

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED Paul Lawless

We have been very fortunate to have the opportunity to travel around the world judging and exhibiting and of course quite often there will be many funny incidents, not always inside the ring!!! Here is a taste of some of the things that can happen....

We were invited to judge in Poland in 2006, our first (and only time to date) to judge there. As this was a new country for us, we asked some friends about their experiences judging there. Many warned us to be careful as several show societies had a bad reputation for their hospitality and paying any expenses. So, we were a little bit weary and as it turned out, their correspondence to us was quite sparse which heightened our concerns. A week before the show, our flight tickets arrived and details of who would collect us and drive us to the venue which was in the city of Lodz (pronounced "Wutch"), a city which has the longest main street in Europe.

We were staying in the Grand Hotel, which lived up to its name. Having travelled for quite a few hours and feeling peckish, we decided to venture out and explore downtown Lodz and grab a snack. It was a lovely sunny day and the famed main street was full of outside bars and heavily populated. In the end, we stepped into a famous Scottish restaurant, (yep, you guessed it, McDonalds) and as we sat inside one of the large windows facing onto the street, we were seen by two Belgian judges who were on the panel, Johan Van De Biest and his wife, they came in to tell us the society had organised a meal mid-afternoon for us near the hotel.

As everyone knows, McD's does not really fill you, so we were confident we could still be polite and accept this hospitality, so off we went with our Belgian colleagues who were now having a great laugh at our expense. The society took us to a Hungarian restaurant, and we were treated to authentic Hungarian Goulash. It was the only time I have ever been accused of having such a small appetite!!!

In the end, the trip to Poland was amazing and the hospitality was incredible (don't always believe what you are told), the society had actually organised each meal over the weekend to reflect the influences in the history of the city. The Hungarian influence as mentioned, we also dined in the Gold Room of the Grand Hotel which was where the Russian Tzars used to entertain their guests, we went to a German Palace in the city for a meal and on the final night we were brought to a Jewish restaurant. This was such a clever and thoughtful idea and on the final evening the President of the society presented each judge with a commissioned painting of a rabbi as it was believed that this brought good fortune (it hangs in our hallway and we keep doing the Lotto).

Of course, along with these amazing adventures, there are always a few less than pleasant memories. I had been invited to judge a Breed Specialty for a small club in Sweden many years ago, and they politely asked if I required a hotel or in view of the size of the Club, if I would accept accommodation with one of the Committee. I agreed to the latter and lived to regret it. On arriving late on the night before the show, the committee member lived in a one-bedroom apartment and had a number of dogs who all wanted to attack me, and they were put into the bedroom to calm down!!! After a cup of coffee and a chat about the show, I was told that I "should

have the bedroom" and was brought into the bedroom as the now slightly more receptive dogs went into the sitting room.

This room contained a single bed, which the dogs had now pulled off the blankets and left the sheets smelling of wet dogs and full of hairs. Needless to say, I spent a very uncomfortable night.

Finally, a story about Santa!! We had been invited to judge in Finland, in the city of Rovaniemi, the official hometown of Santa Claus, in the arctic circle. This involved taking three flights, and unfortunately due to some delays, as our second flight landed in Helsinki, the third flight to Rovaniemi was just taking off. There was no later flight, so the option was to take the earliest flight on Saturday morning. So we were stuck in Helsinki and the show society was going to book us into a local hotel for the night, when I made the remark could we not take a bus or train?...when the Show Secretary laughed, I should have realised this was a very stupid idea !!! However, he said, if we were prepared to do it, there was a train at 10pm from Helsinki...what we did not realise was, this train journey would take over 12 hours and would be full of very happy drunk folks. We ended up getting a cabin, but all announcements were in Finnish, so when the train stopped at stations, we never knew if it was the correct one to get off at, so as you can imagine, quite a lot of stress and panic. As it turned out, Rovaniemi was the final station and we were brought to the hotel to freshen up before rushing along to the showgrounds to be welcomed by Santa who opened the show....We did get a photo with Santa in his workshop, which made it all worthwhile and thankfully the return trip was uneventful. No wonder Santa uses reindeers for his travels...

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