

Roscoe's Story

As told to Jane Wilkinson in 2005

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I have been described as a “real prince of a dog” and I don’t quarrel with that assessment. As of this writing, I am an elderly, gentleman Shar Pei, who alas, became totally blind approximately two years ago. (Los Padres tell me I have *SARD*, for Sudden Accelerated Retinal Deterioration). I know its not fashionable to dwell one’s health, but it should be added that a mysterious side-effect of *SARD* is a ravenous appetite and weight gain. This distressed Los Padres, and they tried several measures to reverse nature’s course. These were unsuccessful. I might point out that my increased girth and appetite concerns me naught, and as to Los Padres’ distress, I suggest that they take a look in a a mirror and address what they see there.

During the months that I was losing my sight, I experienced two emotionally wrenching events, in fact the only two such events (well, there also was the night I spent in a canine jail during my adolescence, but that’s another story) in what had otherwise been an exceptionally placid and comfortable life. The first was the passing, at age 14, of my long-time companion, Portia, a dust-mop of a dog who possessed every bad habit known to dog-kind. By comparison, I was a choir boy and my occasional transgressions were exceptionally well tolerated. Portia, nevertheless, was an amiable companion, especially as she aged and she lost her alpha-status desires.

Portia’s little body was scarcely cold when a Standard Poodle named Milo decided become a member of our household. Los Padres were enthusiastically receptive, and did not so much as consult with me. In fact, they quite erroneously assumed that I would welcome this new companion. Why, I thought, would they think I would want to share my bed, bowl, and family’s affection with a canine whose coat looks like he has a paw permanently affixed to a high voltage device. Worse, they continue to delude themselves: I hear them remarking sometimes that “Roscoe actually seems to like Milo now.” They base this observation on the joy I exhibit when Milo and Pops return from their late afternoon trip to the dog park. It is true, I am very happy when they come home, but the reason is that their outings invariably take place right before my dinner time. I know I won’t get fed until they have safely returned home.

I’ll admit that I take a devilish delight in tormenting Milo. I wisely decided, at the outset, to establish the pecking order in our household, and laid into him several times until, whimpering and crying, he got the idea. The lesson was so well instilled that even now, Milo finds my very presence intimidating. One of my favorite tactics is to sprawl across the hallway to the bedrooms, separating Milo from Los Padres. Rather than simply step over me, as he could easily do, he becomes agitated and whines, cries, barks and carries on like a scared ninny. I silently chuckle at the thought of this young, vigorous and now much larger cur being frightened by an old, blind chap like me. It amazes me that Milo seems to be genuinely fond of me; when he’s really happy, he actually licks my face with considerable enthusiasm. Yeck. I suppose over time, my attitude towards him has softened; it is nice to have the his company sometimes. Still, I’m not about to admit this to Los Padres.



Roscoe “laying down the law” with Milo

The Mexico thing began four winters ago when Los Padres traveled to the Yucatan, Belize and Guatemala, leaving Portia and me to the care of a live-in dogsitter. The fellow wasn’t a bad sort – it was better than a kennel – but he wasn’t around all that much. It was then that Portia’s health started its downward slide. Los Padres, bless their sometimes obtuse hearts, felt badly about leaving us behind, and determined to take us along after that. Frankly, I would have preferred having us all stay home, but Mama J was determined to escape Portland’s rainy winter weather. With my older human brothers now grown, they decided to adjust their work schedules to do some serious traveling.

I fail to understand why Los Padres could not be content to winter in Arizona, like so many do. It certainly would provide relief from the endless sightseeing, something I don’t particularly enjoy, being sightless. Sunning myself for a few months on a patio somewhere in Arizona seems quite ideal to me. Also, there are some definite drawbacks to Mexico. For one thing, the streets of the colonial areas that enchant Los Padres are paved in cobblestones, the curbs tend to be quite high, and the traffic heavy. These characteristics make walking, when one is blind, quite problematic. Although Mama J taught me “up” and “down,” she neglects to tell me whether the step up is three inches or one foot, a considerable difference for someone who measures less than two feet to the withers. And, although she means well, she sometimes forgets to tell me when we are going to ascend or descend a curb or steps, I find myself suddenly doing a header into one of these obstacles. Then there is the trash. Milo is positively embarrassing the way he goes for the trash; he seems unable to distinguish true delicacies, such as a decaying rodent, from ordinary Styrofoam ruffraff.

There’s a positive side of Mexico, to be sure. We are allowed to dine with (or at least beneath) Los Padres in all outdoor seating areas and some restaurants even allow us inside. I tend to receive a great deal of attention from passersby – often more than Milo. I figure this is because to Mexicans, I look more like a real dog: brown, with short straight hair, and modest ears, whereas they don’t know what to make of an oversized heap of black curls with an alligator-style snout, and a pom-pom tail. Fortunately, Milo never sports one of those Poodle show dog coats. I would flatly refuse to be seen with him if he did. Milo does have a singular ability to attract teenage girls in Mexico. For whatever reason, they find him irresistible, and gather around him giggling and cooing. Their hearts turn inside out for me, however, when Mama J tells them that I’m “ciego” (blind). I admit I find their anguished cries of “pobrecito” and gentle petting rather touching.

Roscoe, (1993-2006)