

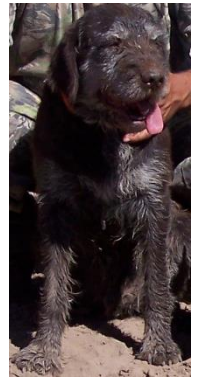
## Recent Ramblings \* ROCKETSHIP

Once upon a time in 1997 a lady called in to a buy, sell, or trade radio program. She was an older lady that was having a hard time curbing a feisty, ambitious 6-month-old wirehair puppy. He was just too much for her. My future father-in-law took down her number and passed it along to my future husband when he got home from work. Trent had been looking for a papered (AKC Registered purebred) German Wirehaired Pointer to train for bird hunting. GWPs were renown for being good family dogs with top-notch pointing instincts on all manner of birds; chukar, pheasants, ducks, geese, quail, grouse... And the price was right: He was free to a good home.



Trigger did find a good home. He was an outside dog with Barnes, Trent's German shorthair that survived a bout of Parvo as a puppy. While Barnes hunted well, he was never as brazenly affectionate as Trigger. Barnes was all business. Trigger was a love that raised hell on birds ...and some feral cats that came around. He was as steady as they came. His points were solid; he knew his job, and he loved every part of it.

Trigger only had teeth on one side of his mouth from trying to chew out of the pen when there was a female-in-heat nearby. When he stood still long enough, you would see him panting with his tongue always hanging out the left side of his mouth.



One Saturday morning in September (9 chukar seasons after Trigger barreled into Trent's life) Trent woke up and looked out the window that faced the dog pen. He saw Barnes, but not Trigger. Trent decided to let the Big Dogs out to run around a bit because they'd been cooped up in the pen more now since Jade was in heat. Trent found his body in the hay just inside the dog house. There were no marks on him from snakes, no bite wounds, no broken bones, no broken skin at all. We never did find out what happened to him. It was a horrible day, between discovering him and burying him out back by the pond. Trent's heart hurt for the unabashed love of that unmannerly pen dog.

I was on the computer a few months later trying to distract myself from the apparent vacancy in my own heart that Trigger had left. I decided the internet was as good a place as any to look for another male wirehair puppy that looked like Trigger; mostly liver with a white "v" on the chest. Trent had commented that he liked how Trigger looked, and I hoped that looks wouldn't be the only thing these 2 dogs would have in common. Mostly I hoped it would help us both get over the shock and hurt of losing Trigger. It took some scouring, but I found one. Papered, liver colored, white "v" on the chest. He was the last pup in the litter. It seemed like a sign.

We picked up the puppy in Utah on our way back from a visit with my family. We arranged to meet the owners at 6AM, and in late December, that's still dark-thirty. I was still packing up our stuff in the hotel when Trent went out in the sub-zero temperatures to warm up the diesel pickup. While he was waiting outside for me, he looked at the sky. It was one of those so-cold-it's-crystal-clear nights. At that moment, what looked to him to be a UFO streaked across the sky. He

couldn't believe his own eyes. His first words to me were, "I think I just saw a UFO!" I had to hear about it the whole way out to pick up this puppy. ...And the whole day in the truck with him and the puppy. ...And listen to him recount the story for the guys when we got home that evening.

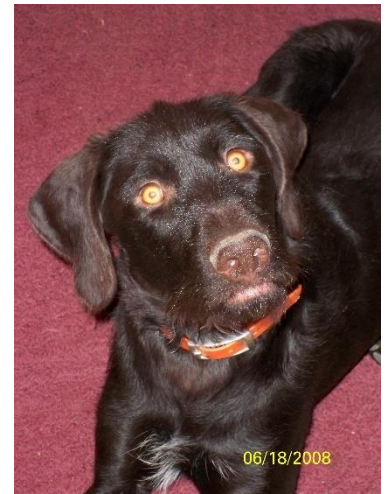
Interspersed into the UFO talk, we did have conversation about what to name the puppy. Trent wanted "Ute" after a Utah mascot. I vetoed that one. We batted around a few other names but hadn't settled on anything. The next morning, our roommate Matt was watching the news and they were talking about a Russian rocket that fell out of the sky yesterday morning and could be seen across several western states...

