

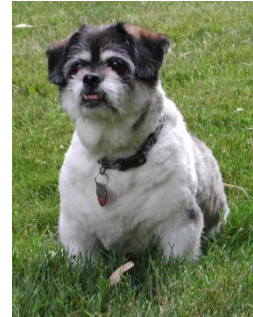
# **Ruff Boyer:**

## **A Good Dog**

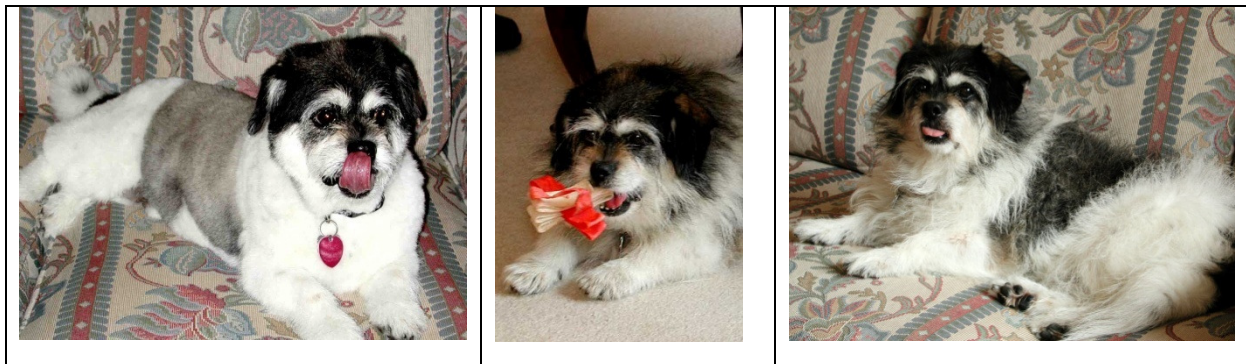
### **1992-2007**

Ruff Boyer was a good dog, known in some circles as the “BDE” (Best Dog Ever). He was the only dog among the 17 houses of Twin Holly Lane, and was a friend to all who met him and a special companion and buddy of the humans at 702 Twin Holly.

Ruff was born in March 1992 in Washington, D.C. He was a “mutt,” a dog of uncertain breed. The puzzled vet thought that Ruff was some kind of terrier. Certainly, he had that strain in him but also a facial appearance much like that of a Pekinese. He was small – never larger than 21 pounds, although he seemed to weigh 50 pounds when he was carried. He had short legs, a tank-like body, and long black and white hair. (His summer haircuts gave him a totally different appearance: a cute, furry stuffed animal from the toy store.)



Ruff was a handsome beast. His face was imperious and distinguished. He was black on the top of his head, with a black streak down over his nose. But the rest of his face was white, including white arches over his bushy eyebrows, so that he looked a little like the long-time leader of the coal miners union, John L. Lewis. He had huge brown eyes and a long red tongue that was almost always in view. And after he lost most of his teeth, the most prominent among the remaining choppers were two that protruded from his lower jaw to frame his red tongue. He almost looked like a walrus.

