

Lines from Linda

Park Avenue at Grand Central Station will be a popular destination for New York's Kamikaze cab and limousine drivers on the evening of Saturday, February 10th. All decked out in glittering attire, dogdoms' elite will be heading for the Empire State Ballroom at the Grand Hyatt New York Hotel to attend one of the fancy's hottest tickets.



TIMES FLIES WHEN WE'RE HAVING FUN REFLECTING ON THIRTY YEARS OF WESTMINSTER WITH STEVE WILLETT

The Ken-L Ration *Show Dogs of The Year Awards* annual event is a prized invitation for Westminster week. (Santa surprised me with a new black evening gown for the occasion and my husband Jim even added another new tuxedo to his own collection.) As we gather again this year, however, we will note two missing faces in the lineup of our favorite folks...

While comfortably stretched out in front of a crackling fireplace admiring a magnificent view of North Carolina's Whiteside Mountain, with music playing and drinks poured, Steve and Barbara Willett will be relaxing and reflecting on thirty years of festivities surrounding Westminster week.

Several years ago – who can remember how many – Jim returned to our hotel suite having just played in Florida's Handlers and Hackers Golf Tournament. It is a dog eat dog, life or death event for some golfers. The club pro picks the teams so Forsyth, Barlow, Ward, etc. can't win every year.

"Did you win anything?" I asked.

"My partner was a lady playing golf for the first time and her husband is with a dog food company," Jim replied. "We did not win anything but we had more

fun than anyone else. I just love that Barbara Willett!"

My daddy's saying of "Friends are the most wonderful part of living" proved to be true once again. Our friendship with the Willetts' has certainly grown since then.

Many times through the years, Barbara and Steve mentioned their dream: to retire and move to the mountains of North Carolina someday. This past July they did it....retired and moved from Woodstock, Illinois, to Cashiers, North Carolina.

For years many of us have enjoyed the big-city style hospitality of Steve and Barbara Willett during Westminster week. We were anxious to sample a little of their new, down-home entertainment style.

Shortly after their move to Cashiers, Jim and I were their first guests in their new home named *Silver Lining*. Hurricane Opal had



just passed through the Western North Carolina Mountains. After driving through some serious tree damage we reached Silver Lining. The whole town of Cashiers was without power. Oh no – perhaps we shouldn't have come I thought. Losing electricity was no problem for the Willetts - Steve had installed a generator the week before. Barbara was able to offer freezer and refrigerator space to all of her neighbors.

Following a fabulous meal and exhausting hike around the property,

with the x-pens odor for two solid days, deal with the often wild claims of competitors...you've really missed it!

"In 1976, Gaines was the official sponsor and we taped the whole show and presented it as a CBS SPORTS SPECTACULAR...THE 100TH WESTMINSTER. (THAT WAS MORE THAN A WEEK!).....But it was fun. Evelyn Monte was still with us then and for those who knew her know what an enjoyable and enlightening experience she made everything."

"Then in 1980, Tom O'Shea proposed we host a hospitality room for the press. It became the Gaines/Cycle Hospitality Room. We could use the forum to introduce some major improvements to our product Gravy Train. This started in the Hilton (Then Penta, then Ramada, etc.) They weren't too thrilled with our sneaking in our own food and refreshments. As the invitation list spread to judges, our Professional Feeder Plan members, etc., and the menu dramatically became more exotic, Tom found us a new home...the Southgate Towers. Here we were, and are, encouraged to bring in Edie O'Shea's wonderful home cooked food. Last year we had three kitchens working full time!

