

Chase

King of the Vizslas



A tribute to my friend

Written by Kenneth Park

Have you ever met that special someone who seemed to have it all ... a commanding presence, superior intelligence, compelling personality, was stunningly handsome, a resolute friend and protector, an instinctive leader ... and before I run out of breath, had the noble bearing of a European Prince? I did and we shared an unwavering bond of love and friendship over seven wonderful years before his health began to fail and our parting became predestined.



Lisa and Chase

When I first saw him, he was sitting aloof from the rest, resplendent in his isolation and savoring the delight of reigning as the only male born a litter of six. Gazing intermittently and approvingly over his sisters, each adorned with a colored identification necktie, he nodded his blessings as they played tug-of-war with their beautiful mother *Fila*. My daughter Lisa and our old friend Gus were along to help welcome this little guy into the family. When it came time to leave, Barrie and Hilarie Brinkworth of [Piroska Kennels](#) presented me with some written and verbal guidance for his future care and extracted a promise that he only ride in the travel kennel unless safely cuddled in a passengers lap.

We readily accepted those terms and set off in our Suburban with Chase happy in Lisa's arms and Gus watching on approvingly. That little man had no idea that he was saying goodbye to the warm and comforting world of his mom and sisters and stepping over the doorsill into his new life at Riverbank Ranch.

Perhaps it was Lisa's cuddling and the motion of the car but for the moment he seemed content to take life as it came.

Not much can compete with the joy and excitement that accompanies the arrival of an eight week old Vizsla puppy. We drove straight to our granddaughter's school for his debut. The kids were at recess and it didn't take long before Chase was being overwhelmed with the affections of Krista, Lexie and a legion of fellow classmates. He seemed nonchalant about the attention and perhaps more than a little confused. As I got to know him better, I learned that he was a socially polite sort of fellow but not disposed to becoming everyone's easy friend. In fact, he matured into a genuine one-man-dog and if the truth be told, I turned into a one-dog-man.

We said our goodbyes and rushed to catch the ferry to Vancouver with Chase safely in his travel kennel, quiet but peering out apprehensively. Although I was keeping my undertaking to Hilarie, I was also bracing for the worst. It wasn't long in coming!

The cacophony of howling covered several octaves and soon reached *stun* volume. “He can’t maintain that decibel level” I assured myself. I was wrong: he had the stamina of an Olympian and the lungs of a Pavarotti. Gus showed all the symptoms of advanced audio fatigue. Staring hard at me with his ears-up, his head angling from side-to-side, he might as well have yelled out “what’s your plan big guy”? I didn’t have one yet but clearly one of us was going to have to surrender some ground and things weren’t looking favorable for my side.

Resolute at first, my determination began to erode when the ticket seller at the ferry terminal shook her head with some disgust before motioning me onto the car deck.



An unhappy convict

Gifted with quick thinking, I decided this would be a great opportunity for my wife Laurie to share some of the heat I was taking and officially meet her new son. When she answered the phone, I pointed my cell in the direction of Chase’s now ear splitting crescendos and casually uttered “meet your new son”. “Sounds to me like he needs a hug” she said. That was all I needed ... out the window went the safety constraints and into my lap came Chase, staring up at me with his piercing blue eyes and we made our way home in peace and sanguinity.

It was to be the first note in the unfinished symphony that was our remarkable relationship. He made up his mind then, that I belonged to him and was not someone to be shared - even with Laurie. It was a bond that never changed during our lives together. He spent countless hours in my lap and it was in that posture that we were both at our happiest.

Adopting Chase into our family must have been helped along by divine intervention. We had been in line for a Piroska puppy for some time when Hilarie let us know that the pickup date was near. Reluctantly, at that point we had to back out due to an unexpected change in our business circumstances. Believe me when I say that leaving the queue is not something one does casually ... the lineup behind you goes over the horizon. Although they generously kept our place on the active list for the next litter, the possibility then arose that Chase, being the only male, might be retained by them for breeding ... a decision which would have dramatically changed the fortunes of both our lives. Happily, providence and the graciousness of the Brinkworths put Chase into our home.

We had just moved on to a small ranch near the little *Village of Chase* in the BC interior. It soon became clear that naming him Chase was “dead-on” appropriate. There didn’t seem to be anything that Chase didn’t chase around Chase!



Every dog needs a tractor

He never gave up his quest to be in my lap or in my tractor. Whatever I was driving he had to be onboard and there were no negotiations. Quite simply he came along or I had the alternative of running him over... and that was his most reasonable position. Living in a very small community it was difficult to find organized opportunities to involve him in *socialization* classes so Laurie would walk him up town to introduce him to people and other dogs. He loved the therapy.

Unintentionally, his people skills got ratcheted up in his second year when we became fully involved in building our new house. Troops of tradesmen arrived daily and Chase soon became the darling of their coffee and lunch breaks. He would entertain them by

seizing a hat or a glove and invite them to retrieve it from him ... a ruse they always fell for. Inevitably, the futility of trying to overcome his speed or trump his agility convinced them that the only way to recover their stolen gear was to pay handsomely in the form of a treat from their lunch box ... a carefully evaluated counter strategy that Chase found well nigh irresistible. It was great fun for him and the tradesmen, but the fun turned into a habit that was reinforced by other visitors and helpers at the ranch. For the rest of his life “coffee break” for the farm staff also meant a tasty ransom for him. Chase became an accomplished beggar!

