

# The Centennial Curse

by Brenda Buckles and Jan Grebe

On September 21, 1993, we were driving across Ohio (or maybe Indiana; they look a lot alike) on our way home from the National Specialty in Pennsylvania. One of us (neither of us will admit to being the one) said, "Why don't we have the Centennial Show in Kansas City! We'd have four whole years to plan it; that should be plenty of time."

Yeah; right.

Four years later, it happened; and it went 20,000 times better than we could have dared to hope. The FBDCA Centennial Specialty Show came together in spite of what we'd come to call . . . *The Centennial Curse*.

It began early, after we had just started our major fund-raiser, having a numbered limited edition of the original club medallion re-struck and selling them. After the samples had been poured at the Tucson foundry where they were to be made, . . . the foundry burned down. But it was still early, right? So we found another foundry, and eventually all of the bronze medallions were made, sold, shipped, and we had our seed money to start with the other projects we'd envisioned in those early, energetic days.

But the fire at the foundry was fate's opening salvo. Worse was yet to come.

## The Hotel

In 1994, we'd struck a great deal for a show hotel with The Ramada Inn. Good rates; no charge for the use of all the meeting rooms, hospitality suites, and ballroom; permission to bring in our own food and beverages for the Hospitality Suite (hence our being able to provide a complimentary Chicken & Beer Welcome Party on Tuesday evening); and a Catering Director we thought would be great to work with. A few months later, the hotel was sold, became a Radisson Hotel, and all of the personnel changed. Oh-Oh!

The new Manager called and said that our original contract was with the Ramada, not the Radisson, so they were going to change it. One change they proposed was to add a \$50 non-refundable Dog Charge to the room cost of everyone bringing a dog. Hasty consultation with an attorney allowed Chief Negotiator Brenda to beat back this threat, and others. Since the Catering Director was to change seven or eight more times, and the Hotel General Manager three times, before the show, we had to go back to the beginning with each one and walk her/him through our needs and plans, fighting to keep all of our original perks every step of the way. This is where we perfected what came to be known as our Good Cop Jan/Bad Cop Brenda routine. The final Catering Director fell prey to *The Centennial Curse* when she developed a strange, relapsing illness last summer. She was having periods of good health interrupted by sudden onsets of total collapse and prostration. Fortunately, the week of Sept. 23-28 came during one of the good

periods. Her problem has not yet been diagnosed; but we know in our hearts that it was *The Centennial Curse*.

As time drew shorter relatively "small" crises happened, like the UPS strike during the summer, when we were depending on UPS to get our stuff to us ... 48 cases of imprinted wine glasses, 250 Centennial Dog Bowls, 600 Floaty Pens coming from Denmark via California, cases of ribbons and rosettes, and so on. But the strike ended and our things eventually got here. Of course the US Postal Service, to no one's real surprise, managed to lose the special wine labels that were being sent from a label printer on the East Coast; this necessitated having the whole order re-printed and overnight FedExed to us just in the nick of time to slap them on the bottles.

Other minor crises arose as numerous people who'd agreed to do specific tasks just sort of punted at the last minute, leaving us hanging. Bless everyone who stepped in and helped out; you saved the day. We decided to rewrite an old adage we felt appropriate: "If you want something done right, or on time, or even at all, you probably should just do it yourself." Either that or hope you've got a lot of really good friends standing by to jump in and do the grunt work.

Illness and death struck several people, and even a dog or two associated with the show.

- Three weeks before the show, Sweepstakes Judge Herschel Cox was hospitalized. Fortunately it turned out to be a problem caused by some medication he'd been on, but it was a nervous time for all, the main concern being for Herschel, and not for the judging assignment.
- Herschel and Doris Cox's daughter Janice fell ill at the Thursday night barbecue, and spent that night and the following day in the hospital. Fortunately, she is fine now and there were no recurrences. Her problem was never really diagnosed; but we know what it was, don't we?
- Our Show Secretary's mother fell terminally ill the week before the show, was hospitalized all week, and died on Sunday Sept. 28, right after our show.
- The Proselytizing Silver Smith's father died (see details of this in Brenda's description of The Silver Medallion Sub-Curse).
- The printer who was doing our show catalogs had two massive strokes the day before the catalogs went to the print shop; he never regained consciousness. The employees at the shop could not find any of his notes or records pertaining to our catalog job.
- Sharon Durr, Hospitality Suite chair, went home to St. Louis on Sunday Sept. 28 and on Wednesday, less than 72 hours later, had a heart attack. She is currently recovering.
- Jan Grebe's Grandpuppy, Gasconade Sans Souci, was having emergency surgery for a salivary gland abscess on Friday morning during the time that Souci was supposed to be in the ring for the 12-18 month bitch class. If anyone noticed that Jan was not at the show on Friday morning, it's because she has her priorities right.