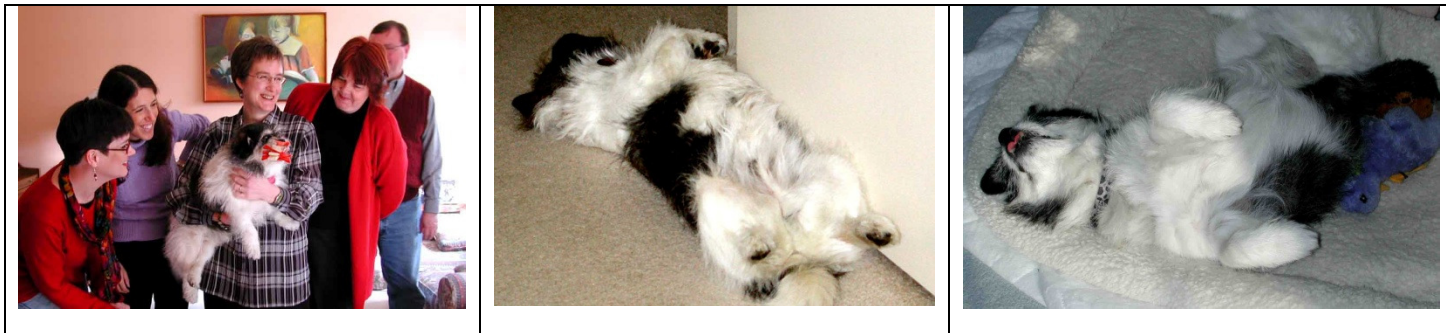


Ruff’s body was mostly white, with a wide black streak that ran over his back and around his belly. His curly tail was usually up in the air. He was very distinguished and never failed to

attract the attention of strangers on the street. Even people who were driving would put on the brakes and yell, “what kind of dog is that?” He was an excellent “chick magnet.”

Ruff was acquired by his first owner, John (a pseudonym), soon after Ruff’s birth. John liked to brag that he could hold his new dog in the palm of his hand. This dog appeared so innocent and vulnerable that John tried to toughen him up with a name like “Ruff.”

John had AIDS, and he lived in an apartment near Dupont Circle in Washington. He often had trouble caring for his pet, and so PETS-DC, an organization that helps people with HIV/AIDS and other disabling conditions take care of their pets, provided daily dog-walking services for Ruff, beginning in the middle of the famed Blizzard of ’93. A series of “Ruff-walkers” would stop by John’s apartment each morning and evening to take Ruff out for some exercise. Johanna was one of these, and for many years she walked Ruff twice each Wednesday. She also became coordinator of the “Ruff-walkers” to ensure that someone stopped by twice a day. The Ruff-walkers held a reunion at Johanna’s house to celebrate Ruff’s 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the event was duly recorded with a photograph and article in the *Washington Post* on March 20, 2005. Ruff was famous.



Ruff was what Johanna called an “urban dog.” Growing up and walking each day in the city, he preferred all his life to walk on the sidewalk, not in the street or the grass. (If there was no sidewalk, he would carefully walk on the narrow curb.) He was totally unruffled by loud noise. He could run along the sidewalk while big garbage trucks or loud fire trucks whizzed by less than a foot away from him and he never even turned to look. At the same time, his street-crossing habits were dangerous. Unless he was held back and told to “wait,” he would dart across a street at full speed. His favored approach to an intersection was to run across diagonally. Generally, we allowed Ruff to go the direction he wanted so long as it was reasonable. Usually, he came to a corner and darted off very quickly, but there was one intersection where there were at least six options. Ruff would first check the nearest pole for messages and then stand still wondering which way to go. We called it “the corner of indecision.”

All the Ruff-walkers noticed that Ruff’s walk was crooked. Curiously, he didn’t run straight ahead but rather at an angle, his back legs about three-to-four inches to the left of his front ones. To the dismay of some of his walkers, Ruff loved cold and windy weather. He might be

less than energetic inside the house, but taken out in the cold wind, his adrenalin kicked in and off he would go, pulling his walker down the street. Look at that dog go!

In October 2004, John's illness became worse and he signed papers authorizing Johanna to adopt Ruff. Shortly afterward, John died, and Ruff went to live with Neil and Johanna in Silver Spring, Maryland. Johanna bought him a bed and put it on the floor in the master bedroom, and five seconds later Ruff knew that was for him and jumped in. Unknown to Neil and Johanna, Ruff snored – very loudly.

The general procedure on Twin Holly Lane was that Johanna would take Ruff for a walk each morning and Neil would do so in the afternoon. At the end of the street, Ruff preferred to turn right in the morning and left in the evening. Almost always the direction of his turn was the opposite of the last one. He clearly remembered which way he had gone on the last trip, and wanted to make sure he checked his "pee-mail" in both directions. Usually on Saturdays and Sundays, Ruff and the humans would all walk together. This clearly pleased Ruff, since it was important to him that the pack stay together. If Johanna took Ruff out the door and Neil was still inside slowly putting on his coat, Ruff would plant his feet outside the door and not move until Neil came out.