Missing a more formal socialization program didn’t seem to be a deficit as he inherited a natural affability and well-mannered character from his father *Janos*, *Evelyn Hilbert’s* champion from her kennel in Livermore, California, and the endless attributes and elegance of his mother “Fila”.

Boot camp training began early in Chase’s life ... come, sit, heel, stay and the all powerful “no” commands were drilled into him. It took a lot of wieners to get him onside even though he was a quick study. He found “stay” the most challenging ... particularly when I went out of his sight. I’d hide, wait and as sure as night follows day, his little brown face would peek surreptitiously around the corner of the building looking for me and we’d have to start all over again and again and again!

I believe the most important commands are “come”, “stay” and “no” because these, if unheeded at a critical moment, could mean disaster. Chase knew that no matter what trouble he was currently mixed up in, he could expect an amnesty if he came when called. His alternative, if he chose not to, was me “running him down”. In other words, if he didn’t come to me ... I went to him, often at the risk of a heart attack, but it was a convincing display that made obeying the preferred option. Because of the distances around the ranch a whistle was much better than my voice and it was rare for him to hear this and not heed. I use an authentic London Bobbie’s whistle that threatens my own ear drums when I blow it. I confess to the charge of under training my dogs (a healthy dose of laziness on my part, no doubt) and I readily admit



You damn right I won't

that I may be reasonably accused of spoiling Chase ... but hell, we were even ... he spoiled me right back!

Although “running” the neighbors beef calves became his preferred pastime, it was also a hanging offence. Ranchers don’t cotton to that behavior so I mustered a concerted effort to stop him. Verbal tyranny didn’t work and the fences were no match for his coyote-like abilities to slither under, over or through. I was running out of ideas short of restricting his movements - when it happened. Chase hit an electric range fence on one of his sallies and I could hear his cries well before I saw his little brown body making for home at flank speed with his tail between his legs - literally. Having made that harsh mistake myself I was very aware of his discomfort. I administered the much needed consoling while he regained his composure ... but in the back of my calculating mind I savored the likelihood that we had *Crossed the Rubicon* insofar as his cattle rustling future was concerned. Getting a high voltage lesson is better than getting shot any day of the week. During the rest of his life Chase never again violated a fence and would only, with great caution, cross through one while I held the wires apart and assured him it was good-to-go. Respecting fences is a critical part of one’s basic training in ranching country.

Minor infractions earned mild verbal reproofs, whereas more serious offenses attracted progressively more ominous language and tone, rising to the well understood and respected “you’re not listening to me”. This threat, coupled with a shaking of the scruff of the neck amounted to a rarely used form of capital

punishment. In practice, normal voicing of a request within their understood vocabulary was all that was ever required for the Vizsla ... a breed that is so innately anxious to please.

I could never determine which one of us was the most remorseful after words. There he would be, trotting along beside me, his ears up and that big face looking at me, filled with repentance and apology. This would continue until I relented, dropped to his level and expressed forgiveness with hugs and kind words that confirmed all was well between us. Then, it was his nature to consider the matter resolved and erased



It's my ranch

from memory as though it had never happened. Chase was a *man's-man* and a higher compliment I could not pay him.

Our bond blossomed on a prescription of mutual respect, praise, encouragement and love. I wanted him to enjoy wide opportunities to express his spirit and individuality, roam the fields of Riverbank Ranch as free as the wild coyotes and return from his adventures exhilarated by the joys of simply being alive ... and he did just that. To have experienced the powerful empathy that developed between us was always wonderment for me. For sure, most dogs are fast mappers, but it seemed that he anticipated events and understood my moods well beyond what I would have

expected him to be capable of ... and clearly, I had underestimated him.

Chase was only one of several dogs in my life, all of whom I was deeply devoted to, but our relationship plumbed depths that I had not previously experienced and wouldn't have believed possible between a man and a dog. I can hear myself saying to Laurie, "I wonder if this guy is a reincarnation of one of my beloved long gone grandfathers". That would have explained a lot!

The guiding principle of *do unto your dog as you would have your dog do unto you* is as immutable as the law of gravity and I believe it should set the tone of the relationship. They respond in kind to your treatment and seem to develop in much the same fashion as children do. As their trust in you grows, their learning expands in tandem. In the end, they will be as great as you have convinced them they can be. To me it's just that simple and recent scientific research bears out my long held suspicion that dogs are far more intelligent than we have given them credit for.



Gus – what a lover

Within the year, Chase's old mentor and our dearest friend, Gus had passed away after a long and happy life. A truly magnificent Vizsla in all aspects, he was a wise and loveable companion that graced our family with his presence for thirteen and a half years. Quite the opposite of Chase, Gus was pretty near everyone's friend and would be happy to accept a lap invitation from most people. During our boating days on the coast, Gus would get invitations from other boaters at the marina to join them for their cocktail hour or be invited for walks by people we didn't know. It was a bit worrisome but they claimed to be former Vizsla owners and somehow he was always delivered back to us safe and sound. We learned to live in the shadow of his popularity but not without much envy and outright jealousy.

