

Introduction

During this pandemic, I have thought of the lives that didn't need to be lost if the right information could find its way to the right people at the right time. On top of that, we now have daily reports of black lives that are lost, taken, mainly because some people have false information in their brains. Although these are scary times to be a human, the pandemic of ignorance facing cats and dogs is much more severe. Every day, I think of the lives I could save if I could get people to listen, to follow my advice. For most of the situations where we are called out to perform a search, the loss could have been prevented. All of the dogs in the shelter, they wouldn't even need to be there if their owners just did the one simplest thing, literally the least they could possibly do, and just put a little ID tag on the collar. How hard would that be? How many millions of tax dollars could be saved (if that's all you cared about) if people would just put ID tags on their dogs? For lost pets, there's more that could be done than just putting on ID tags. You can take steps before a pet is lost, and after they go missing, and each component greatly increases your chance of finding your pet. According to the statistics on my web page, Three Retrievers Guide to Finding Your Lost Cat has been viewed 788 times in the past month. The page for Loss Prevention for Cats has been viewed exactly 0 times. The best, most helpful information is not reaching anyone. And of the people who did access the Guide to Finding Your Lost Cat, I would imagine that most or all of them read it after their cat was missing. The best time to read that guide is before your cat goes missing. I know that it is this way for all the helping professions, and doctors must despair at all of the people who died of heart disease who could have been saved if they were amenable to following sound advice. I'm certain that no doctor would approve of my diet.

Although the problem of lost pets affects millions of lost cats and dogs, a bigger problem is the unwanted pets who don't even rise to the status of lost. The shelters

are full of cats and dogs who weren't lost, they were discarded. Here is my Mu. He is my working partner, my friend, my adopted son. I have thousands of pictures of him, and I wrote a book about him. He means everything to me, and I would be devastated if I lost him. To someone else, he was an inconvenience, disposable. They were happy to get \$100 to be rid of him. If every dog was regarded the way I regard Mu, then the problem of pets dying in shelters would go away overnight. Although Mu is a fantastic dog, he is not necessarily better than any of the dogs that died in the shelter today. If given the right environment, most or all of those dogs could have become like Mu: celebrated, loved, trained at a skill, a contributing member of society.

I'm writing a book about Mu because he is a wonderful dog and I think people would like to know him, see his pictures, and hear his stories. He's a dog that finds lost cats, which is unusual and interesting to many people. I'm also writing this because I want to change hearts and minds about the true nature of dogs, and their value to the world. I believe that I will mostly fail in that goal. Most people are not going to be persuaded by some of my ideas that I consider most important, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I should remain silent. If I only reach a few people, it's certainly worth the effort.

People who have heard stories about Mu and me have said that we are heroes because of the lives we have saved. It is certainly my goal to save lives, and I'm always glad when we can. However, if anything we do could be considered heroic, I don't entirely agree that saving lives is the main thing. What we do that is heroic is that we go out and fail, most days. On most of our searches, we use all of our skills and experience to try to find a lost cat, and we still don't pinpoint the cat. We don't fail because of a lack effort or a lack of ability. Mu has proven himself capable of finding hundreds of lost cats. My knowledge and methods are as good or better than anyone else I know who does similar work, although I'm always looking for ways to improve. We fail

because that is the nature of the job, that the search dog is not always the best answer in finding a lost cat. I bring the search dog because he is the best chance of finding a cat under certain circumstances, and under those particular conditions the search dog may be the only way a cat would be found. If some lost cat is in a different sort of situation, then one of the other recovery methods is going to have a better chance of succeeding. The point is, the search dog is intended to be used in conjunction with those other methods, to give the cat the best chance of being found. It is built into the problem that the search dog is not going to pinpoint the lost cat in about 75% of our efforts. But in 25% he will, and that's why we try.

The main way that I try to help the owners of lost cats and dogs is that I try to get the correct information to them. For 12 years, I have kept track of what works and what doesn't for any given situation. I also fail, probably half the time, in getting people to follow the best advice for finding a lost pet. My failure is not due to a lack of intelligence on my part or on the part of the person seeking my help, usually. Although I spend all day, every day, trying my best to communicate with people, I still can be misunderstood sometimes. The main barrier to getting the correct information to people is that they already hold a set of assumptions in their minds. When I play Scrabble, once I think of a particular word to fit the letters, it blocks me from thinking of a better word. My mind gets stuck on the solution I thought of, and it takes a considerable, concerted effort to work past the suboptimal solution. If you ever lost a pet, you know that lots of people offer advice, much of it contradictory. Many of the best pet recovery techniques are counterintuitive, and much of the free, unsolicited advice seems intuitive but has proven to be wrong in many situations. For example, one of the best ways to catch a stray dog is to run away from him, and absolutely the worst way to catch a stray dog is to run toward him. Running toward a lost or stray dog is actually a good way to get him killed. Other assumptions come from misinformation circulating

by word of mouth. Coyotes, for example. If your cat or dog is missing, there is a 100% chances someone will feed you bad information about coyotes before you talk to the tenth person about your lost pet. I'm always fighting against that misinformation, but I have no hope that I will eradicate it forever. My goal is to move the needle, and guide some small percentage of people to better information.

Much of this book is stories about dogs finding lost pets, and I think many people could find these stories interesting. Of course, this book is full of pictures, sometimes adequate and sometimes more than adequate, of Mu and other really beautiful creatures. It's hard to see how anyone could go wrong with a book full of pictures with Mu. Eventually, I will get around to what I view as the more effective solution to lost pets. With millions of cats and dogs going missing every year, obviously Mu & I can't personally help them all. I hope an understanding of how and why cats and dogs go missing, and the best ways of finding them, will help the percentages. The underlying problem, though, is that our society treats cats and dogs as disposable consumer products. That so many die in shelters is by design. If capitalism and commerce drive the welfare of pets, then a natural consequence of that philosophy is that it's always going to be someone's job to kill the unwanted surplus to make way for new inventory.

My solution to the misery inflicted on lost and unwanted pets is that they need an elevation in status. They need to be treated as family. In the last chapter, a critical part of the book, I'm going to talk about Mu's soul. That shouldn't be a problem, you might think. There are best-selling books about the souls of cats and dogs, so the average reader might be happy to read about Mu's soul. However, in my experience, those books about the souls of pets are complete nonsense and they do harm to the reality of what a dog is. My views on the soul of a dog are rational, and also incomplete and sometimes contradictory. I won't be telling people what they want to hear, as appar-

ently those best-selling books do. I thought about cutting that out, since I feel certain that I won't persuade too many people, and a difficult chapter is probably going to reduce my audience. I tried to cut it out. I can't. If I am going to write a book about Mu and me, it has to be an honest book, even if it means some people won't read it, even if it means some people will finish the book with perhaps a bit of unease, rather than a feeling of validation or triumph.

I think it is in my nature to fail, or at least to have a tolerance for failure and loss. I seem to be attracted to losing causes, to those who were right but lost anyway. Although I always want to do my best, and succeed as often as I can, something in me allows me to do a job marked by failure when others might choose a career where they would be assured more success. In our daily work, I know we are going to fail most of the time, and I never stop trying to use all of my skills and knowledge, knowing the successes are worth it. In writing this book, I need to stick to what I know to be true, from my experience, even if it will limit the audience of my writing. I can't do anything else. If my truth reaches someone, anyone, then it will be worth it.

01 Mu Finds Blaze





On Thursday, May 24, 2018, Mu searched for a lost cat named Blaze. Mu is 85 pounds, dark brown, with the muscular build of a pit bull mix. Although his job is to use his nose, his brown eyes are alert, assessing everything. He wears a bright orange vest, with a panel that says SEARCH in black letters. His job is to find lost cats, the way other trained dogs search for lost humans. When we arrived at the start of the search, he was amped up, as usual, whining and pacing, eager to begin. The previous day, this cat had escaped from a faulty pet carrier in front of a veterinary office in Mill Creek, WA, north of Seattle. His family had brought him there to have a lump on his abdomen checked. They were responsible pet owners, whose beloved cat escaped through no fault of anyone in particular. It could just as easily have happened to me. Blaze, a fluffy orange cat, eight years old and sixteen pounds, ran into the tangled forest near the vet's office when the carrier he was in fell apart without warning. The woods near the parking lot were about five acres, and very dense with thick underbrush and fallen trees. Family and friends searched for Blaze and called his name for hours, but they couldn't find him. I had advised his family to set a humane trap overnight, but after his traumatic experience with the pet carrier, I wasn't sure if he would go into a trap. Often, in a case where a cat is lost in an area with lots of hiding places in dense woods, I would normally recommend using the trap and not necessarily using the cat-detection dog right away. In thick woods, there is the risk of scaring a cat away with the noise of stepping on twigs and brush. Because Blaze didn't go into the trap overnight, and he might have an aversion to the trap, I agreed that bringing the search dog seemed to be the best option. Also, the possibility of an urgent medical condition favored swift action over patient waiting.

When Mu and I got ready to start the search, Blaze's owner, Stacy, presented some items for the search dog to sniff, to follow the scent trail. I explained to her that, although I do have dogs trained to follow scent trails of individual cats and dogs, this

wasn't a good situation for that type of search because of the heavy brush and brambles. It would be difficult or impossible to follow a scent trail from point A to point B because Blaze undoubtedly slipped under the fallen trees and berry vines where a scent-trailing dog and human could not easily follow. Mu is a cat-detection dog. He looks for any cat he can find, the way a search dog might screen luggage for a bomb. In Mu's case, the cat is the bomb. This allows us to search all the hiding places within a given radius, and we don't need to rely on a scent trail when the circumstances might make one difficult to track. Mu has had success finding cats in brambles and brush using the approach of a grid search.

A high ceiling of thin clouds blocked the sun, and the weather app on my phone said it was 59 degrees, but it felt warmer to me. When the temperature rises above 63 degrees, Mu may become less efficient as a search dog. If he starts panting too much, then the incoming air mostly bypasses his olfactory membrane. I wanted to find Blaze quickly, before Mu got too warm to work effectively. I attached the leash to Mu's harness, his cue to switch to work mode. He started sniffing around the edge of the woods, and I held him back, to avoid getting into the brush and making noise. About 30 minutes into our search, on a gravel road beside the woods, Mu found coyote scat, and pointed it out to me, as he is trained to do. Coyotes usually reveal what they have been eating because they consume the fur and bones of their prey. This coyote had eaten a white cat some time in the last couple of weeks, it appeared, judging by the fur. There wouldn't be any wild animals with that much white fur. Coyotes don't normally prey on domestic pets, but once one of them starts doing it, he usually continues, creating a surge in lost cat posters in an area. This discovery made it more urgent to locate Blaze quickly. With his unknown illness and coyotes in the area, and the rising temperatures, I felt like we really needed to find him fast.

