



A Weekend in Fort Bragg

Even though I actually like my kids this year (*disclaimer: add the words "so far"*), who doesn't need a vacation? Upon my request, Matt booked a room in Fort Bragg for a weekend. It's a fairly long drive even from Sacramento, and I had mountains of grading to do (four paragraphs about bubbles *per kid*), but, again, a vacation is a vacation.

We stayed at the Cleone Gardens Inn, somewhere we hadn't been before. Henry disapproved, apparently, at least a first. The *very first thing he did* was pee on the side of the bed. When we attempted to move them, he got the carpet. Thankfully, we recently purchased a travel bottle of Nature's Miracle,

an enzymatic cleaner, for exactly this purpose. It works quite well. Aside from Henry-dissatisfaction, the room was lovely. Quite large (important when one travels with dogs the size of greyhounds), and including a window-seat-table thing that greatly facilitated grading. (Not that I did much of it; the kids just have to do without grade reports this week.) Also, Cleone is close to Fort Bragg, and not on a terribly windy part of Highway 1, so when Matt has a beer at the brewery, it's not traumatic for me to drive back.

We spent a lot of time at the beach and at the botani-

cal gardens (the dahlias are still in bloom!), ate plenty of caramels from the Mendocino Chocolate Factory, and generally made it difficult to go back to work on Monday. . . but such is life. At least we had wonderful weather (although my pansies were wilted when we got back, they've recovered just fine).

Also, at least Henry didn't pee on the sofa when we got home.



A family photo in the dahlia garden.

Henry's Web Page

You may remember a time when cousin Emily, aka Reverend Emily, suggested that Philip needed a Dogster page. And lo, so it was. Consequently, ever since acquisition of Dog A, aka Henry, I have fielded occasional inquiries about

the status of Henry's Dogster page. It's up: <http://www.dogster.com/?370795>.

Henry, however suffers from second-child syndrome, by which I mean that we have fewer pictures of Henry, have spent less

time training Henry, Henry has to make do with old Philip coats, etc.

Also, his Dogster page isn't as good. It's rated just 4 paws (3 voters), compared to Philip's 5 paw page (16 voters).

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Special points of interest:

- *Squirrels eat acorns.*
- *Philip now eats real food.*
- *Cute Overload publishes cute pictures.*
- *Henry's race name was Gbeez July?!?*
- *Azaleas love Kim (and water).*
- *Congratulations, Julie and Brian!*

Oakstravaganza

I like squirrels. However, it is possible to have too much of a good thing.

The problem with squirrels is that they eat. What do they eat? Cashews. (I put some outside once to see. I don't do this on a regular basis in order to avoid feeding nocturnal "squirrels" (with long scaly tails.) Neighborhood squirrels also eat other things, as a neighbor puts out corn on the cob and squirrel houses full of peanuts. Matt and I call this house the rat restaurant whenever we walk by.

In the wild, though, as I learned from watching *Backyard Habitat* on Animal Planet, squirrels eat acorns. Lots of acorns. The trouble is, although squirrels



Most of the oak seedlings we removed from our yard are shown above. The line on the sidewalk represents ground level. The non-oak-tree to the right is a cherry seedling.

need to eat year-round, acorns aren't available year-round. Consequently, squirrels stow them away. (Wikipedia tells us that, in fact, "Acorns are attractive to animals because they are large and thus efficiently consumed or cached. Acorns are also rich in nutrients.") Where do squirrels stow away acorns? In my yard.

Most of the time, it's no big deal. You

see a seedling, dig or pull it out, and we're on our merry way. However, during the summer, it's hot. Inside and out, but mostly out. I don't like to garden when it's hot. Thus, the oaks have gotten more of a foothold than usual, which becomes a problem, as they have an enormous tap root and are consequently not particularly easy to extract. I know this because I personally extracted five of them. Matt removed the other eleven. Some had roots a foot deep. (For those, like me, not adept at addition, squirrel gardeners planted *sixteen* oak trees in my (tiny!) front yard.)

Matt also removed a cherry seedling. As our neighbors have a cherry tree, this could be a volunteer, but I choose to blame the squirrels.

The End (?) Of Dietary Drama

The progression of different Philip foods has finally come to an end. To recap: Philip started out on Canidae, followed by vet-prescribed fish and potato, followed by OTC fish and potato, followed by vet-prescribed rabbit and potato, followed by Health Food for Dogs, followed by vet-prescribed rabbit and potato again, followed by Innova, followed by white rice and cottage cheese, followed by chicken-flavor California Natural. For

simplicity, I've omitted mention of what caused diarrhea and the resulting runs of cottage cheese and white rice.

Anyway, the California Natural passes the allergies test, but not the taste test — Philip just flat out stopped eating. (He's apparently not the only one. Jon the greyhound keeper

offered us a spare bag he has, as his dogs won't touch it.) We solved that problem by getting another dog. Under Henry's watchful supervision, Philip somehow finds it in him to eat every bite. Quickly.

Henry, thankfully, successfully eats Canidae. And so the saga ends?

Under Henry's watchful supervision, Philip somehow finds it in him to eat every bite.

Things For Which I Blame Kevin and Emily, Part 2

Well, really, I just blame Emily for this one. Kevin would probably be horrified to even be associated with it.

Emily sent me an e-mail message a while back ("I don't know if you know about this website. . . I can waste a whole lot of time on it at work. In case you need a destresser. . .") alerting me to the presence of a website known as Cute Overload! ;) (I copied the name, as well as the

punctuation, verbatim from the browser tab on my taskbar. That's how it shows up when you load the page.)

