

The First Time Ever...I Saw Your Face

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In 1985, at the first dog show I attended, a tiny, elegant red dog moved across the grass, light as a butterfly, lifting up its front feet like a hackney pony, nimble and quick in its movement, confident in its stance. It had a short, hard, glossy coat, elegant muzzle, twinkling dark eyes, alert, inquisitive expression, beauty and intelligence.

It was a Min Pin, which was harder to find then. I didn't know about dog clubs or breeder referral contacts, so I spent five years looking at newspaper ads. I saw some dogs I liked, but was uncomfortable with their people. I wanted a companion I'd have spayed or neutered, but first I needed a breeder who could teach me about the breed.

Then I saw the Min Pin I knew I had to own. Her breeder said she was show quality and would only sell her if I showed her. I had shown horses for many years and figured it couldn't be that hard. That tiny puppy came into my life six years ago and changed my life.

I now have five Min Pins, a dedicated dog room and enough crates to stock a store. I haven't had a manicure in ages, but I grind my dogs' nails every week. Dishes sit in my sink for days, but I mop the dog room floor with disinfectant more times a day than I can count. I once couldn't get a stain out of my white slacks because I had used the last of the bleach on that floor!

If visitors want to bring a gift, I ask for newspapers without the color inserts. I may ask about a match, but I'm not a smoker. My dogs eat the best food on the market; I get peanut butter and jelly. In the four years I've had my car, only once has anyone ridden in the back seat. Even then I grumbled because I had to remove the crates. I don't refer to legal holidays by name, but by which club has a show that weekend. Wednesday is no longer "hump" day, the middle of the work week, but "closing date." When my friends visit, they nod at me, then make a lap for my dogs to jump into.

I used to sleep in on weekends, but my Min Pins wake up when a sunbeam hits them, then run at me at 100 mph, even if I'm asleep. They start the day full of love and laughter and insist I do the same, but they're well groomed and beautiful as soon as they wake up. I'm not.

Min Pins like to be involved in daily tasks such as (un)folding laundry. They let me know when the blankets are dry so they can curl up in them while they're still hot. And a cardboard toilet paper roll is their favorite toy!

A nice dress is on sale, but \$65 is too much for anything without pockets for bait. As for that "dryclean only" label, no way!

My vacations revolve around the next specialty. When a co-worker had a baby, I blurted out, "Did she free whelp?" The \$200 suit I wore (with sneakers) to impress a judge has never been the same since that torrential downpour. My boss understands when I say that in 63 days I'll be taking a three-day maternity leave. The only reason I go to the airport is to pick up or drop off a dog. Only for a dog show would I get up at 3 a.m. and spend the weekend outside, in the hot sun, in pantyhose. And I now know why God made professional handlers.

If you're looking for that "special" dog, don't wait. AKC breeder referral (900-407-PUPS) works with parent clubs to help you find a reputable breeder to fulfill your dream, whether for pet or show. I thank the Miniature Pinscher Club of America for having me as guest columnist this month