I let Mu continue the search, into the dense woods. I tried to start working on the far side of where I thought Blaze would likely be, so that if we flushed him out of hiding, he would move closer to his owner, who was waiting near where the trap was set, close to the vet's office. It is almost never our goal to flush a cat out of a hiding place. Our hope is to find the cat and not disturb him. Then I would pull the search dog away and let the cat's owner gently coax him out of hiding. Because there is always a risk that we could inadvertently flush a cat out of his safe spot, I try to work the dog so that if it does happen, the cat moves closer to home, or closer to safety. I used a GPS app on my phone to navigate on the far side of where I suspected Blaze would be. About an hour into the search, Mu found more coyote scat. In this case, the coyote had eaten a grey striped cat, some time within the last two weeks. It appeared these woods were home to one or more coyotes in the habit of eating cats.

Because it was cloudy and I couldn't use the sun for direction, I used my phone's GPS to track our movements and try to search the dense woods in a methodical way. In this tangled forest, even though we were in the middle of a dense suburban area, there were no visual cues to indicate we weren't in the middle of a vast wilderness. Although Mu follows his nose, to some extent, I do steer him to one area or another, asking him to "Check this," or "Check here." We try to work an area in an efficient grid, so we don't miss any hiding places. The GPS track recorded on my phone as a red line on the map shows if we miss any areas, so we can go back and fill in the gaps. We looped through the woods once and came out in a nearby apartment complex. Blaze didn't appear to be in the apartment complex, under a deck or under a car, and we had found no signs, so far, that he had been taken by a coyote. We entered the woods in a new location, and carefully searched a new area. I was trying to move slow and quiet, so as not to displace Blaze, but the dense brush was full of crunchy dead leaves and dried twigs and skinny branches that snapped under my feet. About 90 minutes into

the search, as the temperature was climbing closer to the 63 degree mark, Mu hit on the fresh scent of a cat. I held him back, so he didn't advance too quickly, but up ahead of him I saw Blaze pop out of a fern and jump over a log. I was relieved that we found him, but anxious that he bolted. And he was headed the wrong direction, deeper into the woods.



I called his owner, and asked her to go the apartments to the west because it seemed Blaze was headed that way. Mu and I continued to track Blaze, trying not to make him feel more panic, but Mu was very excited, and not very stealthy. Fifty feet ahead of us, I saw Blaze run up a tree. This was good, in a way, because at least he wouldn't be running farther away. We could get him down with a ladder if he would just stay put. Mu and I went to the base of the tree, hoping to keep him there until his owner came, but Blaze jumped down. I was worried we might lose him, but Blaze just froze, about twelve feet ahead of us. He didn't like the dog following him, and he may have had the instinctive knowledge that it's best not to run from a dog and make him chase. Blaze was going to stand his ground and give Mu hell if he got too close. The fluffy orange cat was stressed, probably ill, and obviously not in a good mood. I used Mu's leash to secure the excited dog to a tree, a little farther away, and I moved closer to Blaze. I watched his body language, and I would stop advancing when he appeared to be getting ready to bolt again.

I guided Stacy into the woods, but it took her a long time to get to us because the brush was so dense. She couldn't see us at all, so I would steer her with text messages as I listened to her footsteps approaching. In places, she had to crawl to get to us. I was able to get within about four feet of where Blaze was crouched. I didn't want to grab at him because he looked like he might panic and run. As his owner approached, the crunching leaves and twigs made Blaze get up as if getting ready to bolt, so I instructed her to stop approaching until he relaxed again. In this way, moving about five feet at a time, she gradually moved closer to Blaze. When she was about three feet away, Blaze started to move slowly away, as if his legs were heavy. He moved like you do in a dream sometimes, when you want to run from zombies but your legs won't respond properly. Blaze's owner moved forward quietly but swiftly, from behind, and she gently scooped him up. Once in her arms, he didn't struggle, and he seemed

ready to go home. I kept Mu away, and tried to keep him quiet, as the owner carried Blaze out of the woods. A friend met her in the closest neighboring yard and they climbed into the car, not even trying to get Blaze in a carrier. They lived five minutes away, and I was very relieved to get the text message that Blaze was safely in the house without further incident.

I felt very proud of Mu, my partner. We have worked together for over 8 years and found hundreds of lost cats. He is my best friend, my family, and he is smart and funny, a hard worker and a great companion. He does get a little too excited sometimes, when I wish he would be quieter around a cat, but that energy and enthusiasm is what keeps him working, in dense woods, for hours, when the temperature starts to climb. With my knowledge and experience, I am able to direct him so that his skilled nose has the best chance for success. We make a great team, and I feel a deep connection to him. He means the world to me, and I would do anything for him. I understand, when someone loses a cat, that they have lost a family member, and they would do anything they could to get their cat back. I can just imagine if my Mu was lost, how devastated I would be. My bond with Mu helps us honor the bond people feel with their cats. We don't always find the lost cat, but we do pinpoint them about 25% of the time. When we don't find the cat, we can at least provide information to guide the search. For cats like Blaze, we are able to be the answer their families need in a time of crisis.

Sometimes, when we are in the middle of a search for a lost cat or dog, I will run into someone who implies or expresses overtly that they think it is odd or surprising that anyone would go to so much trouble to find a lost pet. I've had people say things like, "It must be a really expensive or important dog." Or, "You can get a new cat at the pound, really cheap." Those are the type of people who would not hire me and my search dogs to look for a lost pet. The people who do hire us often refer to their cats

and dogs as their children. That's certainly how I think about my dogs. Mu's full name is Wakomu, a name given to him by his foster family. In Chippewa, it means, He Is Family. (Or so I was told. I haven't been able to verify this. Maybe they were playing a joke on me, and Wakomu actually means "He is crazy," which would also be appropriate.) Mu is my family. He means more to me than any material possessions. I like my dogs more than all but a handful of humans, and those humans I do like understand that they are never a higher priority to me than my dogs. I bought Mu, in 2011, for \$100 to get him away from a life of abuse and neglect, and I didn't originally plan to keep him for myself. I fell in love with him (as if I had a choice), and now we have been working partners since 2012. He likes to sleep curled up behind my knees. We have worked hundreds of cases together, and he has located hundreds of missing cats that probably wouldn't have been found by other means. He has helped families find their lost sons and daughters who just happen to be cats. We do this work because we enjoy it. We do this work because there is a great need for the service. We do this work because if my Mu was lost, I would do anything within my power to get him back. Mu is an extension of my soul, and I would be lost without him.

Mu and I are good at what we do. We work well together, and our years of experience allows us to solve cases of missing pets more frequently and effectively than when we started. We have learned from our mistakes. Still, I always want to improve. One way I think we could make great improvements in the rate at which lost cats and dogs stay with their families is through education. The best way to help a lost pet is to prevent that pet from going missing in the first place. The next best way is to prepare for the chance that your pet will go missing, and have a plan of action ready for a worst case scenario. Another factor that makes a huge difference in the rate of recovery of lost pets is the human-animal bond, and it is my hope that stories of search dogs finding pets can help people see their pets in a new light, perhaps becoming

closer, or understanding each other better. Another way we could help more lost pets would be if more people were trained to do this work. People often ask for my help when I am already busy on another search, and I wish there were more people in my area working in this field so I could refer people in need to a qualified person and search dog. Before I started training for this work, in 2008, I didn't even know it was a thing people did. If I had known I could work with my trained dogs to find lost pets, I would have started doing this sooner. When people do call me, they often say they had no idea there was a service to find lost pets until they happened to stumble upon my web page through a google search, or a friend referred them. Lost pet recovery, conducted by trained professionals, should be a service available for any and every cat and dog. I hope someday it will be common for search dogs to be available for lost pets, and I hope these stories about Mu will inspire some people to train their dogs and educate themselves in finding lost pets. My dogs and I can only help about 700 to 800 families per year with searches and advice. I see on social media and through web sites that dozens of cats and dogs go missing in my area every day. As much as Mu loves to find cats, there are simply too many for us to find them all. I hope that someone reading this book will be inspired to train a dog like Mu.



02 Meet The Puppy





The puppy, about six months old, couldn't lift his head because the cable he was tied out on had wrapped around the base of a shrub. He looked up at me with puppy eyes, his head hung low. I had to help him if there was any possible way. A friend had told me about this puppy, chained in a yard. He was outside all the time, and only the office workers next door fed him and gave him water. I had come to investigate and

see what I could do. His collar appeared too tight, wounding his neck. Looking at him between the boards of the fence, I tried to think of how to help. As I walked to the front door, I tried to come up with a plan, a plausible scenario. Mostly, I wanted to punch these people in the face, and I couldn't think straight. I knocked on the door, and when the owner came to the door, I politely mentioned that I just happened to be at the office building next door and noticed that their puppy had wrapped his leash around a shrub and was stuck, whining and crying. Was there anything I could do to help? I was wearing a sweatshirt with the Missing Pet Partnership logo, so they may not have believed my lie that I just happened to be in the neighborhood.

They said his name was Puppy, (they hadn't even bothered to give him a real name), and they unhooked him and brought him to the front door. He was remarkably friendly, happy, and calm, under the circumstances. With no leash on, he didn't try to get away. He seemed like the kind of puppy you would like to have in your house, flopped on the couch. They said they didn't have time for him, with a new baby on the way, and they were looking to sell him. They never said anything specific to imply this, and I don't have a valid reason for thinking so, but I got the impression they left him tied in the yard without attention because they wanted him to grow up mean and scary, for protection. He probably wasn't mean enough for them. They wanted \$100. I checked my pockets and I had \$70, which I offered them. Had I been thinking clearly, I would have just gone to the ATM right then. Instead, they gave me their number and told me to call them the next day. When I called, they said he was sold. However, a friend noticed they had a craigslist ad posted for him, selling him for \$100. Another friend called, offering to buy the dog, and she identified herself as being with a non-profit that helps lost dogs, thinking that would be a good thing. They told her Puppy had been sold. A third person called to buy Puppy, not identifying herself as being with any group or agency, and they agreed to sell the puppy to her. Perhaps they

didn't want to deal with a nonprofit because they didn't want to get into some sort of trouble for mistreating him, I don't know. Anyway, I brought \$100 and stayed out of sight as my friend completed the transaction. On May 25th, 2011, Puppy became my dog. She brought the puppy over to where I sat on the grass, and he draped himself across my legs. He was irresistibly cute, as you would imagine with a six month old puppy. It was so sad, how his family sold him like a sack of potatoes, but I felt relieved to know we could keep him safe.

