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Reigning Cats and Dogs

By Ginny Zuboy, RCHS Board Member

I saw their picture among the mug shots in the Intermountain. There they were, in the center of the page, two little mini-dachshunds, looking confused, frightened and forlorn. What was their story? I sighed and put the paper down. Later that day I learned that their owner had died. They were once loved, secure in their forever home, and yet here they were, homeless. I sighed again. I called the Randolph County Humane Society, where they were lodged, and was told they were 9 years old. A deep, third sigh.

I showed the picture to my husband. He looked at me then looked away. "Don't even think about it," he said. "The operative word here is *attrition*..." We had just lost Annie, our almost 16 year old mini-dachshund and Jessie, our 12 year old rescued Rottweiler, both to organ failure. We were still missing them and, contemplating our 'golden years,' his position was reasonable. Still, those little dogs kept haunting me. At this same time, I began volunteering at the shelter. I had been sending them money for several years but now that I had more free time decided to put my mouth where my money was. When I saw them there, that first time, I knew I wouldn't sleep until they were under my roof. It took us three weeks to convince my

husband that ours was their forever home and that all would work out. He is our Hero!

Hunter and Pepper live with an 8 year old crazy Rottweiler named Jeb, a 5 year old weagle (wiener/beagle) named Lizzy and a 16 year old mini-dachshund named Millie. We once again have a pack of 5. We have since learned that they are not 9 years old, but are 11. I look at them and ponder those 11 years, but they are not looking back. They got their second chance and are now bounding forward as we make our own family history. They have added such doggie joy to our lives! It has been great comedy getting to know them and watching the pack settle in together. At 11 they are still full of life, playfulness and what personalities! We look forward to many memory- making years ahead.

If you are thinking about getting a family dog, consider adopting an adult pet from the Randolph County Humane Society. Animals end up at a Shelter through no defects or faults of their own. They have simply been unlucky at love. We have many fine adult dogs at RCHS who deserve a second chance at life. Owner death, illness, impairment, military deployment, incompetence, cruelty and neglect are never the fault of the animal. When we bring animals into our homes they arrive with good faith, a reservoir of love and promise of companionship—for LIFE. Dogs don't break contracts. Owners do.

My husband and I adopted a 6 year old Rottweiler from RCHS about 6 years ago. I saw her picture in the paper and that was our mutual good luck. Jessie had been

removed from a bad situation and she was a sore sight. Her hair was out in patches, she was too thin, her teeth were falling out and she was reluctant to make eye contact. Why bother? And yet, there she was, keeping the faith. How gratifying it was to watch her come into her own. Her hair grew back, she filled in, and we convinced her that she was beautiful. And she was! She learned how to play, became protector of our hill and found her voice. We had 6 wonderful years with that sweet loveable dog and have many happy memories.

Myths about adopting Adult and Senior dogs:

1. "They are too old to bond." Absolutely not true! You will not find a more loyal or loving companion than a rescued adult dog. Dogs live in the present. Provide love and protection and they will pay you back tenfold!

2. "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." False! Older dogs are often easier to train because of their ability to focus without all those puppy antics and distractions. Furthermore, adult dogs often come with previous training and just need to 'brush up' on a few important commands.

3. "An adult or senior dog will cost too much in vet bills due to its age." Dog ownership does incur some veterinary expense over the life of the animal, and senior and adult animals are no exception. I don't understand this argument. Providing safety and protection, a proper diet, dental care and adequate exercise for seniors and adult dogs, as with puppies, will help maintain

good health and longevity. My senior dogs, and I have had many over the course of my life, have all died of organ failure – it was simply their time. No extraordinary measures or expenses were necessary at the end of life.

4. "Just when I get attached to him, I'll lose him." This is certainly true for all of us who love our animals, whether for 16 years or for 5 or 6. The loss of a pet is painful and heart rendering, no matter how long we have had their companionship.

Benefits of Adopting an Older Dog

1. No chewing and destruction! I have an antique claw legged table that will forever remind me of Jeb and his puppy days...

2. They are usually house broken, or only need some minor review to 'remember' what you expect of them.

3. They settle in more easily than puppies, and are happy to have a warm bed, a square meal and the security of adults they can count on. What they most desire is love and companionship and to feel safe.

4. Though adult and senior dogs need exercise, they no longer move at full throttle and are happy to take a stroll or roll around in the yard. This reduced need for vigorous exercise is well-suited for families with children or senior dog owners. An older dog's personality and disposition has already revealed itself so you can usually know if it will be happy in a home with children, other dogs, or cats. Puppies are still forming themselves and sometimes develop unpredicted behaviors.

5. Adopting an adult or senior pet, whether it be a dog or a cat, is making a statement about you and your commitment to the value of life of all our animal companions; that they are not property to be disposed of, discarded, or abandoned because we move, get a divorce, because the children won't take care of them or go off to college, or we decide to travel and no longer want the responsibility of owning a pet. These are some of the reasons adult pets end up in a shelter, waiting for a second chance. This is the best of all reasons for adopting an older pet: They deserve a second chance. Finally, by adopting an older pet, you are voicing advocacy for the spaying and neutering of all pets to help reduce the overpopulation of homeless animals.

When we bring a pet into our home, it is a commitment FOR LIFE. Sometimes uninvited, life-altering circumstances make it impossible to meet that commitment. Even then, it behooves the pet owner and the pet owner's family to make every effort to provide for the guardianship of that animal. When those options have been exhausted, the Randolph County Humane Society is there to help. Shelter Rescue should be the last stop. RCHS will accept ALL animals, regardless of circumstance, but irresponsibility and lack of commitment of the pet owner make their job a lot harder.

There are simply too many animals in need of a forever home. If people cannot make a conscious LIFE commitment to owning a pet (and please don't lay this responsibility and commitment at the feet of young children!) as well as a commitment to spaying and neutering, then they should not own a pet.