dollar bills in the man's hand and we drove off, followed by his blessings. After rolling up the window, Lynne turned to me and said, "It was worth two bucks to find out what the damn fences were for."

Having learned first-hand the cost of "talking to strangers", we continued along our way, headed to Cheyenne. Again, we arrived shortly before 6:00 pm local time and, again, we checked into our room and headed out to walk the dogs.

Today, we found ourselves walking through the local auto dealer neighbourhood. This was wonderful as there was little traffic given the hour and, as the sky darkened into night, the lots were well-lit.

After our exercise, we thought about our own dinner. What else could we eat in the land of cowboys and cowboy poetry but steak? With that in mind, we bundled ourselves into the van and headed down the road to the Outback Restaurant we'd passed on the way in (okay, so maybe the Outback isn't quite 'cowboy' but it is a steakhouse!).

It was at this point that we encountered the first of many construction sites and that Lynne learned she really could trust me as navigator.

The entrance to the Outback parking lot was blocked by construction and we ended up on a highway ramp. Not a big deal really, except it was the ramp was under construction and we found ourselves in a sea of reflective orange barrels. In the night, it was almost impossible to find the exit we needed that would take us back to the restaurant. We were in the road construction version of a house of mirrors. Finally, I spotted the exit and pointed it out to Lynne. She couldn't pick it out of the many, many barrels so I finally told her to steer straight ahead, directly into a specific barrel.

She shot me a quick look but did as I said. Sure enough, as we got closer, the exit (really just a slightly larger gap between barrels) appeared on our right. We found ourselves back on our dog-walking route and knew exactly how to get to the restaurant from there.

After a wonderful steak dinner, we returned to the motel for another night. Just as we pulled into our parking spot, a car with Iowa plates, driven by an elderly couple, parked next to us. As she unloaded her suitcase, the woman greeted me and we exchanged a few polite sentences.

As I drifted off to sleep, I pondered the unfairness of it all ... when we talked to strangers, it cost us two bucks but, when strangers talked to us, we didn't get two bucks in return.

Serendipity

Our next day was to be our longest. From Cheyenne, Wyoming, we'd drive to Des Moines, Iowa before resting for the night.

Or at least that was the plan.

Very early in the day's driving, we discovered that it's damn near impossible to see the road whilst driving eastward, on the plains, as the sun comes up. So, after driving less than 50 miles, we pulled off at the Pine Bluffs, Wyoming exit for breakfast. Hopefully, while we ate, the sun would rise at least to a level where the van's visors would be helpful.

Now, Pine Bluffs is not a bustling metropolis. It's not even a one-horse town. The fact is, Pine Bluffs is about one and a half blocks long and consists of a couple of gas stations and a restaurant or two. We took a look at our options for breakfast: Uncle Fred's Restaurant or the Wild Horse Cafe. There was one car parked in front of the Wild Horse Cafe and there were at least six parked in front of Uncle Fred's.

It seemed a no-brainer.

As we entered the restaurant, it became clear that this was the community coffee shop. Not only did it serve food but it also met the community's need for video rentals. As if that wasn't enough, a huge bulletin board was just inside the front door, plastered with all sorts of notices.

I knew that, if nothing else, the coffee would be good.

We sat at a table in the back, ordered our breakfast, and started to look around. Hmmmm. Lots of historical photos on the walls, some of them containing family members. This was a definite plus in my book!

Then we discovered that each table had a small book rack against the wall and these book racks contained humour books. Lynne and I spent our breakfast that morning leafing through all the books and laughing until our sides hurt.

And, as I'd hoped, the coffee was good.

With the sun a little higher in the sky, we drove another mile and crossed into Nebraska. Despite a vague impression of how nice the rest area washrooms were in Nebraska, nothing much else about this state was retained in my memory. The great plains were pretty much the same from mile to mile and the state went by in a blur.

Soon enough, we crossed into Iowa. After Wyoming and Nebraska, we were both greatly impressed with the rolling hills of Iowa and the corn planted in terraced fields. Around 6:30, we rolled into Des Moines and soon found the Motel 6.

It was at this motel that our plan started to fall apart. Unbeknownst to us, this particular Motel 6 was near a large amusement park and it was full of amusement seekers. No room at the inn!

Out came "The Next Exit" and some quick research was done. There was a cluster of motels 20 miles or so down the freeway. Off we went.

Alas, these motels were also full. Uh-oh ... what to do? what to do?

Out came the trusty book and a little more reading was done. There was one motel left to try in a small town called Newton. It was a few miles off the freeway so we had hope that it might actually have a vacancy.

We took the Newton exit and drove through the industrial area. No motel. We carried on, turning left at the Texaco station. No motel. We drove through downtown Newton. No motel.

Finally, the motel appeared. Thank God for "The Next Exit"!

[Travel tip: if you're thinking of a long road trip, you really, really need this book.]

Lynne pulled into the parking lot, stopped, and looked around. We looked at each other. It was like a 1930s motor court and the rooms looked like they were about six feet wide. On the bright side, they had a vacancy.

I went into the office and secured a room. The owner asked me if I wanted the \$36.00 room or the \$39.00 room.

"What's the difference?"

"More room, mostly."

I took the \$39.00 room.

We were directed to some larger rooms towards the back of the court. Although somewhat dated in its decor, it was large and very comfortable. The inside was panelled so that it looked like a log cabin and we had not two but three beds...two doubles and a twin.

As we unloaded the van, the owner came out on the stoop to smoke a cigarette. As I hadn't exactly enquired about their pet policy (okay, I didn't tell him we had dogs at all), Lynne and I thought it prudent to take the dogs to a park down the street. We could walk them out there, feed them, and then go for dinner.

With the dogs fed, we discussed where to eat. Across the street from the park was La Cabana, a Mexican restaurant. Being accustomed to eating Mexican in California, we were more than a little concerned about what exactly we'd find on the menu in Newton, Iowa but we were also hungry and it was getting late.

As we perused the menu, I was pleasantly surprised to see carnitas as an entree. My favourite Mexican dish wasn't always available in Sacramento Mexican restaurants and here it was in Iowa. Hope springs eternal!

Dinner came and I'm happy to report, it was delicious.

Mexican food in Newton, Iowa ... who knew?

After another quick stop at the park to 'water' the dogs, we returned to the motel. It was here that we learned the real wisdom behind the daily 30 minute walks. As we'd travelled further than initially planned, this day was the only day the dogs missed their walk. They soon made up for the lack by jumping from bed to bed to bed, spinning around on the final bed, and jumping from bed to bed to bed back. This went on for quite a while until they were all tired out.

[Travel tip: if you don't want the dogs jumping on the beds, make sure you walk them at least 30 minutes every day while on the road.]

A Glimpse of the Dark Side

After our great experience with Uncle Fred's Restaurant in Pine Bluffs, we decided that we'd try for a similar community-style restaurant for breakfast. We found Nick's Restaurant somewhere in the middle of Iowa and were not disappointed.

Nick's was a combination restaurant and gift shop. It was also obviously the meeting place of choice for the local geriatric set. Breakfast was tasty and we had some of the best country gravy of the entire trip.

Feeling quite pleased with ourselves for having success in choosing good roadside diners, we pointed the van eastward again and struck out for Ohio.

Of course, as most of us know, just when one starts feeling pleased with oneself is when things are bound to go wrong. And so it was that, on this day, we took a side trip to the dark side ... otherwise known as Toledo.

Given our problems securing a room the night before, I called ahead to the Toledo Motel 6 to make a reservation. In talking with the clerk, I had a few requests for a room; mostly, we wanted a non-smoking room with two beds on the ground floor. We also needed to know if the motel had interior corridors or not. If it did, we'd look elsewhere as it could be shocking to people to see us traipse through the lobby with five whippets in tow.

The clerk apologised that all the non-smoking rooms were gone. That point was negotiable so we booked a smoking room. No problem.

"Do you have interior corridors?"

"Excuse me?"

"Do the rooms open to the outside or do you have interior corridors?"

"Oh no, we don't have those."

Great!

When we finally reached Toledo, we were surprised to see that the motel did indeed have interior corridors. We went into the lobby, only to be assaulted by the odour of stale cigarette smoke. The fellow in front of us was paying off part of his "rent" and calculating how much more he owed. As the desk clerk re-activated his key, he expressed his gratitude for being able to leave some of the "rent" owing.

All I could think was "Oh, my god."

I'm still not sure whether the clerk was unfamiliar with the word "interior" or with the word "corridor". At any rate, he explained that he didn't travel much so didn't really know what I'd been talking about.

On the bright side, he had found a non-smoking room for us. Given the smell of the motel's smoking areas, we were thankful for small mercies.

After checking in and feeding the dogs, we proceeded on our usual walk. It went without incident. Upon our return, I discovered that our room was missing some towels. I went to the lobby to get some and also to enquire about local restaurants.

I was followed into the lobby by one of the "residents", a little girl around ten years old. She sat in a chair while I talked to the desk clerk. When I asked about restaurants, she piped up with "There's a Bob Evans just over there."