On the other hand, I realized, as I sat on the grass in the park, in the sun, with the puppy flopping on my legs, that I really should not have a puppy. I already had three dogs and I often took care of a fourth. I was in the process of spending more than \$9,000 for cancer treatments for my sweet dog, Tess, and I didn't have any money. Although I would obviously take great care of a dog, and love him completely, I probably wasn't the best choice for him for the long term, or so I thought at the time. A volunteer and I took him to the vet to get checked out. Then we went to the pet store to get him a proper collar and a name tag. When it came time to engrave his new name in metal, I suggested Ruggles, the name of a dog in a story I was working on at the time. She didn't care for that name. I suggested Mocha, because he was dark brown like good coffee or chocolate, and she liked that better. Once you name a dog, it deepens your bond. Although she had two cats at home, I thought it made more sense for her to take him, temporarily, rather than me. She agreed to take him home and foster him.

She loved him, because how could you not, and he was very happy with her. We met Mocha a few times, with other dogs, to work on his training and socialization. Once freed from life on a chain, Mocha showed great enthusiasm for everything, and he started showing too much enthusiasm for the cats. When he was out in the yard, he jumped in through a window, knocking out the screen, to be with the cats. He earned

the name Wakomu, a Chippewa phrase meaning "He is family," or Komu for short. However, when he reached eight months of age, his foster said she couldn't keep him any more. He had become too energetic, and her work schedule didn't allow her to spend enough time with him. Komu came to live with us, as a last resort.

Obviously, he was great fun, very friendly, a gorgeous puppy. He was also a force of nature in terms of destructive capacity. He loved to chase and harass the other dogs, constantly, and he would chew on anything possible. Although he had been house trained at the foster's home, he forgot his training in our house, which is not unusual for a dog coming to a new home. To keep him safe, to keep him from electrocuting himself by chewing through a power cord, to keep him from harassing poor Tess too much, I had to keep him on a leash inside the house. This meant he was with me constantly. He was charming and exasperating.

When he reached one year of age, in December of 2011, I took him to our weekly training session. Kelsy, my black Labrador, who was trained to find lost dogs since 2008, was still attending training sessions weekly, to sharpen her skills and also as a reward for her hard work. At the training session, we tested Komu for aptitude and ability, both for finding dogs and for finding cats. He showed great desire and a capacity to learn quickly. At home, he had never learned to stop annoying the other dogs, but at training, he was very adaptable and he seemed to understand the concepts of training. Because Kelsy was already finding lost dogs with me, I decided to start training Komu to find lost cats, even though he would have done well at either job. He loved training, and he always found the hidden cat. At home, after we began his training sessions, Mu became much easier to deal with. Part of that was probably due to outgrowing his puppy phase, but I think most of his behavioral improvement was due to having a job. Dogs need jobs. The other dogs and I could finally relax at home without being terrorized 24/7 by the crazy puppy.

In May of 2012, Mu and I took the certification test for him to officially become a cat detection dog. There was a cat hidden in a carrier somewhere within the park, within a five acre area, and we had one hour to find the hidden cat. I felt confident that Mu would find the cat because he had in every other training exercise up to that point. We methodically cleared areas of the park, and Mu performed just as he should, following my direction to check specific areas for hidden cats. When we came past a certain hedge row, I had a feeling that the cat was around because the trainer was watching Mu closely for any sign that he caught the scent of a cat. We walked by a dense juniper several times, and Mu never signaled the presence of a cat. After six months of training, Mu and I failed the test. I knew he had the ability because he had demonstrated it clearly during dozens of training exercises. I don't know why he failed that day, but my suspicion is that the warm sun shining on the exterior of the dense juniper was creating a chimney effect, drawing cool air in from below, with the air rising inside the juniper and releasing at the top. We took the test again the following week, and Mu had no trouble at all finding the hidden cat. Since June of 2012, Mu has found at least 300 missing cats.

I often think about how our lives would be different if I hadn't met Mu. What if I was busy that day and I couldn't answer the call about a puppy in need? What if a friend hadn't persisted and called a third time to see if the puppy was for sale? Would Mu have survived? If he did survive, would he have lived his whole life on a chain? Would he have become mean? Just today, Mu was sprawled across the king size bed with his feet up in the air, snoring gently. We have a gas fireplace and the dog bed on the hearth is known as Mu's spot. Hundreds of cats were found by Mu, but would I have trained some other dog to find lost cats? I'm quite certain that I've told Mu that I love him at least once a day for the past eight years, but many times more than that I have just looked over at him and thought how much I love him, without saying a word.

The dog that was unwanted, sold for \$100, he is as an extension of my soul. On searches, I have said many times, somewhat jokingly, "In my next life, I'm going to be the dog and Mu will be my human." Perhaps I would have loved another dog just as much, I don't know. I do know that I am very glad I happened to meet him, and that I got stuck with him even when I tried not to. I'm lucky he didn't work out at the first foster home. He is beautiful and smart and funny. He is also annoying and difficult sometimes, just like human children can be. Every day, I am grateful to have him in my life. Even if he had failed at finding cats, he would still be the best dog in the world.



03 Mu Finds Mr. Kitty at the Airport.



Mu stood on top of a large rock in the landscape, in a fenced-off area of the airport. His orange vest, emblazoned with SEARCH, might seem normal for the airport, but this search dog was not looking for bombs or drugs. The lean and powerful dog stood on the boulder and whined and cried, and a cat started meowing back at him from

deep underneath, in a crevice. It had to be the lost cat, Mr. Kitty, who had gone missing 5 days earlier. From the sound of him, he was quite interested in Mu, and it almost seemed like they were talking to each other. I recorded a brief video on my phone to send to the owner, to verify it was the right cat. I was able to shine my flashlight into the deep crevice, and I could see just enough of the little black and white cat to know this was our quarry. At that point, Mu couldn't help any more, so I asked the airport employee to stand guard at the rock while I took Mu back to the car. I was quite proud of him, but then I'm always proud of him. Mu had found the lost cat in five minutes after it took five days to get permission to search that area. As I walked him through the terminal, into the elevator, and out to the parking garage, people noticed the sturdy dog in the orange vest, and my jacket that said LOST PET RESCUE in large letters across the back. At seven years old, having been working for six years, Mu had already found hundreds of lost cats. I got him settled into the car, and pulled out the catch pole and snappy snare, tools that might be useful for getting a cat out from under a huge rock.

When Mr. Kitty's owner first contacted me, the cat had already been missing two days. She explained how they were moving to Japan, for the military, and their cat had gotten away from them at the airport. With a leash still attached, he ran under some temporary fencing for a construction zone. The Port of Seattle was redoing an expansive area, roughly the size of a football field, that had once had a large water feature, a recirculating stream running between boulders set in concrete. It had been drained long ago, and just a little rainwater had collected at the low spots. I told the owner I would try to help with the search dog if we could figure out the right person to talk to for permission. In the meantime, Mu and I searched the publicly accessible areas outside the construction fence, just in case Mr. Kitty had bolted across the street in the

middle of the night. The parking garage had lots of nooks and crannies, but Mu did not catch a scent, and I saw no feline footprints in the dust, only little rat footprints.

On the fifth day, we finally got permission to go in, with an escort, as long as I wore a hard hat. I wanted to say that I shouldn't be wearing a hard hat if Mu wasn't, but I knew it was pointless to try to argue with an employee of the federal government, since he wasn't the one who made the rules. As we started working the area closest to the point of escape, Mu of course took an interest in the cat traps that had been set. In the several days that the traps had been deployed, I think they caught one rat. I worked Mu along the rocks, and he hit upon a place where I couldn't even see the possibility for a cat. It was a large rock, the size of a washing machine, probably 500 pounds, and the concrete walkway had been poured right up to it, as a continuous surface. At first, I didn't see any way for a cat to be there. When the cat started meowing back at us, well, obviously there was a cat there, whether it seemed possible or not. This type of situation shows the value of a search dog's nose when looking for a cat. Although most cats are found with just a visual search, there will be times when a dog's nose can find cats that wouldn't otherwise be found. After I took Mu to the car and came back, I was able to fit my hand into a crevice, just barely, and feel the leash still attached. If Mu hadn't found Mr. Kitty, it seems likely that he would have remained stuck under that rock until he starved to death.

Shortly after Mu located Mr. Kitty, I was able to send a video, via Facebook Messenger, to his owner in Japan. You could see Mr. Kitty, with his blue collar, and hear him talking loudly as Mu whined in the background. She was delighted and amazed, and relieved. She called a relative who lived an hour away from the airport, someone who Mr. Kitty knew, and he started driving to us to see if he could coax Mr. Kitty out. While we were waiting, we tried different ways to try to cat the cat out from under the rock. I was able to snake a snappy snare in through the crack and get it around the

neck of the cat. A snappy snare is like a dog leash except that it has a springy rod in the handle. You pull the end of the snappy snare back toward the handle, with a metal ring sliding up the length, and it forms a large loop that is spring loaded. When you let go, the ring slides down the tether, and it tightens around a dog's neck. When the dog pulls away, it tightens more, and he can't back out of it. It was definitely not designed for getting cats out from under rocks, but in this case it was the best tool we had. So, I had the snare on the cat and I had his leash in my hand, but the crack between the big rock and the next big rock seemed awfully small to try to squeeze a cat through. He could fit, but not if he was resisting. When the owner's relative got there, Mr. Kitty seemed to recognize him and come close to the crack, but we still couldn't get him through.

After a couple of hours of trying to get the cat out from under the rock, including fashioning various poking devices to try to prod him toward the opening, unsuccessfully, I had the idea of pouring water down the back side of the rock, to move Mr. Kitty toward the opening. This worked better than I hoped it would, and Mr. Kitty came toward the crevice. As the water came out the bottom, we could see that there was actually a larger opening under the adjacent rock, where Mr. Kitty could get out without having to squeeze through. I eased up the tension on the leash and the snappy snare, and Mr. Kitty willingly walked out to this man that he knew. We quickly secured him in a carrier, to make sure he wouldn't get lost again. After five days under a rock, Mr. Kitty began his journey home to Puyallup, and eventually to Japan.

Was this a heroic thing that Mu did? I would call it heroic behavior for selfish reasons. He likes his job, and he wasn't necessarily doing it because it saved a cat's life. Although I never say so to my human clients, I think it is implied in most things I say and do that I am here for the animals. As previously stated, I like most dogs and cats more than I like most humans. There are a few humans that I value highly, and, as I

think about it just now, it seems that all of them place a high value on the welfare of animals, as far as I can recall. Certainly, I wouldn't waste another moment talking to a person if I discovered they hated animals in general, or dogs specifically. When Mr. Kitty's life was saved by Mu's nose and my experience and training, my goal was definitely to save that cat's life, to save him from suffering. It also saved his owner from the heartache of losing a beloved cat, a family member. I'm happy she got her cat back, and I can certainly empathize with how she felt, both when she lost her cat and when she learned he was safe. I'm very glad that we could help her. I always want to help people, but I want to help them so they can help the animals. Which is not to say that I value the lives of dogs and cats more than the lives of humans. I would say I value animals as much as humans. They are not less than us. If that had been a human child lost in a construction zone, authorities and law enforcement would have acted immediately to find him. They wouldn't have waited five days to authorize access. Because our current laws don't afford cats and dogs the same sorts of protections that human children receive, it is up to the pet parent take precautions.

