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<http://theintermountain.com/page/content.detail/id/547353/Think-about-all-the-things-we-do-for-the-love-of-mutts.html?nav=5324>

For the Love of Mutts

By Ginny Zuboy, RCHS Board Member

One afternoon, in my Montessori classroom a co-worker exclaimed, "Ginny, there's a wiener!" I followed her gaze through the window and there, running across Davis Avenue in heavy traffic, was a large black dog and a little dachshund puppy. I dropped everything, ran out the door and scooped up the little dog. The larger black dog continued running and disappeared around the corner. That was over six years ago.

Ok, now what? She snuggled into my shoulder, all wrinkled and wriggly. If you have read any of my previous articles, you know that I am a "wiener" lover. So, now what to do? It was toward the end of the school day. I didn't consider trying to find an owner because she was in too bad of shape to have come from a proper home. I knew I couldn't keep her. I already had two mini-Dachshunds and two Rottweiler's and I knew 5 dogs were out of the question, right? About that time my husband stopped by the school on his way home and when he saw me with this little waif wrapped around my neck, he says he knew we were in big trouble. Well, he knew it before I did... 5 dogs? Ridiculous! I took her home and planted her in the kitchen, with the idea of

finding her a home. She was just "puppy" for two days- no way was I going to name her- until on the third day that sweet, determined little thing scaled the three foot high baby gate meant to contain her and came bounding over the top. That's when she became 'Lizard', or "Lizzy." She climbed over that gate and into our hearts, on the way to her forever home. And that is how we became a house of five.

When I rescued Lizzy from the streets, she was malnourished, had ring worm, and fleas. As her health improved and she began to grow it became obvious that she was not a purebred dachshund, but a mix. We soon decided and our vet confirmed that Lizzy was a "Weagle," a cross between a 'Wiener' and a Beagle. Her legs are a bit too long, her head a little too square, and when she puts her nose to the ground, the Beagle in her comes surging to the forefront! During a walk in our woods, the first time I heard her high-pitched call, on scent, I feared that something bad had happened to her and she was in serious pain! Her yip reverberates through the trees and she is off and running, with Hunter and Jeb following behind. Jeb loses interest right away- he's a Rottweiler, after all, and hunting isn't his thing. Hunter, however, is in it for the hunt and he and Lizard are often in the woods together. Lizzy is the die-hard, though, and is the last one to return to the house.

My husband and I have always owned purebred dogs. We had father and son Irish Setters, a Golden Retriever, and an English Setter previous to the dogs mentioned above. They all had "papers" and they were

well-loved and long-lived. People are often drawn to certain breeds because of the way they look and/or what we read about them. Some breeds are rare, in fashion, come with high price tags and/or are viewed as status symbols. They may be bred to rescue, hunt, guard, herd or to show. We have our reasons for choosing the pets we do. It is not always a rational decision, and should be. Dogs should first and foremost be a good fit with the family and the family environment.

Since I have been volunteering at the Randolph County Humane Society, I have gained a real appreciation and admiration for the “Mutt” or mixed-breed dog. My fellow dog-walkers and I have fun imagining what’s in the mix. Some of them are elegant, some stunning, and some so ugly by known breed standards that they are absolutely adorable. One of my dog-walking friends recently gave me a fun book on the subject, called the “Underdog,” by Julia Szabo. It is very entertaining with lots of illustrations of comical, glamorous, and unlikely mixes. The message: Pure is a bore. The Mutt is one of a kind! I am not writing to disparage purebreds, but to highlight the values of the mixed-breed dog.

Mixed-breed dogs tend to be healthier and live longer than purebred dogs. Due to over-breeding, some pedigreed dogs are encountering serious health problems. In order to meet certain breed standards, purebred dogs are bred with others of the same breed and over time this practice shrinks the gene pool. It is the pairing up of defective genes that perpetuates genetic disease. Dalmations can suffer deafness;

German shepherds, Labradors and retrievers may be plagued with hip dysplasia; brachycephalic dogs such as Pugs, Bulldogs, Boxers, Boston terriers and Shih Tzus often suffer respiratory problems due to their short snouts, and health issues related to shallow eye sockets; Dachshunds, Basset hounds and Corgis have spinal problems; deep, narrow-chested dogs such as Great Danes, Dobermans, and German shepherds can suffer ‘bloat’; 60% of Golden Retrievers die of cancer. Not all dogs of the above breeds suffer these problems and there are many professional breeders of pedigreed dogs who are doing their best to breed carefully and responsibly to minimize these breed deficiencies.

Though all of my dogs were long-lived, our Golden suffered from hip dysplasia and our healthy twelve and a half year old Irish Setter actually died of ‘bloat,’ due to his deep, narrow chest cavity (and the lack of available emergency vet care at that time). My first two Dachshunds both suffered periodic spinal problems due to climbing and jumping. I was aware of the breed problems when I brought them home and tried to prevent injury by providing stools and using baby gates, but the truth is, especially in their younger years, they were hard to control. They would propel themselves like little flying squirrels, parachuting off the deck, usually after a critter, and totally ignore the stairs. Now I carry my almost 17 year old up and down the stairs- her flying days are over. My almost 12 year old adopted wieners, who have been with us not quite a year now, are

not as adventuresome. Lizzy, the weagle, on the other hand, has a strong, well proportioned frame, and coupled with the combined temperaments of the two breeds, she is a great little dog. In fact, my husband is so taken with her balanced temperament and her well formed little body, he thinks the 'weagle' should become a designer breed!

