

Welcome to 2009!



Sunset in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, from the mirador on the road to Queretaro.

It is 8:19 am, New Years Day, as I begin to write our annual letter, telling you the Beckners are alive and thinking of you. Two thousand eight has been a hugely newsworthy year and we sincerely hope this letter finds you in good health and looking toward this coming year with optimism. *Thank you* to those who sent cards, pictures and letters. It was *great* hear from you!

Roy Orbison's "Sweet Dreams, Baby" is on the radio as we begin our drive from Sherman, TX, heading southwest toward Laredo. Our goal is once again San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where we should arrive late tomorrow afternoon. We'd paid for the SMA rent well before September, so Brian judiciously found a little money each time the market went up however briefly, and by mid - December, announced we could go to our favorite warmer than St. Louis place for January and February. As we drive, it is sunny, 33 degrees Fahrenheit, the shadows are long on the rolling hills, and it is a good, optimistic day. "No smoking anywhere in Flower Mound, TX," according to the news. Yeh!!! That must just be in public places. Yeh!!!

The Kilgore Rangerettes were on Dallas TV this morning. They are the first of the college drill teams and were formed in 1946. Brian related that his dad used to lust after them, and it likely drove his mother nuts! Then he reported that growing older gracefully with me is a lot of fun. ;-)



Brian

Other than his passion for San Miguel, Brian's passion remains his motorcycles. He took his Ducati 996SPS (Sports Production Special) apart in preparation for refurbishing and upgrading it before entering it in the Ducati Concourse at the Moto GP in Indianapolis. He hit a speed bump when, technically, the squish needed to be calibrated and the valves degreed. What does that *mean*? Squish is the clearance between the piston and top of the cylinder head. Too little squish and the piston hits the cylinder head and it is finito! Too much squish, and there is not the optimum amount of compression.

Squish is adjusted by adding gaskets, etc. etc. He decided that by the time he would buy all the tools, screw it up two or three times trying to fix it, it would be less expensive to hire a professional to do the job. Well, it's been over a year since he dropped off the engine and Humpty Dumpty is still on our snooker table. Neatly labeled motorcycle parts have been there for longer than I care to remember. I want my laundry folding table back!

Weather permitting, Brian rides with a group of guys who like to ride for fun and breakfast. He also enjoys watching football, basketball, bull-riding and racing on TV. In Mexico, we watch ballroom dancing competitions - he's a guy with pretty varied interests!

Jeanne

Brian's mom Jeanne will be 88 in February and is in pretty good health. Although she drives everywhere, she was happy that she found an acupuncturist about half a mile from her house to help alleviate hip pain that started when she tried to move furniture this summer. For fun and companionship she plays bridge, and is active in quilting club, church and DAR. I am very lucky to have a sweetie pie for a mother in law. Above is "The Parroquia" or parish, in front of the Jardin, or garden, in San Miguel.



Water was big news in St. Louis in 2008 with record rainfall, over 60 inches, more than the great flood of 1993! Fortunately, it came over a greater period of time and thus, we had no major flooding. But, we had eight 40-50 feet tall native cherries and hackberries fall toward our house, and a locust on our property died and threatened a neighbor's house. There was so much moisture in the ground that that the roots uplifted. Brian was able to remove enough of two trees, but the others required teams of arborists. Ouch! And, Brian got two bee stings in the process -- double ouch!

WOW! There is a strip center with two notable stores, "Fancy Cakes" and "Caskets." With the advent of the casket store, I can tell we are getting closer to Mexico!

DOXIE DIGEST is the newest magazine dedicated to dachshunds. Their article about the Dachshund Club of St. Louis is a fabulous overview and great introduction to field trails and Earthdog events. Check the Dachshund Club of St. Louis site to read it: www.dachshund-stl.org.



Edgar

Edgar has rarely shown an aptitude for hunting except when, once as a pup, he brought me a mousetrap complete with a mouse in it! Having precocious Sophie in his life keeps him active. His whitening face reminds us of ourselves aging, we hope, gracefully. Edgar will be thirteen May 14th. Edgar's photo, left, was taken in April at the Dachshund Club of America National Specialty by Mary Bohach.

Sophie - Happy Tail!

Our hunter and holder of a Junior Earthdog title, Sophie tried for her Master Earthdog title in September, but it eluded her as she became sidetracked, frantically working to find a rat in the false den. No score for working a false den!

Sophie and I went to Field Trials in November where she gleefully sped around the field, rather

than follow the rabbit trail. Oh well... At least her keen nose led her back home after a day long adventure in the subdivision or wherever her little legs took her.

Sophie has given new meaning to the term "hair balls." She's the first smooth coated dachshund we have had who sheds. She now has rather leathery ears, splotchy hair on her chest and thinning hair on her rib cage. At field trials, a friend suggested she may need a thyroid test. I just had that done and she is now on thyroid. Stay tuned to learn if she grows more hair. Sophie found her permanent home with us in December 2006 at age 6½ and is now nearly nine.

Joy & more

I just finished a wonderful book, "Dog Man, an Uncommon Life on a Faraway Mountain" - the true story of a Japanese man who saved the Akita from extinction after World War II. December 30, National Public Radio's Diane Rehm interviewed the author, Martha Sherrill. The main character and I both believe that dogs should retain the natural instincts that have helped them



survive. Ideally a dog should not only be pretty but also be able to function to survive. The book is a fascinating read and taught me among other things, that Akitas can look very different, like ancient

mountain dogs or sleek show dogs. I recently had the opportunity to create a half life-sized Akita for a woman whose Akita, Pasha, has a 3-4 inch long, hard, double coat that looks like it is permanently standing on end. It acts as insulation in summer and winter. When visiting my studio, Pasha was indeed a well-behaved "Gentle Cloud" that is shown above.



