

Accidental Hound Lovers

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We never really meant to fall in love with coonhounds.

When we decided our Golden Retriever mix, Montana, needed a buddy, we started looking on Petfinder every morning in hopes of finding a good Lab at the shelter. My husband had had three yellow Labs in his life (“Like having the same dog for thirty years”), and he knew and trusted the breed. He had his heart set on another and after just a week or so, there she was — a three month old yellow Lab puppy at the Haywood County Shelter. Her name was Juniper.

We were at the shelter that morning when it opened, determined to be the first name on Juniper’s adoption list. When we saw her, she was sweet and beautiful and all that you could hope for in a Lab puppy. She was, in a word, *perfect*. But for some reason, neither of us could help noticing the Redbone coonhound in the kennel next to hers. She was just lying there calmly, not trying to get our attention, but she kept looking up at us with her big brown eyes. I’m not sure which one of us said it first, “Hey, look at this pretty girl,” but one of us did. And the next thing you know, we had her out in the play area.

I don’t really know how to describe what happened to us that morning, but we fell in love so hard with that little two-year old Redbone as we played with her in the shelter yard. She was graceful and athletic and she carried herself with a lovely confidence. But more than that, she was incredibly sweet and affectionate. Her waiting period was already up, so we adopted her that day. Our first Redbone. We named her Layla.

A year or so after adopting Layla, we became a foster home for Sarge’s Animal Rescue. Our first two fosters were Walker hounds, Paisley and Balsam, and our third was another Redbone mix named Dallas whom we eventually adopted. We were sold. Every chance we got, we brought home coonhounds to foster from those Sarge’s had pulled from the shelter in need of placement.

In five years, in addition to Walkers and Redbones, we’ve had quite a variety from Plott hounds to Fox hounds to Redticks to Black and Tans. Every single one of them has fit right in and been an amazing addition to our family for the days or weeks they’ve lived with us. Some of them have been adopted into families who, like us once, never really thought of hounds as a breed of choice, but once they spent time with a good hound, they were sold.

Most people know that coonhounds were bred to be expert hunting dogs, and they have a rich cultural traditional as American originals. Not surprisingly, this tradition often puts coonhounds at a disadvantage when folks are thinking about dogs to adopt as pets. Many people think of coonhounds *only* as hunters who would rather

spend their time chasing after scents than snuggled up on the couch watching TV with their people.

But after fostering so many of them, I can honestly say I've never met a single coonhound that didn't love to be treated as a cherished part of the family. With so many of them ending up in the shelter, if the perception persists that they are only suitable to be adopted as hunting dogs and not as family pets, too many of these wonderful dogs will continue to be euthanized because of limited possibilities for adoption.

So what is it that is so special about hounds? They are beautiful, of course, with their long, soft ears, soulful eyes and sleek hound physiques. But they are so much more than beautiful. Like the other popular hunting breeds, hounds are incredibly loyal, sweet and sensitive companions to both people and other animals. They love attention and affection, but are not demanding in this love. They are incredibly playful and prone to funny antics, but they know how to settle in and chill out when it's quiet time. On a walk, hounds are sheer joy in motion, so alive to their surroundings. You can't help but smile when you're walking a coonhound.

We never really meant to fall in love with coonhounds, but now we're sold on long-eared love.