"Is that a family restaurant?" I asked.

She didn't know what I meant by that so I turned to the desk clerk. He passed a tired hand over his forehead and said "No, actually. It's a bar."

Finally, he suggested we just go out to the lights and turn left. We'd be sure to find a plethora of restaurants from which to choose.

We followed his advice and, sure enough, there was the Bob Evans. It didn't look like a bar. It had a lot of windows and was very well-lit inside. Lynne and I decided that anyone who didn't know what an interior corridor was probably was wrong about the Bob Evans too. We turned into the parking lot.

It turned out to be a family restaurant. We had a servicable meal and decided that servicable was all that could be expected from Toledo.

We returned to the reek of the motel and prayed for a speedy night's sleep.

A New York State of Mind

Happy to finally escape the clutches of hell...errrr, Toledo, that is...we continued on our way the next morning. Next stop? New York!

A multitude of construction sites along the way slowed our progress somewhat and we were later arriving in Utica than we'd hoped. After our experience with the Toledo Motel 6, we weren't too anxious to stay with them again (at least not east of the Mississippi). I called Wayde at home and asked him to see if there was a Red Roof Inn in Utica and, if so, to book us a room. It seemed to be the eastern equivalent of a western Motel 6.

Wayde booked us a room and called back with the confirmation number and directions off the freeway. With that taken care of, we could at least relax a little bit. However, it was getting dark and we really didn't want a repeat of the bed jumping episode. Where to walk the dogs?

We also needed to hit a Walmart for some "winter" clothing. We'd heard a report that Vermont weather was to turn very cold with highs only in the mid-30s. Brrrrrr.

After arriving in Utica, we checked in, fed the dogs, and headed back to the Walmart we'd passed on the way in. In preparation for Vermont's icy climate, I bought a toque with matching scarf and a pair of gloves. Our 'to do' list was gradually growing smaller.

Back at the van, we loaded up our purchases and paused to discuss dog walking. We looked around the parking lot and, I kid you not, lightbulbs came on over our heads. We'd walk the dogs around the Walmart parking lot! It was large and well-lit.

[Travel tip: if at a loss for somewhere to walk dogs, shopping centre lots are a great idea.]

We checked the time and started out on our first tour of the parking lot. It took us over 20 minutes. Great! One more loop and the dogs would get a good walk in. So off we went on another circle of the site. One small highlight of the second time around was being stopped by a middle-aged couple. They wanted to visit with the dogs. We chatted for a wee bit and, just before we resumed our walk, the husband lowered his voice in discussion with me. He explained that his wife had recently suffered a brain aneurysm and, although she came through it reasonably well, she did have some brain damage. He thanked us for stopping, as visiting with us and our dogs gave her both mental and tactile stimulation, both of which were important to her continuing recovery.

The dogs were taken care of so it was time to feed ourselves. We found a small pub-style restaurant called Babe's Grill and Bar. In keeping with my quest for regional food, I ordered the Buffalo Chicken sandwich (a chicken breast cooked like Buffalo wings) and a regional beer. Both were wonderful.

Our next day would be our shortest. I'd planned it this way so that we'd arrive early enough in Vermont to get the dogs settled before racing the next day. Unfortunately, it was our first day of rain so the driving was slower than we'd hoped.

Regardless, we arrived in Stowe shortly after 3:00 and quickly found our hotel, the Mountaineer Inn. As a serious tourist town, rooms had been hard to come by so we'd 'upgraded' to a dog-friendly resort. Although we could only get one night here, it turned out to be a great decision.

Our room was at the end of the hall and had a French door opening onto a private garden. We wouldn't have to wander the hallways with dogs in tow!

A bus tour group was also checked in that night so there was a buffet dinner served in the dining room. We wouldn't have to go looking for a place to eat dinner and, at last, we'd finally start meeting people!

Joining us for dinner were Donna Miner, Sue Mackiewicz, and Lynne McGowan. We laughed and talked and laughed some more until, finally, the dining room was empty but for us and the staff was lined up, waiting for us to leave.

We headed back to our rooms for the night. Tomorrow would bring our first day of racing!

Release the Hounds!

The day of the first race meet arrived. We got up at our usual hour and headed to the dining room for breakfast, meeting up with Donna and Sue again. We enjoyed a continental-style meal of freshly baked muffins and coffee and juice. Lots of coffee!

Due to tour groups, we'd been unable to book the room for two night's in a row so we packed up the van again and headed to the track. At last, we'd be able to meet some more people and see these dogs we've all heard so much about!

My friend, Lorna, once told me that after one's been in racing for a while, the individual races at the meets tend to blur. Unless the meet is historical, you forget what happens in the races and instead remember the people you met. Shortly after we'd had this conversation, Lorna had to be reminded what year it was that her dog, Thomas, won the NOTRA Nationals! Point taken.

As usual, Lorna was entirely correct and I have only sporadic memories of the races themselves. Aside from a general sense of having had a lot of fun and a few memories of poor Parker getting smacked in the head a few times, my recollections of Vermont are centred around the wonderful people I met.

Tracy, another Canadian ex-pat, had driven up from Brooklyn to run her greyhounds. She came a day early to give her youngest a turn around the track in preparation for her NOTRA debut on Sunday. And what a debut it was! She ended up taking points as an FTE!

I'd somewhat expected to see Jean and Vince Balint at the meet, as I knew they were in the area on their annual family holiday. Unfortunately, they too were victims of the kennel cough outbreak. Instead, we got to see another Californian, Pat Burlingame! Pat had flown out with one of my favourite bitches, Ascot.

The cold weather never really materialised and Pat and I found ourselves to be the only souls brave enough to wear shorts at the meet. As the rain began to fall and the wind picked up, I dug out my ski pants and put them on over my shorts. Although my legs were no longer stung by the prickle of the wind-driven drizzle, my self-esteem was mortally wounded by Pat's pronouncement that I was a coward for having given up on the shorts. (Okay, maybe it wasn't mortally wounded; Pat and I had a good laugh over it though.)

Before the meet began, I saw a woman walking out a beautiful little blue bitch. As they got closer, I thought to myself "Gee, that bitch looks really familiar." Sure enough, it was the love of Tighe's life (so far), los, and Mitzi Banks!

As the races were progressing, Donna's cell phone began to ring. She'd answer it, only to hear music ... "Will you be my girl?" She missed the originating phone number so she had no idea who was calling her. Crossed wires? A prankster? Her husband, in a romantic mood?

After several more similar phone calls, the culprit was revealed ... Louise Hoelscher! Despite having dogs down with kennel cough, Louise Hoelscher drove down from Montreal to meet us. As she drove, she accidentally sat on her cell phone, causing it to repeatedly dial Donna's number. The music was the oldies station on her car radio.

It's always nice meeting other Canadians. At one point, we had an all-Canuck line at the finish with Tracy, Louise, and I providing line and foul judging services for a couple of races!

During the third programme, I wondered whether perhaps Lynne McGowan might be having heart trouble. She'd kindly offered to walk Dayton out before his race, as I had Tighe in the race immediately prior to it. After Tighe ran, she walked him out while I handled Dayton. Just as Dayton's race finished up, I saw a fawn dog come streaking full-bore towards the run-out.

"Loose dog!" I yelled.

Oh. That's my dog.

Oh look. No muzzle.

Hey. No collar.

Well, I guess that lure needed to be replaced sometime. (Good thing too, as it looked like confetti when Tighe got done with it.)

A few minutes later, a pale and worried-looking Lynne appeared on the scene. She'd had him in the next field over when he'd backed out of his collar. She reportedly repeated a quick and desperate prayer that he'd remember the bridge they'd crossed to get to the field and not head out down the highway.

With Tighe finally convinced he'd killed that plastic bag and Lynne's heart rate returning to normal, we were able to resume the race meet.

The only downside to the meet came in the final high-point. Ascot blew a toe and Parker, after being hit in the final scrum, came up lame with a seriously swollen wrist. I'm sure it was a grim prospect for both Pat and Lynne. With true sporting spirit, Pat said he was going to take the opportunity to drive back to Massachusetts via the Maine coastline. With the weather a little clearer by now, he'd at least get to do some sightseeing.

Now, before I get too much further on, I have to say that I had one small disappointment at this meet. I'd so looked forward to meeting Judy Lowther and seeing Tighe's puppy, Demon. I had a wonderful time talking with Judy but, unfortunately, Demon had had a serious accident the week prior and had to undergo surgery. Hearing stories about him almost made up for missing him and I'm glad he's being taken such good care of. (Thanks, Judy!)

After the meet was over, several people were interested in taking pictures of the dogs, especially Tighe. Those of you who know us personally know that, while Tighe is particularly photogenic in racing photos, I can't set him up worth a damn and his stacked photos all look like poo.

Jean Krekorian came to my rescue and took Tighe off my hands, stacking him up like a show dog. Hey! Look at that! He looked like he was enjoying himself! He looked gooooooood! The paparazzi, as Tracy called them, went wild!

(Dayton, on the other hand, was not terribly thrilled about having his picture taken.)