Cute Overload, if you hadn't guessed, dedicates itself to "scour[ing] the Web for only the finest in Cute Imagery. Imagery that is Worth Your Internet Browsing Time. [They] offer an



My favorite picture, "borrowed" from cuteoverload.com.

overwhelming amount of cuteness to fill your daily visual allowance."

And now, I check it nearly daily. When I type the letter C into my browser, Firefox happily offers me cuteoverload.com as a choice (along with the Chicago Tribune). Yet another time-waster perpetuated by my cousin. (Although, I admit, it really *is* cute.)

Gbeez

So, coughing and hacking (I was recovering from a virus), I headed to Walnut Creek for the greyhound picnic September 24th. It was fun, and made me appreciate my dog, who behaves impeccably compared to Matt's spastic Philip. (Philip marked — a.k.a. "peed on" — a dog and a person. At least, that's the count we know of. Also, Philip whines incessantly when Matt leaves, for example, to get lunch. Henry on the other hand, kisses up so skillfully that at least one person was very impressed.)

At the entrance, we encountered a sign dividing the dogs up into numerical groups based on the relatedness of dogs. So we were in group 13, along with other dogs related to ours — but which dog? We assumed Philip, be-

cause we never received any genealogical information about Henry. When we actually got around to checking the sign, we found that group 13 consisted of *Henry's* relatives — half-brothers and sisters sharing a mother by the name of Shadow



Henry, formerly Gbeez July, stares intently at dogs at the picnic.

Beauty. And, in addition to Henry's mother's name, the sign listed Henry's actual racing name. It wasn't July. It was Gbeez July, accounting for why I couldn't find any racing records.

When we got home, I looked up the pedigree and racing records for Gbeez July. He had five races, placing 5th once, 6th twice, and 8th twice. He managed to participate in several collisions around the first turn. His racing career (in grade D) lasted roughly a month, from May 1st to June 9th, when he presumably broke his shoulder. He was with us by June 25th. We officially made the decision to keep him July 6th, so he was ours in my mind by July 7th — his third birthday! We'll have to throw a belated party.

Azalea Update

Like Philip's dietary drama, the battle to keep my azaleas happy and blooming seems to never end. The problem is two-fold. First, I didn't plant them, so I had to learn to take care of them on the fly. Second, we're not really suited. Our neighbor Willie told us when we moved in that Brian Patrick Murphy watered every night. We, needless to say, don't.

Well, make that didn't. During the blazing 110 degree heat, we noticed that,

inexplicably, everything in our yard (including all the new grass in the back) started to die. So Matt's been watering the front yard every night post-greyhound walk.

And the azaleas are thriving. Between the unseasonably low temperatures and the regular watering, some seem to be very happy. The current count is: 3

I choose to believe that our azalea cultivation skills are improving.

happy, pretty, blooming azalea bushes, 2 moderately happy bushes, 1 bush with happy foliage but no flowers. . . and 2 bushes that are fried. (The fried bushes get the most sun.) Nonetheless, I choose to

believe that our azalea cultivation skills are improving.

Julie and Brian's Yosemite Wedding

Julie and Brian got married Sunday, September 17 in the Yosemite valley. It was a lovely wedding, and we enjoyed it immensely.

After some mishaps (a highway-stopping head-on crash on CA-12, which made me feel really good about traveling the rest of the way on 2-lane roads), we arrived at Yosemite in time for dinner and game night with Julie, Brian, their family, and

friends. The wedding and reception were Sunday, and we spent Monday hanging out with Julie, Brian, and Julie's parents.

Aside from all the festivities, we got in some good hiking, including a mosquito-laden trek around Mirror Lake, which is where Julie and Brian got engaged, but thankfully did *not* have the ceremony. On the hike, we saw deer, a teeny tiny snake, and bazillions of mosquitoes. (I

got 7 bites. Matt got none.) At the Awahnee, we also saw raccoons!



Above: Julie and Brian
Right: Raccoons at the Awahnee hotel rafters.



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It's That Time Again. . .

Gardening time, I mean. Having once again failed to purchase a drip irrigation system to facilitate watering during the summer (and save water), my once-thriving pansies withered and died. Matt kept the azaleas and other key background plants alive with dedicated watering after dog walks, but everything else — all my chrysanthemums, assorted annuals — fried. (Raise your hand if you've heard that one before.) Ugly though it made the yard look, in the summer I had no gardening inclinations.

It's cooler now, though, and thus Matt and I headed to Talini's nursery last weekend. Parking right in front of a No Parking sign across the street, we embarked on a plant search. (A former McDonald's is undergoing deconstruction, but as it was Sunday and there was no one in sight on the site, we decided to chance it. Successfully.)

Top on our landscaping list is checking out some screening plants to block out the monstrosity behind us (suggestions welcomed), and getting some annuals to pretty up our front yard. We looked at crape myrtles and decided to consult with someone before making any decisions. My Sunset Western Garden Book suggests that some of the shrubs we already



Kim with her freshly planted garden of miniature dahlias. They replaced thoroughly cooked chrysanthemums.

have in back would do quite nicely for screens, if only they were provided with sufficient water. Duly noted.

We return home with new, compact chrysanthemums to replace the plants from last season that miraculously returned but that I forgot to pinch back, so that they now consist of a drooping meter-tall single stem topped sparsely with dwarf flowers. I should say that they consisted, past tense, as they are now consigned to the green waste heap. We also purchased several six-packs of pansies, which have been spared as snail snacks so far due to an assiduous application of snail bait. (Said snail bait is non-toxic to vertebrates, in consideration of our squirrel friends.) A while back, I planted miniature dahlias, which are blooming and growing very large indeed. Nothing in my yard matches (red, yellow, and orange dahlias; purple-y red chrysanthemums; and white and purple pansies), but I'm still happy.