



## **Adopt a Senior Dog!**

**By: Katherine Brown**

Do you live by yourself and want a companion? Thinking about adding a new furry member to your family? Consider adopting a senior dog! Sadly, older dogs are abandoned for many different reasons, including their owners dying, or their family moving away, to even former show dogs being deemed as no longer useful for competitions. Furthermore, many people are quick to adopt a puppy or young dog, leaving senior dogs sitting in the animal shelter.

However, adopting a senior dog can offer many great benefits.

Firstly, they are loving companions. While a dog of any age can be a companion to you, many older dogs have already had previous families or owners. An article notes that, "Many older dogs were once owned and loved by someone. For whatever reason, they were given up and abandoned in a shelter and are in need of a home. Just like puppies and younger adoptable dogs, they make loyal and loving companions" (Cesar's Way, 2019, p.1). I graduated college in May 2020. After I graduated college, I was lonely. I needed someone who could keep me company while my parents were busy or away from the house. I needed a companion. I had already been thinking about getting another dog a few months prior to graduating college, and now seemed like the perfect time to do it. I would be at home more often, and I didn't have to do

class work anymore. At the same time, I felt like our senior male dog, Dominoe, could use a playmate. He had always been the only dog in our household, so I thought he might like to have a friend in his later years. So, I started browsing dogs at our local animal shelter. Most of the dogs at the animal shelter were young. However, I found Ginger, a senior female hound mix. My family and I adopted Ginger from the animal shelter in July 2020.

Another benefit of a senior dog is their relaxed demeanor. When I was searching for a dog, I knew that I didn't want a puppy - they're too energetic and too busy. An article writes that, "Most senior dogs are content with casual walks and cuddling" (DogWatch, 2019, p.1). While Ginger is still frisky for her age, she isn't bouncing off the walls like a puppy or younger dog would be. Frequently, she will go and lay in her bed during the daytime. This allows me to do my work, and it allows her to take a good snooze!

Another benefit of a senior dog is the lack of training needed. An article notes that, "For the most part, when you adopt a senior pup, you're getting a dog that's house trained. Many older dogs have grown out of destructive habits and will be schooled in good manners and basic skills like "sit," and "stay." Adopting a dog who knows the basics will save you some time, and allow you to focus on building a great relationship" (The Farmer's Dog, 2020, p.1). I didn't want to go through the extra work of training a puppy or young dog. I needed a dog who already knew the ropes. A senior dog was the best fit for me (and my family) personally.

Another benefit is the fact that you're saving a life! Unfortunately, many times senior dogs at shelters are overlooked in favor of puppies and younger dogs. As a result, many of these old animals are neglected and end up dying (or getting euthanized) in the shelter. However, there are many senior dogs that would love to have a second chance at life and love to have a new family. And, they will have a strong appreciation for you. An article writes that, "With many dogs having come from homes of neglect or even abuse, an older and wiser dog is going to be able to notice the love coming from you and the home you provide" (Milwaukee Paws Pet Care, 2018, p.1). Ginger's original owners had moved to another state, and they couldn't take her with them. She had been at the shelter for about one month. Apparently, we were the first family to inquire about her. For some reason, her original owners had shaved her hair off, leaving her with random fur patches on her body. She looked rough, and she needed someone to nurse her back to health. Fortunately, I'm happy to report that in the timeframe since I adopted her, her fur has grown back! I take this to mean that she is happy in our home, and that she is in a good place psychologically.

Now, as with many things, owning a senior dog can come with challenges as well. There are things you need to consider when adopting an old dog.

One potential challenge is separation anxiety. An article writes that, "Separation anxiety is triggered when dogs become upset because of separation from their guardians, the people they're attached to" (ASPCA, p.1). Dogs might engage in behaviors such as barking, howling, and digging, among other things. One of the biggest things Ginger has struggled with is separation anxiety. She follows me everywhere. If I leave the room, she will sit next to the door

and wait faithfully for me to come back. And, if I'm gone too long, she will bark at me to come back.

Another possible challenge you might encounter is health issues. An article notes that, "Just as we humans tend to need more medical care as we get older, our senior pets may also need a few extra visits to the vet, depending on any medical needs they may have" (Milwaukee Paws Pet Care, 2018, p.1). For months, Ginger had done very well related to her health. However, in early January 2021, Ginger got extremely sick for seemingly no reason. We took her to the emergency animal hospital, where she stayed for a few days. We found out that she had a condition called vestibular disease. Fortunately, Ginger recovered, and she is now doing well.

A third issue you might face is mobility problems. An older dog might have issues getting up on their own. And, depending on the size of the dog, it might be difficult to move them yourself. You will need to think about how you will transport the dog around if they can no longer move on their own. Fortunately, I haven't encountered this problem with Ginger yet. And, since she's a relatively small dog, it's not a huge issue to pick her up if I need to.

Additionally, it is important to consider the possible lifespan of the senior dog. Since you're adopting the dog at an older age, it can be difficult to tell when they will pass. An article notes that, "While some senior dogs might live for five, six, seven or more years after they come home with you, others will have shorter lifespans. It's something you need to understand and accept because as all dog lovers know, losing a pet takes an emotional toll" (The Farmer's Dog, 2020, p.1). The important thing is to enjoy your senior dog while you still can. Ginger is currently about 9 ½ years old, and I want to give her a great life for her golden days.

It's important to acknowledge that older dogs need homes too. If you're lonely, or just ready to add a new member to your family, consider adopting a senior dog!

## References

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