



Needlenose News

For Sale? No One Told Me!

So Kevin kind of cheated me out of a story here. . . I had one all planned, with a headline of "Things That Are Buried In Our Backyard," which I mentally started composing when Kevin called the other day to scout out funeral plots for his hamster. However, as it turned out at the moment, rumors of her demise were premature. (They're not anymore. Condolences and new-hamster leads can be sent to Kevin.) When the rumors matured, Matt and I were out of town, and instead of making free with our yard, as I kind of expected, Kevin interred No. 2 in a corner of his patio yardlet. Thus passed No. 2, the cute little ball of fur whom everyone feared to pick up. (Insufficient fear =

fangs in one's finger) Kevin's on the lookout for another hamster, but apparently, they're disinclined to breed at this time of year. (This was also a problem in the acquisition of No. 2)

At this point, you might be wondering what's buried in my backyard aside from *not* No. 2.

According to my neighbor Willie, Brian Patrick Murphy entombed one of the cocker spaniels that sold me the house. (Matt: Are you okay with this kitchen? Kim: What? I'm petting these dogs.)



My house: Not for sale.

Willie has also revealed the less gruesome but more inexplicable fact that someone is trying to sell my house. She said she got a real estate postcard with a picture of

my house on the front. "I didn't think you were selling," she said to me, "since you just bought,

but I went out there with the card and compared, and there was your tree, and there were your flowers. . . " Hmm. Matt and I choose to believe an agent picked our house for the curb appeal. (We didn't get the postcard.)

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Special points of interest:

- Azaleas demand more care than I'm willing to give.
- Pictures in this issue provided courtesy of Matt's new toy.
- It's bad form to steal someone's daffodils. The victim will notice.
- With Matt's help, I did something better than Kevin!

Philip's Dietary Update

Previously in Philip's Intestinal Saga:

The standard dog food brand we settled on, Health Food For Dogs, contains lamb, a Philip-allergen. I tried to switch him to an allergen-free food. Philip's bowels staged a coup and forced us onto cottage cheese and

white rice for months.

The latest? We're back on vet-prescribed, \$35/bag IVD Rabbit and Potato. I insist this is temporary, largely because of the hassle. It takes 10 days for food to come in on a special order. On trip #1 to get it, I found that they ordered the

wrong food. Trip #2, they didn't have the food I ordered, even though they called to tell me they did. Trip #3 was (finally) okay.

Soon, I'm going to try *one last time* to find an easily available, allergen-free food (we're rooting for California Natural). Wish me luck!

Things I've Learned About Azaleas

My utter ignorance of gardening (Matt's, too) brought a heavy price: our yard is but a shadow of what Brian Patrick Murphy managed. We've been slowly creeping up the learning curve, utilizing Gardening for Dummies and the column in Sunset that tells you what to do in the garden each month. It's improving, but my azaleas (the primary shrub in the front yard) are far from the bundles of bloom they should be. However, I swear I've learned a few things. Maybe they'll help for next year. . .

And now, roughly in the order of discovery, Kim's bonehead azalea facts:

1. Azaleas are woodland plants. They like shade and lots of water. Letting them go dry in the summer was a bad idea.
2. Azaleas need to be fertilized. This should happen several times a year. Starving them since July of 2004 was a bad idea.
3. Azaleas have shallow roots. Digging around under them to loosen the soil for my pansies was a bad idea.
3. Azaleas like acid soil. Acidic mulch,



Happy azaleas (not mine).

like pine bark, is a good idea. Spreading pine needles from old Christmas trees is a good idea. Having no mulch and letting the water evaporate was a bad idea.

4. Azaleas need to be dead-headed. Leaving withered blooms on the bush was a bad idea.

Should you have additional tips on how to get azaleas to thrive, please let me know. I apparently need them badly. Watch this space for azalea updates!

The Digital Age Is Upon Us (Or, Matt's New Toy)

It will likely come as a surprise to no one reading this that I'm a bit old-fashioned in some ways. More than likely, you're getting a paper version of the Needlenose News (my preferred version). I still send letters when I have time. I own a cell phone that I don't carry with me or turn on (you know, for emergencies). I read books.

However, I've made concessions to the digital age. I read web-based newspapers, not the print kind. To expedite letter-writing, I type my letters (though

Matt's always wanted a darkroom, but come on — our house is 750 square feet. Also, it's 80 years old. All the doors leak light.

I got a handwriting font to make it look like I don't. Sorry to those who feel cheated). And I bought a digital camera.

Matt's dad got him his camera, a big fancy SLR (that's "single lens reflex," for those not in the know), not a little point-and-shoot, when Matt was dab-

bling in darkroom stuff. Matt's always wanted a darkroom, but come on — our house is 750 square feet. Also, it's 80 years old. All the doors leak light.

So, bowing to the way of the future, we got a digital version of Matt's camera. This is a triumph for the Needlenose News, too. Now I just import photos!

The Case Of The Missing Daffodils

My azaleas may be ailing, but my daffodils are thriving. Well, *some* of them are still thriving. (The latest azalea development: yellow foliage. My brand new Sunset Western Garden Book (a Christmas present from Matt's parents) says they're probably suffering from root rot. Great.)