So, no UFO. No "Ute," either. The puppy became Rocket. RocketSHIP when he was in trouble. One of his favorite things to do when he was happy was "hot laps" around the yard, when he'd get going so fast that his butt would get low to the ground and almost go faster than his front! He was as fast as a Rocketship, that's for sure!

Rocket was not what you would call "breed standard" for GWP's. Rocket's eyes were yellow, which is considered undesirable. (*Really? LOOK at that face!*) His coat was more soft than wiry, which is also undesirable. (*For REAL?!*) But his personality more than made up for his physical attributes considered by some to be not up to breed standard.



Rocket was less exuberant about his love for us than Trigger was. Trigger would jump up in front of your face to make sure he had your undivided attention. Rocket would nose you.



He'd literally walk up and stand right next to you or in front of you, and if you didn't pet him, he'd bonk your leg with his nose until you paid attention to him. If you were crouched down, he'd stick his head in your armpit. If your hand was out, he'd walk under it like an engraved invitation to pet him.

We took him out hunting once before the end of chukar season toward the end of January. He was just 3 months old. He managed to make a good retrieve that day and after that, he'd found his place in the world.

He was leery of who he believed to be strangers; he barked at me every time Trent or I came home for the first two years, and would take until he smelled



us to back it down a notch. His first winter

with us, there was quite a bit of snow, and we had an orange tom cat begging by the patio door for scraps. The tom cat was pretty cool; when we'd feed him, we could pet him. After one bad storm, I let the cat inside to warm up while Rocket was sleeping by the wood stove. The cat curled up on the opposite side of the dog bed

*Tom Cat, kitty slipper, and Rocket*



and fell asleep. I kept my eye on both of them, unsure of what would happen when Rock woke up. But Rocket woke up, looked at the cat, kinda sniffed in that general direction, then went back to sleep.

Sometimes he'd even act like a cat. Rocket liked to play with apples. I don't recall how or why he got the first one, but he would play with an apple on the floor like a cat with a ball of yarn. We called the game "applesauce" because the apple always ended up mushed.

*Rocket and Izzy, 2008*



Rocket's favorite sleeping position was on his back. During the summer months, he'd chew ice cubes and lay on his belly with his legs splayed out, letting his boy parts cool down on the linoleum or tile.

During the winter/ early spring days when we would have the curtains or blinds open to allow the radiant heat to warm the house, Rocket would find the largest sunbeam on the carpet and stretch out until his dark fur got warm.

One hunting season, Trent unloaded the dogs for a chukar hunt up one of the steepest canyons around. He was hunting with his buddy Allan this time, and Allan didn't have any dogs. The day was one in a two-week stretch when we had pogonip. (Pogonip is a weather phenomenon consisting of dense, freezing fog that can trap the cold air in elevation pockets.) During the first hour, Rocket had gotten himself turned around, and in the steep canyons, the echo of Trent's call was leading him farther and farther away. By 11AM, Trent had called me at home: "I lost Rocket."

"What do you mean, you 'lost Rocket?'" Soon, the guys and I had come out and help find Rocket. We hiked all over that mountain for a few hours before the call came across the radio that Allan had found him. Rocket was panicked and frothing at the mouth; relieved to see another human, but unsure if THIS human would lead him back to HIS human. Rock had to be coerced to go with Allan back to the meeting point. We treated Allan to dinner that night, celebrating with rib eye steaks, salad, and garlic bread (and plenty of beer). Rocket got as many pets and loves as he could handle, and soon he was sound asleep next to the woodstove, having had his fill of rib eye scraps from everyone in the room. We were so relieved to have him home. And Trent vowed never to go hunting in the pogonip again.