[Mary Hope and Ariel Schoenfeld took some shots of them both and some clips of Tighe chasing his tennis ball after the meet. I'll post a link to those photos in a short while.]

With the photographers finished, the time came to get down to the really important part of the meet--the potluck! The table was filled with some delicious food. Particularly memorable was Lynne McGowan's sausage soup (btw, I'm still waiting for that recipe!) and Linda Garwacki's potato salad (mmmmmm, capers!).

Over the meal, I also learned a little more about some of the NEWC club members. Dale Healy has a great disposition and always seems to be smiling. And why not? Her husband, Jim, has a cheeky (if not downright wicked) sense of humour!

After a great meal and even better conversation, it seemed a shame to leave the field but we still needed to get checked into the new hotel and we definitely needed some sleep. So off we went to the Commodore Inn, our home for the night.

As I'd checked in, the desk clerk asked me if I wanted to see the room. As this was a hotel, not a motel, and we had a second floor room, I thought I'd take the opportunity to scope out the "back route" to getting the dogs in the room. I meandered through the hallways, finally finding an exit door that opened onto a side street. It was a bit of a hike but we wouldn't have to haul the dogs through the crowded lobby and up the elevator.

I went back to sign the rest of the registration papers and met Donna at the desk. I mentioned that I'd found a way in that didn't involve the lobby and she turned to the desk clerk and asked, "How do you want us to bring the dogs in?"

Gulp. I'm sure I went pale.

"Oh, bring them through the lobby. You know we don't care."

Hey, I could get to like this sort of hotel!

We settled in for another night's sleep in preparation for the next day's meet.

Our Last Day in Vermont

After a good night's sleep, we readied ourselves for the upcoming day. First on the agenda was the full breakfast included in the cost of the room. (Hey, never let it be said that we don't have our priorities straight!)

As we all gathered in the hotel dining room, I couldn't help but remember a record my dad had when I was a kid. It was a recording of "When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano" and, in the prelude to the song, the recording artist talked about a breakfast that he and his wife had eaten.

"There was ham and eggs and French toast. It was a wunnerful breakfast."

Well, along with ham and eggs and French toast, there was more eggs and bacon (oh, my God, but there was bacon!) and sausage and pancakes and hashbrowns and Danishes and toast and bagels and cereal and pineapple juice and grapefruit juice and apple juice and orange juice and coffee and milk. It was a wunnerful breakfast.

We were so full we almost needed naps! But we managed to shake off the sleep toxins and get ourselves to the field.

Today's was a smaller meet as we'd lost a few dogs to injury. Ascot was out due to her toe. Although Parker's wrist was now normal size, Lynne decided not to chance running him before he saw a vet. Bengal was not running as he's recovering from an injury; we were all thrilled for Lynne McG. that he'd made it through Saturday's meet sound. (I know from Tighe's recovery that there's nothing quite like the feeling when your dog can run an entire meet again. It's pretty damn wonderful.) Los was out with a toe injury.

Dayton ended up slipping in the 2nd programme and, after his 3rd race, had a wrist that was as big as Parker's had been the day before. Although he didn't show signs of lameness that I could detect, I scratched him to be safe.

However, we added some greyhounds with the appearance of Michele, another person I've known from the lists. I got a chance to finish line with Michele (and nosh on her chocolate truffles!) and was very glad to have met her.

Despite the smaller entry, this meet was just as fun. I was sorry to see it end and to say good-bye to Vermont and all the great folks there.

But, we had a few miles to put on before we could rest for the night. Our plan was to follow Donna to her home in Connecticut, where we'd stay until the next Friday,

sightseeing and resting up. We made it to her place around 8:00 that night and quickly sorted ourselves out.

Donna hadn't warned me but her house looks like it came out of a Country Living magazine. I was in awe as I looked around.

"It's pegged!"

Bernie, Donna's husband, told me that there wasn't a nail in the house and then shared with me some of the design and construction details. Little did he know that I want to be an architect when I grow up. I was in heaven listening to him!

After a pizza dinner, we all hit the sack for the night. The next week would be filled with sightseeing, shopping, and schmoozing; we definitely wanted to be ready for it!

A Day of Leisure

Our first day in Connecticut was definitely leisurely! Lynne McGowan had overnighted at Donna's place as well, breaking up her long drive home from the races. So there we were--four dog biddies with nothing to do but sit around and schmooze!

Wait! we had to exercise the dogs!

Lynne and I headed out around the "block" with our crew. The "block" is a half mile loop so, after a few turns around it, the guys were nicely stretched out and warmed up. While we did that, Donna exercised her pack in the huge expanse she calls her yard.

We spent a little time in the garage, playing at obedience with the dogs. Donna certainly has "the touch" and had Tighe responding to hand signals within about three minutes. He was loving it (and her)!

I could practically hear him thinking: "HmMMM. She's going to put her hand up and all I have to do is sit down and she'll give me COOKIES! How cool is that?" and "Oh, my God. I just stick my nose on whatever she holds out and I get PEPPERONI!"

Tighe had found his soulmate.

The next items on our agenda were lunch and errands. Before getting underway though, I had to make a shopping list. I've forced Donna to read my ramblings about food for well over a year now and, to make up for it, I'd told her that I would cook dinner during our stay at her place. In preparation, I'd printed out some recipes to take with me before we left.

We headed out to a local restaurant, Kathy-John's, and had some great sandwiches and perused their funky gift shop. (There's something truly wonderful about a restaurant that has a funky gift shop attached, especially when the food is superb and the wares are really funky.)

We hit the local pet store, picking up some grooming supplies and some dog toys, and then it was off to the market. We got all the groceries on my list and then Donna sent me to the "packet store" for wine and beer. ("HmMMM. What's a packet store?" I said to myself. Turns out it's a beer and wine store.)

Donna and her husband had some important family stuff to do so Donna headed out for that while Lynne and I lounged around her house. Ahhhhh. It doesn't get any better than this!

As we weren't sure how long they'd be, I waited until Donna and Bernie were home from their family business before starting dinner, Chicken Vesuvio, an adaptation of a dish

originating in Chicago's Harry Caray Restaurant. As it cooked, Bernie started telling me about a recent trip to Nova Scotia he'd taken. Little did he know that, along with Newfoundland, Nova Scotia is on my list of places I want to see before I die. I pored over his photos and soaked up every word about his trip. Heaven!

We ate dinner casually, in the kitchen, and carried on with some great conversation. Both Donna and Bernie were full of suggestions of what we could do and see during our stay and our heads were spinning with the possibilities. Too bad the day was coming to an end!

After dinner, the real reason why I wanted to cook came to light. If I cook, then I don't have to help do dishes! After Lynne and Donna had cleaned up my mess, it was soon time for bed.

Tomorrow, Donna would be back to work and we'd be on our own. We had adventures planned!

[Note: I really like stories that include recipes or books that have maps in them. So I'm including recipes for what I cooked.]

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Chicken Vesuvio

4 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon garlic powder
3 tablespoons olive oil
2 large russet potatoes (about 14 ounces each), peeled, each cut into 6 pieces
6 large garlic cloves, peeled
1/2 teaspoon (or more) dried crushed red pepper
3/4 cup chicken stock or canned chicken broth
1/4 cup dry vermouth
1 cup frozen green peas, thawed
Chopped fresh parsley (optional)

Preheat oven to 450°F. Sprinkle chicken pieces generously with salt and pepper. Sprinkle oregano and garlic powder over chicken; set aside. Heat oil in large ovenproof pot over high heat. Add potatoes and sauté until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Transfer potatoes to bowl.

Add chicken to same pot and sauté until golden brown on all sides, about 10 minutes. Add garlic cloves and dried crushed red pepper and sauté 2 minutes. Return potatoes to pot. Remove pot from heat. Add stock. Return to medium-high heat and bring to boil.

Cover pot tightly; transfer to oven and bake until chicken is cooked through, about 30 minutes. Add peas to pot; cover and bake 5 minutes longer. Transfer chicken to platter. Arrange potatoes and peas around chicken. Pour sauce from pot over chicken.

A Trip to the Past

On Tuesday morning, we found we had the house to ourselves. Bernie was up and gone to work before we got up and Donna was off to her job not too much later. After our morning walk with the whippets, Lynne and I decided we'd "do the tourist thing" and go

to Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts. We gathered up our maps and cameras and headed out for a glimpse of history.

We weren't disappointed!

We spent hours upon hours, wandering around the Village, checking out the architecture and historical info available. We both decided that the Fitch House was our favourite; we could easily transform it into a 21st century home.

Although I carried my camera with me throughout those many long hours, I forgot to take any pictures (typical Jen behaviour, btw). I remedied the situation by buying some postcards at the gift shop.

Lynne and I headed for The Tavern at OSV for some lunch before heading back to Donna's place. What else could we order but clam chowder? Having grown up eating a West Coast-style chowder (red, chunkier, with a thinner broth), the original New England clam chowder was a bit of a surprise to me, especially its uncanny resemblance to mashed potatoes!

