

ABOUT REX

by
Peter Berry



Portrait of Rex by Richard Hardy, 2013

Preamble

Whilst in Hong Kong, I've owned two Boxers (completely mad), one Pointer and two building site mutts but none like Rex, who, through his indefatigable, all-embracing good cheer and friendliness, brings a particular joy to my life, (and, I like to think, to others as well).

There is good and not so good in just about all living things. Rex is no exception. It will be much quicker to get to the meat of Rex's story if I first deal with his bad habits, well, his one bad habit and, quoting Nabokov (I think), "everyone should cultivate one vice and let one's virtues grow about it" and heaven help us, Rex's one vice is very well cultivated, namely his sudden, albeit occasional, sharply moderated, explosive, brain shattering, eardrum bursting, pacemaker stopping bark that bounces off the concrete walls of our flat, delivering both shock and pain in equal amounts.

Admittedly, this is usually in defence of the home. Someone slamming the steel front door will do it (a particular hate) but it often arises from seemingly nowhere, no doubt because dogs have far better hearing than humans. This barking is apparently "hard-wired" into dogs, so nothing can stop it, except, in Rex's case, a strong word or four from his "mother", that being my lovely bride Ira, which makes both Rex and I very lucky indeed. (Yes, I know, a deeply grovelling genuflection on my part, but I don't see where any contrary argument is coming from, so it can only be to the good.)



Rex with Waistcoat

I try to mitigate the noise by shying soft toys in Rex's direction and, if he notices, he will usually stop and come to me to say sorry (a quick lick on my hand).

Oddly, Rex is the only dog I have come cross that is not afraid of the noise made by a vacuum cleaner. He is in fact totally indifferent to it. He has to be asked to move (please say "please"). He will though bark back at particularly loud thunder.

Turning to the good things, Rex's good habits are pretty much everything else he does, or more accurately, doesn't do. Let me schedule the ways.

What Rex Doesn't Do

- steal food (he can walk within 10mm of a piece of cheese and not even attempt a quick lick) and is happy to share his meal with dog visitors,
- sit on the furniture (he has his own bed and don't forget it) BUT see below for recent Sanka developments and pic,
- grab/chew shoes and the like, unless Rex judges the item to have been abandoned by the (now previous) owner (ask Caroline about this propensity, she temporarily lost some clothing when, very kindly, taking Rex for a swim,
- (mostly) jump up on people unless so invited by one or two of his human friends (you know who you are) and
- most importantly (I think we all agree) doing his "business" around the village on paths etc. where we humans walk, he doesn't even "mark his territory"; thankfully, other dogs' "business" doesn't interest him.



Rex with "Uncle" Sanka

Rex is insightful. He intuitively knows the lines not to cross and when/where he is not wanted e.g. where the next door neighbours were cat people. (He's been unable to decide what cats are for, as none of them, that he has met, want to play). No one ever saw Rex cross the notional boundary line except to check out the contents of a workman's tool box. With my now regular visits to the local clinic, without being told, Rex has never attempted to join me inside, but sits outside, "guarding" my wheelchair.

Rex has a small range of English words he understands, "going out", "village", "clinic", "Island Bar" (no surprise there), "post office" and "home" being examples. And, given he only has one eye, when out and about, he's quite good at responding to hand signals and has been known to shepherd puppies.

There is one very strange thing that Rex does that I cannot fathom. He can be asleep in the sun on the roof and I am downstairs. He (obviously) cannot see me. If I pick up my shorts to put on (going out/visitors arriving) he will appear at the top of the stairs, looking quizzically down at me, ears up, head on one side. Are we going out? But if Ira picks up the same shorts, Rex is entirely unmoved. How does he always know that I have picked up the shorts and not Ira? Again, when

Sanka leaves to return to his job, Rex seems to know and doesn't make the usual fuss about it. He just sits quietly.

Rex's innate curiosity will cause him to investigate any body/thing new or unusual he sees sitting/lying around, unless it scares him (which usually occurs after dark) in which case he can be found hiding behind my legs.