It was also around this time that Trent had been batting around the idea of investing in GPS dog collars. After that day, the price tag didn't matter so much. Worth every penny when there's a need to find them.

Somewhere along the line, Rock got the nickname "Bobo". There was a cartoon that Trent recalled watching as a kid at his grandparents' house called "Bobo the Rocket" (or something to that effect). So that became Trent's nickname for him and I don't think Rocket understood it either, but he came when he was called... regardless of what he was called.

Rocket was a pouter. If you broke routine and left when he didn't think you should leave, or for as long as he thought you should have been gone, he'd pout. He would curl up into a ball in the furthest reaches of the house and face completely away from you. If you called him and he was still upset with you, he would ignore you and try to face even



more completely away from you. If you kept pursuing him, eventually he'd grudgingly trudge over to you until you made it up to him with love or food scraps.

When the guys would come home from chukar hunting, I would try to have a good, stick-to-your-ribs, midwestern meat-and-potatoes kind of dinner for them. One of my favorites from my childhood was pork roast, sour kraut, and dumplings with brown-sugared carrots. Everything had turned out fabulous on this particular night, and we were all eating in the living room. I got up for seconds and couldn't find the pork roast. It took a minute or so to find the grease spot on the floor where Rocket had utilized his ninja skills to quickly and quietly pull it from the cutting board onto the floor and devour it. His only admission of guilt was one final lick of the chops. Then he just wagged his tail at me.

On one fateful trip to the desert for a deer/chukar hunt, Rocket was given bacon grease on top of his dog food. He loved it of course, but it sent him into a downward spiral that landed him at the vet's office. After checking his bloodwork, it was determined that he had pancreatitis. No more human food treats for Rocket. This is also a genetic trait, so any offspring he sired would likely have it as well.

Rocket did sire 4 litters of pups. We got 2 puppies from those litters: Jade was Trigger's daughter. Rocket bred with Jade's pup Kenai, and we got Rim as pick-of-the-litter. He bred our female Izzy at 8 years old and we kept a liver male, naming him Optimus Primal (Prime).

Rocket was 5 years old when I had our son, Trajan. I consulted friends and read a bit about how to introduce a baby into a dog household. The blanket that Trajan was swaddled in at the hospital was the first thing out of the truck when we arrived home. Rocket met us on the porch and I crouched down to him with the blanket and let him sniff it. He seemed confused but was curious enough to see where I was going with this slightly used, odd-smelling blanket. I brought over the car seat and he took a look. Well, now I had his undivided attention. Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral? I took baby Trajan out and bent low to give Rocket a good snoot-ful of this new addition. Trajan didn't move fast enough to play with Rocket at this stage, so his interest was primarily a loose degree of protection.

After the kids were born, I found myself making chicken soup a lot and perfected the recipe to my liking, starting with browning seasoned chicken thighs, and ending with adding 8 cups of broth. Rocket knew the routine and would wait patiently at the edges of the kitchen (because "out of my kitchen!" was probably the most spoken phrase in his life). After I'd had my fill and plenty for lunches for the rest of the week, I'd pour the last of the soup from my bowl on his dog food and he'd eat every piece and lap up the broth. It was his favorite meal that I'd share with him. ... 2<sup>nd</sup> only to pork roast.

Over time, Rocket grew keenly aware of the mood of the room. As unapologetic as he was about his feelings for who he loved, he was equally sympathetic when we were upset. He would seek out the uneasy tension and gently assert his



Rocket and Rim, January 2011

nose into your lap, or put his head on your arm, or lay down next to you. I think it was these times that I appreciated his “undesirable” soulful yellow eyes and almost-rabbit-soft coat more than ever. He was a great listener.