"As an aside, the Hospitality Room

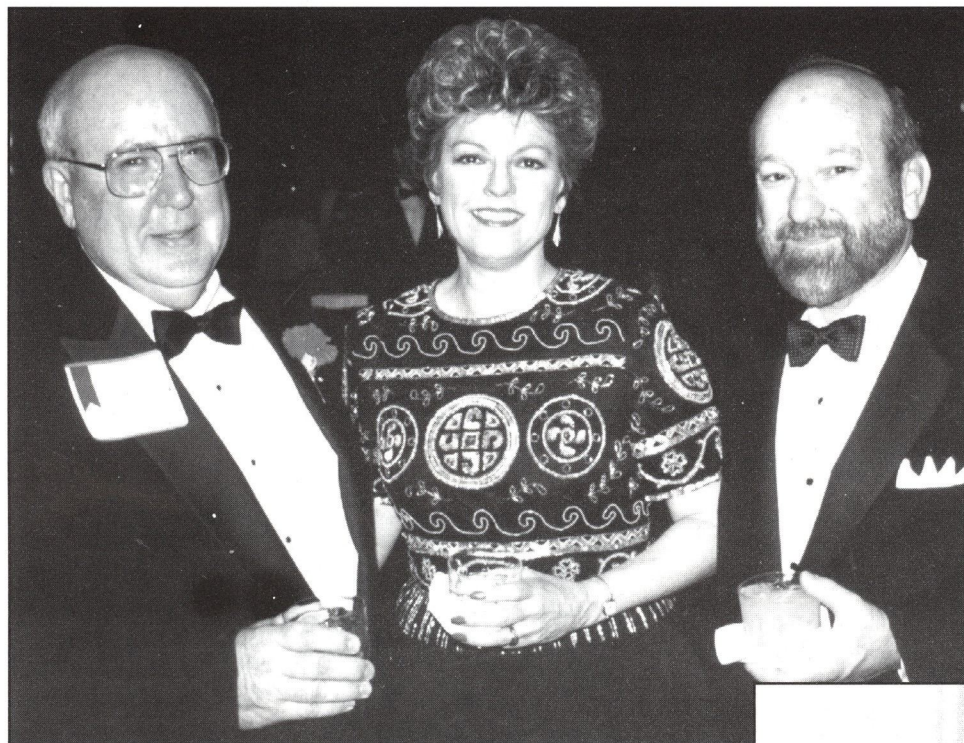
Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Quaker Oats Awards with AKC President Judi Daniels and Bill Daniels

Steve at work

Barbara, with Jim Knorr...the friendship started with a golf cart, now rates a buss

became so popular, we were allowed to present it for five days in Philadelphia during the AKC's 100th. (What a week that was.)

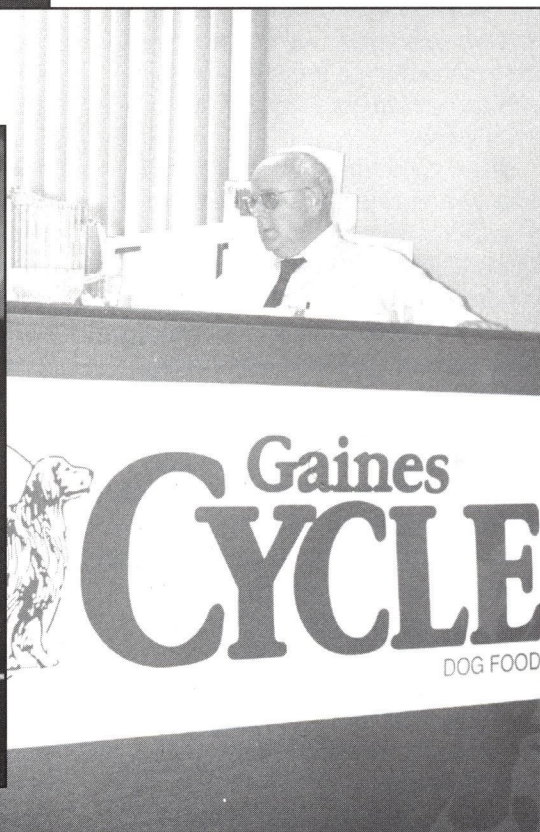
"So, for fifteen years Gaines, then Ken-L Ration, and now Heinz, have been feeding and refreshing Dog Writers Association of America members, judges, breeders, and



Steve started reminiscing and reflecting on his long association in the dog world. His respect for the people who invest so much in owning the best was quite evident. With a contemplative face he shared memories with me, Jim, Barbara and his daughter Susie who was also visiting for the weekend.