After recovering from the loneliness of missing Gus, Chase regained his balance and assumed the role of senior dog ... which included such duties as supervising my behavioral training, ranch security, and an active involvement in all farming activities from his favorite perch within the tractor.

It is thrilling to watch a strong young Vizsla hunting, with their speed, agility and noses close to the ground in hound-like fashion ... nothing escapes their detection. Chase could pace a crow across our forty acre fields and to our amazement caught one that was a tad too casual. Equally at home hunting birds, fur bearing animals or running deer, as is their heritage, he could have survived with ease, in much the same manner as the coyotes do off the rodents and rabbits that inhabit the farmlands. Their sophisticated sense of smell is so intense that a field mouse protected by a thick covering of snow becomes an easy snack.

Chase's security domain encompassed the entire ranch and literally no persons or animals entered without his knowledge and approval. It was uncanny how relentlessly vigilant and effective he was in his quest to keep us safe from intruders. Anyone who believes the [Vizsla](#) is not a potentially superior watch dog, never met Chase ... and his determination in this area was both comforting and reassuring.

His lightning fast muzzle strike, devastatingly accurate to a small fraction of an inch must have been guided by a computer well beyond the grasp of human design.

Chase would *whisper-graze* my nose during horse play where a miscalculation would have resulted in a shortened nose for me had he not been so gifted.



A sea dog

He was the ultimate house companion: clean to a fault, quiet unless security dictated, considerate of the house rules and in the few times that an unavoidable incident occurred, it was always at the barrier door through which he had tried so desperately to exit. He would signal his desire to be let out or in with a bark and never paw damaged the doors. He had mastered the *kangaroo* stance to raise himself high enough to make viewing through windows a matter of ease. And to the horror of many he enjoyed a chair at our table but never ate there or abused the privilege of joining us at mealtimes. He loved being vacuumed, wouldn't miss being blow-dried when Laurie was drying her hair and regularly walked into the shower to join me. He was crazy about boating and always lay on the transom where he kept the safety watch on the skiers being towed behind. I often thought that more than anything else, he wanted to be a human.

Chase inherited his mother Fila's habit of expressing great affection by pressing his muzzle between your legs. He would do this from either your front or back and this was his way of saying "I really like you". We were used to this gesture but others to whom he took a fancy, were more often than not, quite discomfited and suspicious of his intentions ... especially the ladies. Poor Chase! Notwithstanding his friendly intentions, he was often rudely rebuffed for them.



Mackie's accepted

When Chase was 18 months old, Laurie decided that he needed a brother. What a good idea ... I was all for it. Enter *Mackie*, a half brother, fresh from Pirooska Kennels who took up residence with us and was soon thriving under the adulation and tutelage of Chase. The decision to have two dogs was a little more than I had bargained for. Barrie had forewarned me "if you don't work to establish a bond with Mackie, he will become Chase's dog". I was unprepared for the powerful force that Chase would wield over Mackie and probably should have done more to mitigate this. Nevertheless I didn't.

Time was in short supply then and it was great to have Chase doing the baby sitting. It wasn't all bad as Mackie absorbed most of Chase's fine qualities, but the bonding issue happened exactly as Barrie had predicted and never really changed during their lives together. They became inseparable comrades, except on those infrequent occasions when Mackie decided to exercise his own ideas of how life on the ranch should be conducted. Facing the inevitable, he soon adjusted, as we all had, to the better lifestyle that accrued in doing it Chase's way.

Over the years of observing our adult Vizslas at play with the newly arrived 2 month old puppies, never have I seen a little one so much as scratched. I have watched in horror as the puppy's little head disappears into the older dogs' maw only to re-emerge later unscathed! Mostly it was the older dogs that took the beating from the puppy's cat-like claws and shark-like teeth. And even mature Vizslas in full joust always seem to retire in a timely manner before sport deteriorates into hostilities.

Chase's personality inclined toward the *alpha male* and disposed him to constantly exercise his leadership strengths and intelligence to dominate other dogs. Mackie was a text book victim but it didn't stop there. Chase just couldn't help himself. A visiting dog would be progressively worn down by the relentless jousting ... it was a gentleman's sport conducted in the best of spirits but with dominance as the goal. It wasn't bullying as much as a matter of subtle pressure; both physical and mental aimed at achieving a gradual acquiescence from the opponent. I always thought I

was getting a fascinating look into the instinctive character qualities that governed canines in the wild where leadership was something earned, fought for and no doubt enjoyed.



Hope you're enjoying my bone

Machiavelli would have applauded Chase's deviousness. He used it with great cunning in achieving important goals such as getting his paws on Mackie's bone. Here's how it worked. Two new knuckle bones would be passed out - one to each.