It was delicious though and, between that and the sandwich Lynne and I shared, we were stuffed!

We headed back to Donna's place to get ready for dinner. Bernie had arrived home from work before we got back and had with him some local micro-brew. He pulled out of a cupboard a bag of pretzels, a traditional gift from Lynne McGowan, and the schmoozefest was on!

The three of us sat around the kitchen, sipping on some very fine Connecticut brews, noshing on Honey Wheat Pretzel Sticks, and just shooting the breeze. Bernie gave us more ideas about what to see and do on Wednesday and we were busy making plans when Donna got home from work.

Time to start dinner! Tonight's meal would be Chicken Stew with Tomatoes and White Beans ...

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Chicken Stew with Tomatoes and White Beans

(original recipe at <http://food.epicurious.com/run/recipe/view?id=102665> ... it's a little higher in fat content)

6 skinless, boneless chicken thighs

All purpose flour

2-3 T. olive oil

1 large onion, chopped (about 2 cups)

5 garlic cloves, minced

2 14 1/2-ounce cans stewed tomatoes

1 14 1/2-ounce can low-salt chicken broth

3/4 cup dry white wine

1/2 cup chopped fresh basil

1 tablespoon dried oregano

1 15-ounce cans cannellini (white kidney beans), drained

Sprinkle chicken thighs with salt and pepper. Dredge chicken in flour, shaking off excess. Heat olive oil in pot and sauté until brown, about 3 minutes per side. Using slotted spoon, transfer chicken to large bowl.

Pour off all but 2 tablespoons drippings from pot. Add chopped onion and minced garlic to pot; sauté 4 minutes. Add stewed tomatoes, chicken broth, wine, basil and oregano. Bring to boil, scraping up browned bits. Return chicken and any accumulated juices to pot. Cover and simmer until chicken is cooked through, about 20 minutes. Add cannellini; simmer 10 minutes longer. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Putzing around Connecticut

Our plans for Wednesday focused almost entirely on taking in local colour (of the shopping sort). Thanks to Donna and Bernie, we had a list of interesting places to go and things to see.

First on our list was the feed and tack shop. Lynne and I had stopped at a few feed stores on our way through Texas in April and had decided that they were a definite 'must see' on any journey. So we headed off down the road to the local one. Although it was a little more 'suburban' than what we'd hoped for, we did find some cotton horse leads and some more grooming supplies to buy.

Next on our list of places to go was Champion's, a small store in Storr, Vermont. Champion's attraction was that it had lots of homeopathic remedies and bulk foods. Once we got there, we found that the 19th century building was pretty cool too and the owner, who was behind the counter, was exceptionally friendly. We poked around even the darkest corners of the shop and missed NOTHING.

I was thrilled to find some Five Flowers Formula of the brand that I liked and bought some for my first aid kit. Lynne bought some herbs and incense matches and all sorts of neat little things.

Next stop? Putnam, Vermont!

We'd decided we'd like to do some antiquing and Bernie had suggested Putnam as the place to go. As soon as we got there though, we had to have lunch. We found The Vine Bistro and each ordered a sandwich. They were delicious and came served with mashed potatoes. Good thing we had lots of walking around to do!

We moseyed in and out of the antique shops in Putnam, seeing only a couple of whippet things. I was glad to rely on Lynne's expertise as far as pricing was concerned. Although not over-priced, she said the wares in Putnam were certainly at market value. There were no bargains to be had ... bummer!

After walking off most of our lunch, Lynne and I headed back to Donna's place. As chance would have it, we passed Thompson's, another feed store, on the way home. Of course, we couldn't pass it by!

This was more the style of store that we liked and we perused their shelves with unbridled glee. Lynne found a single bag of Bernie's pretzels on the shelf and so she bought it.

Again, when Bernie got home, he had another type of local microbrew so out came the pretzels! More schmoozing!

Dinner tonight would be Paprika Chicken, chosen in honour of Donna's pup, Paprika. (In case anyone notices a chicken theme in the menu, yes, it's true. I could happily eat chicken every single night of the week and Donna had told me that things were the same in their house. So, I cooked a lot of chicken.)

After dinner, we followed our habit of taking the dogs outside to run around a bit. I would take the tennis ball chucker out and let Tighe chase to his heart's content. After that was done, the other dogs would come out and they'd all have a good time playing around in the yard.

I should mention that one of Donna's bitches was in season while we were there. At that stage of our visit, Tighe was convinced that the girl for him was Paprika and he spent all of his 'play time' trying his very hardest to woo her. She was very patient with him and didn't tell him off too many times.

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Paprika Chicken

(original recipe at <http://food.epicurious.com/run/recipe/view?id=104389> ... again, the original has a little higher fat content)

4 skinless, boneless chicken breasts
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 cups finely chopped onion
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons paprika
1 (14-oz) can whole tomatoes, drained
1/2 cup chicken broth or water
1 1/2 teaspoons all-purpose flour stirred together with 1 tablespoon water
2 tablespoons sour cream, plus additional for serving

Heat oil in a 5-quart heavy pot over moderate heat. Cook onion with salt, covered, stirring occasionally and reducing heat if necessary, until onion is very tender but not browned, about 5 minutes.

Add paprika and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Stir in tomatoes and broth, stirring vigorously to break up tomatoes. Add chicken and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, 10 minutes. Simmer, uncovered, until chicken is just cooked through, 5 to 10 minutes longer.

Stir flour mixture and stir into sauce. Simmer, stirring, until sauce is slightly thickened, about 2 minutes.

Remove from heat, then season with salt and stir in 2 tablespoons sour cream. Serve, sprinkled with parsley, over egg noodles, with additional sour cream on the side.

A Pain in the Arm

Thursday ended up to be our laziest day yet.

We'd originally planned on taking Donna and Bernie out for dinner Thursday night, as a thank you for putting us up all week. Unfortunately, that plan was nixed due to my shoulder.

All week, I'd had increasing pain in my left shoulder. I laughed it off as being "sympathy pain" for my mother. My mum had had an accident shortly before Lynne and I left on holiday, severely fracturing her left arm. She'd ended up having shoulder replacement surgery on the day we arrived in Vermont. Had we not had the trip planned for so long, I would have been spending these weeks in Victoria with her instead of gallivanting around the country!

On Thursday morning, I awoke with severe pain in my shoulder, reminiscent of the several times I'd separated my right shoulder. I pretty much just took some pain killers

and went back to bed. Lynne, on the other hand, took the opportunity to tidy up the house. The twenty-four extra feet that were wandering around the house certainly tracked in a lot of grass clippings! It seemed only right to her that we clean up after ourselves (well, *she* cleaned up after us ... I was in bed sleeping).

After I finally got out of bed (feeling much better, thank you), we decided that we'd cook dinner again tonight as I wasn't really feeling up to dinner out. I made a grocery list and off we went.

Our first stop was Capriland's, an herb farm. We were completely entranced by the 18th century barn in which the shop was located. I found the spices I needed for dinner tonight and bought them, along with some wonderful herbal hand cream. Lynne got some advice from the owner of the farm about some plantings she wanted to do at home.

After Capriland's, it was off to the market and then back to Donna's to walk the dogs and then to start dinner.

On tonight's menu was Bulgarian Beef Stew, cheesy bread, and, since we weren't able to go to a restaurant, we even planned a dessert -- Vanilla Panna Cotta. The dessert especially made my shoulder feel much better.

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Bulgarian Beef Stew

1/3 cup olive oil
4 cups chopped onions
10 garlic cloves, minced
8 bay leaves
3 1/2 pounds boneless beef chuck, cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes
3 tablespoons sweet Hungarian paprika
1 tablespoon grated lemon peel
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
3 cups beef stock or canned broth
1/3 cup dry red wine
1 tablespoon butter, room temperature
1 tablespoon all purpose flour
12 ounces egg noodles

Heat oil in heavy large pot over medium heat. Add onions, garlic and bay leaves. Sauté until onions are golden, about 15 minutes. Sprinkle meat with salt and pepper. Add to pot. Add paprika, lemon peel, and cayenne pepper; stir until meat is coated. Add stock and wine. Bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer until meat is very tender, stirring occasionally, about 1 hour 30 minutes.

Using slotted spoon, transfer meat to bowl. Mix butter and flour in small bowl until smooth paste forms. Add to cooking liquid in pot, whisking constantly. Simmer until cooking liquid thickens to sauce consistency, stirring frequently, about 8 minutes. Season sauce with salt and pepper. Return meat to sauce.

Cook noodles in large pot of boiling salted water until tender but still firm to bite. Drain. Transfer to large bowl.

Spoon stew over noodles.

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Cheesy Bread

4 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 cup butter, softened
1 loaf Italian bread
1/3-1/2 pound blue cheese, sliced

Preheat oven to 350.

Combine garlic and butter. Slice bread, leaving the slices attached at the bottom (in other words, don't slice all the way through). Spread garlic butter on each side of each slice. Stuff slices with blue cheese. Wrap bread in foil and warm in the oven for 20 minutes or so.

This is equally good with Gruyere cheese as well.