Anyway, Gardening for Dummies



The deflowered plants.

recommended growing daffodils above all else, and they were right. Even I can't kill them. But back to that part about *some* of my daffodils thriving. Matt and I came home today and noticed that somebody "liberated" five specimens from our yard. The stems are neatly severed a few inches from the

ground. Coincidentally, the missing three were the nicest three. Some of the daffodil bulbs have these odd double flowers. The plants that were deflowered had large single blossoms.

All things considered, perhaps it's best that my azaleas are faring poorly. Otherwise, I could come home to a giant hole in the front yard.

Kim Beats a Video Game!

(Emily: SPOILER ALERT!)

Okay, so that headline completely wiped out Matt's role in the triumph, but that's because it's a more significant event for me. He estimates he's beaten 10 video games. This is only my second. Having persuasively established my case, here's the story:

You may remember from the last issue (or from your own observations at New Year's) that we've been engrossed lately with Dragon Quest VIII. At the last count, we had



Screen shot from the ending — the good one (cover your eyes, Emily!)

about 60 hours invested. That's up to 105 now, but we're done! (Maybe.) We fought the bad guy, got the standard game ending, went back in for the sur-

prise bonus challenge, fought the bad guy again, got the "good" ending (we preferred the standard one), and now have only the optional super-bad-guys ahead of us. Matt's still thinking about fighting the super-bad-guys. I'm pretty much over it.

It's always fun to see how a

game you've invested approximately 4.375 days of your life in ends, even if the surprise is diluted somewhat by spoiler-tidbits from Kevin. In his defense, neither he nor I really thought we'd finish the game. If it had just been me, I'd probably have lost interest. We reckoned without Matt. So for this success, I credit Matt (belatedly), as well as the comprehensive strategy guide Kevin supplied with the PS2.

Wondering what other video game I beat? Paper Mario, for the Game Cube. It's also an RPG involving minimal hand-eye coordination. :)

And Beats Kevin!

(Emily: SPOILER ALERT #2)

Again, this is really Matt's triumph, but I feel that I get to gloat by proxy because I provided input and advice (including a key component of battle strategy). However, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Anyway, here's the deal: After beating Dragon Quest VIII for the first time, players are offered an optional set of super-bad-guys in the form of a slew of dragons. If you beat the dragons, they give you cool stuff. Kevin beat the first four dragons and hit a wall at the fifth,

the Darksteel Dragon. His internet research revealed that, to be successful, he needed a spell the main character learns at experience level 65 (Kevin is at level 46). So he'd come over from time to time, take a cursory shot at defeating the dragon, get slaughtered, and leave again.

Naturally, given Kevin's lifelong video game superiority, I thought it was all over for us when we reached the Darksteel Dragon. However, my internet research revealed a strategy involving

skills our characters already have. Matt beat the Darksteel Dragon on the first try! Demonstrating excellent sportsmanship, I e-mailed Kevin to gloat. His response? "Bite me."

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His response? "Bite me."

Our Grand Philip-less Vacation

Over one of the three-day weekends in February that are one of the perks of being a teacher, Matt and I sent Philip off to GBark and drove ourselves, blissfully dog-less, up to Fort Bragg for a combination wedding planning trip/vacation.

This was good timing for us, as we were both a little frustrated with Philip's behavior and bowels. (You know it's bad

when the person who watches greyhounds for a living tells you your dog "can be demanding.") The weather cooperated, raining and hailing on Saturday, when we did wedding scoping, and bringing out beautiful sunshine Sunday and Monday. We did lots of the hiking that we can't do with a greyhound in tow, found a photographer (phew!), discussed our floral options, and met with the restaurant people.

All in all, we had a productive time and are now at least moderately resigned to having our dog again.



On the Waterfall Trail in Russian Gulch State Park.

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Needlenose News

Rain, Rain, and More Rain

So if, by chance, I gloated about beautiful California weather to East Coasties back in February during that unseasonably warm streak. . . well, I'm paying for it now. My contingent of California confederates are cognizant of the conditions: the current climate is conspicuously clammy! (Partial credit for the previous sentence due to thesaurus.com) Translation: it has rained NON-STOP around here for something like a thousand years.



Philip's artistic rendition of the mud.

Now, while I feel that Oregon and Washington are beautiful, scenic places, I've never felt any pressing need to live there, largely, I confess, because of the confounded rain. So it's a little disconcerting to find myself in my own miniature rainforest climate without any of the benefits. To wit: though azaleas (I know, I'm obsessed) are woodland plants and like to be moist, they don't like to be sopping. Our garden drainage is suspect at best, and right now, we haven't a chance — I've been watching the tell-tale signs of root rot (yellow leaves) creep from plant to plant, and my hands are pretty much tied. Everything else seems to be doing okay, though. The cold weather is keeping my pansies in bloom, and the grass is happy again. At least, the grass is happy in the front yard.

In the back yard, which wasn't a prior-



The mud pit that is my backyard.

ity because it isn't public, the grass died a long time ago, leaving mud. A lot of mud. A whole lot of mud. And although Philip is prissy about getting his feet wet, he is housebroken. Consequently, after he goes out, mud comes in. One can see neat little doggy paw prints across the linoleum. (It's vinyl, really, but who's keeping track?) Since I've had just about enough of that, I suppose we'll have to add landscaping the back to our list of things to attempt. Advice on dog-friendly landscaping would be welcomed!