By now Rocket had just about everything figured out, falling into a comfortable routine of hunting seasons, off seasons, kids, weekdays, weekends, Christmas trees, visitors, and cats. After hunting season, Rocket’s entertainment became cat season. Since sharing his dog bed with the orange tom cat, Rocket was never a cat-killer. He was a cat-chaser, though! Matt told me one day that he saw Rocket sneak up on a cat and Matt thought he was going to kill it. Matt ran to the door to holler at him when Rocket nosed the cat from behind and almost scared it to death! That cat jumped about 6 feet in the air and took off with Rocket right behind! Rocket chased it to the safety of the shed. Like he had to prove he COULD kill every cat if he wanted to. But to date, he’s the only dog we never caught with a cat in his mouth.

Each morning, Rocket’s routine was to run and jump off the deck, run past the dog pen to taunt the outside dogs, circle around the house as fast as he could to the back door to catch the cats off-guard, then watch them scatter and chase them to their safety. Sometimes Rocket would go outside during a time when the cats weren’t expecting him, and he’d sneak around the corner of the house to where we fed them. His back would be ramrod straight and crouching, he would move slowly to where there was a stack of plywood. He knew they would be under it, and he couldn’t reach them. So he would pounce on top of the plywood with his enormous paws and scare them out!

On a particular day in June the year Rocket turned 12, I had a lot to do. Early the next morning the kids and I were leaving to fly out to visit my family. Trajan needed a haircut, he had baseball camp that day that I had to take him to and pick him up from. I had to work, pack for all of us, all while caring for my almost-one-year-old daughter. Amid my flurry of activity, I let the dogs out to go potty. Rim came back. Rocket didn’t, but he was a shy pooper. Each morning, he’d truck about a mile alllllmmmmooost out of sight of the house to poop. No idea why or how that came about. It was just his routine. I was working in my office when I heard Rocket hit the deck on all fours so hard, he slid 4 feet into the door. When I got to the door, he was panting like he’d been chased ...and dripping blood from his hind end.

I called the vet’s office in a panic, and they agreed to see him that day. SOMEHOW, Rocket had a 4” long slice in his butt between his bung and his balls. The vet was amazed that the cut was 3” deep and didn’t go through anything but muscle tissue. The vet stitched the cut at every muscle group, so there were 3 sets of stitches putting him back together.

When we finally made it to Trajan’s haircut, the gal who runs the barber shop took one look at me and pointed to the beer fridge, free to paying customers while they wait. I don’t believe a beer ever tasted so good.

It took me about a month to figure out what had happened:

At first I thought it was a mountain lion, but there weren’t any scratches on his back, just one deep cut. His eyes were getting cloudy with age, and he came from the direction of the back field. My father-in-law had a mirror he’d strapped to a support on his back deck so he could see who was coming up his driveway on the front side of the house. It didn’t take long for that mirror to break, and when he disposed of it, he used the bucket on his tractor to scoop up the pieces

and he dumped them down a 20' embankment that the creek carved out. In the back field. Rocket got too close somehow and slipped down that embankment, managed to get turned around, and ended up bum-first on an edge of glass. After I remembered the glass and checked out the spot, I saw dog tracks, blood, and glass. My father-in-law dumped a load of dirt over the glass after that.

When Rocket was 13, we noticed that he was getting lumps on his testicles. They would look ok, and then worse, and ok, but when they broke open, I took him in. This was the end of June 2019. Trajan made the All-Star team that year, and the tournament was in Alturas, 2 hours north. The boys lost the first game but battled back all the way to the championship game. The first two days, we all drove together as a family. When the boys kept winning, Daren got his trailer and the guys stayed in that to give the boys less vehicle time and more time to rest between games. Both Daren's wife Holly and I had to work, so we would leave around 2 every day to make it up there in time for the game, then come home after eating dinner with the guys. Well, no one included Rocket on this decision to be gone 95% of the week and he was NOT ok with it! After the weekend games, we came home and found the whole border of Trajan's window chewed up. Paint, plaster, and drywall! It had been warm enough to leave a few windows open, Trajan's window was open a smidge, and Rocket wanted OUT.

