

RANGER REEVES

25 April 2008 (25 March 2012) - 17 November 2023



I began to write this on November 18, 2023, the day after I lost my Ranger. And yes, he has the family name, earned and bestowed with gratitude and honor. For approaching 12 years he has been a major part of my life, usually found within a couple of yards of me and always part of my thoughts and actions as I went about my every activity. As I write, I keep looking to the office doorway that he should be blocking or expecting him to show up for his periodic pat and confirmation. That Ranger and our lives became so closely linked was entirely unexpected. I am not doing well. I hope that by writing I can get some of my feelings under control.

I never had a dog before Ranger, except for a beagle, whose name I have sadly forgotten, for a short time when I was a child. I remember working in my back yard, me and a neighbor friend, to train him; sitting him with a long rope around his neck so I could give him a tug to “come.” My parents returned him after a month or so; too much damage in the plants and garden, I think. I don’t remember that I was much bothered.

I often had cats growing up and in my family later. Notable were ‘Pepper’ named after Pepper Drive in Pasadena which we were passing on the way home from picking him (?) up at the moment my parents demanded a name. ‘Chutzpah’ (Yiddish for extreme self-confidence or audacity, for those that don’t get out much), whose name came when he appeared uninvited in

my in-laws (Shell) home in Elmsford, cleaned out the food dishes of the resident cats, got in Irv Shell's lap, settled down and began purring. He lived up to the name in every way; the many tales are for another essay and he is still memorialized in Dan's California license plate. He came to us in Riverdale when we were cat-sitting the full menagerie but stayed when the others went back to Elmsford. And 'Misty,' the long-hair Persian who came to us after an improbable odyssey from a breeder out east somewhere, maybe Arcadia. Originally the size and color of a fluorescent tennis ball, she later survived a month of outdoor living (indoor at night from the care-taker) while we were in Africa, had a bed on the typing table in my office, learned to tolerate being washed in the kitchen sink, and tormented the neighbor's cats by jumping across from our roof to theirs and preening in front of their open but screened windows. She suffered from kidney disease and for many years got a pill each morning. She was deathly afraid of the gardener's leaf blowers, and it still bothers me more than 20 years later that, as she lay *in extremis* on the pantry floor, they came through the back gate revving the damn things; I went to the back door yelling at them to turn off the machines and by the time I got back to her she was gone. I fired the gardeners. The current denizen is 'Nibbler' (aka 'Nibbles' or 'Nibs' after a cartoon character) who I have described as magnanimously allowing us to live in her home; she is becoming more social by occasionally getting in my lap at the end of dinner and on my bed some nights. She got in my lap as I sat sobbing in the kitchen with Ranger dead on the floor next to us.

That brings me back to my topic, my wonderful Ranger. He may have been 'my dog,' although that wasn't the plan when he came to us, but I was at least equally 'his person' and was cared for by him as much as I did him.

RJ arrived in my life in April 2011, also a tale for another time. At at least his last foster home, he had a 100 lb black dog named Lucy but who stayed when they kicked out RJ. I remember meeting and going on a walk with him when RJ and I returned to pick up some of his possessions. I don't know how long it was before the lobbying for us to get a dog began, but I remember saying 'no' firmly until RJ wore me down, one of his particular skills.



Figure 2 Don't You Want To Adopt Me?

So by the twelfth month, we were off to the downtown shelter; we found a collection of 'rats and pit bulls' (small aggressive breeds and larger animals often trained to be 'tougher than yours'), none, fortunately, satisfactory. So off to the westside shelter where we found the same mix available, except for one larger white dog who barked at us from his cage. RJ did not want a dog that barked at him. He says that I pushed things through, which I don't remember, but as this was the only possible choice, we were soon meeting Ranger who showed off his training and manners in return for chunks of hot dog from the volunteer. He had been found wandering the streets of south L.A. and reached the end of his

allotted time in that shelter, but instead of putting him down they transferred him to the westside. He had been micro-chipped, so his name and birth date were known, but the listed owners did not respond. It all worked out and we were soon on our way to the pet supply store with Ranger in tow.

I'm not clear how the transfer occurred but it gradually became clear that Ranger was attaching to me rather than RJ. He slept in my room at night, often on the bed, and hung out near me in the house or office during the day. Not that RJ abandoned him; we always did things together such as trips; the loss has been of both RJ's and my dog; it has added to his difficult week.