A Bouvier des Flandres with natural ears is the dog of choice of Charlotte Peltz, the uber-qualified San Miguel dog training guru. For her, I created this three dimensional sterling pendant that can be modified for those who prefer cropped ears. Check my website under "Living with your Dog" to read some of Charlotte's articles from which she is creating a book

You are invited to see my new listing on the National Sculpture Society site, www.nationalsculpture.org, under Sculpture Showcase. Take a look!

Under 'Hounds' on my site, find more images of "Gentle Cloud," and, under Jewelry, see these:

"Dear to my Heart, Bouvier des Flandres, NE" Design One, Sterling Pendant, above right.

"Dear to my Heart, Smooth" Design Three, Sterling Slide, right.

"Joy's Favorite Adjustable Sterling Serpentine Chain" below.



In Mexico, I will work on these priorities which will be available by late Summer or early Fall.

1. Gordon Setter, half-life sized.
2. "Sunnyside Up, Wire" 1:6 scale.
3. "Life's a Ball, Wire" 1:6 scale.

This year will be my third as treasurer of American Women Artists, AWA. In October, as one of four jurors of our national competition, I had the grueling job of trying to narrow around 1100 entries down to a mere 30 that could be accepted for the intimate space available at our elegant little host, Gallerie Gabrie, in Pasadena, CA. I traveled to our opening, Dec. 12, where I met three of my collectors for the first time. One couple drove two and half hours to get there from Laguna and a collector from Washington state sent a friend who lives in the Pasadena area. I am very honored that they made such an effort to come. The show runs through January 30. Do preview the show at www.americanwomenartists.org.

While in Pasadena, be sure to see the exquisite Norton Simon Museum, and the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens. Not to be missed, one can see a good overview of each in a day.



"Weldon B Long Memorial"

Last but not least, in honor of my dachshund anatomy mentor, Weldon B Long, I helped create a memorial to him for the Dachshund Club of St. Louis. Check my site for more pictures and information.

In my other life as a model, I learned to have a HUGE respect for actors! While I luckily breezed through three of four auditions, the second and only commercial speaking role was *much* harder than I ever imagined. With only a week between the first easy shoot and the second, I had no time to seek acting help until after the fact! You may have seen my grandparents' white hair in the background of the third commercial, for Build a Bear Workshops that aired before Christmas.

We are in Austin, Texas, and it is 60 degrees. Brian just pointed out a Harley dealership with a covered wagon as a sleigh pulled by eight shiny Harleys for reindeer! We just passed the spot where the New Braunfels Smoke House used to be. It is no more! Was there a fire? Were they offered so much money they could not refuse? It was a wonderful family business that was always busy when we stopped in...

After a good meal at Palenque, across from the LaQuinta on the Bob Bullock Loop in Laredo, we slept well, and awakened to deep, early morning fog. Sixty miles north of Monterey, the sun shined and we stopped at an island between the two directions of the autopista, the super highway. There are many shops: a gas station; hotel; espresso shop; candy shop; insurance office; Church's Fried Chicken, both stationary and on wheels; a Quick Stop (their version of a 7/11) and a restaurant with delicious corn muffins. Mind you, there is one squeaky clean "Hombres" and one "Madres" -- restrooms -- for this whole gaggle of people! Everyone is courteous.

We are now driving through the first mountain range, with mesquite growing beneath a forest of Spanish dagger yuccas. It is 70 degrees and we pass a roadside vender selling many sizes of copper pots. We are then on the edge of the next mountain range, The Sierra Madre Oriental, that makes a big ring around central Mexico, and are skirting the city of dust, Monterrey, where they mine lime for concrete and make lots of dust. Our friend in the concrete business tried to help them with the dust problem and he was politely told to leave the country, never come back or he would be shot! (A Jan. 8, article in the Mexican paper, THE NEWS, stated that Cemex has been hit with a pollution suit for violations at their Lyons, Colorado plant. They may have to pay \$30,000 a *day* in fines!)

Brian reminded me of the time when we came home two years ago. We left Saltillo before sunrise and found the very winding road lit like a runway to keep the truckers and everyone else awake! At that early hour no one was trying to sell ropes of fresh garlic, or fresh strawberries. The locals are very resourceful. More about their family values in another letter.

It is now 2:52 pm CST. We are on a super highway and we just passed four floats destined for a Three Kings Day parade. Three Kings Day is celebrated January 6.

It is sunny and 73 degrees at 4:30 pm when we arrive in San Miguel three days after we left St. Louis. The next morning, January 3, the apartment is 60 degrees inside, 10 degrees warmer than in prior years in early January! Let me explain; the walls are made of concrete and stone and they take a long time to heat with a fireplace and space heaters. We are lucky it is warm earlier this year. Life is Good!

2009 contract, courtesy of my friend Ferney.

After serious and cautious consideration, your contract of friendship has been renewed for the New Year 2009. It was a very hard decision to make, so please try not to screw it up!

Our Wish for You in 2009:

May peace break into your house and may thieves come to steal your debts.

May the pockets of your jeans become a magnet of \$100 bills.

May love stick to your face like Vaseline, and may laughter assault your lips!

May your clothes smell of success like smoking tires.

May happiness slap you across the face and may your tears be that of joy.

May the problems you had forget your home address!

In simple words ... may 2009 be the best year of your life!

Love, Joy, Brian, Edgar & Sophie

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If you've read this far, we look forward to hearing from you! Thank you!
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