"While the Westminster show has been a part of my life for over thirty years, the last decade has been even more intense. I use 'intense' because of the variety of activities and length of time spent in New York City. We'd start on the Thursday before and end with the Dog Fanciers Luncheon Club meeting on Wednesday...now that's a week!

"Gaines and/or Ken-L Ration has always had a big booth at the garden. For those who have never had to deal with getting materials in, paying the exorbitant fees, hiring guards to watch over Garden Security, dealing with the mob scene, live





that they try to stay overnight in the hospitality room; take help on the trips to Macy's Bakery; get the Southgate to slice the meats so we don't slice ourselves; lock your van when unloading [Tom had all of his clothes stolen while checking in]; publish hours, manage people's expectations about what and when we're serving, recruit helpers. Most people are really nice and appreciative...but not everyone is as courteous as they should be; don't let the little things bother you and most of all have a great time yourself!

"As many of you know twenty-four of my thirty-two years in the game were with Gaines, the last eight years with Gaines/Ken-L Ration so the Quaker/Bisket/Ken-L-Ration dinner was, until 1987, something about which I had only heard glowing

DWAA President Hal Sundstrom presents Steve with the Outstanding Service Award

Barbara at Silver Lining, with some of her cherished antiques

reports. In the 90's responsibility for planning and executing the dinner was my department. Fortunately, I had a great staff and we had some terrific events. Probably the most spectacular and memorable was the 1995 event when we celebrated forty years of the Ken-L Ration Show Dogs of the Year Awards.

"For those of you fortunate enough to have attended in the past, you know this is like the Oscars.....a fashion show, men in black tie, celebrity guests, acceptance speeches from proud owners and from proud and often humble handlers. There is so much history in forty years that it can not be recapped here in one brief interview.

"A commemorative program was prepared for the fortieth celebration; I believe there may be a few extras available. Contact Patie Ventre, 4547 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, New York 11235. Patie did the superb job of planning and executing last year's event.

"There are many stories and reactions to the celebrity guests and their comments. Remember, you can't please everyone every year. Some were great, some were flops, some were at their peak, some were old-timers. Some were into dogs, some were into sports. Last year's feature guest was one of your own.....Bill Trainor. I, for one thought he was perfect for helping to celebrate the fortieth. Bill's returning this year.

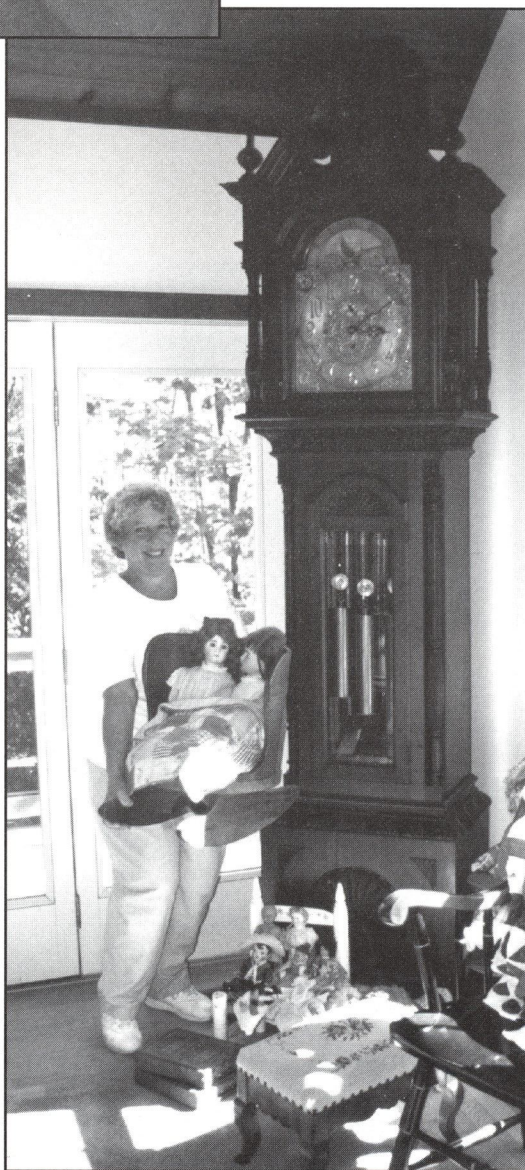
"For me, one of the highlights each year is the warm recognition given Russ Webb who worked nearly forty years for Ken-L Ration and is still such a friend to so many on the dog fancy.