Chase would immediately take his bone and bury it, return and start the *sting* operation that would relieve the ever gullible Mackie of his bone. Getting his attention away from his bone was the next hurdle and Chase was shameless in using whatever ruse proved effective. The most reliable was the "fake intruder scenario", which Chase initialized by suddenly moving off with much fanfare and barking in response to a fictitious threat. It worked almost every time. Mackie

would abandon his bone and rush to the crime scene ... and that would be the last he saw of his bone till Chase had finished enjoying it. Soon, Chase's buried bone would reappear and a new cycle of deviousness would begin in an effort to deny possession to the other.



Mackie pinned for the count

In their endless pursuit of fun, it was taken for granted that Mackie would be the prey and Chase the victorious hunter. In their early days, Chase was faster but as Mackie matured he grew slightly taller and fleeter of foot. Off they would go across our fields, Mackie feinting left then right just like a running back, Chase dogging him, waiting for that mistaken move that would place Mackie in the perfect position to be attacked. Down they would go, skirmishing until Mackie had been pinned for a

count of three ... then both were up to pause, catch their breath, then the chase would begin all over again until finally Mackie would tire of losing and quit.

Their games provided plenty of exercise for them and endless entertainment for us. One of the more hilarious, *ring-around-the-Lilac* began with one chasing the other around our large Lilac at full gallop. At some unknown signal, they would appear going in the reverse direction and the chased had become the chaser. Then, the chaser would stop dead and wait for the other to appear from around the other side in the *head-on-collision* mode. A screeching halt and then both left in opposite directions, deftly whistling past each other on the new head-on approach ... all as though it had been scripted. Perhaps it was. It was right out of a Disney cartoon!

Chase always approached strange dogs in a sociable posture: tail wagging, a bouncy gait and friendship on his mind. Pleased if he was lucky enough to meet a new friend he would refuse to be intimidated if his reception became ugly. Although he was never in a dog fight, on occasion he had to signal his intent to stand if necessary. Not so with Mackie who would charge toward every strange dog with one eye over his shoulder expecting Chase to be galloping in behind like Tonto to cover him ... and if this backup scenario failed to materialize he would beat a hasty retreat. Mackie's approach to strange dogs was heavily based on the classical comfort one derives from being able to threaten "just wait till you see my big brother"!

Something like that may have been at the bottom of what was surely the worst nightmare I could have imagined. Chase bit our friend and neighbor Pinky, leaving teeth marks across his forearm. I wasn't at the scene of the crime and when told of

the incident by my helper Tim, I instinctively and defensively denied that it was even possible. But self denial was no substitute for the bite marks on Pinky's arm ... it had happened. You can only imagine my distress.



I'm watching you

With hat-in-hand I went to see Pinky immediately and expressed my deep apologies and concern for his well being. "Not to worry" he allowed, "I'll be alright". Then he told me the story. His dog Poncho and Mackie had been running up and down on opposite sides of our common fence line growling and barking at each other. They had done this before. Chase was involved but mainly as an "out rider" more interested in watching than participating.

It's anybody's guess whether this noisy business was a game or a territorial confrontation but the fence guaranteed it couldn't amount to more than sound and fury. Nevertheless, during this bedlam Pinky reached through the fence into our property at ground level to

turn on the irrigation water which he took from our line. Chase must have seen only the motion of his arm slipping through the fence and in the heat of the fracas saw it as an intruding animal and attacked.

Nothing else made any sense.

Whatever the motivation it was a painful and frightening experience for Pinky and a major worry for me. Those kinds of mistakes are serious business. Shortly thereafter Pinky was over visiting and Chase greeted him as a long lost friend as in previous visits. It wasn't long before he was lying beside Pinky on the couch with his head on his knee. Maybe he was apologizing for his dreadful mistake and a more generous forgiveness could only have come from an impressive man like Pinky.

Although he was a consummate watch dog with the Vizsla's strong protective instincts, nothing even close to this had ever happened before. Clearly, under the right provocation an overreaction is possible with even the most stable of dogs and that risk should never be underestimated. Additionally, I suspect that the likelihood of uncharacteristically aggressive behavior grows with the number of dogs involved ... similar to the militant conduct of human gangs. I was certain this was an aberration and was happily vindicated in that nothing like it ever happened again.

Sharing me with Laurie caused confusion and distress for Chase. No matter how covertly undertaken, our embraces were invariably known to him and invited his immediate objections. Frustrated whining was his opening salvo of disapproval after which he'd force his body between us and brow beat us with his enormous powers of speech. Usually his distress and persistence persuaded us to *forget the whole idea!*



I'm going to be okay, don't worry

Perhaps not surprisingly, I discovered within myself an unusually protective concern for his safety which I didn't feel was compulsive but certainly compelling. There are many hazards to a dog's well being around a mechanized farm, from the indifference of visitors driving vehicles (Chase was hit but only slightly hurt in such a case), the fast running river along our property, the misuse of attractive and deadly chemicals such as antifreeze and the inappropriate handling of hazardous harvesting equipment.

For reasons not entirely clear to me, I became a sort of prisoner to my

protectiveness. I flatly refused to leave him unattended and was very reluctant to entrust him to the care of others. It was much easier for me to find a way to take him with me ... we were both happier. Sadly, this preoccupation was to be strangely clairvoyant, only the danger lurked where I least expected it ... within his own body.