Car trouble happened too. The Van Scoy family

vehicle was rear-ended just outside of St. Louis on the way from upstate New York to Kansas; but they and their dogs were uninjured and were able to make it here. An RV full of dogs and Canadian women broke down in rural Idaho, so that only a few of them made it here.

The Scale for the Show was a hassle from start to finish. We had located a great one, the right size, newly calibrated, that a local company would let us use. But a month before the show we found that it weighed only in kilograms; the AKC Show & Trial Manual says it must weigh in pounds and ounces. We located one that some people would loan us, and they agreed to take it with them to a show in Kansas a couple of weeks prior to the Specialty, so that one of our committee people could pick it up there and bring it back to Kansas City. They forgot to load it and take it to the show. OK; then they would instead bring it to the Heart of America Shows the first of September. Oops! They dropped it and broke it while loading it. So Brenda called her vet and threw herself on his mercy. "Don't worry about it; you'll have your scale," said Dr. Hecker. A few days later Brenda got the call: "Your scale is here whenever you want to pick it up." Brenda rushed over to Hecker Animal Clinic and picked up a brand-new, still-in-the-box, factory calibrated Feline Scale. Oh-oh! Feline! So we slapped a gold foil Centennial logo sticker over the word "Feline" and we had our scale. Little did we know how much use it would get. The Frenchie sticker is still on it, covering up the dread 'F' word, too.

By far the two biggest crises were . . . The Silver Medallion Sub-Curse and The Banquet Chef Emergency. Brenda single-handedly resolved both of those purely by the force of her will. Here are her recollections of them.



### The Silver Medallion Sub-Curse

Sometime during the beginning of 1997 we and our Trophy Chair, Saint Jim, decided to have three sterling silver Centennial Medallions made and encased in special

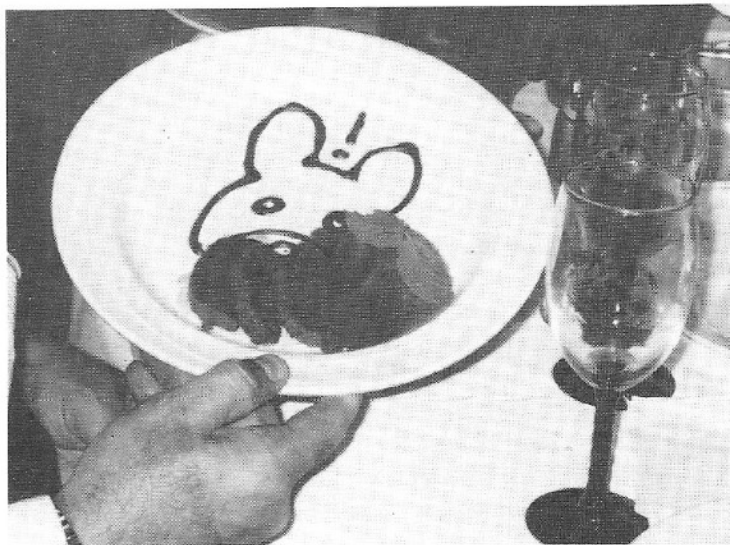
plexiglass trophies, to be given for Best of Breed, Best of Opposite Sex, and Highest Scoring Dog in Regular Obedience Classes. No problem; a company in Rhode Island was happy to accommodate us. They did take a little longer than they promised; and we did have to call them and prod them a few extra times, but the silver medallions arrived in April and were perfect . . . until we had them engraved. Two of the three came back from the engraver's with chunks of silver gouged out of the backs, apparently because dirt had been in the molds and had made tiny fault lines in the silver that fractured under the engraver's tool. A frantic call to Rhode Island resulted in a promise that if we sent the bad ones back we'd have two new silver medallions in 4 weeks. OK; we could live with that. Only the 4 weeks passed, and no medallions.

Another flurry of calls as one deadline after another passed until finally, in June of 1997, we found that the

medallions had finally been sent but had been lost by UPS. So . . . another promise of 4 weeks would put them in our hands by the beginning of August. OK; still time to get them engraved and the trophies made. We'll cut this short by saying that six faxes and 10 phone calls later, we received during the second week of September (two weeks before the show date) a package containing RAW SILVER. That's right; just raw silver. I sat down with a phone book and called every silversmith and dental lab in Greater Kansas City.