Because we just can't ever have one crisis at a time, this was also the week I was able to get Rocket scheduled for the testicular cancer surgery. He pulled through just fine, but the vet cautioned, "nothing strenuous for 2 weeks." So no long walks, limited cat-chasing, etc. Well, nobody spoke to Rocket about that either. I thought he could recover in the comfort and quiet of the house with not much going on because we'd be working and at the games.

I came home from Alturas 2 days after his surgery and in my headlights, I saw his yellow eyes shining back at me as he greeted me outside. "Odd," I thought, "I could have sworn I left him in the house. Oh well, I guess I didn't."

Oh no. I left him in the house, all right. Since he tried to chew out of Trajan's open window, I kept all the downstairs windows shut, and only opened the ones upstairs, in the bay window of our master bedroom... where dogs are not allowed.

Since that day Rocket got lost in the pogonip, he's been a bit more than a Pouter when we'd go away. It bordered on more of a panic disorder. It's a rarely seen phenomenon because usually when we're busy, Matt's home, so no big deal. Well, Matt wasn't home. Rocket, because he's spoiled, is permitted to sleep on the landing at the top of the stairs, but that's as close as he's allowed to the master bedroom. We had his dog bed up there and it was his domain; closest to his humans without breaking the rules.

On this day Rocket breached forbidden territory, entered the master bedroom, jumped 3' up on the bay window seat (on which I found claw marks), punched out the screen (which I found lying on the porch roof) with his super-poker nose, and jumped out onto the porch roof. We're not sure from which part of the porch roof he leaped; it's anywhere from 12 to 16 feet to the ground, but he had a cut on his nose from not quite sticking the landing. But he didn't break

anything, and he didn't die. He didn't even tear his stitches! 13 years old, just after cancer surgery, and just one little cut on the nose after a feat of fear-driven acrobatics that would have made a nice audition for Cirque du Soleil.

He wasn't as lucky after another bout with cancer 2 years later. He'd just turned 15 the month before. He went in for surgery in the morning and I picked him up in the afternoon. I pet his groggy head all the way home and followed the vet's instructions with the medicines. Early the next morning, Trent and Trajan headed to Redding for a double-header for travel baseball and Tallyn and I stayed behind to get the house ship-shape.

That morning, Tallyn ate cereal, and I drank my coffee as we watched cartoons in the kitchen. I checked on Rocket about every 5 minutes, petting him and encouraging him to eat. I'd just made some chicken soup, so I poured some broth over a bit of dog food and warmed it up for him so it would be soft and wouldn't hurt going through his system. He ate all of it, drank a bit of water, and slowly made his way over to where the sun was shining on the floor in the living room. Tallyn and I went upstairs to get dressed and when we came down, the room felt empty. Hollow.

My hand flew up to cover my mouth as I saw Rocket lying in the sunbeam, not breathing. I cried, repeating, "No" over and over. *How was I going to tell Trent?*

I ran to get Matt and he ran back with me and he felt it too when he came in the house. Like an invisible black hole. He checked Rocket's neck for a pulse. "He's gone. What do you want to do?"

"We have to dig a hole. I don't want Trent to have to dig a hole. And I have to call Trent."

Then I called Daren and he and Matt moved Rocket to the back of the hunting truck, wrapped up in a blanket. Matt and Daren dug most of the hole and then I carved the edges and tried to make it smooth; nice looking, I guess. I don't think they saw the point in it, but they didn't say a word.

After the hole was dug, we opened our beers. Slowly, Trent's family filed back by the pond and visited with us. Someone brought food and more beers to share. We told stories and laughed and Trent's dad's phrase "Dog Gone" came up as it did every time we buried a dog back by the pond. Not all the tears shed were for Rocket; the healing had begun on other fronts as well.

"It's ridiculous how much they mean to us, isn't it?" I asked Trent's sister Brooke on the way back to the house.

"It sure is."

*3 Generations: Prime (5), Frank (puppy),  
Rocket (14)*



