

Virginia 2009

Cindy Benedetto, MFH, Smithtown Hunt with Julian Jet on the trailer, picked me up at my Aquebogue home on Sunday morning 10/11/09 around 7 AM. I am blessed with a nearly perfect horse who self-loads on virtually any trailer and this adventure started auspiciously as he hopped up to renew his acquaintance with his equine buddy. The trip got a bit too interesting as we motored west on the LIE. There was a vehicle that was moving so erratically in front of us that we, along with the other three lanes of traffic, slowed so that we could keep it in sight and not in contact with us. After a few exits, I called 911 to report this dangerous situation and found, not surprisingly, that the dispatcher was already aware of it from other warning calls. It was with no small amount of relief that we exited the LIE at the Clearview Expressway leaving the drama to unfold without our input.

We had the GPS directing us and clearly being unhappy that we were not following instructions. Sadly, Ms. B. Betty did not recognize that we were towing a horse trailer and she kept routing us onto parkways and having to recalculate as we ignored her directions and spoke unkindly back to her. We pulled into Norman Fine's beautiful farm in Millwood, Virginia around 3 PM. We were greeted immediately and with exuberance by Winnie, a black lab who is a wonderful ambassatrix of welcome.



Our horses were delighted to get out into a pasture that was probably two or three acres in size. After the ceremonial roll and shake, Ricky decided to investigate the automatic waterer. He helped himself to a nice long drink and was suddenly airborne and beating feet AWAY. You see, the waterer was refilling itself and the hissing noise sent Mr. Cuteness into orbit. Not to be left to the demonic propensities of the waterer, Julian took flight right behind. While this episode was unfolding, we just shook our heads remarking that horses always seem to surprise us when we least expect it.



Once we got them settled, Cindy and I went up to our cottage. What a perfectly delightful spot with the most terrific view of the Blue Ridge Mountains.* Our kitchen table had fresh, home-grown roses and the décor was clearly geared to please the eye of foxhunters with prints of Mr. Fox's Hunt Breakfast on Christmas morning and a map of the Blue Ridge Hunt's territory. Our living room had plenty of copies of Covertside and a cozy fireplace. It didn't take long for us to celebrate our arrival with wine and cheese on the patio overlooking Mr. Fine's pastures with their



stunning mountain background.

Our first hunting adventure this trip was 10/12/09, Columbus Day, when we followed Norman Fine to the Blue Ridge Hunt's meet. About 48 riders behind 18 ½ couple hounds rode from 9 AM to 12:30 PM in 46° temperatures on this overcast day. We were advised to close the back door of our trailer so that we could avoid having as uninvited guests the cows whose field we were parked in.

Because of the lack of rain, the conditions in tilled fields were dry enough that our jackets were covered in dust moments after hounds were cast. We followed through Matthew Mackay-Smith's farm and Farnley Farm. Galloping in paddocks where 20 to 30

loose horses and/or ponies joined in the fun was a new experience for Cindy and me. Our horses seemed not to mind much; though Julian finds cows somewhat alarming, Rx must be discouraged from investigating them up close and personal. Hounds worked like mad to find scent and they did pursue Reynard up to a railroad track before being re-cast. At one point, the field watched Our Pilot stroll along a hill top not looking terribly concerned that hounds were nearby. Those same hounds were put directly on his line and simply could not appreciate it. As I said, the conditions were incredibly dry. We proceeded through corn fields, open meadows, across streams and past some stunning homes. Many of the pastures were traversed were enclosed by fences with gates that were opened and closed to admit horses and riders.



[Photo shows Norman Fine and Guitar jumping.]

One hound managed to be on the wrong side of some wire fencing that reached to the ground. The young and most athletic whipper-in dismounted his horse, climbed the fence, lifted the hound like a suitcase [without a hint of complaint by said hound] and deposited him/her where he/she belonged before re-climbing the fence, leaping on his horse and galloping away without catching his off side stirrup. Ah, youth. From our vantage point throughout the day, this Welsh whipper-in was not only a gifted rider, he

appeared completely fearless. The day ended with hounds putting their third pursued fox



to ground in a field filled with round bales.

