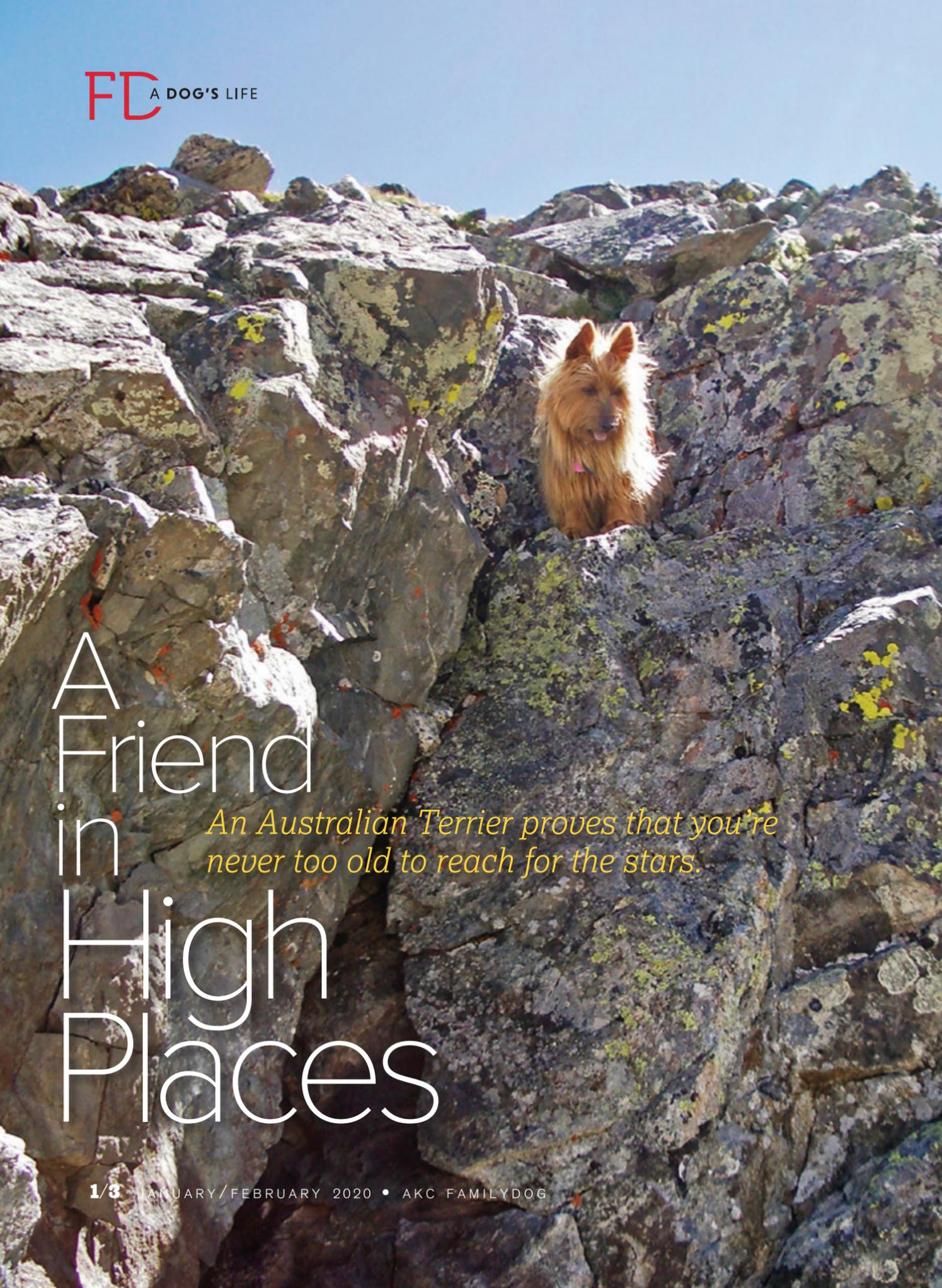


# A Friend in High Places

*An Australian Terrier proves that you're never too old to reach for the stars.*



**W**e were at 13,400 feet and had just summited the second 14,000-foot mountain that day in the Colorado Rockies. Between the two incredible peaks—Redcloud (14,404 feet) and Sunshine (14,007 feet)—we stopped for a breather when I spotted what no mountain climber ever wants to see. An electrical storm had gathered in the distance and was headed our way.

Nothing is more terrifying than being caught high above the tree line in a thunderstorm. We had to get down.

The “we” in this story was a foursome of two sets of friends: Shan, a longtime hiker in the Colorado mountains, and Laura, also a fit hiker, both in their 50s.

Then there was the odd couple: me, Rick Crandall, a guy in his late 60s with a passion for climbing high mountains, and Emme, my remarkable Australian Terrier—20 pounds and short on legs, but with muscles on her muscles and a towering spirit.

Emme had just climbed her 13th and 14th peaks over 14,000 feet, a rare feat for any dog, especially one whose owner is nearly a septuagenarian.

A sign where we had stopped warned, DANGEROUS AREA. NOT A TRAIL, PLEASE RETURN VIA REDCLOUD.



There was no choice; we were going to have to go up before we could head down.

As she always did, Emme took the lead. Her mind always sought the highest point wherever we hiked, and it was immediately clear to her that we were headed back up to the summit of Redcloud. It had already been a long day, but she was still game.

## LEAD ON, MY PUP

Being considerably older than my climbing partners, I was used to lagging on the uphill sections of a climb. At times my partners



would be farther up and out of sight.

Emme instinctively knew that she needed to link the members of her party. She would climb up to spot my friends and then retrace far enough for me to spot her, which showed me the direction I needed to go.

