

NEEDLENOSE NEWS

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Special points of interest:

- Philip enjoys a canoe so much, we get one of our own. (I just hope we can convince Henry.)
- Matt's bicycle attacks Philip. Check inside for a *Needlenose News* exclusive timeline of Philip's recovery.
- Kim is less than delighted with her summer harvest.

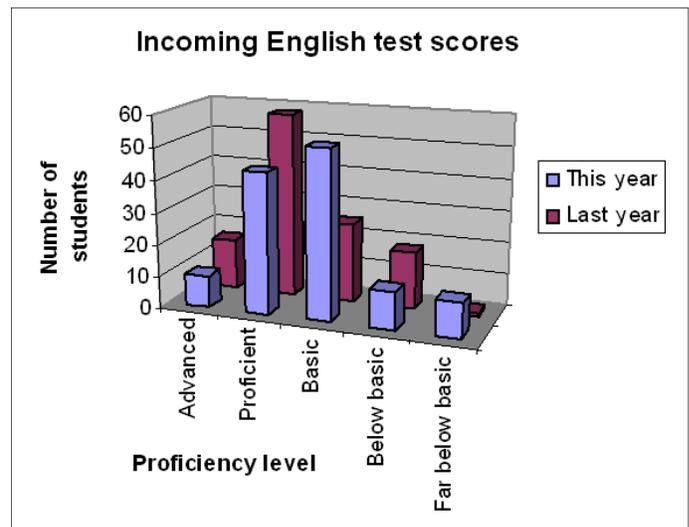
HOW'S SCHOOL GOING?

NOW WITH MORE DATA!

The most accurate answer to the question posed by the headline is, as usual, "it depends." By some measures, my kids this year are fantastic, way better than last year. By others, they are horrific, way worse than last year. Naturally, the true answer lies somewhere in the middle.

Good news first: Their behavior is excellent. This year, I am working with my preferred group of teachers, and it's always easier to get students who had those teachers the year before. (They come in better trained.) I don't have a class like my miserable seventh period last year, which boasted an arrest rate of 12% by December. Their rate of work completion is impressive; average grades for all of my classes are remarkably high so far.

The bad news: The amiability of my students appears to be inversely proportional to their overall skill level. My kids are nice, and they are hard workers, but they are lower skill than my students last year. Students must score profi-



The graph compares the English test scores of my students this year and last year. Last year's students had higher test scores.

cient or advanced on the end-of-year standardized tests to be considered at grade level. You can see (above) that fewer of my current kids are reading at grade level, although many of them are basic, which means they're close. (I ignored math scores for this because I find that English skills tie into my class more than math skills.)

On the whole, I'm coming around to my kids. Every year, I tell Matt, "I want my old kids back!" But the thing is, by the end of the year, the new kids are the old kids. And the good behavior goes a long way toward compensating for having to do more direct instruction. All in all, I think this will be a good year. Stay tuned!

THINGS I LEARNED FROM PHILIP'S INJURY

1. Surgery is expensive.
2. Dog antibiotics are expensive.
3. Dog pain medications are expensive.
4. Bandaging supplies are expensive.
5. Antibiotics are not good for Philip's digestive tract.
6. Philip likes cottage cheese and white rice.
7. Although bland, this diet may or may not help Philip's digestive tract.
8. Cottage cheese and white rice are only marginally less expensive than rabbit and potato dog food.
9. Yogurt may help Philip's digestive tract, but only if it's a brand and flavor of which Philip approves.
10. Philip likes bananas.
11. But not if they're cold.
12. Philip sometimes likes pain pills.
13. Philip is a pain.

DOGGY PADDLING

Not long ago, Matt's parents purchased a canoe. This provided a perfect test opportunity for Matt and me. We've been half-heartedly considering a canoe or kayak for ages

now, but with the arrival of the dogs, prospects looked dim. (Since they're home alone during work days, I hate to commit to weekend activities that don't include them.)



Matt and Philip enjoy Ron and Jeanette's canoe.

But wait! What if the dogs could go *with* us in the canoe? Unwilling to purchase a canoe solely for this experiment, we've discussed renting one in Fort Bragg a few times. But something always came up (like the fear

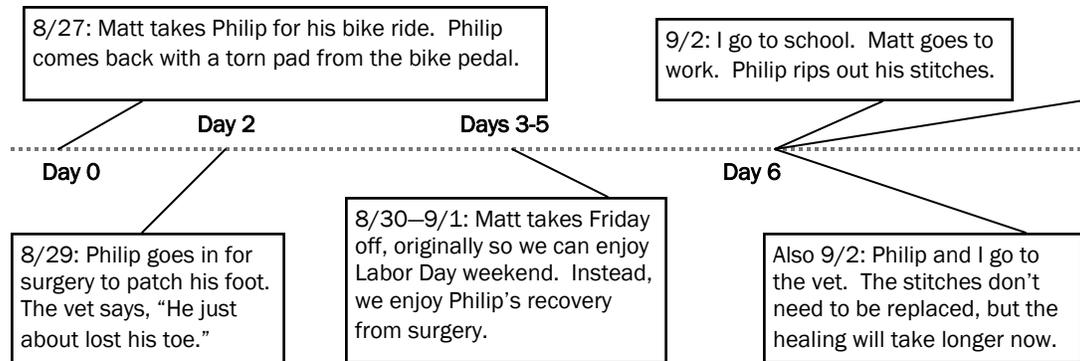
that the dogs would swamp us in freezing water), and we never have.

Ukiah does away with these disadvantages — it's warm, so if we're swamped, there's no harm done. We'd borrow the canoe, so if the dogs flat-out refused to get in, there's no monetary loss. So we tried the canoe the last time we went up.