Ironically, the most unexpected and potentially devastating threat to Chase's safety occurred at our own hands. We were experimenting with a device that made a very loud bang designed to scare the Starlings from the vineyards when fired. Chase and Mackie were in the vicinity but busy with their own matters of interest. Without thought for them, we test fired the device and even I, who was expecting the bang, was surprised by the earsplitting loudness of its thunderous report.

A short time later, a neighbor came down our driveway and asked if both my dogs were at home. Apparently he had seen what looked like one of our dogs heading at breakneck speed across the busy railway tracks and up toward the town of Chase. A quick check revealed that Chase was missing. It had to be him. With my heart in my mouth I jumped into the pickup and headed for the village bracing for the worst.

I hadn't gone far before I noticed my father's car coming toward us and with



Comrades ... always

immense relief saw Chase sitting in his front seat. Quite by chance Dad was in town and saw him running down the main street amidst the traffic. Chase then moved off onto the sidewalk and began walking aimlessly alongside a woman and her children. Uncertain if was Chase, Dad called to him and he came immediately. He was in a dreadful state: white froth around his mouth, panting heavily and obviously much disoriented. Panic-struck, he had run frantically from the unexpected loud noise, off the ranch and into extreme danger. It was a thoughtless mistake on our part and I can't recall a more unnerving experience

during my life with him. To be sure, we got off cheaply!

Over the next four years our lives were saturated with the wholesome joy of ranching, mutual love and respect, good health and an earnest wish for the continuation of our licentious happiness.

But the dark clouds gathering overhead broodingly foreshadowed the portentous change in our fortunes that was now afoot.

In June 2006 I took Chase to our family veterinarian, Dr Carmel, for his annual checkup. All seemed well except for a *dime-sized* sore on his right thigh about two or three inches from his tail. It had scabbed over leading to the assumption it was an injury suffered during rough play with Mackie and was now in the healing process. I recall noticing the same sore later that summer. By then the scab was gone and it looked as though it had healed leaving a pinkish skin, without any hair re-growth. The absence of hair seemed odd, but I didn't connect the dots.

By mid December I noticed Chase licking the same area and closer examination revealed ulceration. Near panic was my first reaction. What injury doesn't heal in six months? We returned him to our veterinarian clinic on December 27, 2006 and an associate doctor opined that it didn't look like cancer. However, he took a fine needle aspiration for microscopic examination and said he would phone us with the results. He felt a biopsy or perhaps an operation to remove it may be needed.

We didn't hear back and assumed no news was good news. It wasn't!

By mid January 2007 this ulceration had worsened, and as Dr Carmel was away we waited for him to return to have it surgically removed on February 14, 2007. Laurie returned with Chase the day of the surgery with tears streaming down her face. Dr Carmel advised her that the [surgery](#) revealed an aggressive Mast Cell Cancer which he was not able to fully remove as it had spread to his tail and anal area.

A few weeks later, Dr Carmel's diagnosis was reinforced by the pathology report indicating "*an incompletely re-sectioned Grade 2 Mast Cell Cancer*". Was it a death sentence? Yes! Dr Carmel confirmed there was no further meaningful treatment he could provide and that the tumor would re-grow within a few weeks.



WSU Veterinary Hospital

Desperate, I began researching MCT on the internet and discovered that Radiotherapy was an effective treatment in certain circumstances. About the same time Dr Carmel phoned to say his investigations led him to a veterinary Oncologist in Calgary who felt that Radiotherapy was indeed a very promising treatment against grade 2 MCT's and suggested contacting the University of Saskatchewan. My research indicated that the [Veterinary Hospital](#) at Washington State University could also provide radiotherapy and Dr Carmel agreed to contact both. WSU's oncology

department wanted no time wasted and would take us almost immediately. We arranged to have Mackie cared for and set off for Pullman, Washington on March 26, 2007 ... a ten hour drive by car.

Next morning, at the hospital on the University grounds we were greeted by Shelley,



Shelley and Betsy

a fourth year veterinary student who would graduate two months later as a veterinarian. She began Chase's "tumor staging" with a comprehensive interrogation of his medical history followed by a thorough physical examination. Next we met Dr Rance Sellon, a specialist in Internal Medicine, who conducted his own physical examination and then set out for us the clinical testing regimen that Chase would undergo in order to accurately determine the current state of his cancer. These tests included ultrasound, organ aspirations, X-rays, blood panel, bone marrow analysis and because Dr Sellon had detected a heart murmur, he would also

receive a heart-echo. Based on the results of this complete *work-up* they would be able to determine his validity as a candidate for the radiation treatments. If any metastasis to his vital organs was found, it was unlikely that he would be accepted. Although we had some misgivings about putting Chase through lengthy *Radiotherapy* treatments, we had an even greater fear of not being accepted due to the metastasis of the cancer into his vital organs.

All tests were completed that afternoon and Chase was declared fit to proceed under the competent care of Betsy Wheeler, technician and Dr Fidel, the Oncologist. He was to receive eighteen treatments, one each weekday, with the weekends off. Using a fast acting gas with no anesthetic hang-over, each session would be completed in forty five minutes. His first treatment would be the next morning March 28, 2007.



