

# Jipper

Category: Animals

written by Henry Schneiderman | September 20, 2018

In the summer of 1972, I worked for an oncologist at Yale-New Haven Hospital, assisting with research and animal care, and drawing blood on cancer patients. My boss was working on what was then called granulopoietin, a substance that helps white blood cells recover after chemotherapy-induced marrow suppression. He took bone marrow from dogs under general anesthesia and then sampled their blood daily to identify and extract this substance. One such dog was "9557," a border collie who had lived at the lab's animal facility for two years; they kept careful records and knew he had been a two-year-old stray when this stint began.

I fell in love with 9557.

He was always so pleased to see me. After I drew his daily blood from the jugular (!), he would give a paw as though to assure me that he did not mind my pricking him. Dr. M said, "Pick the largest dog so daily draws will cause the least depletion." Even though 9557 was the same size as one other dog, I always selected him. Afterwards, I would refill his water-bowl, say a few words, and pet him.

We were not allowed to name the dogs, wisely, lest we become too attached. But I named this one, anyway: "Velban-Dog," after the chemotherapy drug that lowered his counts. He received chemotherapy though he had no cancer.

My boss was a simpatico man, so when I asked to adopt the dog, he assented and would not take the proffered money for a replacement animal. He warned me that animals often can't adapt to a home after prolonged life in a lab; the effort might fail.

My parents, Moe and Betty, drove up from New Jersey to meet Velban-Dog. One photo shows me drawing his blood. Another shows him sprawled possessively over me as though he had already figured it all out. Moe and Betty agreed to house the dog; I was about to head off to medical school at Tufts in Boston. This kindness was the more striking in that they had given up their previous dog six years earlier for health reasons.

We converged on a Saturday and put him in the car. He had not been outdoors in two years. That night at 4 a.m. he was restless, and I walked him in our backyard. Then I took the train back to Boston.

My parents loved their new dog, and they renamed him "Jip." No harm to body or spirit endured from his earlier life as an experimental animal. Jip had a glorious life for more than a decade.

When my father died, Jip comforted my mother. Jip outlived my mother as well and came to live with me. He even converted my cat-loving wife.

The Jipper died at age 17, in 1985. I still smile at the photo of him and my

mother, remembering our rescue who was my bridge to clinical medicine and a great joy to many hearts.

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