Although Ruff had known Johanna about a dozen years, in time he became what Johanna complained of as "daddy's dog." Neil's buddy would follow him around the house all day, plop down by the computer while Neil was working on genealogy, and make himself comfortable on the cold tile of the bathroom floor while Neil was shaving or in the shower. Later, when Johanna set up an office in the lower level of their townhouse, Ruff would spend time with her on a blanket on the floor, but often when Neil came home Ruff would tear up the steps with him. If Neil went to kiss Johanna on his way out, Ruff quickly intervened and barked – apparently to protect one of them.

Ruff was not a working dog. It just wasn't in his genes. He was primarily decorative. (He liked posing under the Christmas tree.) Ruff clearly considered that his chief role was to provide companionship, and to protect us against whoever might have rung the doorbell. There were days when Ruff simply lazed around the house, sometimes lying on his back with legs in the air. We had to keep reminding him of the story of the quick brown fox.



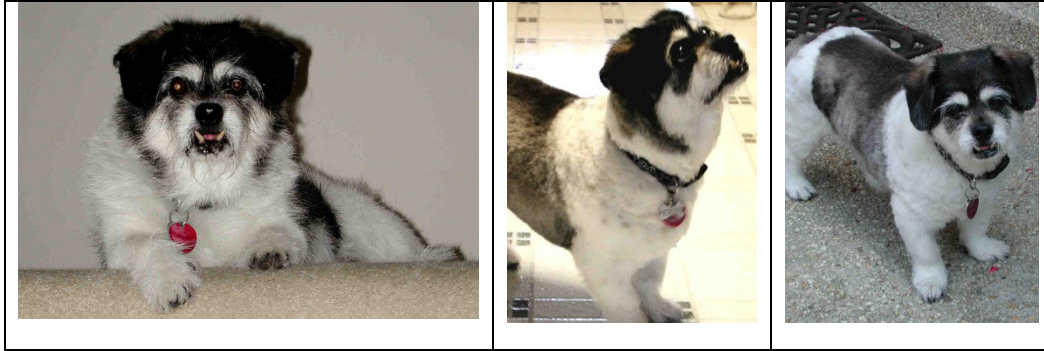


Ruff could not be trained to do anything. He would “help” while one of the humans was busy with some task – by lying still and smelling the breeze. He was not a retriever. He did not fetch. He did not play ball or Frisbee. His only trick was to “shake,” although he did that with his left front leg. His favorite “game” (actually his only game) was to seize one of his toys or a rawhide bone and taunt Neil or Johanna to try to get it. With a lot of growling, he tried to engage in a tug of war, and surprisingly he always won.

As long as his legs still had the strength, Ruff liked to jump up on the sofa. He was a serious “sofa diver,” sticking his nose under the pillows and cushions until he had knocked everything onto the floor, and then looking innocent as though he didn’t know who had caused the mess.

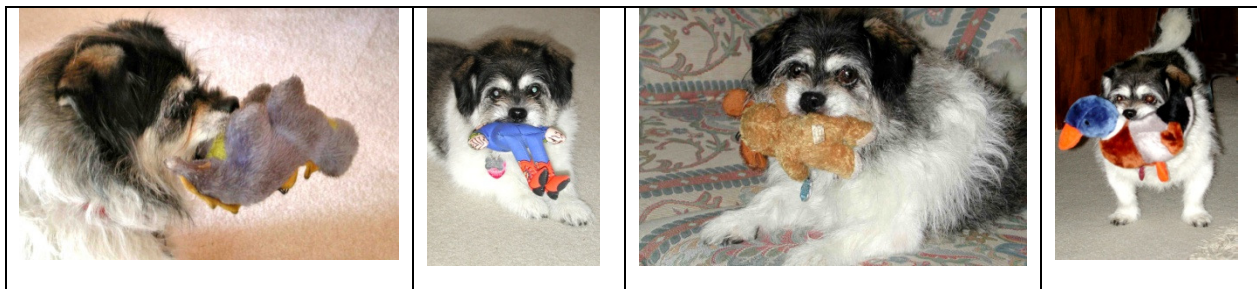
Ruff generally did not complain when he was told, “we’re going out – you stay here,” and as far as we know he didn’t bark or fuss when we were out (at least no one ever complained). But he clearly worried about us. Often we would come home from a movie or restaurant and he would be standing on the landing on the stairs inside the front door, watching for the humans to return. Sometimes he would sit and watch, but on most occasions he was actually standing and waiting. Johanna would say she felt so guilty, hoping he hadn’t been standing there waiting for us for two or three hours. (This is probably what he intended, and after greeting us, he would give us a serious bark-lashing for leaving him alone.)