Lucas House

dedication to their dog Lucas who died of cancer. It was our very good fortune to meet these wonderful people.

Chase could have been boarded at the hospital but we couldn't face leaving him on his own for the month.

Laurie decided to stay with her boy while I returned to look after Mackie and tend to the ranch business. Dr Sellon referred us to Jeff and Carmel Travis who rented us a suite in their home near Pullman which they make available to people who need pet friendly accommodation while their pet is being treated at the hospital. It's called [Lucas House](#) in



Carmel Travis

Laurie and Chase settled in and I flew back to the ranch that afternoon. Lucas House has wireless Internet available so we put together a laptop computer and digital camera to help us keep in regular contact. Pullman is located smack in the middle of the large wheat farms that dominate the low rolling hill country, known as The Palouse, in the south eastern corner of Washington State. With less than an hour devoted to Chase's treatments the two of them spent the rest of the day discovering the local countryside and strengthening a bond between them that heretofore had been monopolized by me. Being the beneficiary of

many e-mailed pictures of their adventures roaming *The Palouse* I almost felt I was with them. We spoke each afternoon using the Travis's house phone as cell phone charges were prohibitive.

It wasn't long before Laurie and Chase became expert tour guides ... advising real



tourists they'd meet "to go there and see that". Amazingly, one such couple, spotting Chase as a Vizsla asked if he was from Piroska Kennels, as they were sure they had seen a picture of him chasing Mackie in the snow on the kennel's website. It was in fact our boy's picture and that night's e-mail exchange was entitled "It's a small world after all". They walked, hiked and visited the surrounding countryside and despite our worry it was a rare and precious time for both of them.

The Palouse

Thirteen treatments and two and one half weeks later all seemed to be going well. I was going to Pullman to bring them home in a week. The Travis's were arranging a farewell celebration dinner for Chase and we were floating on air.

Then it happened ... Laurie's phone call was earlier than scheduled that afternoon ... Chase was trouble. She was at Lucas House with Chase who was lying on the bed wheezing and in obvious distress. She put the telephone near him and I could hear the unmistakable sounds of his labored breathing. His demeanor was wretched. Dr Sellon had seen him earlier in the day and could find nothing definitive but gave Laurie his personal phone number and requested that he be contacted if his situation deteriorated. We agreed that he should be taken back to the hospital immediately. I



A fellow patient

would arrange for Mackie's care and catch the next available flight to Pullman. We'll never forget that ominous day, Friday, April 13th.

Although it was after hours, the hospital remains open for emergencies and Chase was soon in the capable hands of Dr Barry, an emergency specialist who toiled over him for several hours. Carmel Travis had joined Laurie at the hospital to bolster her courage and help in any way she could.

They sat together in the waiting room and worried.

Later that evening, Dr Barry informed them that Chase had pneumonia probably caused by inhaling some vomited fluid during the morning's radiation treatment. In addition, an ultrasound scan indicated a new mass development around a lymph gland that was immediately below the site of his first tumor. Dr Barry had biopsied the mass and it was already being analyzed in the hospital's pathology laboratory. Chase was responding to treatment but would remain over night in the hospital. Laurie and Carmel returned to Lucas House late that evening and worried through the rest of the night.

I arrived at the Spokane airport two days later, apprehensive but determined to show a bold face. Laurie and Chase both greeted me lovingly. Chase seemed to have recovered surprisingly well from the pneumonia that had knocked him flat but the other, more worrisome matter remained with him. He seemed a little fragile.

Laurie brought me up-to-date on his prognosis which was incomplete pending the results of the pathology test. We were resigned to the inevitability that he had suffered a major setback and tried desperately to fight off the worry that silently consumed us. We didn't want to hear the news ... it could only be bad.



We arrived at the hospital on the Monday morning and met with Dr Sellon who had seen the pathology slide but not the formal report. He confirmed our worst suspicions with his appraisal that the mast cell cancer had metastasized into his lymph gland directly below his original tumor. The oncology department knew that the behavior of mast cell cancer was not easy to forecast and that the risk of this kind of setback was always a possibility, however unlikely it had seemed just three weeks earlier.

My boy is in trouble

It was in fact a clinical first and it was little comfort to learn that such a rapid metastasis under similar circumstances had never before happened in the hospital's history.

What now? Could this new tumor be surgically removed before it metastasized further? Dr Sellon said "Yes, it was not a difficult surgery". Should we finish the rest of the radiation treatments? Again "Yes", it was the best hope for containment of the initial tumor at the original site. We had suffered a significant setback and his prospects for a remission of the cancer were now unpredictable.

So with heavy hearts we marked time while our little brown prince finished his radiation treatments and underwent surgery on the following Thursday. We stayed over Friday to give him time to recover enough for the trip home Saturday, April 21st. We had said our farewells to Dr Sellon and the staff and looked forward to hearing from him as soon as the pathology report from the surgery was available. Then a decision could be made on what further treatment was possible.



