

**Sunday Column – That One Special Dog
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She came into the shelter one very cold winter morning just about a year and a half after I began my career in animal welfare. A little black puppy, she weighed only one pound, eight ounces and had not one hair on her body. Obviously suffering from neglect, and the stress that goes with it, all of her hair had fallen out. We see a lot of this in shelters. It is not contagious and is easily resolved by moving the dog into a loving foster home for several weeks and administering an inexpensive medication.

The man who brought Tinker in said he found her on his front lawn that morning as he got ready to leave for work. You wouldn't believe how common this story is for both puppies and kittens. People dump them anywhere they can hoping some kind soul will take them in. Most people can't simply take kittens and puppies into their homes on the spot and so they are dropped off at animal control agencies all over America.

The worst environment for a puppy is an animal shelter of any kind. Without a vaccination history all young dogs are prey to parvo, one of the most dreaded communicable diseases wherever large numbers of dogs are housed. It can sweep through a shelter in no time if there is not a good vaccination protocol in place.

With this in mind, I wrapped little Tinker in a towel and took her home with me that evening, my first puppy in almost four decades. I'm not a fan of taking in puppies for all the obvious reasons. I prefer to adopt dogs after they have completed the annoying puppy stage. Puppies poop and pee everywhere. They want to play continuously and they have needle sharp teeth. They are really cute and that is about all they have going for them.

But, what can I say, I fell in love with this little girl with her bald face and expressive, Marlene Dietrich eyebrows. Watching a scared little puppy grow into a beautiful, intelligent, shiny, black-haired beauty is an amazing privilege and I'm glad I put up with the inconvenience.

Everyone has that one special dog in their life and Tinker is mine. This is in spite of the fact that I've had some wonderful dogs over the years. I believe we are soul mates and were always meant to be together.

I describe Tinker as a 60 pound Labrador retriever in the body of a 13 pound Chiweenie. I ran a Wisdom Panel on her, only to discover she is neither Chi nor weenie. What the panel did reveal was that her genetic heritage is sketchy with Manchester terrier being the only recognizable possibility. I prefer to believe the reference to Pekinese was in error. Her heritage will remain a mystery which is part of the fun that comes from adopting a shelter dog.

Tinker is a fetch-a-holic. She loves her Frisbee and can catch it when I throw it properly. She will put her heart and soul into a hopeless game of tug-of-war with her sister, a 110 pound English Mastiff. She won first place in the Tiny Tots division of a dock diving contest last year.

She loves to swim more than anything in the world and I think she would swim until she sank from exhaustion if I didn't keep an eye on her.

Tinker did not let a rough start hold her back. She has a zest for life that never quits.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.