I consider Mu to be an extension of my soul, if there is such a thing. Perhaps Mu is a metaphorical extension of my hypothetical soul, but at any rate, he is what I value most in the world. What is the value of a frightened cat hiding under a rock? Is it equivalent to a lost piece of luggage? Is he a nuisance? Is he someone's soulmate? 23 cats and dogs have been mine over the years, including the five dogs and one cat I currently live with. My animals contain fragments of my soul because of a bond of love. I hope that, compared to how animals are treated in the future, we live in the dark ages, relatively speaking. It is inhumane, the way our society treats them as disposables. To be fair, in the past, various cultures have treated other men and women, and children, as disposable property for centuries, so it's not just dogs and cats who have been improperly valued. I hope that in the future, cats and dogs and other ani-

mals won't be seen as inferior in any way. All animals have their own genius, even possums and slugs (two of my least favorite creatures). Possums eat thousands of ticks, and protect us all from these parasites. I certainly don't have the skill or the patience to go around finding and eating ticks, so I ought to be grateful for their service and mastery of their niche. I am not better than a possum, just because I know how to type on a computer and drive a car. My dog, my Mu, the living manifestation of my soul, means the world to me, but he is little more than a piece of luggage in the eyes of the law. If the police came to my house because of a mistake, because they got lost or had the wrong address, and if Mu barked at them, as he would bark at any stranger entering our house uninvited, a police officer would be allowed, under the law, to shoot and kill him as if he was nothing, and there would be no repercussions. Someone could kill my dog due to no fault of his, or of mine, but simply because of their own error, and they would be perfectly within their rights. They could destroy a living manifestation of my soul without suffering any legal consequences. If Mu became lost, someone could find him and keep him, even though it is illegal to do so, and no government agency would expend much effort to get him back to me. Mu, the living, breathing manifestation of my hypothetical soul, is wandering around in a potentially dangerous world. In order to avoid a catastrophic loss for him, and an insurmountable loss for me, I had better make sure the odds of losing him are very low, and the odds of finding him, if lost, are as high as possible. I know that people who have lost their cats feel the same kind of bond as I feel towards my Mu, and that's why we work so hard to help make them whole again. Additionally, if everyone valued every dog and cat the way I love my Mu, we could change our laws and practices to keep them much safer.

If you are traveling by air with your pet—first of all, don't. Don't put a cat or dog in the cargo hold of an airplane if you can possibly avoid it. It is a terrifying experience

for most animals, and a significant percentage of pets are lost at airports when carriers are opened accidentally or inappropriately. If you absolutely must put your pet on a plane, as when the military requires you to move to a foreign country, do not, do not, do not open the carrier for any reason. You may think you are doing the cat or dog a favor, giving them some relief from confinement. While that may be true to some extent, you are exposing them to too much risk. If you are receiving a dog from an out of state rescue, saving him from a high kill shelter and giving him a chance at a new life, you may want to open the carrier to greet him and make him feel loved. Don't do it. Do not open a pet carrier until you have reached your final destination and you are in the house and all the doors are closed securely.



04 Komu and Kelsy



Kelsy was Mu's whole world. He loved her and he lived for her. Indeed, I wouldn't have Mu if not for Kelsy. I first saw Kelsy on the internet, as a puppy, nine weeks old, available for adoption. A little black Lab, she looked like what you would get if my two dogs, Porter and Tess, had a baby. I drove 100 miles to get her from the shelter. From day one, I wanted to work with Kelsy somehow, with her being a search dog of some sort and me being her handler. When Kelsy was three years old, Kelsy and Porter and

Tess and I went to our favorite off-leash park, and I saw a notice on the kiosk for training your dog to find lost pets. I knew right away that that was the right job for us. That got me involved with Missing Pet Partnership, a nonprofit that helped reunite lost pets. By the time I found out about Mu, Kelsy and I had been working lost dog cases for several years. Kelsy was never any trouble as a puppy. At home, I didn't need to put a leash on Kelsy because there was no need. Kelsy was a great search dog, the perfect partner. She was about 80 pounds, sturdy and solid. She loved to swim. She did not like Mu. Obviously, she came to love him eventually, but for at least six months, she just found him annoying. Kelsy loved to fetch. From the time Mu was about a year old, he could beat her to the ball every time. I had to hold onto Mu, throw the ball, and let Kelsy get a head start. Even then, he sometimes beat her. Kelsy complained about Mu often and loud. Really, she never stopped complaining about him, but she was his older sister, and he was a bratty little brother, so the complaining was more theatrical than heartfelt. Later on, when Mu matured enough that he wasn't constantly harassing Kelsy, she would often instigate a battle by teasing him with a stick or a piece of cardboard and keeping it away from him. Kelsy and Komu both loved going to training on Sundays, swimming in the lake, and fetching until they were exhausted. If not for Kelsy getting me involved with MPP, I wouldn't have found my Mu. If not for Kelsy being a search dog, I wouldn't have trained Mu to be a search dog, probably. Tess died shortly after I got Mu, so for many years it was Porter, Kelsy, and Mu, going on adventures, wrestling, fetching, swimming, sleeping in a big pile, and living a good life.

With Kelsy being the dog finder, technically a scent trailing dog, and Mu being the cat finder, technically a cat-detection dog, there weren't too many occasions for them to work together. A lost pet case would usually just require one or the other. In some cases, if a cat only ever lived indoors, we can try to follow the scent trail from the point

where the cat escaped, and then if that doesn't pinpoint the lost cat, then the cat detection dog can do a more thorough sweep.

Guinness the cat was fifteen years old at the time he went missing, and he had recently been diagnosed with the beginnings of kidney failure. He drank water frequently and needed a special diet. He had lived indoors all his life, but tried to escape now and then. On August 3rd, 2013, when company visited, Guinness took advantage of a distraction to scoot out the door. His home is on Lake Joy, among woods and farms northeast of Seattle. Shannon and Mike looked for Guinness immediately, but couldn't find him. Shannon called me the next day. I gave her advice over the phone and by email, but I wasn't available to bring the search dogs out until August 6th. I told Shannon we needed to start at 7 AM because search dogs don't perform well in the heat, and the high was predicted to be in the eighties that day.

Kelsy, Komu, and I drove about ninety minutes to reach this remote area. The dogs rest as the car hums along the freeway, but when we start to turn, slow, and stop as we approach our destination, they get worked up, anxious to play the game. Arriving at their home by the lake, I explained to Mike and Shannon and their daughter that I would be using Kelsy first, then Komu. Kelsy was trained to follow specific scent trails from point A to point B. She followed dogs, mostly, because they travel longer distances in new territory. I usually didn't use Kelsy for cats because most cats are lost in their home territory, with new scent trails overlapping old trails. In this case, since Guinness was an indoor-only cat, I thought we could try Kelsy on the scent trail, as any scent she found should lead us to Guinness's current hiding place. Cats usually move in a more convoluted pattern than dogs, so following their scent trails can be tricky. I put Kelsy in her harness and took her around to the back door. As we left the car, Komu howled in protest at the unfairness of being left behind. Kelsy, a sturdy black Lab, sniffed at Guinness's bedding, and took off toward the northwest. She followed

the scent trail around the house to the north, back into their yard, and then into the yards of the homes to the south. Kelsy followed a trail winding in and out of thickets of ferns, salal, and huckleberry, around the homes by the lake. The scent trail looped over itself in several places, and it seemed that it overlapped as well, creating trail segments with double the scent of the rest of the trail. After working through several yards, Kelsy came out to the road and appeared to follow the scent down the road about half a mile, headed north again. I stopped her, and told Shannon and Mike that this portion of the trail could probably be attributed to transferred scent tracked by the family as they put up posters. While it is possible that Guinness could have walked right down the road like that, it would be unusual behavior for a frightened indoor cat.

We went back to the house, I put Kelsy in the car, and I brought out Komu, the cat detection dog. I explained to Shannon and Mike and their daughter that Komu works differently than Kelsy. He had been trained to search for any cat he could find, the way dogs search for concealed drugs or bombs. He would not be following a particular scent trail. He is rewarded, during training, when he finds a cat hidden in the bushes or in a structure. It would be possible that he could find the wrong cat, but if he did, I would reward him and tell him to keep searching. As I put Komu to work, methodically checking all areas, Kelsy howled in protest at the unfairness of being left behind. As we worked Komu, all of us humans could see an orange cat crouched on the front tire of an old truck in a driveway, but the cat was out of sight from Komu's perspective. Dogs generally don't pay attention to things that aren't moving, and because the cat was fifteen feet away, on a windless morning, Komu could not smell it. Although this obviously wasn't Guinness, I worked Komu over that direction to demonstrate his reaction to finding a cat. As we came within about five feet of the cat, which was out of sight behind the fender of the truck to Komu at that point, Komu alerted, starting to whine and pull hard on the leash. You could see, by the way he moved his nose, that he was

working into the scent plume, to the source. Mu followed his nose to the top of the tire, which was covered in orange and white fur, the cat having just slunk away under the truck. Komu barked his signal, and I rewarded him with string cheese I kept in my pocket just for that purpose. Energized by the find, I urged Komu to keep working, to find another kitty.

Two houses south of the point where Guinness escaped, Komu alerted on the scent of a cat. It was not his strongest alert. I read his behavior as indicating either that the cat had left that area recently, or the cat was inside the crawlspace of the house. It was a vacation home. The owners had been there over the weekend, and then left. If Guinness had hidden in the crawl space while the family was there, he could have been locked in when they left. Shannon worked at contacting them for access to the locked crawl space as Komu kept searching. We reached the southernmost point of Kelsy's trailing effort, and Komu wanted to keep looking farther south. We worked that yard thoroughly, then went out to the street and back down the driveway of the next house.

That family was not home, but we had received permission to search their yard. Komu worked around the edges of a wide thicket of blackberries, but the brambles were too thick for us to work into it. A cat could sneak right under the thorns. I worried that we could miss him if Guinness chose that patch of brambles to hide in. Closer to the lake, Komu became intensely interested in a boggy area with skunk cabbage and ferns. He worked down into the low area, his nose darting from side to side, analyzing fresh scents of a small animal. He did not whine as he usually does for a cat, so I began to suspect it was some other creature. Just as Komu came out of the ferns, he gave a small whine, and I saw the face of Guinness looking out from under a fern! I pulled Komu back and told Mike, "There he is! There's Guinness, right there." Mike got right down on the ground, just feet away from Guinness, but still didn't see the dark cat in

the darkness under the fern. He was looking to the left of the cat's location. I had to pull Komu back as he became excited about winning the game. I gave Komu more treats and tried to keep him quiet so he wouldn't cause Guinness to bolt.