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Vanilla Panna Cotta

1/4 cup cold water
1-1/4 teaspoons unflavored gelatin
1.5 cups whipping cream
1/2 cup sugar
1 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 1/2-pint baskets raspberries
1/3 cup sweet white wine or a combination of white wine and Chambord

Pour 1/4 cup cold water into small custard cup. Sprinkle gelatin over. Let stand until gelatin softens, about 15 minutes. Bring 1 inch of water in small skillet to boil. Place cup with gelatin in water. Stir until gelatin dissolves, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat.

Combine cream and 1/3 cup sugar in heavy medium saucepan. Stir over medium heat just until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat. Mix in vanilla and gelatin. Divide pudding mixture among 8 wineglasses. Cover and chill until set, at least 6 hours and up to 1 day.

Combine berries and remaining sugar in medium bowl. Crush berries slightly with back of spoon. Mix in wine. Let compote stand until berry juices and sugar form syrup, stirring often, at least 1 hour and up to 2 hours.

Spoon compote over puddings.

We Got Crabs in Delaware!

After several days of R&R in Connecticut, it was time to get back to business. Friday would be spent getting the dogs ready to race again and driving to the next race site.

Donna was taking Gypsy and Chloe, two little girls of her breeding, along as well, so their owners dropped them off on Friday morning. If Tighe had thought Paprika was the girl of his dreams, then Dayton fell head over heels in love with Chloe.

Imagine, if you will, a young teen-aged boy on his bicycle or skateboard, doing bike tricks or showing off his boarding finesse, all to impress a young teen-aged girl. Now, take away the bicycle or skateboard and change the boy into a black whippet and the girl into a brindle one.

That was Dayton and Chloe.

Dayton frolicked around her, trying his best to look handsome, and seriously showing off for his new friend. For her part, Chloe played hard to get and let him chase her through the yard. Aside from the race meets, I think flirting gave Dayton the best exercise during our entire trip!

By 12:30 or so, we were on the road again, this time headed south to Delaware where the dogs would race in the Jersey Rag Racers' meet. Luckily, we missed the rush hour traffic from New York so it only took us two weeks to get there. (Okay, maybe that's an exaggeration but the traffic was pretty heavy.)

We arrived at our hotel in New Castle, Delaware, got checked in, and set out for the restaurant to have some dinner. Lynne McGowan was hosting Adele Monroe and Donna had arranged with her to meet us there.

Now, we'd heard that Adele was a pretty serious type of person. In fact, there was a rumour going around that she didn't laugh at all. I can personally attest to the fact that, although Adele can be serious, she definitely does laugh. Sometimes, a lot!

The five of us ended up at a table near the door of the restaurant and, after lots of driving, our capacity for silliness was pretty much reaching its peak. Suffice it to say that Adele has a similar quotient for silliness and it wasn't long before we were all laughing uncontrollably. I think Adele might have even laughed until she cried.

After an incredibly silly dinner, we all retired, anxious to get an early start for more racing the next morning!

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Racing the next morning was to be held at the Governor Bacon facility in Delaware City. Judy Stainbrook, co-owner of Racing-L with me, was going to come out and meet us. Little did she know that we'd put her to work handling dogs too!

Although I'd made an exception in Vermont, I only run my dogs one day per weekend so my guys weren't entered. That meant I could help Lynne handle Parker and Brock and Makena. (Good thing there weren't all five dogs to race too as the humidity and temperature was pretty high. There ought to be a law against it getting so hot when the humidity is that high!)

On this day, we discovered one of the true gems of East Coast whippet racing--Bob Fisher. By chance, we ended up parked next to him and his wonderful whippet, Blaze. What good fortune for us as Bob turned out to be one of the nicest people I've met in a very long time.

Judy arrived during the first programme and we quickly put her to work, catching dogs and walking dogs out, both before and after their races. In between races, we had a chance to talk and get caught up on things.

The races went well with Parker winning the meet and Blaze placing second. The most memorable moment came after the final high point though. Lynne McGowan had been very pleased that her lad, Bengal, had stayed sound today as well (I mentioned earlier that he's coming back from injury). Well, not only did he 'stay sound' but he taught the youngsters a thing or two when he won the final high point.

We thought we'd have to call 911 for Lynne's poor heart!

After the meet was over, we rounded up as many people as we could find to join us for dinner across the street at Wiso's, a local crab restaurant. Lynne and I were back on our 'eat regional' kick and we'd heard they had good crabcakes at Wiso's.

What a crew we made! Bob Fisher, Lynne and Leon McGowan and Lynne's nephew, Donna Miner, Adele Monroe, Judy Stainbrook, Alex and Bronwen Sosangelis, Lynne and I all sat down to dinner.

After a quick primer on some of the menu items from Bob, I was ready to order ... crabcakes, coleslaw, and hushpuppies. Mmmmmmm. As a beverage, most of us were sipping the hard lemonade they had on tap.

A great meal with some great folks after a good day of racing. It just doesn't get much better than that. (Well, maybe if the humidity hadn't been quite so high ...)

Turkey Trussing

Sunday's meet was conducted under better weather conditions; it was still nice and warm but the humidity had dropped a lot.

John Huff brought to the meet prints of whippet racing from the 1930s made from a set of old glass negatives. The negatives had come up on Ebay recently and Carol Huff had very cleverly outbid me for them. (In truth, I thought they were getting close to my budget's upper limit so I bid the exact amount of the opening and Carol, having the same thoughts, bid exactly one dollar more!)

Lynne and I loved looking through the prints, especially the ones of the rough-coated whippets.

(John has said he plans to make the images available when his schedule allows and, after listening to his conservation plans, I know the negatives are in a much better home.)

Today was not a happy day for me. The pain in my shoulder steadily increased as the day went on until I was unable to handle either dog and pondered scratching them both. JRRWA members, Barbara and Carol, came to my rescue, fitting me out with a sling made out of a plastic garbage bag and Elastikon.

[Note to Lynne McGowan: how much did you want for the negatives of those pictures you took?]

Lynne McGowan and Donna Miner took over the handling of the dogs and, as for my part, I took some painkillers.

After one more programme, it was clear the garbage bag sling wasn't going to hold up. Again, Barbara and Carol rescued me, trussing me up with Vet Wrap and Elastikon. Ahhhh! Relief!

The end of the meet couldn't come soon enough for me and, instead of following our original plan of heading directly to Gloria Goble's home in Maryland, we followed Lynne and Leon to their place and unloaded dogs. Lynne U. took over feeding them all while Lynne McG. took me to the emergency room.

After an examination and xrays, it was determined that my shoulder had not separated; I had tendinitis. The doctor said it was caused by some repetitive strain ... hmmm, couldn't be holding a little fawn 'bucking bronc' at the boxes, could it? (Tighe says "No" but I think we all know better.)

I called Gloria to let her know what had happened and that we'd be arriving on Monday afternoon instead of that night. Then it was back to Lynne and Leon's for a good dinner, good conversation, and a good night's sleep!

And that's exactly what we had!

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The next morning, I finally had a chance to look over the dogs. With his stopper tape removed, Dayton's wrist had swollen up again as it had in Vermont. I decided to give it a few days and see what happened.

We'd heard a rumour there was a Cold Water Creek Outlet store in Delaware and Lynne was bound and determined to find it. Off we went, in search of bargains!

We found the outlet stores and were thrilled to see the "Up to 90% Off" sign in the CWC window. Alas, we discovered that the sale had started a week previous and there were no more bargains to be had.

Not to be dismayed, we decided to go to The Bunny Junction, a tack store near our hotel in New Castle. We'd driven by it every day but it was always closed when we were there. It turned out to carry a lot of Western wear but also had a small inventory of the 'good stuff' (supplements, liniments, etc.). Unfortunately, none of it was new and exciting so we left empty-handed.

Obviously, we were not meant to shop in Delaware! So, we said our good-byes and thank yous to Lynne and Leon and set out for Maryland.

“More crab cakes, please!”

It didn't take us too long to get from Delaware to Maryland and, after skirting the outlying areas of Baltimore, we were not too far at all from Gloria's place. I gave her a call at work so that she'd know how far we were; Lynne put in her request for 'more crab cakes, please' ... by now, both Lynne and I were keen on regional eateries!

We knew we'd be at Gloria's before she got home from work so we just mentally marked the turn-off to her road and carried on to do some sightseeing. Historic buildings seemed to be the attraction, both officially and unofficially, as along the road, Lynne and I were amazed by the barns with incredible stone foundations.

[As a side note, not everyone enjoys looking at the same types of things when holidaying. From Lynne's addition to my post about shopping in Delaware, you might have figured out that I'm not one much for shopping and Lynne is. However, I have to say what an utter joy it was to travel with someone with a similar appreciation for architecture. It was almost uncanny ... I'd be privately coveting the door on a particular house and Lynne would comment on it; Lynne would be admiring a dry stone fence just as I'd say something about it. These barns in Maryland were something that literally made both of our mouths drop; they were simply wonderful. To translate this into a travel tip...if you take the time and make the effort to find something that interests both yourself and your travelling companion, any trip taken will be all the richer for it.]