FINALLY a guy said that he thought he could do this for us in one week's time. I dashed over to his shop with the raw silver, showed him what we needed, and frantically begged and pleaded with him to do the work. He looked at me and said, "You know, little lady, you seem a tad bit frazzled and I know just what it is that you need." My mind was racing through the possibilities of what he was about to say when he shouted, "PRAYER!" . . . "and I'm just the guy to do it for you!" Then he started questioning me about my religious beliefs and finally dangled the carrot of "The Deal." He would make the medallions for me in one week's time for X amount of money, PROVIDED I would agree to give him 30 minutes of my time to talk about being "born again." "No problem," I lied. On the way home I called Jan from my car phone and told her I was resigning. But Divine Intervention saved me! The guy's machine blew up on him over the weekend and spewed our raw silver all over the ceiling and walls of his shop . . . right after he got the phone call telling him that his father had died.

*The Centennial Curse* was shifting into high gear. I did not have to be subjected to The Talk, but it was now September 16 and we still did not have the silver medallions. But the next person I found turned out to be a gem, getting the silver medallions done, and done beautifully, just in time to have them encased in plexiglass for the trophies. Hey; no problem!



### The Banquet Chef Crisis

We wanted The Banquet to be the biggest, most elegant since the first show, at the Waldorf. Brenda, Jan, Mike and Jim went to The Radisson about six



months before the show, where we'd asked Chef Dwight Hawkins to prepare for us his best dishes. He did; we ate; we were thrilled. Especially when he agreed to paint little Frenchie heads in chocolate on each of 300 dessert plates. Since we'd already gone through three general managers and 7 or 8 catering directors, our big question was: Will Chef Dwight still be with us at Party Time? Toward the end of August, I was talking with the Catering Director and inquired as to Chef Dwight's health when, following a heart-stopping silence, I heard those dreaded words, "Oh, didn't I tell you? Chef Dwight left last month." "NO, you DIDN'T tell me! Who is the NEW Chef?!" "We promoted the Sous Chef." "The 19 year old hamburger flipper?" I screeched. We told the Catering Director, "You will just have to get Dwight back for our Banquet if you want us to have it at the Radisson. After a week (we are now into early September) our demand had not yet worked, so I located two alternative banquet sites that we felt would do a good job. There was, though, the teensy weensy little problem of how to move 300 people, most in formal dress, several miles distant for the banquet. Not to mention moving the decorations, which included approximately 150 linear feet of New York City skyline flats and twenty Frenchie weathervanes. But the Radisson finally realized that we were serious, called their corporate offices, and we had our Chef Dwight back for the night. This was one of the happiest moments.

Jan sent me one of my favorite mementos as I was hassling with "The Chef" crisis - a 1941 Red Cross booklet titled "How To Feed Large Crowds in a Disaster." Just knowing that we had the recipe for ham & pickle sandwiches for 400 was reassuring.

## The Good Things

OK, so not everything was a hassle. Sometimes we would wish for something and an angel would appear and drop it in our laps as a gift. Each of us had a Favorite Moment. We considered these our "Gifts."

## Brenda's Gift

Somewhere we'd read that the Pug Specialty had the pugs in their Parade of Champions entering the ring over a little bridge over water with dry ice billowing out smoke. We talked about what could go wrong with dry ice and decided that we would need big fans to get the smoke off the floor, or that we'd only see two little ears above this huge cloud of stagnant vapors ... OK, the smoke is out. Then we had a vision ... The Arc de Triomphe! Symbol of French victory! It had to be big; it had to look real; it had to have Frenchies on it. We mentioned this to Mitch and Lauren Weiner, and the photo shows what appeared on Friday morning at 8 AM at the entrance to the show ring for the Parade of Champions and Obedience Titleholders. In my wildest dreams I could not have imagined it better. It was a total gift. We did not have to spend one minute of time or one dime on it. Mitch's family owns a company that



supplies holiday decorations, and he had one of his artists design and build the Arc for us. Jim and Mike and Charles Satchell, visiting from England, picked it up in our rented U-Haul and set it up late Thursday evening while we were all on the roof at the Barbecue. Seeing the Champions and Obedience Titleholders coming proudly through that Arc was a vision I will never forget.