The result? Fearless Philip enjoyed the canoe, once he was laying down. Henry hated it, although I later managed to lure him in on dry land with hot dogs. That's promising. . . maybe we'll get one of our own. Someday.

A TIMELINE OF PHILIP'S INJURY

While sketching the cut, our vet said: "The cut went from here over and around to here. He just about lost his toe."



HAZARDS OF BICYCLING

Or, Philip has surgery.
When Matt told his mother he was taking Philip on bicycle rides, she was understandably concerned. "Isn't that a little scary?" she asked. Matt assured her he was wearing a helmet and being as careful as possible, so as to avoid injury.
To no avail, as it turns out. Surprisingly, though, the victim of the bicycling accident

wasn't Matt. It was Philip. While staring at a barking dog, Philip wandered into the path of the bicycle. Last time this happened, Matt took a pedal to the leg. This time, Philip took a pedal to the bottom of his paw.
Matt brought him home as slowly as possible, and we examined the wound as

best we could. He seemed to be getting around okay, so we decided against an ER trip. A mistake, as it turned out. Visiting the vet the next day



Philip rests his bandaged foot.

revealed the need for stitches. He's recovering from surgery nicely, but we may have to reconsider this bicycling thing.

A CANOE OF OUR OWN

As it turns out, someday has arrived. "Someday" proved to be September 14th, actually. That's when we headed to REI to pick up our canoe. After we tested Matt's parent's canoe, we decided that one might work for us, too. Philip loved the canoe. Henry didn't, but we figured we could work on that (I did manage to lure him into Ron and Jeanette's canoe, once safely on dry land. For treats, naturally — hot dogs).

Our criteria for a canoe of our own were simple: a length of about 16 feet (the better to accommodate two greyhounds), a weight on the order of 60 pounds (I'm too

much of a weakling to handle Ron and Jeanette's 80-pounder comfortably), and a non-bank-breaking price. We splurged a little because the kitchen project we'd planned for the summer never came to fruition, so we had a bit of saved money lying about. I found the canoe while browsing REI's end-of-summer clearance.

There's just one minor problem. The 16-foot canoe that looked manageable in front of Matt's parent's house does *not* look manageable in front of ours. It won't even fit in our garage; we'll have to build a storage lean-to in the side



Matt's brand-new, 16-foot canoe. It's really, really big.

yard (which, I might add, is only 20 feet long). And, although the canoe hasn't hit water yet, it has been christened. Henry may not want to *get in*, but he's not averse to marking *on*, if you know what I mean. Not exactly champagne, but. . .

(IT JUST KEEPS GOING AND GOING AND. . .)

Also 9/2: Philip reminds us that greyhound heads are bigger than greyhound necks by evading his e-collar in ten seconds, flat.

Days 7-10 and 13-17 (weekends excluded)

9/13: Dr. Ellsworth says Philip is healing nicely. We go to Chico for the day!

Days 19-???

Day 18

9/3-9/5 and 9/8-9/12: Philip and Henry go to work with Matt. Philip goes for the purposes of stitch preservation. Henry goes because he doesn't do well alone. Matt is understandably delighted.

9/14-???: Philip's foot is still bandaged, but there's no further potential for damage. We resume our normal routine. . . without bike rides.

9/2: Philip reminds us that greyhound heads are bigger than greyhound necks by evading his e-collar in ten seconds, flat.

OUR CANOE'S MAIDEN VOYAGE

Leaving the dogs at home, Matt and I took our canoe out for its first trip to the Cosumnes River Preserve. The preserve is in Galt, and dogs aren't allowed, so it seemed a perfect destination for this trip. (Philip's bandage needs to be dry for optimal healing, and Henry is still convinced that the canoe is his worst enemy, although he *does* own it, if you know what I mean.) Matt has been to the preserve

before, and it's known as a bird refuge (with river otter sightings from time to time), so I was hopeful it would be pretty. It was pretty, although it turned out that there were less birds than advertised — Matt went during migratory bird season, which,



Kim bird-watches on the canoe's maiden voyage.

needless to say, isn't now. Nonetheless, we had a good time seeing how the canoe handles (well) and just taking it out on the water. Also, the preserve took much less time to reach than Matt thought, so any time we're looking for an outing sans dogs. . . we've got one.

Happy 4th birthday, *Needlenose News!*

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Nothin' but greybounds



Needlenose News

SUMMER GARDENING ANALYSIS

I can sum up my summer gardening experience with extreme brevity:

FAIL.

However, as I still have room, and I choose to assume you are clamoring for details, I'll expand a bit.

There are three main culprits responsible for my so-called garden's abysmal showing, in no particular order:

aphids, rats, and personal incompetence.

First, aphids. Our Chinese Hackberry tree is infested with aphids, which, in turn, are taking a toll on the tomato plants below. There are two barrels full, each with two plants, and they are very sticky and looking mighty sad. Insecticidal soap has had little effect. It also failed to



The high point of Kim's summer gardening efforts: ratatouille made from garden vegetables, served over polenta.

help my squash, which is infested with what appears to be a different kind of aphid, whose population also seems to rebound rapidly from applications of insecticidal soap. My colleague Arlene recommends that I plant marigolds with my veggies next summer to deter aphids. I am considering not planting veggies at all next summer, which I'm

pretty sure will be more effective. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Gardening-blame-scapegoat #2: rats. My four-legged, four-toothed friends have decimated the harvest on the south side of the house. They've eaten every single bell pepper. (Actually, that's an exaggeration. I got one.)

They've also gotten all the tomatoes. They're harvesting them before they're ripe, eating the

inside ripe-ish part, and leaving the rest. I'm so pleased to be providing board as well as room. [Sarcastic voice.]

Finally, one really can't overstate the problem of my incompetence. We'll have to see whether this is a case of live and learn. . . or one of live and give up.