Purebred dogs, by definition, must conform to strict breed standards. The Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show is held every February in New York City to recognize and award the 'best' among breed champions. The judges circle each dog, feeling their skeletal frame, gaping into their mouths, lifting their tails, watch them walk, and note minute variations of breed standards that are lost to most of us. To the lay person, they all look pretty much the same. Mutts, on the other hand, represent the 'happy accident' and no two look alike. This random coupling holds appeal for many. Julio Szabo, in the *Underdog* concurs: "People who fancy Mutts tend to be iconoclasts... They have no problem being "owned by" a dog with mysterious markings, mysterious habits, and a mysterious past." The Mutt is highly sought after in many 'dog friendly' cities across the country. In Austin, Portland, Seattle, Hoboken (who knew?), Mutt masters enjoy the status of owning a one-of-a-kind canine who was also rescued from a local humane society. In short, it is in vogue. This is only good news for the discarded, the neglected, and the homeless.

As a volunteer dog-walker for Randolph County Humane Society, I have walked an unknown number of mixed-breed dogs over the past year and have had my eyes

opened to the lively personalities, the noble character and the unique physical presentations of these special canines. They often combine the best traits and characters of two or more breeds, minus the health/extreme temperament issues, making them exceptional companions. Pedigreed dogs are often bred to hunt, to herd, to retrieve and to guard. If you are seeking to fill any of those specified job descriptions, then certainly consider the pedigreed dog. But if you are looking for a family dog, a-middle-of-the-roader, a companion, I recommend that you consider a mixed breed. Like my Lizzy, she is a scent hound as are both the dachshund and the Beagle, but unlike the Beagle, she is content to stay within the bounds of her territory and does not require being tethered. The Dachshund in her has rounded off that Beagle edge, and the Beagle in her has neutralized the spinal problems of the Dachshund, all contributing to make her a healthier and easier-to-live-with family pet.

Along with confessing my growing bias toward mixed-breed dogs, I am also a big fan of adopting adult and senior dogs, as I have mentioned in a previous article. Puppies are adorable, I get it. But since I have begun volunteering at the shelter, I hardly even look at the puppies. I know that their "puppiness" will carry the day and they will be adopted; I am not worried about them. It is the adult and senior mixed-breed dogs that I am rooting for and promoting with faith and confidence that they represent solid investments. An adult dog has

revealed itself; by and large you will know what you are getting.

Last weekend, during Forest Festival, our RCHS off-site adoption event at the City Park netted 26 canine/feline adoptions—an all time record! I thought my heart would break numerous times. A special canine friend of mine, Pogo, a boxer/terrier mix, was adopted by a couple who saw in him what I knew he could be. I met Pogo on my first visit to the Shelter, almost a year ago. The adoptive family brought him back to the park the next day, for a visit, and to report that all was going well. He had been adopted into a pack of three and was getting along just fine with the other dogs, as we knew he would. To see him approaching on the end of that leash, no longer a shelter dog, but with his “family”, was a bittersweet thrill that I will never forget. Thank goodness for the care, the confidence, and the patience of our RCHS manager, Kelly Scheidegger, who allowed him the time to be discovered. That same day a gentleman who had adopted “Speckles,” an Australian Shepherd/hound mix, the day before, came back to return a leash and told me he “wouldn’t take \$500” for her, that she was great with his cat and already playing with his little Jack Russell terrier named Cricket. He was obviously in love. We received the same happy feedback about Warlock, a Schnauzer/Lab mix, and Millie, a Weagle, and Shep, a Shepherd mix, and the list goes on. It was one glorious weekend! These dogs were all adult, mixed-breed dogs. I love my wieners and my Rottweiler. I can imagine another rescued Dachshund in my future, down the

road. Roughly 25 % of the U.S. shelter populations are purebred dogs. They need rescued too! We have seen many wonderful pedigreed dogs come and go at RCHS. But as I continue walking dogs at RCHS, I am constantly falling in love with every breed combination imaginable. If you, or someone you know, are contemplating canine companionship, I invite you to call me. With the assistance of RCHS staff, I will happily introduce you to our smorgasbord of lively and lovely mixed-breed dogs. As Julia Szabo says, so eloquently, “Why get something off the rack when you can have something that’s one of a kind?”

Please spay and neuter your animals and encourage your friends and family to do the same. Neutered dogs have a decreased chance of developing prostate disease, and are less likely to stray from home; spayed females have a reduced risk of developing breast cancer. Both spaying and neutering mitigate common behavioral problems. Most importantly, spaying and neutering reduces the number of neglected, abused, and homeless animals. It is the responsible thing to do.