Mike's daughter came up behind him and saw Guinness under the fern.

She redirected her dad's gaze, and then Mike saw Guinness, too. I told him to just talk softly to Guinness and not make any sudden movements.

Guinness was found about 400 feet south of his home, within the range that 90% of lost cats are found. Kelsy's initial scent trailing pointed us in the right direction, and Komu's cat-detection training pinpointed a cat who was hiding in silence, invisible to anyone passing by. As Mike and his daughter stayed with Guinness, I took Komu back to the car and got Shannon, who had been busy trying to track down a key to the neighbor's crawlspace. I explained that Komu found Guinness, and Mike was talking to him softly. I directed Shannon to bring a carrier so that we wouldn't risk losing Guinness again by carrying him back. I tried to explain which house it was by saying it was the really big house to the south. Apparently, there must have been an even bigger house I hadn't seen, because Shannon went too far south. After putting Komu in the car, I caught up to her and directed her to the right house. When Shannon came up to the swampy area, Guinness heard her voice and came right out to her. She carried him in her arms all the way home, forgetting my advice about the carrier.

As part of their reward, I took Kelsy and Komu back to Mike and Shannon's house and played fetch with them in the lake. Kelsy loved to play fetch, and she also loved to swim. Fetching and swimming were better rewards for her than string cheese even. Mu thinks fetching and swimming are fine, but what he really liked was getting the ball away from Kelsy. As Mike and Shannon and their daughter celebrated having Guinness home, Kelsy and Komu and I celebrated a successful search by splashing in the lake, fetching the ball many times. Sometimes, I would hang on to Komu's collar while

I threw the ball, to give Kelsy a head start and make sure she got the ball. Komu is too athletic, and he would get it every time if I didn't try to balance things out. Drenched, tired, and happy, I took the dogs back to the car. Mike and Shannon took Guinness to the vet, and his kidney values checked out just fine even after three nights of hiding in the bushes. Kelsy and Komu slept very well on the way home.

Mu sprawled over the back seat, and Kelsy took the front seat, draping her neck over the console to rest her head on my knee. Not all searches have happy endings, so the drive home after a successful search is especially enjoyable, with wet dogs sleeping, a decent song on the radio, and air conditioning. I like the smell of wet dogs. It almost always means we've had some sort of successful adventure.

Mike and Shannon hired search dogs to find their cat, Guinness, because he was a family member in their view. I knew how they felt because Kelsy and Komu were family to me. They were my work partners, but I loved them just as much as any parent loves a child. I started doing this work in 2008 because of Kelsy, because I wanted to work with her in job where we were partners, equals. In the years that we have been searching for lost pets, the single greatest predictor of whether or not a family will get their cat or dog back has been their bond with the missing pet. When a family views a cat or dog as a possession, as subordinate to other members of the family, they often give up, saying, "Well, we tried our best." For those families that feel a cat or dog is a key member of the family, giving up is not an option. They exhaust every option in searching for their pet, and they keep going even when several search strategies don't pan out. I tell people that the search dog only pinpoints the missing pet about 25% of the time, in my experience, and the search dog is only one tool, to be used in conjunction with all the other methods of searching for a pet. People are disappointed when we leave without finding the cat or dog, but those who are committed to continuing the search are usually rewarded with finding the pet, one way or another. Kelsy and Komu

and I searched for hundreds of lost cats and dogs, and I have consulted and advised on thousands more. I have experience with over 7000 lost pet cases in over 11 years of doing this work. Since 2008, I have only been able to help with a small fraction of the missing pets in the Seattle area. Dozens of pets go missing every day, and I could never hope to help them all with personal advice and search dogs. I want to help more pets get back home by sharing these stories of what worked and what didn't. Also, I want to inspire and encourage pet owners to build a deeper bond with their cats and dogs.

I got my first dog, Porter, in 2000, with expectations he would serve a purpose. I did not expect he would become such a central part of my life. At the moment, I have five dogs, Mu, Fozzie, Sky, Viktor, and Valentino. Fozzie was running down the freeway when someone told me about him. Mu and I went looking for the stray, and I was able to catch him in a humane trap. I found Sky wandering in a cemetery, and coaxed her to safety after many days of building trust. Viktor is a stray that we captured twice, the second time after he broke out of our house. Valentino was born in our laundry room after I had captured his stray mother in the mountains the day before. They are my children, my family. I take many precautions to keep them from escaping, including GPS tracking collars for Fozzie, Sky, Viktor, and Tino. If one of them should disappear because of some event I didn't foresee, I would deploy a range of strategies to get that dog home as soon as possible. I would never rest until my dog was found. I want all pet owners to have this kind of bond with their pets, for many reasons. First, it is rewarding in and of itself, to have a solid, positive relationship with an animal that is not your servant or your possession, but your friend and your family, your kin. Second, the animals deserve lives where they are valued, where they can contribute to society in the ways they are best suited. Third, if more people had this bond with their animals, fewer would be lost, and those pets that were lost would have a greater chance of be-

ing found. Our shelters are full of cats and dogs whose owners aren't even looking for them. Building a deeper bond with your pet does not need to be difficult, and it is rewarding for all. I am more, I am better, I am happier because of the life I have built with my dogs. I live through them and they live larger lives with my assistance and guidance. Like the owners of Guinness the cat, I would do anything in my power to get them back if they were lost.

Kelsy died a few years ago, due to cancer, a month after Tino was born. I miss her every day, and would have given anything for her to live longer, to not have cancer. I have written about Kelsy in a previous book, *A Voice for the Lost*. I intend to write more about her, someday, but it is too difficult right now. Kelsy is also in my works of fiction, including a previous book, *The Retrievers of Useless Bay*. Kelsy will figure prominently in at least two upcoming works of fiction, *School of Assassins*, and *Free-land*. I think about Kelsy every day, and I believe Mu thinks about her often. One day, maybe a couple of weeks after she died, Mu was lying on the couch, as usual, and he began howling softly and sweetly, which was unusual for him. I can't know what he was thinking, exactly, but I believe he was singing for Kelsy. He loved her so much, and one day she was just gone, never to return. Sometimes, when we are on a search and we find the remains of a cat, or if we can't find the cat, Mu will see that the owner is grieving, and he will comfort them. He leans into them, and they hug him and cry. I think he knows what it is to love someone so much and to never see them again. He can comfort them in ways that I can't. Mu is eight years old, and in the middle of a great career. I'm writing his story now, in the middle, for many reasons, including that I want to tell the world what a wonderful being he is. But I'm also writing his story now because, well, when I eventually lose Mu someday, I just don't think I could talk about it for a very long time.



05 Training Day





Around our house, training day is the best day of the week. When Kelsy first started training, in 2008, I would load the three black dogs, Kelsy, Porter, and Tess, into the truck and they would all be amped up, even though Kelsy was the only one actually training. When Mu came along, Tess had died of cancer by the time he started training, and then it was Porter, Kelsy, and Mu that got revved up every Sunday morning. Later, it was Kelsy, Mu, and Fozzie, the little white poodle, who went to training every Sunday. These days, every Sunday it's Mu, the cat detection dog, Fozzie, a scent trailing dog, and Tino, the very large German Shepherd who finds lost dogs. Tino, three years and six months old, really goes crazy on training day. He loves the game, and being together with his friends. Over the years, we have trained with many other great

dogs, including Karma, Lucy, Zeke, Griffin, Harley, Kaiser, Bailey, Jake, Sounder, Rachele, Bogey, Mojo, Penny, Sadie, Freya, Brodi, Tate, Parker, Haas, Ava, Max, Pudge, and many others. For all of these dogs, training day was a day of fun. We set up the training exercises as games they could win, making it a little harder each time, so it is challenging but never too difficult. After seven plus years on the job, Mu doesn't need training, but he still enjoys the excitement. Plus, there are always great treats to be had.

I am often asked how you train a dog to find lost cats or lost dogs. Mu and I were both trained by Kat Albrecht, a pioneer of many of the techniques of search and rescue for lost pets. Albrecht was a police officer who handled bloodhounds to find lost people or fleeing felons. She has trained hundreds of people and dogs to find lost pets, and she has also written several books on the subject. As she says in her books, she got the idea of using dogs to find lost pets when her bloodhound ran away one day. Bloodhounds, when they get loose, just follow their noses toward whatever interests them. They can easily get lost and be hard to find because they travel long distances. Albrecht used a friend's tracking dog to follow the scent of her bloodhound, and she found him within a half hour, before he could get into too much trouble. Since then, she has used her knowledge of scent trailing dogs, police work, search and rescue strategies, and animal behavior to refine and improve the methods and strategies of finding lost pets.

Mu learned to find lost cats the way a dog would learn to find a bomb or drugs. First, a dog is evaluated to see if they have any interest in cats, or if they maybe have too much of the wrong sort of interest. Fozzie, being 13 pounds, was the ideal size to find lost cats, and I was hoping to train him for that. During his evaluation, he showed great interest in other dogs, and zero interest in cats. So, Fozzie trained to follow the scent trails of lost dogs. Mu showed enthusiasm and aptitude for finding either cats or

dogs. I chose a career of finding cats for him because Kelsy already was skilled and experienced at finding lost dogs. During beginning exercises, we hide the target cat, a volunteer's cat who doesn't mind dogs, in a crate in the bushes not far away. When the beginning search dog takes an interest in the scent of the cat, we reward the dog, praise him, give him treats, and play fetch if he enjoys that. Gradually, we hide the cat farther away and in trickier locations, so the search dog has to work a little harder each time. The cat detection dog is not following the scent trail of a particular cat. He is looking for any cat he can find. The dog handler's job is to work the cat detection dog in a pattern that covers every possible hiding place in a given area. Years of collected data show that most lost cats are found within 400 feet of the place they were last scene. During a real search, Mu would thoroughly search every hiding place in that 400 foot radius, under cars, under tool sheds, in crawl spaces. During training, the beginning search dog learns to clear larger and larger areas of no cats before being directed into sniffing range of the hidden cat. The dog learns that the reward of the game may be delayed, but he finds the cat if he sticks with it. In many ways, finding cats is easier than finding drugs or bombs because cats are inherently interesting to most dogs. Of course, cats don't blow up, so that's a plus.