We carried on to historic Emmitsburg, hoping to find some antique shops to peruse. Instead, we found more architecture! The entire town centre was predominantly residential with the houses situated right up against the street. No yards! No gardens! It was early American urban life! Gloria told us later that the community discouraged commercial ventures on the main street in order to preserve the historical aspects of the neighbourhood.

However, not knowing that at the time, Lynne and I carried on through Emmitsburg until there was no more Emmitsburg to carry on through! We found ourselves out the other end and still no antique shops to browse in! So, we turned around, headed back through town, and decided to visit Gettysburg, just across the border in Pennsylvania.

We made it as far as Gettysburg Village, the factory outlet stores. Even I wanted to stop there! (Okay, maybe I like to shop sometimes.) We walked around the shops, looking for bargains, and (not finding any) then decided it was time to head back to Gloria's.

Lynne's off-hand request for "more crab cakes, please" paid off! Gloria had asked around at work and had been given suggestions on where to find them (not an easy find, given our distance from the coast). But before that, we had an opportunity to explore her house!

As always, the dogs were our first priority so they were taken down to the huge turn-out yard (maybe 1/2 an acre?) where they could run and play. Gloria pointed out various features of her acreage and the surrounding area. Then it was on to the House of Many Fireplaces!

We were amazed at the house. As Gloria told us the story of its construction, it was clear that it had been built as a labour of love by its first owner. Fireplaces everywhere! It was truly an amazing structure!

After feeding the dogs, we headed to Westminster for dinner. Gloria's research paid off in spades. Not only did we have crab cakes but I had crab soup as well and more hushpuppies. We were in epicurean heaven! And, as if the incredible food wasn't enough, the entire evening was filled with incredible conversation as well.

I went to bed that night feeling that my shoulder had robbed me of an opportunity to spend more time with a very interesting and intelligent woman but also pleased that I'd had a chance to meet her at all.

Next stop? Kentucky!

Bury Me Along the Big Sandy

Our day started early as we headed west again. Our route today would take us through rural Pennsylvania, on to western Maryland, and then through West Virginia to Kentucky. We drove the state roads at an almost leisurely pace, enjoying the landscape around us, and finally hooking up on an interstate for the rest of the day's journey.

It was in West Virginia that we had a small thrill--a glimpse of some true wildlife. Traffic was fairly light on the interstate but there was one car about one hundred yards in front of us. As we drove along, a black bear jumped over the guard rail and ran in front of the car ahead of us. Lynne and I were stunned! I hadn't seen a bear since moving to the US and Lynne had never seen one in the wild. Some quick reflexes on the part of Lynne and the driver ahead of us prevented the bear from meeting its maker and we were left with an appreciation for the untamed nature of parts of the country.

Somewhat pleased with ourselves for being in the right place at the right time, we continued on our way towards Kentucky. As we drove through Charleston, I called Beth Coney; we would be staying with her for a couple of nights and I wanted to let her know we were on our way. We determined that we'd arrive at her place soon after she got home from work.

Today, our timing was perfect! Beth had arrived home shortly before we got there. We parked the van in her back yard and let the hounds out to cavort. Bette, Beth's borzoi,

came out to meet the crew and cavort right along with them. Although her neighbourhood looked very respectable, I became worried that we were in the middle of a crime spree when, shortly after hearing a siren go down the street, a black helicopter started circling overhead. The cops were looking for someone and that someone was close to us!

We watched as the helicopter circled closer and closer, lower and lower in altitude. My God, they were right over Beth's neighbour's house! I was taken aback to see one of the policemen in the helicopter lean out and start waving to Beth. Then he was making hand signals at her!

It turns out that Beth's neighbour is the deputy police chief and he was buzzing his own house to wave at his kids. Obviously, what little television I do watch is far too much for my imagination.

Feeling much safer, we decided to feed the dogs and head out for dinner. Tonight we would try some of the regional Chinese food and hit the Plum Tree restaurant in Georgetown.

[If you're ever there, try the sui mai. It's *very* good and still available at dinnertime!]

After lots of food, lots of conversation, and lots of laughing, we returned to Beth's for the night. We explored her 19th century house, marvelling at every little detail. (I was particularly impressed by the beauty of the woodwork.) Lynne retired to the couch in Beth's office, I retired to the couch in Beth's living room, and Beth retired to her bedroom. Beth had early morning appointments and late afternoon appointments so she'd have most of the day to go exploring with us; we were all looking forward to a good night's sleep!

Alas, on this night, the poor whippets discovered that they'd got quite in the habit of playing musical beds and, without the opportunity to switch bed partners, were rather lonely. Most nights, Makena slept with Lynne, Dayton slept with me, and Parker, Brock, and Tighe slept with either of us, often changing beds several times throughout a single night. I was awoken in the middle of the night by a quiet whippet whine ... there was Parker, standing at the French door of Beth's living room, looking very sad that he couldn't come get into bed with me. So, I got up to let him in and, before I could even get back into bed, Tighe was off to get into bed with Lynne.

Finally, I could get back to sleep and be well-rested for the following day. We had some big plans to experience the horse racing culture of Kentucky!

Screaming Monkey Heads

Today would prove to be one of our busiest days during our entire adventure. Beth had a lot of things to show us and we were up for it!

As she had early morning appointments, Beth was up and gone to work before I dragged my sorry butt out of bed. I awoke to the smell of coffee and fresh doughnuts and the sound of screaming monkey heads. Lynne had walked to a doughnut shop Beth had pointed out and bought "breakfast" for us. That explains the coffee and doughnuts but I'm sure most people are wondering about the screaming monkey heads.

The night before, Bette had shown the whippets the location of her toybox, in case they wanted to play with something while she was at work with Beth. The toys of choice were the screaming monkeys and their heads ... plush toys with a scream instead of a squeak. Bette had decapitated the screaming monkeys and, despite Beth's best surgical

attempts, they remained headless. The whippets had a blast making the monkeys scream and playing with their heads.

Lynne and I did a bit of laundry and then walked to Georgetown's centre, home to many antique stores. We spent some time, poking around in several of the shops. Again, those antique dealers were too savvy for us and we didn't find any bargains. With our antiquing curiosity fulfilled, we headed back to Beth's to meet up with her for the bulk of the day.

We had lots planned but first on the agenda was the Kentucky Horse Park. We spent quite some time there, looking through the museums, visiting the different breeds of horses, and seeing some great horses in the Hall of Champions. Lynne was especially taken with the life size bronze statue of Secretariat ... now she can say she's been on both Secretariat and Seabiscuit!

Beth then took us on a drive of some of the private horse farms. Aside from all the beautiful animals we saw, I was struck by just how pretty this area was--lots of green grass and lots of white fencing. It was like being inside a postcard!

After a quick but photographic trip to Keeneland for some horse racing, we headed back to Beth's clinic for her late afternoon appointments. When we arrived, we were greeted by none other than Bro' Shine, Mike Downey!

Mike was kind enough to drive me back to Beth's house to collect Dayton, as he needed to have that wrist looked at. Back at the clinic, Beth gave him a close once-over, singing nonsense songs to him all the while. Those of you who've been at a race meet with Dayton know that he particularly enjoys music and likes to sing; he was happy to know that he and Beth shared a common interest.

I'd been afraid of chip fractures in his wrist so Beth took a couple of xrays. No extra pieces! Phew! It turned out that Dayton had the same thing as me--tendinitis. Along with some treatment options, Beth advised me that, if the swelling was gone, he could probably race with the wrist wrapped. As for me, I decided to make that decision when we reached Texas on the weekend.

Shortly after Dayton had been looked at, Emma Downey arrived at the clinic. We had just one more client to wait for and then we'd be off for dinner. Tonight would be filled with margaritas and great Mexican food!

At dinner, I found that, even when I wasn't eating regional, I could certainly talk about it and I also found the perfect people to talk with ... Mike and Emma! Barbecue was a hot topic at dinner and, before the night was out, Mike was promising to try and get his grandfather's secret sauce recipe for me. (Okay, perhaps that was a sad and desperate reminder to Mike ... I'm not proud when it comes to barbecue.)

I left the restaurant with my mind whirling with ideas for building smokers and the different woods I could use. Mmmmmm.

Although we'd spent hours over dinner, our evening seemed to be over far too early. It would have been easy to spend even longer with Mike and Emma but Mike was off on holiday the next day, Beth and Emma were back to work, and Lynne and I were on to Arkansas.

Thornburgh the Dog

We'd hoped to say a leisurely good-bye to Beth but an emergency call from her clinic got her out of bed and off to work very early. Instead, we said a quick good-bye and promised to lock up on our way out.

Today's journey brought our second day of real rain. Although the weather forecast had told us that we'd eventually drive through the front, that meant that we'd miss seeing the rest of Kentucky and all of Tennessee. What little we were able to see of Tennessee made us sorry too as it looked like it was a beautiful state.

Despite that drawback, today was the day that we finally learned the truth about Thornburgh the Dog.