At any rate, as the years went on, our lives and routines became more and more entwined and complementary. I certainly never did anything without arranging for Ranger. During the pandemic, he was often the only living being I interacted with for days and he certainly saved me from the loneliness and social isolation that affects many older people.

His last day began unremarkably: he greeted my arising, got his morning pats, told me it was going to be a great day and came down to his breakfast which he ate with the usual enthusiasm. I left him in the house with the housekeeper while I went to lunch and he came up to guard the office while I worked in the late afternoon. As I got ready to go out, his energy, in hindsight, seemed low and he peed on the rug. I cleaned up and told him it was all right. When I went downstairs, he didn't follow immediately but came a few minutes later without incident and went out to do his business. When he returned, he just lay in his bed, uninterested in his dinner or a cookie. I patted and spoke quietly to him and left for a theater event downtown. When I returned, he was lying on the kitchen floor near his bed, body slightly twisted but without signs of a struggle. I'll probably beat myself up for a long time over leaving, knowing that things weren't right.

All I could do was to say "Oh, Ranger!", sit and pat him, and sob. The cat got into my lap.

I texted RJ who called immediately. Dan and Marie both responded. I also texted Mark Lanza, who, in an incredible act of compassion, came and took Ranger to the hospital and made arrangements for the people who will deal with him.

I am sobbing as I reread this and make small corrections and additions. I looked carefully as I got out of bed this morning to be sure I wasn't going to step on him and I can't understand why he isn't blocking the office door as I sit at the computer. It will be a long time before I can retrain myself.



Figure 3 In Command

When I was saying 'no' to RJ's lobbying efforts, I was completely ignorant of the depth of emotional connection that I would develop with Ranger and, I think I can say without being accused of anthropomorphizing, would be returned. Dogs and humans are social animals and can clearly bond across species boundaries. I have been lifted up by his presence in my life.

So many times I told him how lucky I was to have him as my dog and for me to be his person.

I have said my daily life has been completely entwined with Ranger.

- Blessed with an aging prostrate, I get up several times in the night, stepping carefully around Ranger who lifts his head when I return, checking that I'm OK and getting his pat.
- When I shower, he guards the bathroom and waits for his pat when I emerge soaking wet then goes back to the bedroom to wait for me.
- As I dress, he may have to be asked for some space to allow shoes and socks, but then he always pushes into me for a extended scratch as soon as they are tied. Especially he likes to be petted and scratched, and he moans and sighs, almost purrs in pleasure. Then he barks full throat, probably telling me that it's a brand new day and we need to go and make it ours; it's the only time he barks at me.
- At breakfast and dinner, he has a routine: several repetitions of standing tall, sitting and shaking hands, flat dog and roll-overs before accepting his meal.
- During the day, when he lies blocking the office door or guarding the top of the stairs, he raises up to be sure I pay my toll of a pat or a thorough scratch each time I pass.
- Every hour or so, he feels the need for affirmation and comes to disrupt my typing with a nose under the arm, sending the mouse cursor flying. If I don't respond, he stands up with his paws on the arm of the chair until I accommodate him.
- If I am going out but not taking him, his excitement at the placing of his water dish outside and the offer of a cookie is palpable. If he is staying inside, the command "In Your Bed" sends him there to await his cookie.
- He never attempted to run away. If the gate is open, perhaps to bring in the trash barrels, he may come through to inspect, but goes back inside the yard when asked.
- He barks anyone on the front porch; visitors are carefully inspected but approval hinges on back scratches. His hearing has declined in recent times, so the post delivery does not always set off a paroxysm of barking. The mail carriers have usually been anathema, but one succeeded in making friends.
- In younger days, he loved to be leashed to the bicycle and run along with me a couple of miles. He knocked me over only once, crossing in front to defend against an unleashed dog that was charging us.
- He was happy to sail on our boat, wearing his life preserver, sleeping in the cabin and the cockpit as we pattered about the ocean outside of the Marina.
- He didn't want to be picked up and if I tried, he would flop on to the floor to make it impossible to grab him.
- There are few clues about his early life: he could never "play" as in chase a ball or tug a rope; he originally was afraid of being beaten with things like thin ropes. I wondered about abuse, but later, when I rolled up the newspaper after reading it, he would roll over to be tapped with it.



