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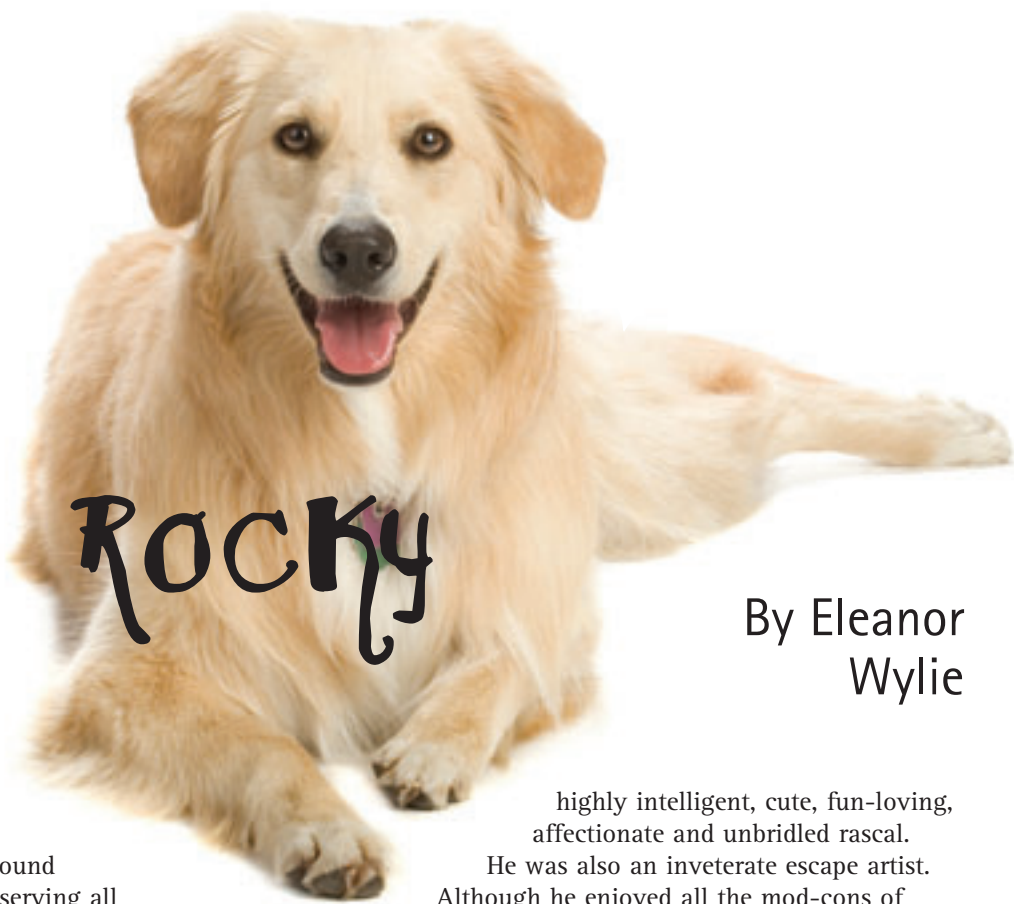
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# Something About Rocky

A family love-match with an unbridled rascal



By Eleanor Wylie

I must confess that I personally have never been adopted by a dog, to the extent that I have been honoured enough to have shared my home with one. Ours has always been a feline household. Unlike me, my cats have a superiority complex when it comes to dogs. They have enough trouble trying to tolerate each other at times, let alone cope with a dog upsetting the domestic bliss (leave that to the humans!). After all these years of pecking-order feuding, I have no wish to upset the status quo which has become safely and firmly established here, now. Despite several close calls with dog adoption, I have managed to resist the urge so far. However, for better or for worse, I have been involved in aiding and abetting other members of the family, when it comes to acquiring a dog.

Throughout my life, there always seems to have been a dog padding unobtrusively around in the background, quietly observing all of the human goings-on, and patiently waiting for a gentle ruffle round the ears or a therapeutic back-scratch. Perhaps, I've been fortunate in that most of the canines that I have known have simply been a bit more mature in age or have been dutifully trained to be on their best behaviour. Several of these old acquaintances were working dogs who knew and respected the boundaries of human authority. Though, as always, there are exceptions to the rule.

Rocky belonged to my teenage sister, Carolyn. He was a Golden Retriever crossed with a Labrador. A

highly intelligent, cute, fun-loving, affectionate and unbridled rascal.

He was also an inveterate escape artist. Although he enjoyed all the mod-cons of domestic life, he could never quite shake off his vagabond nature. We should have considered this at the start of our relationship with him, for Rocky was a jailbird, an inmate of the Pound. But, as with all affairs of the heart, we overlooked this vital clue to possible future heartbreak. Love is blind and we fell for him hook, line and sinker.

