

# Honoring Ranger

## the original City Dog Country Dog

By Caroline Spark



Ranger died on June 8, 2013, at the age of 16. Adopted at six years old after five homes, time on the street, three long shelter stays and a close call with euthanasia, Ranger's next ten years were filled with learning and love, making up for the bad times, and turning him into a teacher and guide for others.

We started out on a rocky road together. He was untrained, hyper-impulsive, distrustful, anxious, insecure, and sometimes aggressive. Our first years of walking together were a nightmare of relentless leash pulling and reactivity towards other dogs. But during that time, Ranger also dragged me into learning all sorts of things I might have been slower to absorb firsthand, or missed altogether. We went to classes and seminars, and learned from some great trainers and behavior specialists. We tried out an endless stream of training strategies, exercises, games and tools, as new ways of working with reactivity were developed in the dog training world. Ranger was always up for trying new things, and his exuberance was legendary.



Always gentle with children even in his wilder days, Ranger gradually mellowed and his kind, affectionate nature flourished. He had a great sense of humor and an enormous joy that could not be extinguished even in his darkest hours. He was the genial host of five Call of the Wild Dog Camps, and many more Play & Train days. He was also my work partner in behavior consulting, helping other reactive dogs on their path of recovery. He achieved animal-assisted therapy certification as a Delta Pet Partner, and finally passed his Canine Good Citizen test at age 15, after three failed attempts years before. Probably Ranger's favorite achievement was in K9 Nose Work. He was always so wildly excited to be doing it that he wasn't very accurate, but he more than made up for that by having so much fun. He did manage to pass his first Odor Recognition Test, and enjoyed classes, training seminars, and searching for hides on walks and other outings, before retiring to pursue the wilder scents of elk trails and rodents holes. Eventually he lost his ability to detect a treat two inches away from him. But before then, he was the one who showed me, incontrovertibly, how absolutely marvelous it is to live by the nose!

Ranger was the original City Dog Country Dog and the inspiration behind it. He became a healthy, happy, well-adjusted dog because of all the training he did in the city, and the time he spent just being a dog in the country. Seeing him thrill to the call of wild places in himself and in nature inspired the first Call of the Wild Dog Camp. Many of the nature games offered at dog camp were first devised by and for him. Now that he is released from an increasingly burdensome body, I like to think that his spirit lives on in every dog who is learning how to live better in the human world, while enjoying life more fully as a dog.