Figure 4 Practicing for the Iditarod

- He was delighted by car rides, happily climbing – more recently lifted – in to go to the market and wait while I shopped or ran other small errands.
- He traveled well, happily accompanying RJ and me on trips to Portland (we almost lost him when he charged a flock of geese on a golf course), in the F-150 to Seattle to get the Pierce, the RV for the Christmas trip.
- He charmed my friend Susan Wilson who dog-sat him when RJ and I picked up the tool truck and later went to Las Vegas for the Cornwell Tool “mega-meeting.”
- He loved to swim and probably clogged many pool filters with shed fur. At the pool at Dan’s and Marie’s, he loved to jump in, swim to the other side, climb out, shake to transfer gallons of water to the deck, and repeat until too tired to continue. There is a picture showing him in a full racing dive from the side of a pool.
- One of the trips was to Midland, where we camped in a cow pasture. His first meeting with cows: Destiny! Unfortunately they were range cows and let him know that he was of no interest to them. Rejected as a herd boss, he found a fresh cow pie to roll in. We had to drive down the valley half a mile, RJ sitting in the car trunk calling him to follow, to the reservoir where we could wash him off. The water was freezing, but we couldn’t get him out for the longest time.
- It was always shedding season, and I could have stuffed multiple quilts with dog fur.
- He loved his walks – “go walkies” always got him going and he was capable of watering every tree along the route.
- He taught Nibbles to eat like a dog: that is, clean everything from her dish, as it wouldn’t be there to return to. I’ve already commented on his purr; they taught one another.
- When I returned from some event that Ranger could not attend, he would bark at the alarm as I opened the door and meet me as I opened the blocked door to the kitchen. Nibbles would take off – unless dinner was in the offing – but Ranger always gave and accepted a greeting, a back scratch, and a thorough sniffing to discover where I had been and what sins – interactions with other dogs – I might have committed.
- If the trip had been in the Model A on a warm day, Ranger took his cookie and stayed happily in the back yard. He stood on the top step to welcome our – both me and the Model A – return. His enthusiastic greeting made coming home a special joy.



Figure 5 Isn’t it dinnertime?

- Speaking of Nibbles, she also seems to have been affected considerably. From a cat whose only appearances were meal times, when she screamed until her food was put down, she has been present, frequently appearing to get in my lap, even coming to the door when I come home from errands. I’ve already commented on how she learned to eat like a dog, cleaning her dish completely at the first sitting. There was lots of interaction between them, Ranger nudging or even licking her, she winding through his legs.

- I'm not sure where I became a farmer, but I have usually planted some green beans and tomatoes in what I hope is a productive part of the back yard. I have grown some lovely tomatoes but never tasted them in the last years. Ranger defeats whatever netting or barriers I place and gets them all just before picking time.
- We didn't do a great job of socializing him to other dogs. He had trouble with the small, aggressive breeds and fought with more than one if they got in his face. His behavior at the dog parks was always edgy, so he rarely got to them in the early years, and later not at all. But he was best friends with Achilles who lived in the yard of the next door garage apartment. The only time he got out of our yard when we were away, he apparently walked around the block to the apartment gate and waited there until the resident – Rod – noticed him and let him in. The two had a wonderful time until I got home. There is a specially made hole in the fence so the two could communicate. Now there is a new resident of that yard, younger, much bigger and less controlled; the two get along and usually 'talk' through the fence hole but the previous strong connection isn't there.
- His strength and faculties have been declining for perhaps longer than a year. His hearing became poorer – the mail could arrive without his noticing – and he might stumble when walking or trying to climb steps too enthusiastically. He needed a lift up to the car seat and he liked to be helped back down. For years he struggled with some sort of nasal infection that produced a thick yellow mucus that he would always clean up from his face or the floor when he had blown it from his nostrils; his lungs or trachea were often congested and he would breath heavily to try to clear them. The vets attempted diagnosis several times and prescribed an antibiotic that decreased the symptoms, but never cleared them and they returned as soon as the treatment ended. His last day was symptom-free.
- Above all, he loved to be petted, scratched and talked to. Always a wagging tail to encourage any of those – but not while happening.



Figure 6 Dog is My Co-pilot in the Model A