I'm sure you're asking yourself, "Just who is Thornburgh the Dog?" Believe me, we spent a lot of the trip asking ourselves the same question!

On our second day on the road, as we crossed from Utah into Wyoming, we spotted a large billboard advertising a Western museum and historical site. Tacked underneath the billboard, seemingly as an afterthought, was another sign, proclaiming the site to be "The Home of the Grave of Thornburgh the Dog".

As you can well imagine, such a sign gave us frequent pause for thought. Who was Thornburgh the Dog? Why was he famous? We scoured the roadside signs for more information about how to get to the museum but, unfortunately, we had missed the turn-off.

This didn't stop us one bit from thinking about Thornburgh. Just knowing that he had a grave (one worth visiting, no less) afforded us more than a few minutes of amusement. Perhaps our entire adventure was nothing more than a spiritual pilgrimage to the Grave of Thornburgh the Dog, undertaken at the behest of our canine companions. When confronted with a perplexing choice, should we be saying to ourselves "What would Thornburgh the Dog do in this situation?"

Of course, underlying all these small jokes, we were still curious ... "Just who is Thornburgh the Dog?"

Finally, as we drove through a rain-sodden Tennessee, we learned the answer. Donna, who had listened to us ponder the *raison d'etre* for the Grave of Thornburgh the Dog more than once, took pity on us and did a web search, printed out the information and then called me up on my cell phone. She read the information slowly so that I could repeat it to Lynne.

From the web page that Donna read to us
(<http://www.roadtripamerica.com/animals/thorn.htm>):

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Thornburgh got his name in 1879, when he survived an Indian attack that took the life of Major T.T. Thornburgh. The dog became a sort of "camp follower," winning friends and admirers far and wide as tales of his heroism spread.

He captured a commissary thief and received a stab wound in the process. He warned soldiers of an attack in time to save themselves and keep their horses and mules from stampeding. He saved a young boy from drowning, and he saved a man's life by intercepting his attacker's knife-wielding arm.

Thornburgh had many fans and benefactors, but it wasn't until "Buck" Buchanan came to work at Fort Bridger that he found a real human soulmate. They were inseparable until one of Buck's mules delivered the blow that ended Thornburgh's life on September 27, 1888. A grief-stricken Buck had an elaborately carved marble headstone inscribed with this epitaph:

"Man never had a better, truer, braver friend.

Sleep on old fellow,

We'll meet "Across the Range."

According to the ranger at Fort Bridger, Thornburgh is the only dog ever to have received a military funeral. Buck Buchanan, on the other hand, is believed to lie in an unmarked grave in a cemetery in Salt Lake City.

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Rest assured that the next time we're on I-80, passing from Utah into Wyoming, a visit to the Grave of Thornburgh the Dog will be made.

[Note to all: I call dibs on the name "Thornburgh the Dog" for a future whippet.]

With the question of Thornburgh the Dog's identity answered, we could focus our attention on one of the highlights we had planned for this trip--a visit to the Dixie Pig.

I've mentioned throughout these accounts that I'd done some regional food research before setting out, that Lynne and I were keen on eating regional whenever possible, and that I love barbecue. Well, one of my personal goals was to visit a restaurant in North Little Rock called the Dixie Pig.

This particular Dixie Pig is not affiliated with a chain of restaurants in the South by the same name. It was started in No. Little Rock in the 20s and has remained a local phenomenon since then. In the research I'd done, I'd found that it was not only glowingly reviewed but it was also listed as a "bargain".

Outstanding barbecue on the cheap ... does it get any better than that? Apparently it does because the Dixie Pig was only blocks from the North Little Rock Motel 6!

We arrived at our motel just after the sun had set, got checked in, and fed the dogs. I wasn't quite sure how to get to the Dixie Pig, although I could tell from the numbered street names that it wasn't too far. So, off I went to the motel office to ask directions.

Now, unbeknownst to me, not everyone in Arkansas talks like Bill Clinton. In fact, I think it's safe to say that very few people in Arkansas talk like Bill Clinton. This posed a bit of a problem for me as, although I can understand Bill Clinton and am usually very good with a number of different foreign accents, I had a lot of trouble with the "average" Arkansas accent.

I did manage to discern "right" and "two lights" in the given directions. Hmmm. Between that and the address on my "Dixie Pig print-out", it was close enough for me.

So off we went, in search of the Dixie Pig.

Oddly enough, we turned right at the corner, went through two lights, and there it was! the Holy Grail of Barbecue Joints--the Dixie Pig!

Lynne and I both ordered the "pig plate", a dinner of barbecue pork, salad, French fries, and hot, buttered rolls. On each table sat two bottles of sauce from which we could choose: a hickory-smoke sweet sauce or a Southern-style vinegar sauce. Lynne went for the sweet sauce and I went for the Southern-style sauce.

We were in heaven! hog heaven, in fact!

We filled ourselves on barbecue and, before leaving, I made sure to buy a Dixie Pig t-shirt for myself and a bottle of their incredible Southern-style sauce. With happy tummies, we headed back to the motel for a good night's sleep. Tomorrow we'd be in the land of brisket--Texas!

Where the Boys Are

On Friday morning, all of us--dogs and humans alike--fell back into our usual 'travelling routine'. We got up around 5:30 and, after a quick bio break for the dogs, settled in for our 'rise and shine' activities...coffee, showers, cookies (for the dogs), and gettin' ready to go!

For Lynne, part of that "gettin' ready to go" involves putting on her make-up. That part of her routine became one of Tighe's favourite parts of the day. After showering and dressing, Lynne would sit on her bed, with one pillow propped behind her back, and begin to put on her make-up. Every morning, Tighe would join her, snuggling up to her on the other pillow.

After putting on her foundation, Lynne would reach over and pat Tighe's face. She coloured her cheeks with blush and then flicked the brush over Tighe's cheeks. If Lynne wore eyeshadow, Tighe wore eyeshadow. Lynne's eyebrows were drawn on; Tighe's eyebrows were drawn on. The only thing he missed was lipstick and even then Lynne would draw the closed tube over his lips so he got to pretend he had it on.

Once Lynne and Tighe had their faces on, it was time to pack up the van. When we opened the motel room door, we were shocked to find that we were surrounded by at least a dozen Army sharpshooters!

Lucky for us, their guns were packed away.

It turns out the motel was almost full of a group of Army sharpshooters from Rhode Island who had been participating in a shooting competition. They'd seen us out with the dogs earlier and were waiting for us to come out again so that they could see them.

All five of them--Makena, Tighe, Brock, Dayton, and Parker--performed admirably as representatives of the breed. They milled around the Army shooters' legs and demanded pets as well as much attention as they could get.

With everyone's curiosity satisfied, it was time to hit the road again. Today's journey would be a short one; we had only a few hundred miles to drive before reaching McKinney, Texas, a town not far from Celina Downs.

We arrived at our motel in the early afternoon and got ourselves settled into our room. We knew David would be at the track though and figured he'd be anxious to see his boy, Brock, so we headed straight out again.

About half of the Texas club members were at the track so it seemed natural to just hang out. David was thrilled to have Brock back and Brock was equally as thrilled to see David! The dogs got to run around a bit while we visited with our Texas friends. Jon Demere cooked a wonderful dinner for the entire crew and, with our appetites satisfied and the sun below the horizon, it was time to head back to the motel for some sleep.

There'd be more racing tomorrow!

Don't Mess with Texas

The signs advising motorists "Don't mess with Texas" might be aimed at cleaning up roadside litter but, as far as I'm concerned, it applies to the racing community there too. Don't mess with Texas because it's one of the best places to race! The people are wonderful, the racing is fun, and the food is outstanding!

Although we'd hoped to make the Texas meet another "family affair", Wayne was unable to get away from work long enough for him and Kathleen to fly in for the races. Despite

the fact I missed them a lot after three weeks on the road, I took the news philosophically and, always one to look on the bright side, promised myself that I would eat their share of Ann McMath's famous barbecued beef brisket.

It seemed only right and, as I wrote previously, when it comes to barbecue, I'm not proud.

The meet on Saturday was just a lot of fun. I helped Lynne and David with their dogs, schmoozed with friends, and (best of all) got to visit with Tighe's pup, Shine. The lunch table was fantastic and, along with Ann's brisket, I made sure to fill up on the potato salad (whoever makes it puts pimiento-stuffed olives in it and it's very, very yummy!).

By the end of the day, I was still undecided about whether or not to race Dayton the following day. Although the bulk of the swelling had gone down, his wrist was still slightly "thickened". I'd try one more night of treatment and then make my decision in the morning.

When Sunday morning rolled around, I figured I'd wrap Dayton's wrist well and just watch him closely to see if it was bothering him. Did I ever make the right decision as this oval meet was one of the most exciting meets I've been to. The races between Dayton and Concho in the first two programmes and then Dayton, Concho, and Chester in the final two programmes were incredible!

Concho won the first high-point with a smooth move along the rail. Dayton seemed to be annoyed that he'd not won the race and, playing on that emotion, I gave him a little "locker room" pep talk before the second programme.