Rex has an early morning routine which includes a "good morning" kiss for me (several licks under my chin) before going for his constitutional and a play in the sand pile near the nullah, and/or Simon's tiny dog Jimmy. Rex tried to get (retired) Dr. Luke's dog to play, but to no avail.

What Rex Likes

Rex really, REALLY likes (loves) the friendly company of any animal, two legs or four, (except cats....see above) particularly if playtime, hide and seek being a favourite, or if a long walk/a proper swim is on offer. He would rather do that than eat, presumably on the basis that the meal will still be there when he gets back. Anyone with kind intentions can take him for a walk and/or play.

One of my enduring mental pictures of Rex is of him "working the crowd" of visitors sitting outside the Island Bar, parading up and down, tail wagging and encouraging patting.



Some of Rex's Fan

He is very considerate of small children and the elderly (like me). No jumping up. He usually stands very still, as when playing with Simon's tiny dog, which gets very demanding if Rex ignores him, giving Rex a firm nudge with his paw, just to remind Rex to pay attention to what's important.

Rather more concerning is Rex's discovery of wild pigs. He thinks they enjoy being chased by him. So far he has avoided meeting a sow with piglets or the boar!

Rex can't see enough of Sanka and has taken to sleeping with him (much to my chagrin), and at night he now sneakily joins Sanka on the settee. Should Sanka be in the temple garden "socialising" with fellow Sri Lankan lads, Rex will know and kick up hell's delight until allowed out to join in, no matter what time of night (morning) it may be. It's not entirely unknown for these two big kids to be playing hide and seek near the playground at well past midnight.

Rex's overt friendliness and cheerful disposition gains him many friends, often with children and their parents who Ira and I have never met, they having first got to know Rex. "Oh! YOU are Rex's owner" has been a common enough greeting when on our way around the village with Rex. It happened again quite recently with a couple, relatively new to Yung Shue Wan, wishing him (only him) a happy new year. This I know is not so unusual. Many local dog owners are only known by their dog(s).



Rex Above the East Lamma Channel

Several people have described Rex as a happy dog, some going so far as to say that there is no happier dog in the village. I hope it's true. For me though, as a "parent", I sometimes feel a bit abandoned. Rex feels obliged to spread his friendship far and wide. As noted, Rex enjoys charming complete strangers sitting outside the Island Bar (never inside, no dogs being allowed, even if an owner – of the bar that is) rather than sit with me. (Harrumph!!)

These occasional, unknown to us, acquaintanceships gained by Rex have their benefits. It would come as no surprise to anyone that Ira is often in need of curry leaves. On one walk with Rex she had spotted a large bush of it in a garden, ownership unknown. Ira took the chance and knocked on the door. Upon

opening the door and hearing Ira's request, the lady of the house, first asked "do you own the dog?" Ira admitted that she was the owner, to which the lady responded "then please take as much as you like, whenever you like." Perhaps, no Rex, no curry leaves. As a precaution, Ira still takes Rex when she goes for more.

This Rex recognition goes a bit further than the village. My son John reports meeting a couple in Singapore who happened to mention that they had spent six months on Lamma. John asked them "did you meet my father?" No, was the reply (I really must get out more). "Er...did you by any chance come across a one eyed dog named Rex?" "Oh REX! Yes of course we know Rex."



Rex at the Lamma Windmill

The ageing process garners experience and has made Rex more discerning. Include the word "village" in the invitation to go for a walk and he will often refuse to go. This may have been because one of the late Lynda's dogs that lurked near the bank was, and still is, very occasionally, prepared to sneak up behind Rex and attempt to nip him on the backside – though not when faced with Ira's wrath.

Of course, it may be that he just doesn't like the crowds or the VVs. It was the same for "clinic", but now the

wheelchair goes too, it gives Rex something to look after whilst I'm being seen to. More recently, there are occasions when nothing (other than Sanka or Lorna) will get him out of the house at midday. He hides under the coffee table and ignores all demands to go for a walk. No one can figure out why.

