

Lisa Ebeling and Rango



Rango was supposed to be a companion for our six-year-old Bernese Mountain Dog, Ollie, but they never met. Ollie was diagnosed with histiosarcoma cancer in January of 2021, and he died suddenly, one month before we picked up Rango. After Ollie passed, I wasn't even sure I could go through it again with another dog, but my kids talked me into seeing this pudgy little square of a Berner. When I held him in my arms, I was a goner, and my husband gave me a knowing look, understanding that this pup was already ours. For the breeder's organization purposes, the litter was

the "R" litter, and so, our new bundle of fluff needed to have a name beginning with the letter "R." We love camping in Colorado, so we were trying to come up with a place where we've camped that we could name our baby Berner after. We came up with Durango, a favorite spot, but that



didn't adhere to the letter "R" requirement. We added the words, "Rocky Mountain," and we had found the perfect name for our new family member! The kennel name goes first, so his full papered name goes like this: Sandbarr's Rocky Mountain Royal-tea Durango, call name, Rango. A big name for a big floof! His "Gotcha Day," or the day we picked him up from our breeder, was February 14, 2021. From that moment, he's been our little Valentine!

Initially, I had no intention or idea of doing therapy work with Rango. We took him to Puppy Kindergarten, and he was quite enthusiastic, always making everyone laugh and earning the title of "Class Clown." He passed his AKC "Star Puppy" certification with flying colors, and he moved on to pass his AKC "Good Citizenship" certification as well as earning his AKC "Community Canine" certification. We also dabbled in some scent work classes, and although enjoyable, I decided it was more for enrichment for Rango than a pursuit. He does have the nose of a bear, and he enjoys finding his own Easter eggs! At that point, our trainer and I noticed that Rango had a natural affinity for people, and people really seemed taken with him as well, so I asked her about next steps. She pointed me toward Denver Pet Partners, and she explained that



DPP Team of the Month (May 2026)



they are the highest standard in therapy team registration! Well, the rest, as they say, is history, and Rango and I have team tested twice now, passing both times and visiting everywhere from assisted living/memory care facilities, to local colleges in the Denver metro area before finals, to elementary and preschoolers, to the Golden courthouse, to the 911 Dispatch Center in Lakewood as well as Brent's Place on the Anschutz campus.



We have had wonderful experiences everywhere we've gone, but our regular visits to the elderly in assisted living and memory care units are really Rango's sweet spot. He adores being the center of attention, and we have had some magical moments in a few situations where the person has entered hospice care. Once, when a family we've gotten to know invited us into their father's room while he was in his last moments, Rango did his "paws up" trick without me giving the command! Since Rango is not as tiny as a chihuahua (although he thinks he is!), he cannot be placed on a person's lap! When I tell him, "paws up," it means I want him

to place his front paws only on the bed so he can get closer to the person for them to pet. When Rango did this twice without being asked, the family was astounded as it appeared that Rango wanted to be closer to their father. He held very still, got close to his face, and then went to the daughter so that she could give him a hug. Sometimes, it's not the resident that we are there to provide therapy for, but the family, and the daughter stated that she didn't realize how much she needed that hug until Rango was there to provide it. Another time, we were visiting a woman who was



nearing her transition and the daughter announced to her mother that Rango was there for a visit. Again, he did "paws up" so that he could be closer to her and so that she could see him, and for the first time in several days, she opened her eyes and smiled! She then closed her eyes, and her face completely relaxed. She passed the next day, and her daughter said that neither of them would have felt so much peace had Rango not been there. He has been called "my best friend," "the best part of my day," and "the best part of my life" by many residents, and I believe Rango and I get just as much or more out of our visits as do the people we visit.

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In his “downtime,” Rango loves to go hiking and camping, exploring and sniffing to his heart’s content. He keeps me, my husband, and our two adult children warm at night in our family tent, and he’s always up for whatever we are in the mood for, be it snuggle time or an outdoor adventure! He ADORES attending our community’s Doggie Dip Day, where the dogs take over our pool on the last day of the season, and although he’s not with the Labs and Golden Retrievers jumping in the deep end, swimming, and fetching, he’s more about just wanting to play with the other dogs and stand in the baby pool, wading and drinking! He also



loves all things that are about snow, and we attend the Breckenridge Bernese Mountain Dog parade as well as the Golden parade each December. He truly believes the entire parade is for him, and if he could lift his massive paws to do the “queen” wave, I believe he would! His other favorite event is going up to the mountains to hike and cut our family Christmas tree, and the more snow, the better! With their double coat, this breed is truly all about the snow, and when there is snow in our backyard, Rango will toss, eat, and play in it as well as lay in it as though he’s on a beach somewhere! He loves to find his toys underneath the snow and come up with a hidden treasure! His favorite game is keep away, when he has a toy in his mouth that he just knows you are dying for, and his next favorite game is tug, true to the cart pulling nature of his breed. However, his true love is to be wherever people are, especially his family, and he’s most content snuggling right up next to, or on top of, his favorite person...me. All 120 pounds is typically plopped down on top of my lap, and we spend time on the reclining couch or our California King bed “holding hands.” His massive paws are so fun to squeeze, and he doesn’t mind having his paws touched-in fact-he enjoys it! If you stop petting or touching him, he normally paws at you for more! He’s quite a sponge for love and affection, and I wouldn’t have it any other way. He has brought so much comfort and joy to others, and I am so grateful for the day I decided to give one more pup a try. Yes, he provides therapy to many others, but the best therapy he’s provided has been for me!