He was not an independent dog. On the way home from a walk, his leash would often be removed so that he could run down the street ahead of us and get to the door first, but he rarely went more than 10 feet from the humans, continually turning around to ensure the pack was together. Only in his later years did he decide it was safe to leave the humans in the kitchen or dining room while he retired upstairs to his bed. What an independent dog, we would say. Often when he went upstairs ahead of the humans, he would plop down on the top step and patiently wait for the pack to get back together.



Ruff was not a very demanding dog, except on rare occasions. When it was time to eat, he would often grab a squeaky toy and make a lot of noise, tossing the toy in the air, apparently hoping that if he entertained the humans well enough, food would come faster. (This usually didn't work.) One of his occasions for demands was lunchtime. This was not normally a time for food for him, only for the humans, but he thought he also might "need something." He would begin gently, sitting by the dining room table and looking up expectantly. Then he would try brushing against the legs of the humans. Then he would try talking – a roo-roo-roo or a very soft grrr grrr grrr – to get attention. If that didn't work, he would give a snort of exasperation. (Neil thought that Ruff puffed out his cheeks in exhaling to show his feelings, but Johanna insisted that dogs don't have cheeks.) When all else failed, he would ratchet up his repertoire to the Bark, and often this got him something. (How can humans be so dumb?)

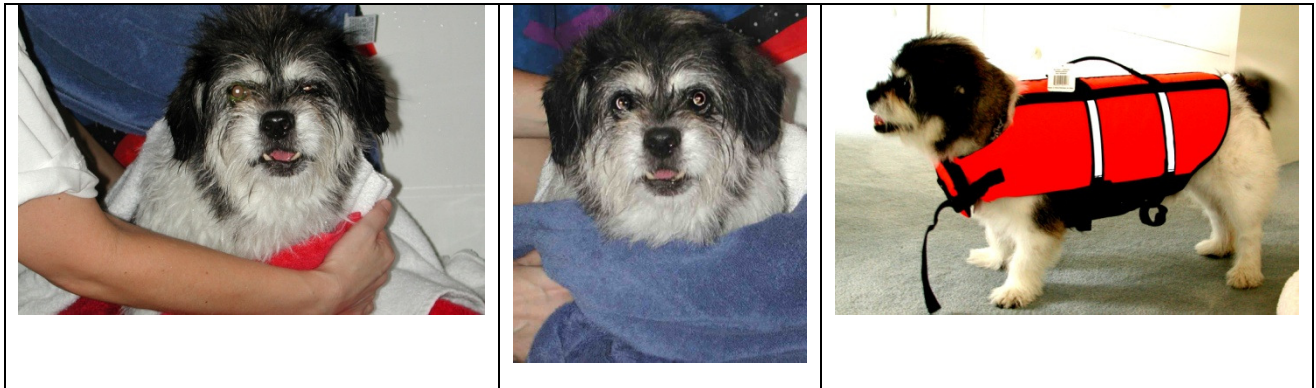
Ruff liked almost all humans, especially those on Twin Holly Lane, but he didn't like other dogs at all, not even his cousins Buster and Lucia (who were attached to Neil's children Gary and Sabrina). Taking Ruff to the dog park was simply out of the question. He would growl his feelings to almost any other dog we met on the street, since he felt safe with a human holding him back. In particular, Ruff didn't like what we came to call the Big Bad Black Dog, who lived on Fenton Street. BBBD was probably as old as Ruff, and he didn't like Ruff any more than Ruff liked him. Luckily, he was behind a chain link fence and the two couldn't get at each other. Every time we walked past this yard, Ruff would be on the alert for the BBBD. Often the dog wouldn't be around. One day as we walked past the yard, Ruff growled and lunged at the dark object just on the other side of the fence where the BBBD often was sleeping, but it turned out this was only an inert large black upside-down flower pot. We think Ruff was embarrassed.