On our way back to the trailers, we chatted with Albert, a young gentleman who was a former resident of Farmingdale, LI and who started his interest in horses with the Bethpage polo ponies.

The ride home was brief and, after cleaning tack, we enjoyed hot soup that Cindy's Mom



had made and a roaring fire at our cottage.

The fresh roses left on our table for us were such a thoughtful touch.

We were up before the sun on Tuesday 10/13 to get to the Thornton Hill Hunt's Turkey Mountain fixture. It was not only chilly at 6 AM, it was dark and, inexplicably, the lights in the interior of the trailer were not working. To the rescue came the perfect loading horse, Rx. We used a flashlight to illuminate the floor of the trailer and in he went without a second glance. I sometimes wonder if he's not part dog. He must think he's going for a ride someplace and he's READY – just like my canines. Guess they like exploring as much as I do.

We followed some very explicit directions believing we didn't need a map – WRONG. When we started to see signs for Dulles Airport, we KNEW we'd missed a turn. So, we turned around, got out the map and negotiated our way to the fixture with an arrival time over an hour late. What to our wondering eyes did appear, but Mitchell Green, a gentleman in his 70's who'd been awaiting our arrival and who directed us across the street to a mountainside. Our horses weren't even unloaded when Cindy saw her first fox of the day and we hear huntsman Billy Dodson's horn pealing across the mountain. We hopped aboard, thanked Mitchell profusely and went out to meet the hunt. About 20 riders and 18 ½ couple hounds crossed into the field where the trailers were parked at 9:15 AM. We hunted with them for another hour and viewed Reynard yet again as he approached a river. Hounds tried to follow, but lost him. We chatted with Tom Walker and his sister, Dotty. We rode up and down the mountain again and exchanged pleasantries with Suzanne who was leading second flight on her boyfriend's horse, "Teddy, the chick magnet". We met Sandy who owns a B&B nearby and was playing hooky on her horse instead of vacuuming and cleaning. We strolled amidst white-faced

black cows that were curious about the horse and not particularly afraid of them. Once the countryside had been fully cast, hounds were brought in and riders were treated to Bloody Mary's served by none other than that sweet Mitchell Green – what a charmer. We also found out that Rx is a carnivore – he ate a leftover Jimmy Dean sausage breakfast sandwich as though it was cooked especially for him. Whodathunkit ?

We stopped in Middleburg for the obligatory visit to the Tack Exchange and Saddlery Liquidators after we'd checked out the Old Habit. We got some terrific bargains for other people. I do like being a personal shopper, but I'd love to find things I can't live without, in spite of the fact that I do NOT need them. It's a woman thing.

Norman had suggested we stop at Locke's Country Store in Millwood and we are so delighted that we did. This shop had gourmet provisions from quiches to salads to breads to wine and beer. Yummy. We bought dinner and headed home to deposit our tired horses out by their run-in sheds. Once turned out, Rx, AKA Nosey Parker, had to groom Kestrel, a kitty who was strolling along the fence line of the pasture.



On Wednesday, we rode with Snickersville at Egypt and Jubilee Farms. It was about 45° when we arrived and noticed that our friend Liz Williams brought two hounds with her and huntsman Todd brought another couple. Sort of like home schooled canines I'd thought, but it was a social issue among hounds at the regular kennel. Kennel man John arrived shortly with 12 1/2 couple. We rode from 10:15 to 12:30 with 26 other smiling riders. One horse was tattooed with what looked to be "FUN" on his/her butt. Hounds found in a ravine and exploded with voice that echoed in the surrounding hills – talk



about the sound of music, it was spine-tingling to hear.

The tailgate tea was a great time to get to know these very nice folks and toast all with some champagne. Naturally, foxhunters exchanged tales of hounds and foxes. One about a pet fox who used the doggie door was quite unique.

Since the forecast for the rest of the week included lots of much needed rain, Cindy and I cut our visit short and headed home on Thursday, but not before reserving “our” cottage for next October. Arnold Schwarzenegger isn’t the only one who says, “I’ll be back.” Thanks to all the wonderful folks of Virginia who made us feel welcome wherever we went. You give meaning to the term “Southern Hospitality”.