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A Few Good Women Writers

Finding Winston

by Vicki Foertschbeck
September 19, 2011

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On a very cold day last January my dear friends' cockapoo, Winston, went missing. We started our search by contacting local shelters, vets and by putting up pink flyers around Ellicott City and Columbia. We even set up a Facebook page, "Help Find Winston." But still no Winston.

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Someone suggested contacting Dogs Finding Dogs, a local nonprofit organization of trained handlers and dogs dedicated to finding lost pets. Lynn and her tracking dog, Mabel, were called to action. I spent an afternoon

watching Mabel pick up Winston's scent and was in awe of this canine's tracking abilities. Mabel memorized the scent from Winston's bed and took off sniffing. Her nose was stuck closely to the snow-covered ground (snow actually holds the scent longer) as she led us through woods, fields and close to a stream. Based on her behavior, Winston had definitely passed through the area. We had hope!

With a confirmed scent, we put up more flyers, this time within a 3 mile radius of the neighborhood. But day and weeks went by and still no Winston. Then a call came in from the Ft. Meade area with a possible sighting. Lynn and Mabel were called back but Mabel knew immediately that it was not Winston.

Lynn said it was common for a dog who had been missing for weeks to seek shelter near food and water – even if the food meant other animal droppings. She also made it very clear to approach Winston gently, as he would be in "survivor mode" and probably wouldn't come to anyone, not even his owner. He might even run away again. The best course of action was to try to keep him contained in an area by placing food out, in the hopes that he would stay. Unfortunately, Winston was on the move. Big time. There were more possible sightings, but, still no Winston. Lynn and Mabel continued to give everyone hope and encouraged us not to give up.

Two major snow/ice storms went through the area, and the outlook for finding sweet Winston was bleak. Nobody was giving up, though. One of the volunteers happened to see an ad on the DC Craigslist: "Found – white dog." No other information was given. The family wanted to protect Winston, to make sure that whoever made contact was the owner and not someone looking to do harm. It was highly unlikely that Winston had traveled to the DC area, but it was worth a shot. The two families connected, pictures were exchanged, and it appeared to be a match! My friends drove 33 miles, 44 days later to see if this dog was their boy. After doing his tricks, they knew it was him. He was safe, happy and quite shaggy. Winston is now back home and doing quite well.

Vicki Foertschbeck is an account executive for Maryland Life with first-hand experience working with Dogs Finding Dogs. For more information, visit www.dogsfindingdogs.com or check out the article in the October issue.

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