During training, and on searches, the dog needs to investigate what is interesting to him, and yet also follow directions so that the handler can make sure he has checked all the hiding places. I have an app on my phone that draws a bread crumb trail on a map, showing all the places we have covered. Our goal is to find the cat if he is in the search radius, or declare with some confidence that the cat is not in that area. Unfortunately, because cats are sometimes the victims of predators, a search dog must also check wide open areas of lawn or pavement, where there is obviously no cat, but there may be remains, or signs of a struggle, or a broken collar. On a recent practice search, the target cat, Boots, was placed in a carrier on top of a transformer

vault in an office park, about five feet above the ground. I worked Mu all around the grassy areas and the parking lot, paying extra attention to shrubs, cars, and window wells. Mu and I get into a groove. It seems like he is ignoring me as he sniffs along the ground, but he is very responsive to a couple of clicks of the tongue and a little pressure on the leash, redirecting to a new area of focus. I don't like to watch video of myself working the search dog because I walk with an unnatural gate, and I look lumbering and awkward next to the agile dog. I have figured out that I walk funny during searches because my focus is on details in the environment, and the angle of Mu's head, and the breeze moving the air through the leaves of a shrub, and I am not paying much attention to my footing on the uneven ground. It keeps me from falling down, but it looks funny. As Mu searches the grid, I reel in the long leash or let it out, depending on how fast or slow he moves. It is automatic and natural. The handle is cut off of the 15 foot nylon leash, so it won't get caught on any bushes if Mu passes through a thicket of brambles. I automatically wrap the leash around my hand, without thought or hesitation, and if Mu pulls suddenly, if perhaps a squirrel darts in front of us, the tension on the leash constricts the loop around my hand and I have a firm grip. The harder he pulls, the tighter the loop on my hand. If I need to let him out farther, with tension on the leash, I ease my grip and let the loop of nylon slide around my hand. When we work, we are a unit, with my movements adjusting to his reactions, and his movements sometimes diverting at my direction. Neither of us is the leader. We are partners in a dance. Sometimes he says one thing is important and I follow his lead, and other times I direct him to the salient features. On this training day, we danced across the office park in this manner until he entered the cone of scent of the cat on the transformer vault. Mu's nose came up off the ground, and he followed the increasing scent gradient up to the top of the transformer where Boots had been enjoying the sun. Mu whined a little, his signal that he had found a cat, and then he

turned his attention to me for treats, in this case hotdogs. Later, I let him loose in a grassy field with Tino, and I threw a stick that they both ran after. Mu got the stick and teased Tino until the puppy caught up to him and stole the stick, and then Mu chased Tino across the open field in the sun.

On training day, Mu is assured of finding the hidden cat. On actual searches, he usually finds several cats, although his rate of finding the particular lost cat is historically about 25%. Our success rate could certainly be much higher if we always started immediately after a cat went missing, but people may not even know an outdoor cat is lost until he doesn't show up for dinner for a day or two. Because of scheduling conflicts, we may not be able to get there for several days. If a cat is locked in a neighbor's garage, the scent may not be available to Mu's nose, and we could go right by him. On training day, though, Mu always finds the target cat eventually.

Because he is not a dog finder, Mu is often the target dog for the scent trailing dogs to find. For this recent training session, I had walked Mu around the office park in a loop several days earlier, to let the scent trail age. For the scent trailing dogs, our historic success rate in tracking up to the current location of the lost dog is about 20% to 25%. Again, this is largely a function of how quickly we get started on the scent trail. If we always started immediately, we would have a very high success rate. If we are five days behind on the scent trail, we could accurately follow the scent for hours and maybe not catch up to the wandering dog. In training, we age the scent trails various numbers of days in order to mimic the conditions of an actual search. Tino really had no trouble following the scent trail of Mu through the office park, except he has one weakness. Tino cannot stay out of puddles. According to Tino, Mu must have walked through a dozen puddles, when in actuality, Mu avoided them all. Still, Tino cruised right along on the scent trail. When he overshot a turn and ran out of scent, he would slow and stop, come back, and check the ground until he found the turn, and then he

would be off at full speed again. Tino likes to find Mu because he loves the search game, but he especially loves to find Mu because Mu is his favorite person in the world. If Mu and I have been on a search and we come home, Tino bolts past me to visit Mu and sniff him all over, to see what adventures he has had.





06 Fozzie Finds James



I was sick, and frustrated that it was preventing me from getting my work done. At least ten people wanted our help finding their lost pets, and I was forced to take a day off. When the going gets tough, I take a nap. I got into bed, pushing Sky over to make room, and Valentino and Komu climbed up and joined us. Fozzie was upstairs by the fire. I fell asleep on my left side because I was just having a quick nap, and I laid down fully dressed, with my pepper spray and pocket knife on my belt, so I could only lie down on my left side. All the dogs were to my left, and as usual, I had about a six inch strip on which to sleep, on the edge of the bed. After about half an hour, I was awakened by a dog's wet nose bumping me on the back of the arm, just above the elbow. I turned to look, and no one was there. Komu, Valentino, and Sky were all on the other side, sound asleep. A name popped into my head, Kelsy. I had distinctly felt a wet nose bumping my arm, but there was no dog over there, so it must have been my feverish brain.

Although Kelsy died over a year earlier, it is safe to say that I have thought of her every day since. She was my first search dog, my partner, my daughter, my friend. I don't believe in ghosts, but when I thought I felt a cold, wet nose on the back of my arm, waking me, I thought of Kelsy. Obviously, whatever illness I had was messing with my head, but I didn't mind that Kelsy's memory was the first thing that came to me. Kelsy is my spirit guide. I mean that in the sense that I think of her often, and she is in the back of my mind when I go out on a search with Fozzie, my current search dog. When Fozzie and I are searching, I am of course paying attention to him, and to my surroundings, but in my mind, Kelsy is there alongside us, providing guidance in the way that the past informs the future. I remember the hundreds of searches Kelsy and I undertook, the ones we found, the dogs we found deceased, and the times we failed through no fault of hers. My spirit guide, Kelsy, didn't actually ghost bump my arm, I know, but it was comforting somehow. I thought, if it actually had been her, she would

have just been saying, Hey, I'm here with you. You will be okay. I really hoped I would recover from this headache and nausea quickly, because we were supposed to search for James the next day, and I didn't want to have to cancel.

James, a quiet and shy Basenji, went missing near a cabin in the woods on Whidbey Island, ten days earlier. His family searched for him several times, but they couldn't find him in the 32 acres of woods, at the beach, or in the adjacent neighborhood of homes to the north. On December 2nd, 2017, Fozzie and I went to look for James. We stopped by James' home in Seattle, on our way out, to pick up his bedding to use for the scent. His family couldn't come with us because they had previous plans. The two hour drive to the cabin passed quickly, in part because I was on the phone with a woman in California who had lost her cat, giving her advice. Also, I seemed completely recovered from the previous day's illness, whatever it was. After a short trip on the ferry, we headed up the main road of the island, Route 525, and we passed several places where Kelsy and I had searched in the past. We passed the sign for Useless Bay, where I would really have liked to stop if we had time. We passed Freeland, the location of a science fiction novel I'm working on, which features Kelsy prominently. With each memory of Kelsy, I had a sense of the landscape as we moved through, the wet places, the dense thickets, old growth forest, ferns everywhere.

At the cabin, a friend of the family showed us where James was last seen, running out of the woods to the north, toward the residential neighborhood. I presented the scent article to Fozzie, and he took me the opposite direction. Fozzie seemed to have caught a scent that was relatively strong, certainly more recent than ten days ago. The environment, shady woods, was ideal for preserving scent, but I would have estimated the age of the scent to be about three days old, based on Fozzie's interest and intensity. James must have been hanging around, revisiting the last place he saw his family. Fozzie led me back toward the cabin, across the porch, around the south side, and

down the steep switchback trail to the beach. The closer we got to the beach, the weaker the scent trail seemed to get. At several points, Fozzie stopped, and I thought he was going to turn around and lead me back to the top. When we approached the small cabin at the beach, Fozzie found some poop, which is not unusual. What was unusual was that this scat was bright orange, which I had never seen before. Some animal, possibly a dog about the size of James, had been eating an unknown fruit or vegetable that was mostly orange. This might be a sign of an animal eating something of low food value, out of desperation. Near the cabin, Fozzie was indicating that the scent was weak. I had planned to restart him on the scent trail heading back up toward the top of the bluff, but first I wanted to check out the beach to see if I could find any footprints in the sand. The tide was high, and the sand was covered.

We walked around the corner of the cabin, near where Fozzie stopped, so that I could check the deck boards of the little cabin for any muddy footprints of a little Basenji. As I slowly walked up onto the deck, bent over and looking for prints on the boards, I was startled by an animal in the corner who had been startled by us. It was James. I didn't even look directly at him, (I automatically used a technique called Calming Signals, for frightened or skittish dogs) and I knew it was him. I pulled Fozzie away, and I sat down about fifteen feet away from James and fed Fozzie his treat, in this case string cheese, his reward for finding the lost dog. I tossed some over to James, huddled in the corner, and he came out to get the cheese. I could see his ribs. He had lost a lot of weight. When James came closer to take the cheese from my hand, I realized why Fozzie had stopped short of James: he smelled terrible, like that mucky mud on the beach that makes your shoes stink when you get home. It reminded me of Kelsy's first walk up find, of Thelma, the little terrier. Thelma smelled like sewage when we found her, under a bush, and Kelsy had this look on her face, like, I think I found the dog we are searching for, but she doesn't quite smell right.

Fozzie had led me close to James, but not quite all the way there. Had I paid closer attention to Fozzie's behavior, I might have recognized that he was saying something wasn't quite right about the scent. Making themselves stinky is an instinctive thing dogs do to try to disguise their scent, as many dog owners have experienced when their dogs have rolled on something rotten.

We might have turned around, ten feet short of our objective, and we might have taken much longer to find James, or we might not have found him at all if we followed other trails and they led to dead ends. What made me check around the corner even though Fozzie didn't quite lead me there? Was I just being thorough, searching for evidence? I would say yes. It also seems possible that Kelsy, my spirit guide, helped us along those last ten feet. I don't mean that in the sense that Kelsy's ghost led us to James. Kelsy is my spirit guide in the sense that my memory is filled with all of those searches I did with her, including our first walk up find, 8 years earlier, when stinky Thelma was hiding under a bush and Kelsy was reluctant to get too close. That memory may have been rattling around my subconscious when Fozzie slowed down and stopped, ten feet short of the lost dog, with a similar sort of hesitation. At any rate Fozzie did an excellent job of getting us close, finding a lost dog after ten days, in 32 acres of woods, when we were told the last known direction of travel was in the opposite direction.

