

"There Seems To Be A Heartbreaking Trend"

by: Kathleen Prince, Founder Miniature Pinscher Rescue of Orlando (as published in the Pinscher Patter, September, 1997)

There is an epidemic preying on our beloved Min Pins. It is preying on all breeds, actually, because it is not prejudiced. It doesn't care if the dog is big or little. It doesn't care if the dog is young or old. It doesn't care if the dog is a purebred or a lovely mutt. It doesn't care if the dog is a champion show dog or a cherished companion. The epidemic has a name - it is heartworm disease. The worst part of all is that heartworm disease is so easily prevented.

I have been running the Miniature Pinscher Rescue of Orlando since 1993. In that time we've rescued a total of 102 dogs - with 57 of those being purebred Min Pins. We have always tested for heartworms as soon as a dog comes in and always recommend the adopters retest in 6 months. We have always stressed the importance of heartworm prevention to our adopters. We got our first heartworm positive rescue dog in 1996. Her name was "Tina" and she was a Rottweiler who had been living on the streets for her 9 months of life. This was not an unexpected diagnosis in her case. We treated her and she is living happy and healthy today. Then in November of 1996 we took in our first heartworm positive Min Pin! "Ginger" was also our first chocolate. She was given up to an area shelter with a Shepherd mix because the people were moving. "Ginger" sailed through the intense treatment because she was a little overweight and she is now living healthy and happy with another Min Pin.

Our statistics for 1997 (as of July) are staggering. We've taken in 19 Min Pins and 3 "other" types of dogs. Of those 19 Min Pins, 6 have been heartworm positive and 1 of the "others" has been positive. What is going on? The only explanation I can think of is that people are not being educated on the dangers of heartworm. I really hate to think they just don't care. Being in Florida it is essential Min Pin owners know the dangers of heartworm disease and the proper way to use prevention. No matter what part of the country you are in, I believe you **MUST** use prevention year-round. I believe breeders (whether they are club members or not) **MUST** educate their buyers. Dying from heartworm is not a pleasant way for any animal to go. I believe veterinarians **MUST** educate their clients. I believe every Min Pin owner **MUST** educate anyone they come in contact with who is also a dog owner. (By the way, cat owners are not excluded from the dangers of heartworm, as previously thought. Prevention is different for them and you should seek the advice of your veterinarian.) During a fund-raiser last year, an older woman was

telling me about her little dog she was thinking of getting a friend for. When I asked her what type of heartworm prevention she used she replied, "I don't use anything, she never goes outside." I proceeded to scare her to death by telling her it only takes one mosquito carrying the disease to infect her dog. I asked her if she'd ever noticed a mosquito in her house?!? It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out "house dogs" are at risk just like dogs who live outside. Needless to say, she did not get a Min Pin from me.

As far as breed rescue is concerned, heartworm is a tough issue. The treatment is very expensive and it is very time consuming. Treatment prices vary from \$150 - \$400. Treatment time is usually 6 - 8 weeks where the dog must be crate rested, leash walked and kept from getting too excited. In Florida most breed rescues won't take heartworm positive dogs because they can't afford the money or time involved. We've had countless shelters tell us they were shocked when we said we'd take the Min Pin even though it was positive. Our philosophy is this: it is not the dog's fault it is sick. It is through the ignorance of it's previous owner. We don't feel they must die because of that.

"Nikki" was an unusual situation for us. We got a call from an area shelter that they had a Min Pin. I immediately went to the shelter and saw a teeny Doberman Pinscher. I couldn't fault the shelter worker, at least she was trying to help the dog. This shelter had recently adopted a new policy regarding heartworm positive dogs. They are euthanized. So, when I looked into "Nikki's" beautiful eyes (trying to not look at her atrocious ears!) I could not sentence her to die because she wasn't a Min Pin. She was successfully treated and her new mom adores her. She even thwarted a burglary attempt the second week she was in her new house!

"Joey" was a stray at another shelter. We believe he's a Chihuahua/Min Pin mix who's about 5 years old. He typically would have had no problem being adopted out of this shelter, but he was heartworm positive so he sat there for almost a month. We got him out and started his heartworm treatment. He had several complications and I was his foster mom. His vet bill pushed close to \$400. He is now my 11th dog because I couldn't bear to let him go with anyone else after all we went through. He likes to hide under the bed when it's time to get in his crate.

"Julio" was a 2 yr. old stray Min Pin at an area shelter. He was handled by my St. Petersburg chapter of Min Pin rescue and she was able to place him with his new mom right after he started his treatment. He likes to give the cat a hard time. He had no complications and his new mom paid for his treatment. This is not usually the case. We try to cover our vet bills with our adoption fees, but it doesn't always work out that way for some reason.

"April" was an older girl, probably at least 8 yrs. and definitely a Min Pin. She was a stray at the same shelter where Julio was. She was positive, too. An older man adopted her and paid for her treatment. She is living with another older Min Pin. Jennifer Miler, who runs the St. Petersburg chapter of Min Pin Rescue is doing a fantastic job!

"Alex" was quarantined for biting the people who tried to get him out of the street. All of his 4.6 pounds was far from being vicious! The shelter workers debated whether he was a Min Pin or a Chihuahua - he happens to be a nice Min Pin. He was also heartworm positive. Alex had a rough time through treatment because he was so little. His bill ended up being around \$350 but his foster mom fell under his spell, kept him with her other rescues and paid his bill - thank goodness! He likes to boss the other dogs around.

"Toby" was yet another stray Min Pin at a shelter. Isn't this amazing? We did not think this boy was going to make it. He was around 5 yrs. old and emaciated. His heart was already showing signs of damage from having heartworms for a number of years. When I took him to my vet I was halfway hoping we wouldn't be able to treat him or he would have a nasty disposition and then my decision wouldn't be so hard. Of course, Toby is one of the most magnificent Min Pins I've ever seen. His temperament is outstanding, as well as his manners. Nothing bothers this boy. He took the first week of treatment badly. His heart started having arrhythmia. I would visit him and he didn't even know I was holding him. My vet kept him for the first week to be sure he survived. He is a fighter and we've decided he's got to make it no matter how much his care costs!

"Ginger II" was taken in over a year ago by a woman who thought she was doing the right thing. She is a 4 yr. old Min Pin who was being dumped by her previous owner. The lady who cared for her the past year did not have her tested for heartworms and did not use preventative. She is now with us because the woman suddenly now doesn't have time for her and we are having to treat her for heartworms. She shouldn't have too many complications because she is a little on the fat side.

On Sunday, July 13th "Toby" and "Joey" were both special guests on America's Health Network for their show "Ask The Veterinarian". Can you guess what the topic was? Yes, it was about heartworm disease. The calls that were coming in to the show exemplified how ignorant the majority of people seem to be when it comes to heartworm disease and heartworm prevention. The ball is being dropped somewhere and responsible dog owners and breeders need to pick it up.

Miniature Pinscher Club of America, Inc.