I assume full responsibility for the Rocky saga. After all, I was a married woman, a young mother into the bargain, and in complete control of all my faculties, wasn't I? Rocky had already grabbed my unwavering

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attention at the Dogs' Home. Knowing that Carolyn was keen to adopt a dog, since her old childhood collie, Kimba, had recently been put down after a protracted fight with cancer, I blabbed. It was already a foregone conclusion that Rocky would be adopted by her before she even set eyes on him, because I had sown the seeds for a love-match so convincingly. She made a hasty visit to the Pound, introduced herself and the deal was struck. I paid for him and Rocky was free to go. We never discovered his original name, since he was initially picked up by the Ranger off the street, with no accompanying I.D. Rocky was the name bestowed on him by Carolyn, and we estimated his age to be between 2 and 3 years old at the time of his adoption.

The first thing that Rocky did at this, his taste of renewed freedom, was to charge full pelt out onto the lawn and spend several minutes rolling and snuffling around in the grass in sheer ecstasy. His utter joy at finding himself released from prison was contagious. We were all highly amused at his antics. Any doubts as to his suitability as a member of the family were totally dispelled and our spirits were immediately uplifted. Here was a unique and expressive individual who was set to make an impact on our otherwise rather routine, lacklustre and orderly lives. My sister herded him towards our house and ushered him in.

And what an impact it was! He bounded through the doorway, his nose leading him straight to the kitchen where my mouthwatering, rich fruit cake, fresh from the oven and intended for afternoon tea, had been cooling. Before we knew what was happening, Rocky had wrestled the cake to the floor and proceeded to break off large chunks which he wolfed down unceremoniously, paying no regard either for etiquette or our cries of dismay. It all happened so quickly and unexpectedly, that the full extent of this unruly behaviour did not sink in. After the initial shock, we couldn't help but laugh. We reassured ourselves that this had just been a temporary aberration and was induced purely by hunger and a desire for something other than gaol slops.

Rocky went home with Carolyn to the delight of my Dad and the tacit disapproval of my mother who, unlike the rest of us (despite being brought up on a farm), will freely admit that she has little affinity with animals and prefers to lavish her affection onto other people's babies instead.

Rocky settled in well and went everywhere with Carolyn. He was her constant companion. Rocky was a great celebrity at the football in particular. Carolyn and her boyfriend were regular supporters and Saturday afternoons were spent cheering on the

local squad with Rocky enthusiastically in tow. Rocky would mix freely with the spectators, quietly cadging morsels of food and contentedly being showered with tokens of affection from all and sundry. He was well behaved during the match, but at half-time he would run boisterously onto the field, unleashing his pent-up energy to play with the kids. He was adored by everyone. There was just something about Rocky. He was everybody's mate. You couldn't help but love him.

Rocky had only two vices which were troublesome. Something had obviously happened to him as a youngster. Despite the absence of other dogs, he would try to grab the food bowl before it was placed on the floor for him, and would occasionally snap. He would growl while he was eating too, warning off anyone who dared approach him while he was consuming his dinner. Such was his fear of missing out on food. One can only speculate why this poor creature had developed this unpleasant and undesirable trait. Through time he became more relaxed about feeding, but there was always a sense of distrust vaguely lurking under the surface of his mind.

He was also a regular Houdini. Despite appearing to be otherwise perfectly happy and at home, he obviously still yearned for new experiences, people and places. Life beckoned and he was unable to ignore the call. No matter what steps were taken to prevent it, he always had the ability to wrestle himself from confinement. The number of times that my sister would arrive home to find that he'd dug himself out, were many and



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frequent, much to the annoyance of my Dad who had the laborious task of repairing the damage.

Several times, my parents received phone calls from people saying that Rocky was comfortably ensconced in their households. He would be duly picked up and brought home, seemingly glad to be back in the fold, till the next break-out. Once he went missing for a week. We were all heartbroken and worried that some tragedy had befallen him, only to receive a call from a family, only a couple of streets away, who had been looking after him and wanted to adopt him. His dog tags had provided them with his emergency contact details. We were overjoyed to learn that he was safe and after protestations that he unfortunately wasn't up for adoption but had simply escaped and got lost, Carolyn rushed off to collect him. He was stretched out on the sofa of his latest foster family when she arrived, totally at ease, yet still very pleased to see her.

Sadly, Rocky finally went missing, never to be seen again. We hoped for weeks that we'd hear something but nothing emerged as to his fate. He didn't turn up at the Pound nor was his body picked up by the Council. A check with all the vets in the area failed to find any trace of him. He just seemed to have evaporated into thin air. My Dad always had a nagging suspicion that he might have been picked up for vivisection, since they lived in close proximity to the local university campus. The rest of us have always pushed this horrendous thought from our minds, but it's a possibility, since it was rumoured that this was common practice in research at the time. We tried to think positively and hoped that he'd simply been fostered by another family with little kids, since he particularly enjoyed their company.

Whatever became of Rocky, there is one thing for sure; that for a couple of years, he delighted our family and friends with his inimitable joy for living and sometimes crazy antics. He was a very special character, a free spirit and a much-loved member of the family.

He was a loving and affectionate dog who embraced life with exuberance and a passion for living. Exploring the world, communicating with the people inhabiting it, and embracing life to its fullest extent, were high on his agenda. These are, especially in our modern era, good tenets for humans to live by. Rocky left an indelible impression on those of us who had the privilege of knowing him, and who undoubtedly enjoyed his company. It has been more than 25 years since he vanished, but he will always be loved, fondly remembered and sadly missed.



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