

## Rocky

We had to say goodbye to Rocky on Monday (5-12-25).

Having Rocky with us for nearly 13 years was a blessing, and he was most certainly a part of our family.

Rocky was a working dog. Not one to want to stray on his own or run with Ginger (our other dog), he always stayed close – because he was always on duty.

When Jill took him for walks, he was the protector. If anyone got too close, a growl would keep them at bay. As for me, he was my guardian – my herd dog. Yes, border collies are herd dogs by nature, and since we didn't have sheep, he herded me. From our back door to my office in the back yard was my path. Rocky led the way every trip I made, to and from the office. If I headed toward the gate, he barked and got in my path to turn me back. If I veered off to go anywhere except my office, he barked and got me back on course. If he was laying in the living room and saw me get my shoes on, he was up and on alert – usually standing by the front door to be sure I didn't go there. Only the back door, toward my office, was my designated path. And if he was on the porch with us, if I tried to go over the gate to go down the steps, I felt his snout on my leg, and a firm bark, to herd me back.

What held him back from being a herder of sheep and eligible for the stock dog trials – a competition for herd dogs to show their skills in herding a flock of sheep – was his propensity for nipping you just a bit – every now and then – to keep you on track. That's instant disqualification in the dog trial competition. For me it was just an occasional, casual nip to remind me I was straying off course.

When he was younger and full of energy, he would race me from my office to the house and then wait for me at the back door with a few barks (mostly to clear Ginger out of my path). If I strayed in another direction he would race back to me, attempting to herd me in the right direction.

Rocky loved working. Until he got older and not as able to get around, he loved going to our "farm" about 25 minutes away. He always stayed close to me. When I mowed, or cut with my chain saw, or trimmed with my weed trimmer, or chipped away at a stump with my axe, or dragged some branches to the burn pile – he always "helped." He got so close in helping that I had to pay close attention so as not to chop off his nose with my axe, or clip him with my weed trimmer. And once or twice when I was dragging branches, he actually helped by pulling the right direction. Usually, though, I felt a bit of extra weight in the branches I dragged, as he pulled in the opposite direction.

He loved the farm, and especially along the creek where he played a game of splashing at the water and trying to catch it in his mouth. Over and over and over he did this. And if you watered plants, he loved the occasional spray as he caught the water in his mouth. When Jill picked wild blackberries, he also picked some for himself, despite the thorny branches.

He liked cold weather and never minded the snow. When I shoveled, he always tried to catch the snow when I threw it off to the side. He was so well insulated that he would sometimes lie there as the snow accumulated on him – and it wouldn't melt but just keep accumulating.

Rocky did have his idiosyncrasies. Every time a siren was heard (and we have a lot of emergency vehicle traffic in our town), Rocky would howl in sympathy with the siren. If there was a storm coming, we would need to get him into the house quickly, as he developed the habit of tearing siding off of our home, presumably attempting to get into the house. (We have many pieces of siding and trim that still bear his tooth marks as a reminder, and a few were ripped off entirely.)

Rocky was not food-motivated. He ate well, but if I walked past him to go back to my office, or anyplace other than back into the house, he left his food behind to come to my side and to be sure I stayed on track.

He had a variety of barks for various instances – a standard bark when another dog had the audacity to walk past our home, A short yip if he wanted to come in the house, or (more often) if he thought it was time for me to return to work in my office. And at times he made noises that were very close to human speech and probably were – if only I could understand what he was saying.

Every evening when Jill and I settled in to close out the evening with one or two hours of relaxing TV shows, the dogs would join us and spend time with us while chewing on some dog chews. Rocky loved this TV time.

In the morning If I was first out of bed, I would walk into the living room where Rocky would be lying on the floor. His tail would begin to wag and I would get down on the floor beside him, my face close to his. He would just lay back and let me give him a hug, and immediately thereafter he would jump to his feet ready to guide me to the door and out to my office. He was a faithful friend, and my work buddy.

Mornings are now a bit emptier. Our dog Ginger misses Rocky, and I miss him. As I look around the yard on the way to my office, I see all the places he would dash past me, or where he would lay attentively waiting for me to come out of the office. I can see him in my mind – racing me, herding me, waiting for my next move.

As you can see, Rocky's presence in our lives was huge. And since he was never far from me, I miss him a lot!

God only shared with us in the Scriptures the destiny of humanity when this life has ended, providing little information on the animal kingdom. Maybe this is because animals cannot read. Or maybe it's because animals are so trusting and so fully dependent, they trust always in the good. And therefore they simply trust that their Creator will provide for them. Maybe that's good enough!

I know that He is a God of love and that He acts always with a purpose consistent with His character of love. Knowing this about Him, and knowing that He created our Rocky with a soul, a personality, and the breath of life ... I know that our Rocky will live again.

I think about the day when the Lord returns to reign upon the earth. We are told He will ride from heaven on a white horse (Revelation 19:11) and that His armies that follow Him will also be riding white horses (Revelation 19:14). Horses with celestial bodies, galloping down from heaven.

This is enough for me to know that animals, too, will receive spiritual bodies, and that Rocky will one day live again, along with our other pet family members. Until then, sleep well Rocky. Thank you for loving us, and for being such a big part of our lives!

We look forward to the day of resurrection when you are in our midst once again!