I put Fozzie's leash on skinny, stinky James, to make sure he didn't try to run off again. I took Fozzie's jacket off and put it on James because he was shivering, possibly hypothermic. The jacket fit perfectly. James wouldn't step off the porch of the cabin, either because he intended to wait for his family there, or because he was uncomfortable due to some unseen injury. James let me pick him up, so I tucked the smelly little dog into my jacket and started climbing up the hill towards the car, to start our journey home. Fozzie trotted along beside us, glancing up every now and then, perhaps

wondering why he had to walk, even after doing such a good job, and the bad dog who got himself lost was being carried. This reminded me of Kelsy, too. When I picked up smelly Thelma after Kelsy found her, and carried her back to the car, Kelsy actually looked offended, as if she thought I should be carrying her if it was going to carry any dog. We trudged up the steep trail toward home, James in my jacket, Fozzie glancing up, and the memory of Kelsy shadowing us.





07 Kelsy Finds Molly



Kelsy did amazing work over her career. We celebrated those occasions when she tracked right up to the lost dog, but she did some of her best work when we were not able to catch up to the dog for reasons beyond our control. Kelsy searched for Molly

in February of 2016. Kelsy followed a scent trail for four miles, through the densest urban neighborhoods, turning down alleys and crossing the busiest streets, and through the 230 acres of brush, woods, and mud of The Arboretum. Ten years old at the time, this search took most of her energy, and Kelsy was fairly tired by the time we hit water at Foster Island. Molly had gone through the water at that point, so we were unable to track any farther that day. Kelsy's search work enabled volunteers to get posters up in that area, 4 miles from the point of escape, where they wouldn't have known to look if not for Kelsy.

The next day, Molly was seen a quarter mile from where Kelsy's search ended. Kelsy and I started again, and the scent trail led to a fence between a park and a golf course. The only way through was to cross a patch of mud. It looked like just ordinary mud, maybe an inch or two deep, the sort of mud we have slogged through on hundreds of occasions. Molly, being about 30 pounds, must have stayed on top of the mud. Kelsy, at 75 pounds, sank into the mud so deep that she couldn't get herself out. Soon she was up to her shoulders in the mud, and I was becoming worried. We were in the middle of the city, but in a remote location between a neighborhood, a park, and a golf course, a no man's land where no one was likely to happen by to help us, or hear me call for help. I had my phone, but how long would it take for someone to reach us, or find us. When I tried to get her out, I just sank in deeper. I lost my shoes in the mud, and I had to kneel at the edge of the mud pit and reach in to grab my shoes and wrestle them out. Eventually, I was able to lay a few branches across a corner of the mud pit to stand on, and I held onto the branches of a holly bush nearby. Kelsy didn't panic. She just patiently waited for me to get her out, confident I would succeed. I was able to lift her by the harness, and she pushed with her feet until we broke free from the mud. It took us about ten minutes to extract ourselves from that mud pit. It took another hour for us to go back to the car, drive three miles around to the other

side of the fence, get permission, and have a golf course employee drive us in a cart to the point on the other side of the fence where the scent trail led.

Kelsy started again on the fresh scent, and it led back to the other side. In a classic maneuver of a wandering stray, Molly was using a fence to frustrate her pursuers. She could get through, but we had to go the long way around. As we started back around on the three mile journey to the other side of the fence, we got the call that a volunteer had just spotted Molly in that neighborhood beyond the fence. A witness kept an eye on Molly as she ran another mile before hiding in a hedge, where she was ultimately caught.

Kelsy worked her ass off following Molly, she did everything right, and she still didn't have the chance to walk right up and find the dog she tracked. A great search dog needs to have the drive and commitment even when we don't get to "win the game." Besides being my best friend and my partner, Kelsy was a really excellent search dog. I wish I had a way to tell her just how much I appreciated what she has done for me and for all those dogs and cats.



I started writing a book about Mu because, well, because Mu deserves to have many books written about him. But the specific impetus was something I would say to people in jest as we were searching for lost cats. "In my next life, I'm going to be a dog, and Mu is going to be my human." I think I started to say this when Mu would flop onto the grass in the middle of a search and roll around on his back, enjoying a good scratch. I used that phrase to explain my tolerance of his shenanigans, saying, when he is the human and I am the dog, he'd better remember all the goofing off I let him get

away with. I don't actually believe in reincarnation in that specific sense, and if reincarnation was a real thing, it seems unlikely that karma would work out exactly right so that I would get to be my dog's dog, and he would remember our past life. This idea of reincarnation does serve as a useful thought experiment, to consider, what would I want to tell my dog? If he was reading a book about the adventures of Mu & I, some day in the future, as he was sitting by the fire with his dog on the couch nearby, what would I want him to know?

Now that Mu's book is almost done, just needing a little rearranging and editing, my thinking on the afterlife of dogs has evolved. Just this morning, the thought crystallized for me that I am the afterlife of my pets. I keep them alive by remembering. The story of Mu's life is ultimately a story of loss and failure. Although Mu has found over 300 lost cats in 7 years of work, in more than 100 of those cases, Mu found remains of the lost cat, who was taken by a coyote or another predator. For the 300 cases that Mu solved, probably at least 900 were not solved by Mu & me, and many of those cats were never found. Even when we succeed, those cats will die eventually. And the premise of my book about Wakomu is that there must come a day in the future, sooner or later, when he will be gone from my life, and all I will have left is the book about him, and my memories.

For many years now, and as I have explicitly stated in my previous book, *A Voice For The Lost*, I have known that the way to help cats and dogs, to find them at a higher rate when they go missing, to prevent them from going missing in the first place, is to form a deeper, stronger bond with our cats and dogs. Empirical evidence shows that those who have the deepest attachments to their dogs and cats are less likely to lose them, and more likely to recover them quickly, or recover them eventually if the search is long and difficult. I will always advocate for a deeper bond with our cats and dogs, for a number of reasons, including that it is better for us humans. People with cats and

dogs live longer, healthier lives. Those who have had a deep bond with their pets will recognize that it also makes for a more painful loss, inevitably, some day.

When I lost Kelsy--when Mu and I lost Kelsy-- to cancer, I planned for it to be painful, to experience a significant but manageable amount of grief, as I had felt when I lost Porter and Tess, two very excellent dogs. As the days and weeks and months and years passed, I learned that the loss of Kelsy was an order of magnitude greater than any other grief I had experienced after the death of an animal or a human. I've had plenty of time to consider why that is, and I think it's mostly due to the deep involvement I had with Kelsy. She was not just my pet, or my best friend. Kelsy was my working partner. It was my job to observe her closely as she worked, to read her body language and manage the search accordingly. Kelsy was an extension of my mind. Kelsy made me more than what I could be alone. The synergy of Kelsy and me working together is what helped us find those lost dogs that could not be found by any other means. Kelsy was also the subject of a nonfiction book and a science fiction novel, so she occupied my thoughts perhaps more than the average dog. When Kelsy died, truly, literally, a piece of me died with her. I became smaller, I became less, without Kelsy in my daily life.

Since Kelsy has been gone, more than three years now, I have never tried to avoid remembering her, even though it causes me grief. I couldn't forget about her even if I wanted to. I have thousands of pictures of her, and her image pops up on my facebook memories almost every day. Even though, many times, when I think of Kelsy, I relive that moment of her death, when I held her in my arms while she took her last breath, and a part of me died...even though I am forced to experience that pain more than anyone would want, it is much more common that my memories of Kelsy bring me pleasure. Kelsy added so much to my life. She allowed me to be so much more than I would ever have been without her. In a cold cost-benefit analysis of whether I

ought to remember Kelsy every day, (as if I had a choice) a bean counter would say I am definitely better off remembering her.

Independent of whether I ought to think of Kelsy every day since she died, or whether it would make my life better to think of Mu after he is gone, and also feel the sorrow of the absence of him, I have come to realize that it is my duty, or my *raison d'être*, to help them live on after death by keeping them alive in me. I am the memory palace that Kelsy lives in. Kelsy's Forest is the name I give to a mnemonic device for me to remember facts, but also my mind is where Kelsy lives. It is a system of loci, a memory technique that is at least 2,000 years old. The way a system of loci or a memory palace is usually taught is that you would think of rooms in a building or a home, and you can attach memories to locations within the building. It is an effective memory technique, and it has helped me in many ways. In my case, I used a familiar trail through the woods, with specific native plants at each location. Spruce, Oregon grape, Douglas fir, alder, willow, oak, maple, sword ferns, Douglas fir, cedar, oceanspray, huckleberry, Madrona, dogwood, Salal, grand fir, cedar, hemlock, yew, and finally the cedar at the top of the stairs. I can walk down that trail in my mind, and remember whatever I want to. I used this system to learn morse code in one day. My memory palace, Kelsy's Forest, is also a place where I remember all the pets that have shared my life. Chena, Gizmo, Heidi, Tanzy, Duck, Charlie, Smookler, Norbert, Porter, Max, Boots, Jinx, Wolfgang, Tess, Bear, Kelsy, Olive, Mu, Fozzie, Sky, Viktor, and Valentino. I can walk down the trail through the woods and revisit each of them. The way I have set up this memory palace, Kelsy walks with me as I move through the woods. The collar she wears changes depending on the topics I am remembering. When I remember Kelsy every day, and when I use the ideal of her to create new memories, I give her a longer life by keeping her active in my mind.

A human and a dog are not just a human and a dog, two separate entities. They are one being, an ecosystem, a symbiotic being. The dog does his job, using his heightened senses and hunting ability, and the human does his half of the work, planning, talking, remembering. Or, in the modern era, posting cute pictures of the dog on Facebook. Now, a dog can't really appreciate that his cute picture is on Facebook, so that is up to the human part of this combined being to check a dog's Facebook feed. Likewise, it is the job of the human half of the dog/human entity to remember the dog after he dies. We give dogs immortality, a life beyond death. Of any job or duty I've ever had, I can think of no higher calling, no more sacred duty, than to carry my dogs in my heart after I have buried them in the earth.

It is my job to help people find lost pets. Far too often, that involves telling them their cat or dog is deceased. I always try to give the bad news to the owner of the dog or cat as tactfully as I can. I hope they understand that I sympathize with them even if I can't think of an adequate way to express it at the time. Hopefully they can see my deep bond with my dog, and understand that I would certainly feel a very deep loss if I were in their shoes. Their grief will probably last a long time, and I won't be able to help them along the whole journey. If I could speak to them during their period of mourning, I would advise them not to try to forget about the cats and dogs they have lost. Everyone's grief is different, but I have found that holding onto the memories of my dogs and cats provides me with much more comfort than pain. Also, these cats and dogs, these adopted family members, deserve to be remembered, even if it causes the grief to well up again. As I write this, Mu is on the bed, sleeping. I can see his eyebrows twitching as he dreams. His tail starts to wag a tiny wag, as if he is greeting someone he loves. I wonder if he is dreaming about Kelsy.