That wasn't the only way she helped me. On many of the high mountains, the closer

you get to the summit, the rockier things are underfoot. The rocks could be huge boulders you had to climb, football-sized with sharp edges, or small slippery marbles. Each presented a different challenge.

For me, the trickiest were the loose stones caused by rockslides, very unstable underfoot. Emme was always ahead of me,

and whenever she got on a shaky rock, she would stop and look back at me, as if warning, "Don't go on this one, Dad, it moves."

That day, we made it back up to the Redcloud summit and then headed down quickly just as the storm arrived. The storm was no joke—it turned out to be a combination of hail, rain, thunder, and lightning.

When hail hit her, Emme just growled. After a deafening thunderclap, she would bark as if to chastise Mother Nature to "cut it out," but she continued purposefully rather than cowering. On a climb, her whole being was devoted to her important job: protecting her human.

We made it back to our car that day, drenched and tired, but jubilant and committed as ever to continue a passion for climbing the high mountains that started years earlier.

### THE ANSWER: A PUPPY

Emme came along, as the song goes, just in time. I was at a crisis in my life. My career as a successful businessman, founder of one of the first computer timesharing companies, took a big hit in the tech bust of 2001. As I approached my 60s, I was in an emotional tailspin, sure that my best years were behind me.

I had no idea that the coming decade would be the best ever.

It started when my wife, Pamela Levy, a

passionate animal lover, made a big decision.

"Let's get a dog."

Pamela chose the breed, found a breeder, and picked a 9-week-old pup she named Emme (pronounced Emmy). Under the tutelage of renowned handlers Gabriel and Ivonne Rangel, she trained Emme to be a show dog. Our little terrier quickly earned her AKC championship, then she had one litter of pups. Some of them have grown up to become champions as well.

However well she did, our Emme made it clear she was ready to leave the glamorous life behind. She had her eyes on loftier goals.

It took a while to discover what that meant. Not until we began hiking in the hills of Colorado near our home in Aspen did it become apparent that hiking was her only interest.

### QUEEN OF THE HILL

Wherever we hiked, she gravitated to the highest point. Her passion for high places began to infect me.

Over the next few years, Emme and I hiked about every trail within a 30-mile radius of our Aspen home. I wanted to experience as much of the diverse terrain as I could to develop the muscles and skills needed to go higher. We ran into marmots, ptarmigans, picas, cows, deer, foxes, and bears along the way. A few deep barks from



Emme, a Crocodile Dundee stare, and they would all scoot.

She owned the trail, and every other living thing knew it.

We hiked in the snow, in hail, in rain and high winds. We hiked to high-mountain lakes, passes, ridges, and steep gullies. We hiked to Electric Pass, which attracts the worst of the weather. That day the winds were ferocious, but Emme went right to the top of the ridge, her hair horizontal, dug in all claws, and

stood there daring the wind to try to knock her off.

Every new experience was an adventure. Emme loved it, and I came to love it. We were perfectly matched.

We started going even higher. When we got into more serious rock formations, I marveled at her determination and cleverness. She would not accept a lift. Instead, she would puzzle out an alternate approach or make an amazing leap.

### NEVER TOO LATE

The Colorado Rockies contain almost all the tallest mountains in the continental U.S. There are 58 of them in the Rockies that are over 14,000 feet, fondly called “fourteeners.”

Fourteeners are a big deal in Colorado. They are promoted as a wonderful outdoor experience. Still, they are serious backcountry exertions that must be done with preparation and awareness of altitude sickness, the right equipment, hydration, fitness, and attention to the weather. There is something mystical about them, even though they are just rock left over from glaciers carving away the softer parts of massive land upheavals millions of years ago. The glaciers were the artists, and the mountains are the sculptures they have left for us to cherish.

Emme and I formed a bond often described between man and dog, but it was a remarkable experience for me.

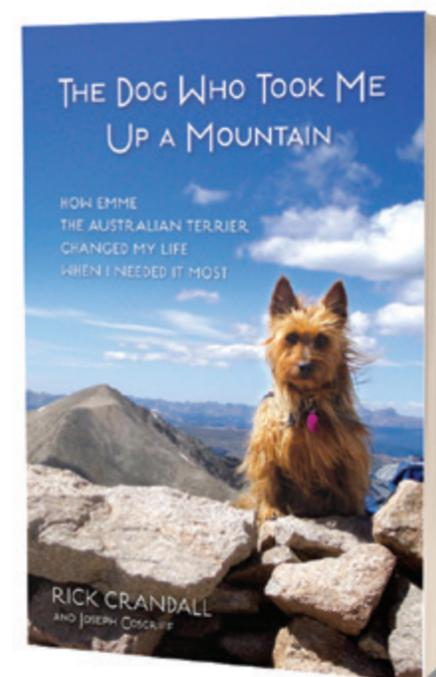
Together, as unlikely mountaineers, we climbed 16 fourteeners and countless lesser peaks and trails. Even after she got too old to continue safely, I made it my personal pursuit to continue the path that she started. By age 74, I climbed the 58th and final fourteener in all the Rockies. The climb capped the best 10 years of my life and was all made possible by my wife’s decision to get a puppy.

Emme inspired me and astounded the climbers we encountered along the way. So many times, upon meeting fellow climbers on

a mountain, the first question would be, “How many times did you have to lift her to get to summit?”

My answer, truthful for sure but believed only by some, was, “I have never lifted her on the way to any summit, only occasionally to take a photo together.”

I am surely living proof that it is never too late to find a new passion in life, and passion is a key to quality of life! **FD**



*Rick Crandall is a transformative tech innovator and serves on the boards of Donnelley Financial Solutions and the National Cybersecurity Center. His inspirational new book, The Dog Who Took Me Up a Mountain, chronicles his climbing adventures with Emme.*