

The Dog Show

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(I am indebted to the Revd. Michael Stark for the inspiration for this article and I should also add that any similarity to persons, organisations etc. is intentional).

It may have been the rich fare and intoxicating speeches at the Torquay conference that brought it on, but the other night I had a dream. Some might call it a nightmare. Perhaps because I wear a dog-collar, in my dream I dreamt I was a dog who, without any by your leave, had been entered in a dog show. A very grand and revolutionary affair it was with the imposing title of 'Fresh Start'.

The promoters were an organisation with the title P.D. and it was understood and widely proclaimed to be a show that would enhance the doggie world and unite and unify all breeds.

It didn't seem very well organised because they kept changing the rules, and the show secretary was puffing here, there, and everywhere issuing bulletins to keep the organisers aware of all the changes.

If as they said, the show was meant to unify all breeds of dog it seemed strange to me that there were two separate and distinct classes, one for what they call the unified and the other the non-unified breeds. It also seemed odd that the unified dogs were fed twice as much as the others. We thought that very unfair as we were all working dogs and especially as those classed as non-unified were very highly trained and experienced dogs and had lots of certificates to prove it.

Most of those in the unified class were clearly guard dogs and they belonged to a pack called the Peeohay. One could see that the promoters treated this pack with great respect for when the promoters wanted this pack to do something of which they did not approve there was a great deal of barking and growling and the promoters had to give them extra tit-bits in case they got bitten.

Among them were some older and much more experienced dogs who looked a little lost because they had been separated from those they had always been associated with. One of them when he was addressed as 'Chief' growled back — 'Don't call me that, my name is Geefor.'

A group of dogs in the non-unified class previously known as Ayos had also been given a new title which sounded like Humms. They had the responsible job of watching over the entry fees and prizes. Considering how experienced they were and the responsibility they carried they too were undernourished compared with those dogs in the unified class. We all thought it all seemed very unprincipled and didn't comply with the accepted rules for dog shows. On the whole those dogs in the non-unified class were quiet well behaved breeds, they didn't bark as much as the others which was why the promoters didn't seem as concerned about them as they were about those in the unified class.

I found myself in a section marked 'Specialists' (if I was special why didn't I get treated as such?) and much against my will I'd been locked in a kennel marked — INM. ACTS. With me were other dogs. One was obviously a farm dog, another was an industrious dog who had his eye on a very intelligent and well educated little thing who was much more interested in a gymnastic dog who was so excited he kept turning somersaults and flexing his muscles. I thought he was called Pie or maybe it was Pei, anyway he had a whistle round his neck and I wondered what it was for.

'What on earth was I doing in a kennel with this lot?' I asked myself. We had little in common and we didn't do the same kind of work. It was all very confusing especially as the promoters kept insisting on something called 'clear lines of accountability.' It wasn't at all clear to me or it seemed to any of the other dogs because some were chasing their tails in their confusion.

I was about to do the same when along came a friendly looking chap whom everyone addressed as Ardee. He patted me and said 'You're a nice sheepdog'. So that's what I am I thought and I licked his hand and wagged my tail. But although he seemed to like me he wouldn't let me out of my kennel.

I had just made friends with a dog called Psycho in the next kennel when along came the Show Security Officer. I could see he didn't like me — 'I know your breed' he said 'a doberman pinscher, I'll have to keep my eye on you, you should be on a leash, can't have you running around.' 'Me a doberman, just when I thought I was a sheepdog.' Now I was confused. I did know that my breed had always been allowed to roam freely for over 200 years. But I knew it was no use my trying to point this out, or that I was one of the three original breeds called Guv, Chap and Mo who had been around long before they introduced these other breeds into the show.

How was I to convince the promoters and everyone else that they had got it wrong? I'd tried wagging my tail, I'd tried being friendly. Perhaps if I howled, or bit someone, or cocked my leg on someone in authority they would listen to me.

I had just about given up when I spotted my master. Perhaps he can convince them I thought. Its true a lot didn't recognise him though he is quite well known. He's called God and I try to serve him faithfully. 'Don't worry old chap.' he said 'You are my dog — you are not the breed they think you are but a St Bernard. Your job is to save people and you have a little barrel around your neck full of my Spirit You should not be on any kind of a leash or in any kind of kennel. If you were you would not be able to do the work you were bred and trained for.'

He left me to try and have a word with the promoters. I don't know whether or not they listened to him, because it was then that I woke up. ■