Ruff once got spooked by phone books piled on the street corner for later delivery. No telling what he thought they were. And he *really* got spooked by thunder and lightning. Many were the nights when Johanna had to get a blanket to lie down on the bathroom floor to keep Ruff company while he huddled between the toilet and bathtub, shaking with fear.

He also was in fear on the few occasions when he went to see the vet. Put up on the table for examination, he trembled while he was examined, refused any offered biscuit, and when off the table pulled pulled pulled to get out the door. On each subsequent visit, he would balk just outside the door before we went in. He knew this was not a good place.

One year at the beach in North Carolina, we had a house with a dock extending out over the inland waterway. Neil and Ruff went for a morning walk down on the dock. Ruff apparently got curious about the water, and Neil, who was not looking, suddenly felt a strong tug on the leash and a loud splash, and there was Ruff practicing his doggie paddle. It was quite a struggle to get him around the dock and back on shore. We'd forgotten to put on his life vest. And after that, he clearly needed a bath.



Besides the kibble in his meal dish, Ruff's favorite food was baby carrots – two or three for dessert at meal time, chopped up with his few remaining teeth. Going for walks in the park also was an occasion for carrots, as Ruff learned, and he remembered from walk to walk which place the carrots normally came out of a pocket, and he would stop and look up expectantly. Once we went on a trip and forgot to take the carrots, but we found that apple was an acceptable substitute.

In the fall of 2006, we noticed that Ruff was getting a little slow, and he sometimes stumbled trying to run up the stairs or jump onto a curb. We took him to a vet, who did some tests and told us that Ruff had arthritis in his back, and possibly fused vertebrae, and he urged us to carry Ruff up and down the stairs so that he didn't hurt his back. The vet gave us pain medication but more importantly suggested that we change Ruff's diet. Instead of giving him kibble and processed dog food, he proposed that we cook for him brown rice and chicken, and mix in raw broccoli and Brussels sprouts. The diet worked. Within two months, Ruff was again racing around the house and even up and down the stairs when we couldn't stop him. Ruff was not about to be kept down.

Of course, he didn't like being carried on the stairs. Apparently that was too undignified for a proud dog. He would make lots of angry noise when he was picked up and throughout most of the ride up or down the stairs. Neil got the worst of this one night. He bent to pick up Ruff to take him upstairs to bed, and Ruff apparently thought Neil was trying to get the biscuit in front of his nose. He sank his teeth into Neil's left thumb and forefinger, and we spent several hours the next day in the emergency room of a nearby hospital, while Neil tried to explain to the nurses that this had not been an attack by a wild animal, just a misunderstanding with his favorite dog. Most of the time after that, Neil used thick gloves when picking Ruff up.



In the fall of 2007, Ruff's repeated blood tests showed steadily elevated liver enzymes. (The multiple medications we were giving Mr. Chemical Dog every day apparently weren't working.) X-rays showed stones in his kidney and bladder in addition to his arthritis, and the vet said he had a heart murmur. Also, half of his teeth were gone, and he was a little hard of hearing, especially when he didn't want to respond. Nevertheless, he continued to behave in an almost normal way, except that our walks got shorter and shorter.

Then, Ruff suffered a fall down a straight flight of wooden steps, thump-a-thump, and although he seemed fine immediately afterward, a day later it seems all of his problems had caught up with him and he stopped eating. We took him to the vet on November 27, 2007, and Ruff snored right to the end. He was 15 years and 8 months old.

A good friend and a good dog.

December 16, 2007

Neil A. Boyer