Back together

It was good to get back to the ranch. We were all together again and Mackie and Chase made up for lost time with much love and affection and endless *cracker dog*.

Even though he was still recovering from his surgery and radiation treatments, it was business as usual. Chase resumed command and for the time being we felt that maybe, just maybe God might look upon our little family with some needed favor.

It was not to be ... depressingly, the news just got worse. Dr Sellon confirmed what we already knew but added a much more frightening dimension. The pathology report indicated a “small but clean surgical margin” but ominously the “MCT had progressed from a Grade 2 to a Grade 3”. This blow virtually assured the probability of further metastasis and a “gloomy” outlook for his future.

The medical treatment that he recommended was chemotherapy. He felt that Chase would tolerate it well, that it had proved effective in prolonging life with good quality in many cases and could be discontinued at any time if we felt it was deemed not to be in his best interests. Although it was not an optimistic prognosis he suggested it was our best medical hope.



Dr Rance Sellon

The thought of chemotherapy, which involves the use of indiscriminate cell destroying drugs, was not appealing but we were not about to *jump ship* on his advice. In abject desperation we consented. Dr Sellon contacted Dr Carmel with details of the treatment and the required toxicity testing that had to be done regularly. Chase had his first chemotherapy treatment on May 2nd.

By now, Chase had recovered from the surgery and radiotherapy and was very much himself. He cavorted around

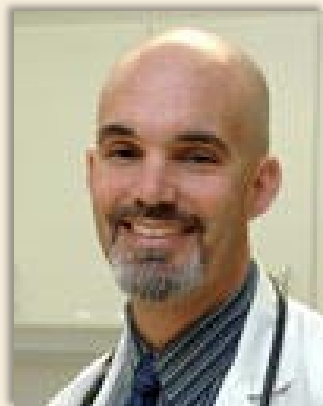
the ranch with Mackie and seemed to be enjoying every moment of his life. We enjoyed it with him, grateful for these happy times and looking forward to a reprieve from the lock-step march of bad luck. As Dr Sellon had predicted, Chase seemed to shuck-off any potential side effects from the chemo. However, he was underwhelmed by the frequent visits to Dr Carmel for the countless injections necessary to administer the drugs and ensure that toxicity was at safe levels in his system. He always entered the clinic bravely but once inside his body was shaking and he sought protection between my legs. It was heart wrenching.

We were drifting into the *dog days of summer* and we had enjoyed over two months without any signs of further trouble. We began to think positively about his future. He continued to take joy in an active life and his coat was finally growing back where it had been shaved at the hospital – this seemed to us a milestone of progress.

Five months had passed since his initial surgery when we noticed what looked like a rash developing on his stomach. Dr Carmel wasn't sure what it was but wanted it monitored for change. It got worse and by July 2007 had grown into a patchwork of ugly lesions. An aspiration was taken and sent to be checked by a pathologist.

It was back. The chemo had failed to prevent the cancer from spreading ... we braced for the horrible inevitability of losing him but still, I could not give up.

I sent e-mailed Dr Sellon digital pictures of the lesions and confirmed the pathology results. He was low on hope and doubtful about any further medical intervention. I was down to begging for miracles and when I asked if he had any left in his black bag, he hesitated and then offered to discuss Chase's case with Dr Jeff Bryan, an Oncologist from Missouri who had just joined the WSU staff.



Dr Jeff Bryan

Dr Bryan confirmed we were at the end of the line of reliable and tested medical solutions but raised the possibility of trying an untested medical treatment. It was a drug which had proved miraculous in the treatment of certain forms of Leukemia in humans. This drug, called *Gleevec* ... a kinase inhibitor, had been found effective against certain tumors in humans that were “shirt-tail cousins” of Mast Cell tumors. And to bring this into relativity for Chase, he had attended a seminar where researchers from a veterinary hospital in Japan had reported a promising success ratio in tumor regression in a small but representative number of dogs afflicted with MCT

whom they had treated with Gleevec. Dr Bryan made no bones about it ... it was an extremely long shot!

As I understood it, kinase inhibitors are only effective against certain “targeted” cell mutations which are causing the cancer. Unlike chemotherapy which destroys all cells, the inhibitors attach to the mutant cells and prevent them from reproducing which serves to put the cancer into remission. Research data indicates that only 20% of dogs with MCT would be candidates for Kinase inhibitor treatment ... and these would be the lucky ones whose cancers would respond to the inhibitor drugs.

Once again we faced the dilemma ... do nothing and lose Chase, likely in the very near future due to the malignancy of his cancer. Laurie and I agreed that we would never subject Chase to any unnecessary discomfort or unreasonable risk but would consider any well-thought-out and intelligent options that would help him survive. In these circumstances we were satisfied that there would be very little downside to Chase’s quality of life in attempting this untested treatment.



MCT on August 12th

We knew it would be repressively expensive, that it required constant blood monitoring but mercifully, it was easily and painlessly administered in tablet form.