Rex loves his "Aunties", Marilyn and Lorna. When they show up on dog radar i.e. when they are still some distance from our flat, he goes ballistic with excitement. Rex can also instantly find Louise and John in any crowd (and as a quid pro quo, Rex is, very occasionally, allowed into their flat, the only dog, so far, to attain this very special privilege).

And despite Andy G's occasional protests to the contrary, he gained promotion to a "Leading Uncle". He will have to up his game though if he is going to

compete with Sanka, who seems to have taken over the “top male” spot even from me, all done by “bribery” I submit, by allowing Rex to sleep next to him (see pic) at night. Hah! The first couple of times, Rex couldn’t look me in the eye in the morning. He was a very guilty looking dog. Now he’s becoming truculent about it.

For Rex’s understanding of young humans, his first meeting with the then 6 year old Jack Berry, is instructive. They were introduced straight off the ferry. Thirty seconds later young JB had his hand on Rex’s back and they walked together, side-by-side, along the pier and into the village, Rex diligently following JB’s instructions. “Wait”. “Sit”. Whatever. I still haven’t achieved this level of respect in the more than six years of keeping company with Rex. (Training is a totally inappropriate word for it.) Only his mummy and his aunty Lorna get close. He will actually come to heel for Lorna and he knows enough to comply with his mummy’s requirements, based on her tone of voice. (I too am well aware of this and also find it easier to follow Rex’s lead and comply.)



Peter with his grandson Jack

Other than the abovementioned bank lurking dog, Rex gets along with (or totally ignores) every dog he has ever met, including some supposedly “difficult” ones. In common with all canines, he recognises any serious intent by a dog to attack him and immediately takes evasive action...naught to thirty miles per hour in 3 seconds and home. Rex does cheerful charm, not warrior heroics.

He is generous and doesn’t mind if other visiting dogs eat whatever may be found in his food bowl (bearing in mind he much prefers spicy, sometimes eye watering chilli-hot food and not all dogs do)!

Those who, very kindly, walk Rex tell me that the one particular sight I’m missing is of him running flat out on Power Station Beach. It has been described to me as a “liberating experience”, demonstrating Rex’s joy of freedom unconfined.

What Rex Doesn't Like

LOUD NOISES – particularly when at home. Rex's response is very sharp LOUD BARKING, which can take me by surprise and frighten the life out of me, often with the consequence of tea/wine being flung into the air.

Rex has his own bed (in our bedroom). It is forbidden for adult humans to touch it, much less move it. If Rex sees any such attempt, it will be met by Rex jumping on it and refusing to give it up. A tug of war then ensues with Rex (eventually) giving way to superior force. In winter, part of his bed is my discarded dressing gown. I made the mistake of letting my new one (thank you Ira) fall on the floor.



Rex was on it in a flash (see above concerning discarded articles) and the battle for ownership commenced, which I (eventually) won after some tugging and me yelling "it's mine you beast, let go".

As much as Rex enjoys swimming, very strongly (and fearlessly, which can be a worry) he doesn't feel the same way

Being left at home - not taken to the Cricket Club!

about going out in the rain or his weekly bath. He knows the difference between Ira or I announcing we are going for a shower and the call for it being his turn, when his head will drop and he will sloooowly turn and slink away to seek protective cover behind me or a piece of furniture, only to (eventually) answer Ira's call and, in a very hangdog way, do as asked.

The exception is when he has had a swim. Rex will then go straight to the roof to be bathed, it being the price to be paid for the swim and/or having splashed around in the muddy pond on the way home from the beach. (Well, humans do have mudpack beauty treatments.) Of course, when it comes to having a post bath rubdown, that is always acceptable. Just pick up the towel and he's by your side, tail thrashing.

Early Days

Initially, they were desperate. Given Rex's first encounter with a human being (an assumption not easily defended) it remains a mystery why he is so tolerant of the rest of humanity.

