

# Poncho

by Teri Saya



Born a pure-bred short legged Jack Russell Terrier (JRT), Poncho was a handsome and complex dog. He was the essence of life in a small package. He indelibly touched our hearts....This is his story.

\*\*\*

A pair of young college students bought the puppy from a breeder and took him home to their small apartment. The initial excitement of having a cute, energetic little puppy around wore off after a couple of months. Poncho was left alone in the apartment most of the time while his owners went to work and college. Out of loneliness, fear, and frustration, Poncho failed to be housebroken and began shredding everything he could get his teeth into. On the rare occasions that he came into contact with other dogs, he was aggressive, especially toward the smaller breeds. He was crated and finally returned to the breeder when the students realized they had no time or patience for him. By this time, he was a year old, fearful, hesitant, and depressed. The sparkle in his soft brown eyes had dulled.

Art Sanchez, a Vietnam Veteran, was looking for a small companion dog at the suggestion of a friend who had acquired a sweet, little female JRT and had found out that her little brother was now available. He contacted the breeders, and they e-mailed him a photo of Poncho. Art recognized the lost, lonely look in this dog's eyes. He had endured those very same feelings after returning from Vietnam three decades earlier. He arranged to pick Poncho up four days later.

It was mid-afternoon when Art arrived at the breeder's estate. It was a big place with outdoor runs, lots of toys and healthy, happy looking Jack Russell Terriers running every which way. The breeder was a large, jolly woman who gave Art the full tour of her estate while talking exuberantly about the advantages of owning a JRT. Poncho had been sequestered to his own area and was curled up on a little bed in the corner. Art got down on one knee and gently began calling his name, coaxing him out with a cookie. Poncho hesitantly came out of his corner, took the cookie, laid it down, and then licked Art's hand.

By the time Art had made the transaction with the breeder the sunny weather had turned grey. It was a four hour drive home. The wind and rain buffeted the small truck while Poncho, wrapped in a blanket, shivered and pushed his nose further into Art's down jacket. It was dark and still raining hard when they arrived at their destination, a large house on the coast surrounded by redwoods. That night Poncho would not eat and would not sleep in the new doggie bed, but burrowed under the covers and slept in his new owner's bed. He was frightened of the storm and wasn't about to be left alone again.

\*\*\*

---

The next morning, Poncho was introduced to his new housemates. Besides Art, the other occupants of this house included, his sister (the before mentioned female JRT), an older Black Labrador, a big grey cat, and a family of 2 adults and 2 teenaged boys. This was a full house and Poncho was suddenly the center of attention. It did not take him long to figure out he wanted to be the dominant male of this pack.

Poncho proceeded to make his presence known and having constant interaction with this new pack, he learned many new things...do his *business* outside, steal all the toys from the other dogs, chase the cat without getting scratched, herd the teenagers, snag a hotdog on the run from a plate too low, swim with the old Labrador, outrace the other JRT, and ride shotgun in the car. Poncho refused, however, to play fetch, He figured it was beneath his status to do such a ridiculous thing.

Once a week, Art would give Poncho a bath. With an indignant, stiff posture, Poncho would tolerate the bath and teeth cleaning, then after being towel dried, would run torpedo style around the house in circles, and like a tornado, the rest of the dogs would follow in his wake until they were all panting and exhausted. Poncho Ponchito Sanchez, as was his official name, became a very busy, happy little guy and everyone loved him.

\*\*\*

Art was working as an office manager and technician for an internet company. Poncho stayed with Art during the day in the office and greeted customers. He still had an over exuberance with what he considered to be "rodents" which included small pocket dogs such as Chihuahuas, Pekinese, Pomeranians, etc. While the owners would hold their precious pooches as high as they could, Poncho was fast and jumped quickly, he sometimes would land with tufts of fur in his teeth. Art stayed alert to anyone who came in with their tiny dogs and tried to keep Poncho at bay. However, Poncho seemed to know the difference between adult and baby "rodents" and was extremely gentle with tiny puppies.....go figure.

One customer had a small Dachshund and the first time Art went to his house to install internet equipment Poncho jumped out of the truck before he could catch him and streaked directly at her. Art was terrified that Poncho intended to hurt this poor little dog and tried to stop him, but he was too fast. Amazingly, Poncho screeched to a halt just short of his target and instead of nipping, he sniffed her and wagged his tail. It turned out this Dachshund was elderly and blind. Poncho was very gentle with her, and she seemed to like him too. On subsequent visits, they would play together until time to go.

When Art had to go out into the field to repair or install equipment, it became an adventure! Some of the equipment was located on towers that stood out in remote fields, and while Art was doing his job, Poncho was digging furiously for the ever-evasive gopher.

In one particular field, there was a tower with a glitchy piece of equipment that Art had to take care of often. In that field lived a large, gentle, Clydesdale horse named Comet who Poncho immediately tried to herd. Comet tolerated this tiny, barking thing nipping at his heels and then began to play. It became a ritual of stomping the ground while Poncho ran wildly around him barking, then with a quick whip of his head, Comet would roll Poncho over with his nose. Which would of course ensue more frantic barking and nipping until finally exhausted, Poncho would lay down in the shade next to the water trough and Comet would saunter over, take a long drink and dribble all over Poncho's head. They became best friends.

\*\*\*

---

When Poncho would meet new people or animals, he seemed to make a conscious decision that he loved them, liked them, or barely tolerated them and inexplicably stuck to that decision. One dog he never liked was a long legged female boxer named Roxy. She belonged to Angelica, a friend of Arts whom Poncho did not seem to care for either. One day, Angelica brought Roxy over to meet Poncho. She was a big, floppy, rambunctious puppy at the time and Poncho refused to play with her and completely ignored her.

Art took Poncho with him for visits at Angelica's place hoping he would have a change of heart, but he never warmed up to Roxy or her owner. One evening Art drove up the driveway of Angelica's house and walked up to the doorstep. Poncho stopped short when he realized where he was, turned around and began walking down the driveway past the truck toward the road. Art called to him, and he looked back over his shoulder as if to say, "If you don't take me home now, I'm walking home myself." Art never took Poncho back to Angelica's again.

\*\*\*

Poncho had just turned six years old, and one evening while watching T.V., he was in his usual spot on Arts lap when Art noticed Poncho's belly seemed unusually taught, and when he began to rub it Poncho winced in pain. The next morning Art took him to the veterinarian. After an exam and much blood work, the veterinarian told him it was cancer of the lymph nodes. He would not survive it for long. Art was stunned.

Art brought Poncho home with the medicine the doctor had prescribed and once a week took him back for more blood tests and chemotherapy. He hoped beyond hope Poncho would at least survive the year. The whole family tried to help Poncho continue his routine, but the deterioration was apparent. He lost weight, lost all interest in play, and slept more often than not. The medications worked less and less until Poncho was in too much pain to allow. Exactly six weeks after the diagnosis of cancer, Art took Poncho to the vet, and reluctantly, made the decision to him put to *sleep*. Those last moments were excruciating for Art. He held Poncho close and told him he was the best dog ever. As he slowly slipped away, Poncho licked Art's hand and looked up into his eyes as if to say, "You were the best friend ever."

----- END -----



(1,547 words)

---