

FRIDAY August 12 2005

Email from Mandy's mom in Boston



Vanessa and Mandy in May when Vanessa came to adopt Mandy and fly her back to Boston.

In Praise of "Older" and "Unwanted" Dogs

People are often reluctant to adopt a dog from a shelter, particularly an older dog, because they worry that there's a higher chance of health and behavior problems. They think that buying a pure-bred puppy is a safer bet. But there are no guarantees in either case. As for me, gambling on an older dog with an unfavorable history has turned out better than I dreamed. All the surprises have turned out to be happy ones.

First, though Mandy was long featured on Straydog's website as an older dog, she has the stamina and enthusiasm of a young adult. Our vet found her in perfect health and estimates her age to be two years *younger* than the Straydog vet's estimate. The vet assures us that with good care, a hearty mixed-breed of her size could easily live another ten years. Frankly, Mandy's energy level is just perfect for us: after sharing our family activities, she's as tuckered out as we are. (Some labs and border collies we know

NEVER tire and it's quite a headache for their families.)

Second, when we adopted Mandy, it wasn't known how she would do in a house, since she had lived at Straydog for over four years and appeared to have lived on the street for a long time before that. Well, not only is Mandy perfectly house-trained, she also has excellent manners (no begging at the table, no climbing on the furniture, no unnecessary barking). On the rare occasion of a transgression, she responds immediately to being corrected.

Finally, when you adopt a creature that has been abandoned and mistreated, you wonder if the emotional scars might make it hard for the animal to form loving attachments. Well, it can go the other way, too. When you give a loving home to a dog who's been without one, you can find yourself on the receiving end of a tremendous amount of gratitude and appreciation. Mandy's resilient little heart has certainly embraced our family fully. And she has fulfilled our hopes for a wonderful family pet many times over. Were there any guarantees that this would happen? No, but the people at Straydog make it possible to get to know an adult dog, see if there is a good "fit," and ultimately, to have a better idea of what kind of dog you would be getting than you would ever have with a puppy. Moreover, Straydog's policy gives dogs like Mandy a chance to have the forever home they deserve.

Erin, I want you to know that Mandy is no longer just a great dog to me, she is the most wonderful dog I've ever known. I feel so lucky to be the object of her devotion and love. We can take her anywhere knowing that she'll be friendly with people large and small, will steer clear of cars and horses, and won't tangle with dogs that leave her be. She is a clever one! (She learns routes and routines instantly and can open the latch to the cat food.) She's patient with my three-year-old and protective of him. She's silly and obedient with my teenager. She especially likes to woo-woo at my husband when he sings a low note close to her cheek. Most of all, she is my lovely, cheerful companion wherever I go.

Last month Mandy was not feeling well. We may never know whether it was a virus, a reaction to her Advantage dose, or something else. She was lethargic and had a poor appetite for about a week. The vet verified that her vital signs were fine and prescribed a steroid and an antihistamine (thinking it might be an allergic reaction) but the meds didn't help and I stopped administering them. A few days later she improved-just as mysteriously as she had fallen ill. This experience made us terribly aware of how much we'd grown to love Mandy. To see her playfulness and enthusiasm return gave us great joy. After several days of having the old Mandy back, we took her to a state park so she could engage in her favorite activities: romping on a trail and scooping up water with her snoot in a river. I don't know who was happier-Mandy, or us watching Mandy.

I can't help wondering how many other Straydog pups would make perfect family pets if given the chance. Sally often comes to mind. I remember her being so sweet, alert, and pretty. That glorious fox-colored coat! She already knows "sit," "down," and "paw." Whenever I entered or left the hospital trailer, there was Sally, watching me intently, all smiles and ready to give and receive love. Her story left such an impression on me: the way she remained alongside her trapped friend on the golf course, and how that friend later gnawed off Sally's tail during a storm. No, unfortunately I am not able to adopt a second Straydog pup, but I do talk about Sally to anyone who mentions wanting a dog. If possible, I would like to add a passage to her Petfinder profile. And maybe there might be a photo that better conveys her good looks? I think about Mandy's kennel mate, Bear, too. He was such a friendly old gent. I realize that you guys are totally inundated with the tasks involved in caring for so many dogs. I'm sorry we live thousands of miles apart because I wish I could help find homes for some of those gems living at Straydog.

I hope this letter finds you and your family well.

Keep up the good work,

Vanessa