## Jan's Gift

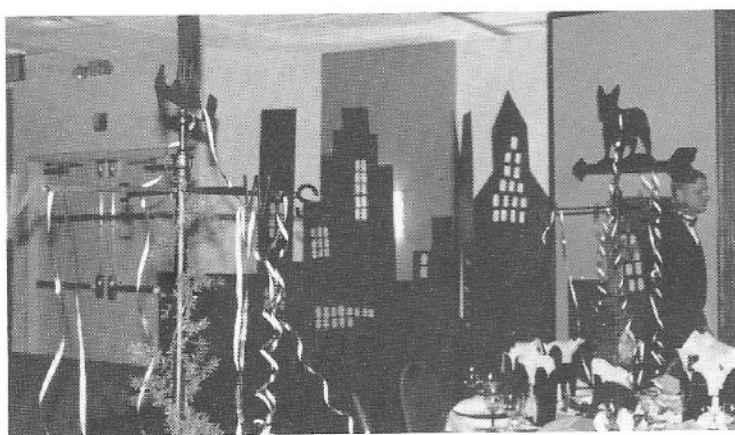
After the Show had ended, the Doggy Cake had been cut and passed out to the canine competitors, the show photos taken, and the people and dogs had left the ballroom, the Decorations Committee swung into action. The ring was broken down, chairs and risers moved, trophy tables taken out, and the carpet vacuumed. The 150 feet of NYC skyline and floodlights and extension cords used to backlight it were dragged in from the U-Haul. The big iron Frenchie weathervanes were brought in. The banquet tables and chairs were placed, tablecloths spread, and the huge job of decorating and setting the tables began. As Fred and Lori Seron and their assistants worked on the flowers and confetti, hotel staff outdid themselves in the place settings. But the Silent Auction in the rooftop bar was in full swing, the banquet hour was drawing near, and there was no way . . . NO WAY . . . it would all get done in time. Fred and Lori, with Sharon Durr assisting, were running about scattering flowers and leaves and confetti and streamers and trying to do it all. No way could it get done. We'd just have to open the doors with whatever we managed to get put together by then. I dashed off to take care of some other things, then ran to my room and threw on my banquet dress before sprinting back to the Ballroom. Going in the back door (only committee people were allowed in before the appointed hour), I nearly had a cardiac arrest when I suddenly found myself in the Banquet Room of Our Dreams. It was lovely. The skyline looked incredible. The weathervanes were fabulous. The flowers were gorgeous. The crystal and silver and linens perfect. The 300 Frenchie Face gift bags at the diners' places (these had taken me three years

to make, working intermittently) provided the finishing touch, along with the special wineglasses and Frenchie wine bottles.

I was standing there with my mouth hanging open when I saw the Catering Director; she'd been helping in the kitchen, washing and drying the 300 wine glasses so that they sparkled like diamonds.

At the appointed hour, the doors were opened, and the diners entered past masses of Boston ferns outside the main door. Then it happened: My Favorite Moment. The partygoers would come into the room, stop dead in their tracks, look around, and gasp. It was the sound of the gasps that did it; I had to shed a little tear. But hey; no problem. I'd been in such a hurry I'd forgotten to slap on any mascara.

But I didn't care; no one was looking at me anyway. They were all looking at The Best Party Decorations Ever Seen at A National Specialty Show. And gasping.



### **And Finally ...**

when it was all over, and a few weeks later we sat over a nice quiet meal and a beverage or two, or maybe it was three, we thought back over all of the things that went right. Most of them were due to the efforts of a lot of wonderful and hardworking people, some of whom don't even have French Bulldogs!

Here are a few of the good things, in no particular order; I'm sure we've missed some, but just chalk up any omissions to our fatigued state.

- We got all the foreign visitors picked up at the airport. *Thanks, Shauna, Jim W., Susan, and Jim G.*
- The ballroom was big enough. *Whew!*
- The videos are fine, and the extra monitors were great. *Thanks, K9TV.*
- The actual show ran smoothly. *Thanks Carol W. and Toni.*
- The trophies and ribbons were breathtaking! *Thanks, Jim G. and Ken P; and thanks Linda J. for helping keep them straight.*
- The Hospitality Suite was a huge success. *Thanks, Sharon.*
- The Beverages available in the Hospitality Suite were excellent. *Thanks, Mike.*
- The Raffle went great. *Thanks, Shauna, Susan, & Julie.*

- The Silent Auction was the biggest ever. *Thanks Vicki, & everyone who donated and/or bought something.*
  - The mats and jumps and gates and so forth were great. *Thanks, Jim W.*
  - The wine labels got made and the catalogs printed. *Thanks, Jean.*
  - The name tags and pins and bowls got passed out. *Thanks, Gayle, and all of our local non-frenchie friends who turned out to help us at the Welcome Table.*
  - There were no fistfights. *Thanks everyone.*
  - Dwight came back for us. *Thanks Dwight and Radisson International.*
  - The Floaty Pens arrived on time. *Thanks, Kip, for the art; and Sandy at Floaty.*
  - The grounds looked good. *Thanks, Meredith and Ardyth, and everyone who picked up after their dogs.*
  - The Catalogs got sold. *Thanks, Marlene and Joe and Jeff.*
  - The Memorabilia sold out fast. *Thanks, shoppers.*
  - The Doggy Cake looked lovely and, I imagine, tasted good. *Thanks, Three Dog Bakery.*
  - The financial support and Woof-A-Roni were much appreciated. *Thanks, Thompson's Pasta Pet Food.*
  - We had a huge entry of dogs, and a huge crowd of people. *Thanks, everyone who came, and all you dogs who entered.*
- \*It is over!!THANKYOUTHANKYOUTHANKYOU!!**