Someone had clearly intended to kill him. Only a few days old, he was heard crying by persons unknown (I'd like to give them credit), who found him inside a Ziploc bag in a rubbish bin at Yung Shue Wan beach, who did not pass on by on the other side, but delivered him to our local vet Hans and then on to Animal Welfare. From there Kate Allert and Daniel Clark took him to Dr. Paul, the Wanchai vet. He (Rex, not Dr. Paul) was apparently rather more dead than alive, with a damaged jaw and one eye hanging out.

Dr. Paul did a great job putting him back together again, hence Rex's relaxed attitude to visiting Dr. Paul. Only good things have come of their meetings. Consequently, Rex is now very cooperative when receiving the occasional medical treatment by any friendly human. He just sits there.



Rex Recovering

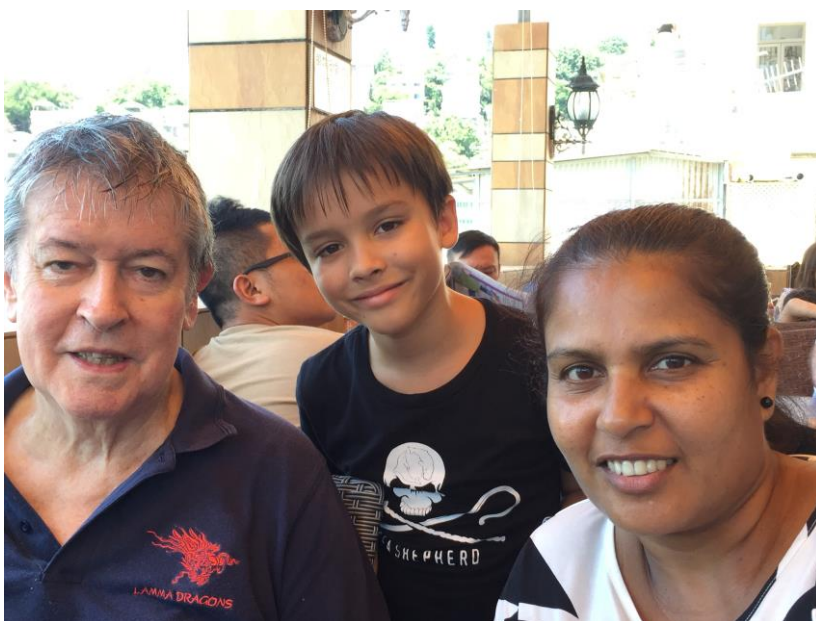
When Rex was first found and given a home, Ira was working for the aforementioned good Samaritans, Kate and Daniel, and took over caring for Rex (or Rex, with great perspicacity, attached himself to Ira, following her everywhere). So when Ira accepted my proposal and moved into my flat in Tai Peng, Rex came too, as a sort of dowry, and the words “mummy” and “daddy” came into use. I didn't see that coming.

As can be seen from the excellent sketch by Richard Hardy, plus the pics, the damage incurred, plus the corrective surgery, has left Rex with a very distinctive face. The protruding lower jaw supporting the two large, rather aggressive looking teeth have been known alarm some mainland tourists (thereby creating space for my wheelchair on crowded weekends etc). Other than this, Rex has virtually no teeth with which to chew solids, so he eats like a cat (please don't tell him), flicking the food into his mouth between the two teeth. Perforce, Rex has become very good at it, even being able to pick up mulberries in the children's playground, whilst on the run.

Tai Peng

A tiny little slip of a dog arrived with Ira to his first, full-time, real home. To begin with, Rex spent nearly all of his time on the ground floor. Having only one eye made gauging the height/depth of each step of the stairs difficult and intimidating, so Rex slept in his bed on the ground floor, awaking us at about 7.30 am to be taken out and then back for breakfast. His morning wake-up bark to us was about the only time he then ever barked. (Were it still so. With puberty came the brain bashing bark. A typical noisy, truculent teenager then.)