We decided to go and ordered the Gleevec from the head pharmacist, Dan Wildeman, at the Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops while clinging to Cicero’s famous words “where there’s life there’s hope”. We appreciated the kind offer of Drs Sellon and Bryan’s to counsel us within the limited medical knowledge available for Gleevec as a therapy for canine MCT. We also reconciled ourselves to the lonely realization that we were assuming the role of Dr God ... an awesome responsibility without the comfort of knowledge. We gave



MCT on August 18th

Chase the first tablets on the morning of Sunday, August 12th. Dr Carmel, a gifted man with a bent for succinct comment allowed that “we will see results soon or it will have been no different than giving Chase expensive water”.

I took digital pictures of the lesions on Chase’s stomach that day for comparison purposes. We continued with the daily dosage of Gleevec and six days later on Saturday August 19th we decided, with apprehension, to

take off our blindfolds and examine the tumor area. At first we just looked ... then we looked at each other, speechless. The view that greeted us defied credibility. The tumor's lesions had regressed from a menacing swollen redness to a pink rash. We could not contain ourselves. We hugged Chase and each other with triumphal joy. E-mails with before and after pictures were fired off to WSU and Dr Carmel. Our fortunes were finally ascending ... had we found the magic bullet? The doctors responded with uncharacteristic buoyancy ... Dr Bryan e-mailed "That's exactly what we wanted to see". Dr Carmel paraded the pictures around his clinic. It was undoubtedly the most remarkable turn of medical fortune seen in a long time by all those who had been involved with Chase's care. I doubt that any of us could really believe our eyes, but the pictures said it all.

We continued the Gleevec treatment through September and everything including his clinical monitoring was going well. Now ... if only the remainder of the tumor would do us the courtesy of disappearing entirely, we could begin to breathe easier.

However, in the latter days of September the tumor started to seesaw ... seemingly better one day and slightly worse the next. By the first week in October we suspected we might be losing ground against it. Was this really happening or were we just suffering battle fatigue? The daily pictures were beginning to confirm our gathering fears. The hoped for remission of this dreaded nightmare appeared to be slipping through our fingers.

Although Chase seemed to be holding his own, staying active and happy as the month wore on, another cruel and more devastating blow was about to be delivered. In mid October another tumor erupted on the flank opposite the original tumor. We realized our struggle was ending. Within days his system began to fail him. He would rally temporarily and then continue to lose ground. He became very sick for the first time since this nightmare began and my own health seemed to be unraveling in a sympathetic parallel.

We clung to straws ... he might regain his strength, but in fact his magnificent fight for life was in its final phase ... and we were powerless to save him. To witness this great dog finally falter, after standing for so long, was a grievous blow ... our agony was crushing. Chase had faced his formidable challenges so stoically and with such courage that both we and the doctors were indelibly awed. We learned from him the real meaning of courage and now, our own was about to be confronted with a soul-destroying intensity. We knew we would soon have to face doing the un-doable.

If I could have run away, I would have admitted my cowardice and done so ... but now it was time for me to show my courage as he had so often done ... I would stand and I would suffer and I would never let him down.

All too soon, with his body down but his head still held high, he let us know that he could no longer continue his reign over Riverbank Ranch.

On October 23, 2007 he passed away with us comforting him and bearing witness to the horrible finality of his death. We were overwhelmed by a devastating sadness.



Chase

2000 - 2007

Our little brown prince ... and King of the Vizslas

Afterword

We are proud of our efforts to save Chase's life. He would have laid his life down for us. It is difficult not to let the sadness of his early passing cast a long shadow over the seven wonderful years we spent together as a family. Those blissful days were a treasure trove of happiness and flat-out good times for us all. I believe Chase would be the first to remind us that although he didn't live long in years, he lived a lifetime of happiness.

I wrote this tribute in the hope that I could capture and portray the love and admiration we felt for that little Vizsla, who so enriched our lives during his brief, but meaningful stay on earth. I also wanted to commemorate his life and recognize his gallant fight against a common and lethal form of cancer that plagues many dogs.

His inspiringly successful treatment with Gleevec adds impetus to the need for ongoing research into the use of kinase inhibiting drugs against canine MCT. In the latter part of Chase's life, we had to assume the role of *Dr God* as there was no well-tread medical path for us to follow. We learned in the process and some advice for those who may face similar challenges is offered by clicking on the Dr God link.

Enough thanks cannot be heaped upon the dedicated professionals at WSU Veterinary Hospital. They took us in, they did their very best for Chase and they stuck with him long after he had left their impressive facilities in Pullman Washington.

As I wrote to Warwick Bayly, the Dean of the Veterinarian College ... "for us, WSU was an unforgettable experience in professional care combined with large doses of warmth and friendliness ... a comforting combination during those difficult times".

WSU's Veterinary students, along with the faculty and staff of the Oncology group made a generous monetary donation to the *Pet Memorial Program* in Chase's honor. We salute them and encourage you to support this valuable Veterinary educational and research fund.

It would be wrong to close without expressing our praise and gratitude for our family veterinarian Dr J-F Carmel. He was the medical foot soldier in this saga and deserves great credit for his concern and care during our struggle. It fell to him to end Chase's suffering after trying so hard to save him.

Ken, Laurie and Mackie Park
Riverbank Ranch, Chase, BC
January 31, 2008