As we approached the boxes for the 2nd high-point, tension was high. Concho had drawn the number one box with Dayton next to him in the number two. Jon opened the first door for Betsy to load Concho.

Hey! Wait a minute! Concho had the lure!

Sure enough, Concho was in front of the boxes, trying to draw the lure through his muzzle! Jon had forgotten to close the front of the boxes.

Betsy quickly collected her errant whippet and, after Jon closed the boxes, we started over again. This time, Dayton pulled the same rail move on Concho that he'd used in the first programme!

[Note to self: use pep talks more often!]

As we collected our hounds after the races, Betsy was heard to mutter, "Hmmm. Local strategy goes bad."

Chester threw a spanner in the works when he won the third programme high-point, thus putting the outcome of the meet on the outcome of the final race. I've only been to one other meet where it came down to the final race and it was every bit as exciting as this meet!

In the end, Dayton powered by Chester on the home stretch for a first place finish and one of the most exciting races I've had the joy of watching.

After three weekends of racing, Lynne and I were somewhat relieved to have the competition part of our holiday finished. Brock had jammed a toenail in his first race on the oval; Parker had taken a nasty tumble in his final race; Makena sliced one of her pads on something in her race; and, after removing his tape, Dayton's wrist swelled up again. Only Tighe was unscathed and, even though I'd managed to sucker...er,

persuade Chris Bowen to help me with him, my shoulder couldn't hold up to handling him anymore.

We decided that, rather than spending Sunday night at the track, we'd get a few miles behind us. Bill McMath had told us of a shorter route home so maybe we could chop a day off our trip home. And so, after saying our good-byes and thanks to the Texas folks, we set out for Amarillo and the final stretch home.

Exit 53

Although there'd be no more racing on the trip, it was far from over. One of the major attractions of the adventure had yet to happen--our visit to The Gathering Place, a Navajo co-op shop in Thoreau, New Mexico.

We'd first found the shop on our return trip from Texas in April. On that trip, I'd bought my mum a beautiful handmade silver and turquoise necklace for her birthday. When she heard we'd be through Texas again, she asked if I'd stop and look for earrings to go with it, as she was having trouble finding stones of the same colour in the Victoria shops.

As if we needed an excuse to stop there! Ha! If there is one shopping venue that Lynne and I both love, it's the Navajo co-op!

We eagerly counted off the exit numbers, waiting for Exit 53. As Lynne steered the van off the freeway, our anticipation grew. We weren't disappointed. The same woman who had helped us in April was working the shop and, even better, she remembered us! She helped me pick out earrings with the same colour stone as Mum's necklace and left me with them to decide. As it turned out, I could only narrow it down to two pair so bought them both.

[Note to Mum: Will put earrings in the mail ASAP.]

Lynne was looking for a watchband but, as she has obscenely small wrists, had no success. The woman at the shop directed us to Richardson's, a pawnshop in Gallup. Pawnshops in New Mexico are not quite the same as what we would think of as a traditional pawnshop. It was explained to us that people would use the shop much in the same way that others would use a credit card. Ninety-five percent of all items pawned are redeemed and ninety-eight percent of all saddles are redeemed.

Even in Richardson's, the largest pawn shop, there were signs everywhere encouraging people to look for their "dead pawn", or items that had not been redeemed and were now up for sale.

We spent quite some time in Richardson's. While I ogled the handmade rugs and wished passionately that I'd won the lottery, Lynne examined their watchbands. Well, that's what she started out examining...by the time we left, she had a watchband, a bracelet, and the most incredible squash blossom necklace. And all that for less than one-fifth the cost of the rug I wanted!

We set out from Gallup feeling rather pleased with ourselves for having had a great shopping experience. We knew we could get well into Arizona that day and, with luck and Bill's shorter route, maybe we'd be home tomorrow!

An Unsavoury Lot

We managed to make Winslow, Arizona before stopping for the night. It was getting late and, as beggars can't be choosers, we found ourselves sprinting to the front desk of the

Motel 6, hoping to beat a crew of construction workers to one of the last rooms. Did we care that it had interior corridors? Hell, no!

As Lynne checked in, the desk clerk asked if she had pets. Now, I'd been asked this in the past and had answered with a simple "Yes." To me, checking in to hotels follows the same guidelines as the Armed Forces policy on homosexuals: "Don't ask. Don't tell."

This particular desk clerk was a canny one though and cited their pet policy to Lynne. One pet per room. Maximum weight? 15 pounds. Lynne volunteered that we kept the dogs in their crates in the van. Of course, what she didn't specify was "while we're driving."

After getting the room, we drove around the back of the motel, looking for an out-of-the-way entrance. We found one at the very back however, as we unloaded our gear, the desk clerk stood at the end of the hallway and watched us.

Finally, she was gone! Quick! Get the dogs!

With them safely in the room, we took turns going to the KFC to get our dinners. Dayton and Parker had that look in their eyes that said "We're going to start jumping on the beds any minute now." They weren't to be trusted alone in the room and we didn't want to chance sneaking them through the hallway again. We'd gone all this way without being busted for dogs and we weren't about to risk it on what we hoped would be our last night on the road!

Luck was with us again though and we got through the night without being evicted for violating the pet policy. In the morning, we took the dogs on their bio-break and decided to load them directly into the van afterwards. The motel was next to a large vacant lot and we wandered there, letting the dogs stretch out a bit and perform their morning toilette.

Dayton was a little slow in getting his toilette performed so I was encouraging him by singing one of those nonsense potty songs we all know.

"Who has to go potty? Come on, Diddy, let's go potty."

Imagine my surprise when, just as I was singing the chorus ("Potty, potty, potty!"), a face appeared in the brush lining the lot. A transient had been camping there and my rendition of the potty song had woken him up!

We smiled, said a polite "Good morning," and decided that Dayton could toilette further on down the road.

We headed out, planning to turn off at Kingman towards the Hoover Dam and Las Vegas, instead of carrying on to Barstow, Bakersfield, and California's I-5.

As we approached the dam, we saw several signs warning of roadblocks. We'd been told that all vehicles were stopped before proceeding across the dam and, as we obviously were an unsavoury lot, our vehicle was waved over for inspection.

The officer politely asked permission to look in the back and then walked around to the side door and opened it up. I'm sure the sight of four whippets wasn't what he thought he'd find, especially given their diverse reactions. Makena was asleep and stayed that way; Tighe wagged his tail and cocked his head to one side ("Cookies?"); Dayton looked at him rather earnestly; and Parker offered a small "Woof!"

The officer closed the door with a laugh and sent us on our way.

We stopped at the dam to take some pictures and then continued on our journey, winding our way through Las Vegas and then out into the desert. As we drove and drove and drove, it soon became apparent that we wouldn't make it home that night. Lynne checked a map at a rest area and suggested we stop at Fallon for the night. It was only an hour or so outside of Reno so the drive in the morning would be relatively short.

We both agreed on that and set out for Fallon. Unfortunately, Fallon was actually over 150 miles away still. We ultimately arrived there at almost 9:00 and in a rather road-weary condition. Needless to say, we all slept well.

The next morning, we set out early, turning onto US-50, our last highway. Carson City was just over 60 miles away so we planned on stopping there for breakfast. Before we could arrive though, we saw signs for Dayton, Nevada, site of the first gold found in Nevada. Having missed Dayton, Ohio, we thought we'd look around and, if any signs looked promising, would trot Diddy out for a picture or two.

We cruised up and down the small streets of Dayton, looking for a suitable sign but, alas, there were none to be found. Besides that, we were getting hungry and Carson City was just over the hill! Who cares about pictures when we could be eating?

We stopped at Grandma Hattie's on the west side of Carson City and had a wonderful (and big!) breakfast. Satisfied once again, we started out on the final stretch--through Lake Tahoe and on to Sacramento.

Although we'd missed the fall colours in Vermont due to a warm spell, we were treated to a wonderful display of autumn foliage on our way through Tahoe. As we drew closer and closer to Sacramento, the landscape grew more and more familiar.

Before we knew it, we were turning off the freeway and navigating the surface streets. After twenty-five days and twenty-four states, the big adventure was over.

Epilogue

In the end, we were gone for 25 days and travelled through 24 states (a number of them more than once). Our total mileage was well over 7000 miles. Along the way, we saw some pretty incredible landscape and met some pretty incredible people. We ate casino food and crab cakes and pulled pork barbecue and Texas barbecue. We not only saw the country, we ate it too!

A few people have sent me notes privately, asking what the dogs thought of this grand adventure we took them on. I have to say that I honestly believe they had a blast. Besides the fact that they got to go racing, all our whippets love meeting new people. While we stayed with Donna, they discovered a new way to communicate with us (now it's up to us to find an obedience trainer to train us to keep those lines of communication open!). At every rest area and every motel and every friend's home, they were eager to meet new people and to play with new dogs.

Insane? Probably. Fun? Most definitely!

It was the trip of a lifetime and I think I speak for Lynne when I say thank you to all the people who made it so much fun and so memorable.

I can't wait for the next one.