Right from the start, Rex “did his business” in the jungle and his overt friendliness soon surfaced. This worried us in that he may well cuddle up to either the local cat eating python (magnificent beast, at least 4 meters long) or a cobra. Self-evidently, and most happily, neither came to pass. He also quickly



Rex “Loves” Peter, Jack & Ira

learnt to attach himself to any passer-by walking their dog(s) and disappear for a while. This was also worrying until we, and the passers-by, got used to it. Then, one or two of them would, most kindly, call in for him.

It was in Tai Peng that we first noticed an application of Rex’s doggy social service. (He is not alone in this it seems.) One of his

disappearances was rather longer than usual. It transpired that he had been keeping company with an elderly Chinese lady whose dog had recently died. Rex repeated the house calls when Sharon and Dan lost their last dog. No idea how he knows when his services are needed or why he does it.

His concern is not limited to the loss of a dog. When a house guest returned home one night rather the worse for wear and had to pass the night on the sofa, Rex was so concerned by this he spent the night sleeping on the floor next to the stricken party.

1st Flat in Main Street

Ira, very sensibly, made me buy a flat. We could not gain occupation until the previous owners' tenant's lease had expired, so we moved into a ground floor flat adjacent to the children's play area. Rex loved it, with its steady stream of children asking if Rex can come out to play. The arrival of another dog ready for a charge around the playground was a bonus. Even notionally hostile ones joined in.

2nd Flat in Main Street, Second Floor & Roof (Home At Last)

It was here that Rex started to develop his own tastes in food, particularly curry and rice (never just plain rice). Given the restrictions imposed by his bottom jaw, Rex can't chew bones or large lumps of anything. As noted, he ate cat food and smaller dog biscuits but, not being spicy enough, he very quickly became bored of it and would refuse to eat it, even waiting up to a couple of days before deigning to eat such stuff. Much had to be thrown away before we got the message. Recently, he has developed a taste for our leftovers...which often means curry and rice or spicy anything. He will wait until our leftovers are delivered to his bowl, then eat.



Peter, Richard & Ira

Should we proffer just the standard dog food, the boring stuff, Rex shows his disapproval by flicking the corner of the towelling mat upon which his food bowl is placed over the top of the offending offering. If we uncover the food, Rex flicks it back again in a battle of wills only settled when either he is desperate for something to eat or we spice up our offering (usually the latter).

Other Sundry Happenings in Rex's Life (So Far...)

Rex has developed his version of the English tea ceremony. In mid-afternoon he takes a lively interest from the moment Ira (or anyone) puts on the kettle/opens the fridge to get the milk. As my tea is being delivered, Rex knows it is accompanied by a biscuit or two, which he and I share (M&S ginger biscuits preferred). When they have gone, he goes.

On the evening of 17th March, 2015, Rex decided that summer had arrived. He would not get into his bed and go to sleep. He just walked around our (small) bedroom making puffing noises until Ira put on the AC. Then all was well.

In June 2015, Ira found a baby pigeon that had fallen from its nest and decided to nurture it, feeding it night and day. (By the way as Ira was feeding it I had visions of it growing up to be like one of the dragons in “Game of Thrones”.) Ira named her Vicky (for Victorious). Rex came to recognise the name and give her an occasional quick encouraging lick (kiss). Sadly, after about three weeks, she died. For a while Rex looked for Vicky whenever Ira mentioned her, expecting to find her in Ira’s hand.

A Summary to Date (January 2016) But Not Yet the End of Rex’s Story

As noted, whilst in Hong Kong I’ve “homed” five other dogs. Of course they all had their own personalities but none of them were anything like Rex in terms of friendliness, cheerful demeanour and intuition. No tricks though. (If I’d wanted those I’d have got a Jack Russell.) Rex is now six and a half. If he “goes” before I do (and he had better not) I don’t think I could have another dog. Cloning him is starting to look a viable option, though the clone would have two eyes, a proper set of teeth and a different character, so not exactly what I would be seeking. Perhaps not then!



Peter, Ira and, of course, Rex at Home 2016

*Photos: Richard Hardy, Kate Allert, Ira Berry & Andy G
Layout: Marilyn Hood*