"The week closes with the presentation of the Cycle (formally Gaines)

stewards. We've been open from 7:00 am until 2:00 am on Monday and Tuesday. Tom's Belgian Waffles on Tuesday morning are a ritual. Edie always outdoes herself as to variety, flavor and quantity of food. Volunteer bartenders have always been welcome and often provide comic relief. The Dog Writers Association of America holds their annual meeting there. One of my prized possessions is one of their outstanding service awards presented to me in 1993 by then-president Hal Sundstrom.

"Many, many long-lasting friendships have been started in the hospitality room. For lots of folks, that's the only time they get to see each other. People come from across the nation for fellowship, food and fun. For the past several years Katie O'Shea has been on hand to provide support for her mom and dad. She's even going to college studying to work in the hospitality industry. My wife, Barbara, and I have spend many hours helping out with food prep and cleanup...but not this year, 1996, now that we've taken early retirement. We'll miss our friends, but not the long hours. I don't know how Edie and Tom do it. If any of you go this year, go overboard on your thanks to them and then especially to Mike Retzlaff from Heinz for paying for it.

"Over the years we've learned some lessons: don't let people get so soused





A decidedly relaxed Christmas; the Willetts, Mary & Hal Sundstrom, and yours truly

All of us getting our exercise
while enjoying the gorgeous grounds of Silver Lining



Fido Awards at the Dog Fanciers Luncheon Club. We recognize (via peer balloting) dogdom's man and woman of the year, handler, and writer of the year. This luncheon also includes the Group and BIS judges offering commentary in support of their prior evening's selection. The event is an exciting and fitting conclusion to an exhausting week.

"I hope everyone will appreciate all of the resources that go into providing this level of support for the dog fancy — human and financial. Can anyone point to another company who's done so much for so long during Westminster week? While it has always been an arduous week, it's also been fun to visit with so many friends, old and new."

Each member of the dog world has been blessed by the tremendous support to our sport given by the Quaker Oats Company. Our sincere thanks go to Heinz Pet Products for continuing all of these traditions which have become so important to all of us. What would we do without their sponsorship of our obedience competitions, humane society and local shelter support, pet care centers for veterinarians offices and shelters, yearly awards honoring dog heroes, good sportsmanship, the Fido Awards and on and on.....

Retirement is sort of semi-retirement for Steve as he will continue to do special projects for Heinz (probably about seven or eight obedience events per year). We need the expertise and experience of men like Steve, and he can't miss playing in the Handlers and Hackers this month!

Next month, Madison Square Garden will be all abuzz with prominent journalists from around the globe. Colleagues will be spraying, brushing and putting on the finishing touches before entering the ring. Spectators will be on the edge of their seats, awaiting the all-important outcome of the judging. And Steve Willett will be spending quality time with the most important person in his life - Barbara.

Silver Lining has a home theater system with a 56" wide screen with surround sound. What a way to see the dog show! I know they'll be thinking of us!

My, How time flies when you're having fun!

Happy New Year!

Linda Ayers Turner Knorr