Randomly, some pictures of Kelsy came up from May 6, 2015. One of these pictures is probably my favorite picture of Kelsy, my favorite picture of all time, showing

her standing on Kite Hill, looking alert, intelligent, strong, and beautiful. I've looked at this picture hundreds of times. If I knew how to paint, I could paint this picture from memory. When this picture came up on my phone today, I looked back at the other pictures from that day, of Kelsy fetching in Lake Washington, and many other views of her. This morning, I am reliving May 6th, 2015, and my time with Kelsy. She is immortal, and my life is better with Kelsy running around my brain.



08 Tino Finds Puppy



Tino had his first “Walk up find” on the morning of July 22nd, 2018. Tino’s nose saved the life of Puppy, a 150 pound, 11 year old Great Pyrenees who had been missing for 40 hours. He was stuck in the mud, and his back legs had stopped working, probably due to the cold. Tino followed his scent trail in a wilderness area, about a mile from his home. Three people used ropes and straps to free him from the mud.

I received a call about Puppy on Friday, and I thought Tino would be able to help. Because of the July heat, we had to search early in the day, before the temperatures would cause Tino to overheat and start panting, diminishing his ability to track scent. We left home a little after 3, and arrived in McCleary just before 5 AM. Low clouds and mist, 52 degrees and 93% humidity created good working conditions.

The first 90 minutes were spent simply trying to locate the place where Puppy was last seen. This forest land had trees all about the same age, and Puppy's owner had a hard time pinpointing the spot she last saw him. Once I presented the scent article to Tino, he pulled me down the trail fast, indicating he had a strong scent. Tino led us into a ditch, the only source of water around. Puppy would have been thirsty and would have been drawn to the water by the smell. Once down in the ditch, it would have been hard for Puppy to get out because of his weight and some lameness in his back legs. Tino followed the scent trail down the ditch until we came to a point where Puppy's scent seemed to loop around in circles. Tino couldn't find the single trail leading out of that knot.

I took Tino back to the main walking path, and presented the scent article to him again. He took me up the hill on a loop through the woods, and then back to the same ditch, but a little farther down. At several points, while trying to track the scent in the ditch, the mud sucked my shoes right off, and I had to reach down and pull my shoes out, and put them back on. What looked like regular dirt would actually be deep mud.

Tino took me down the ditch and around the corner. I caught a glimpse of white fur, and at first I thought it must be Puppy's remains, not the whole dog. As I came around the corner, I saw his face, alive and responsive, but two thirds of his body was submerged in the mud hole. Tino barked at this strange creature in the mud before he figured out it was a dog, the dog we had been searching for. Puppy's owner was very

relieved to find him there, and Puppy started to whine, as if to say, Please get me out of here.









It took another hour for us to get him out and get him home. I gathered dead branches and arranged them across the mud so we could get to him. I used Tino's long leash

to loop under Puppy's body and start to get him out. I had to reach deep into the mud to try to fish it out on the other side. We got him closer to solid land, but realized we needed more rope and more muscle.

Puppy's owner drove a quad out to the location, and brought ropes and straps. The three of us kept tugging on Puppy, with a strap under his chest and a strap farther back, until we got him out finally. At first, his back legs didn't work at all. We loaded him into a trailer behind the quad, but when it went over a log, Puppy spilled out. Puppy started to gain some strength and coordination in his hind legs, and I was able to walk him out by supporting him with a strap under his body while he pushed with his legs the best he could. He started to walk a little better, but he was breathing hard from the exertion and fatigue. Once we walked him out to more level ground, they loaded him into the trailer again and gave him a ride the rest of the way home. He was so caked with mud, I couldn't imagine how they would ever get him clean.

I was very proud of Tino. Of course, I love him no matter what, but I was so happy he could have this great start to his search career. This was his third official search. His first search, we couldn't continue because the hound we were following had a skill for going under and over fences, across private property. His second search, starting in the mountains at 4,000 feet, was also thwarted by obstacles. That lost dog had gone down steep talus slopes through thick brush, and although Tino would have been able to follow, I could not. Tino's search work helped in both those cases, providing a direction of travel, and both dogs were eventually found. In this case, in spite of very rough terrain in places, Tino and I were able to track down the lost dog. Tino had done such a great job in training, I never doubted that he would soon have his fist Walk Up Find.

This search, Tino's first success, was especially meaningful because I doubt Puppy would have survived without the help of Tino. Puppy is deaf, and he couldn't hear his

family calling for him, so he couldn't bark to call for help if they were close enough. I can only imagine what Puppy must have been going through, stuck in that mud hole for hours, wondering if help would come in time. If not for Tino, I don't think anyone would have ever found him. Not only did Tino perform flawlessly on his first success, but he saved a life. Tino slept soundly on the drive home, mud still caked on his snout.

Amazingly, we received another call about Puppy, on May 12th, 2019, ten months after the first rescue. Puppy had disappeared again. He would normally stay close to the house, but he had wandered away, possibly confused in his old age. His house is in the middle of a wide open space in a sparse subdivision that use to be a farm field. You could see a long distance in any direction, and Puppy would always be visible unless he fell in the irrigation canal and couldn't get out. The ditch circled around the neighborhood, almost entirely encircling it. Puppy's people had searched along the canal, but they hadn't found him.

When Tino started on the scent trail, he took off to the south. He led me to the neighbor's shed, where I was surprised to look in and see half a dozen puppy faces looking up at me. They were black lab puppies, and they looked like Kelsy on the day I got her. Tino had found puppies, but he hadn't found Puppy yet. After the brief distraction, Tino continued on to the south and southeast, and in a short time, he found Puppy, stuck in the ditch, half submerged in water. He'd probably been in the cold water almost 24 hours, about a quarter mile from home. We helped him out and let him rest a while. After he warmed up a bit, Puppy was able to walk home under his own power. I threw a stick for Tino and played fetch with him in the field, to celebrate finding Puppy for the second time.







09 Our Success Rate



One of the most common questions asked of me is, What is your success rate? Although I understand why people ask, it's really not a simple question, and it doesn't have a simple answer. I can either answer that question briefly or accurately, but so far

I haven't found a way to do both. Briefly, the search dog has about a 25% chance of pinpointing the lost cat or dog on any given case. Also, of the people who come to me for assistance, their pets are found at least 70% of the time, one way or another, whether it is by the search dog, posters, social media, checking shelters, or the cat or dog simply coming home. That's the short answer, and when people are in panic mode, searching for their lost pets, they don't have the patience to really listen to even the short answer. If someone really wants the best chance of finding a lost pet, they would benefit themselves by listening to and understanding the long answer, if they can.

We fail, most of the time, in the sense that we don't find the lost cat or dog. Of the more than 1100 searches my dogs and I have conducted over the last 11 years, we have only pinpointed the location of the lost pet about 25% of the time. When we fail to locate the lost pet, we still provide value and we can increase the chances the cat or dog will be found eventually. So, even when we don't find the lost pet, we still provide information, data, that can help. Also, when we fail to find a cat or dog, we may still learn valuable lessons that will help some other pet.

Going by the standard of whether or not you find your lost pet, all of the other methods fail, too. Using large posters is a great way to find your pet, but in 11 years of records, it is successful about 25% of the time. As much as I hate Facebook, it has proven an indispensable tool for reuniting pets at least 20% of the time. Humane traps are definitely recommended in many cases, but only about 20% of lost pets are successfully caught in traps. Checking the shelters only gets your pet back about 15% of the time. (These percentages add up to more than 100%, but sometimes more than one method was critical, and also, they are approximations from incomplete data.) If checking the shelter only gets your pet back about 15% of the time, does that mean you shouldn't check the shelters? Of course not. To find your lost cat or dog, you want

to use as many tools as possible, to increase your odds of success. The search dog is at least as successful as any other recovery method you might use, for the right circumstances. The point is to use the search dog in conjunction with all the other techniques.

We could have a very high rate of success if I only accepted requests for help when we have a high probability of being successful. If we always started within a couple of hours of the dog or cat going missing, we would probably have a 90% success rate. I hardly ever recommend a search dog in the first couple of hours because the lost cat or dog is likely to be found pretty soon by other means, and a search dog probably isn't necessary. A good time to use the search dog is after one, two, or three days, after you have tried many of the other tools for finding lost pets. When we start later, our success rate goes down. A dog can travel far enough that we can be on the correct scent trail all day long and never catch up. A cat can climb into the engine compartment of a car and be transported miles away. Or if a cat is accidentally locked in someone's garage, the search dog probably won't be able to sniff him out. When the search dog has a much lower chance of success, after a week or two, depending on the circumstances I may tell the pet's owner that the search dog is not recommended as a tool that has much chance of success. People have asked us to come out anyway, even if it is long odds. Fozzie found a dog that had been missing 10 days. Mu found a cat in three minutes after he had been missing a week. Tino found a lost dog after five days, when I told the owner we probably wouldn't. Even if the odds are long, we might still succeed. But working those cases with long odds brings our overall success rate down. It's not a reflection of the dog's ability, or the usefulness of search dogs in general. The success rate is just a historical record of our work, which reflects the difficulty of the cases we took more than the efficacy of the search dog.

At any rate, I never recommend the search dog as the only way to find a lost dog or cat. I provide, for free, extensive guides to all the other steps you can take. If anyone with a lost pet puts all of their hope in the search dog, and doesn't put effort into the other search methods, they are greatly reducing their chances of getting their pet back.

Even though I provide all of this written support, with clear steps people can take, in an emergency it can be hard to force yourself to sit down and read an instruction manual. Many people want the search dog to be the answer to their prayers. Many people have even told me, "We want to use the search dog so we can say we did everything we could, before we give up." Not only is that expecting too much from the search dog, but you would be shortchanging your lost pet if you put all of your hopes on the search dog and didn't take advantage of the other avenues of discovery.

Some people, I don't know what percentage, hire the search dog as a scape goat. If it works, great. If it doesn't work, then it's the search dog's fault they didn't get their pet back. Perhaps that's a wise strategy as a coping mechanism, and if it helps people deal with loss, then maybe I don't mind so much if we unfairly take the blame.

Recently, someone has been posting on Facebook that my search dogs actually reduce your chances of finding your lost pet. The entire time I've been doing this work, there have always been people saying I'm doing my job wrong even when they know almost nothing about what I do. The only way that could possibly be construed as accurate, that my search dogs reduce the chance of success, would be if you include people who put all their hopes in the search dog and don't use the other search methods, which I explicitly warn against. I can understand that people are upset if we aren't successful every time. It is theoretically possible, on rare occasions, that Mu or Tino could locate the lost cat or dog and scare the pet farther away. It's possible that Mu might fail to detect a hidden cat, or Tino could get on the wrong scent trail, be-

cause of contaminated scent article, and lead the search effort in the wrong direction. I don't have any evidence that this has happened with these dogs, but it could theoretically happen. I do know of at least two occasions with Kelsy, during her eight year career, where it appears we followed a scent trail far in the wrong direction because the lost dog was found the other way. My guess is that we had a contaminated scent article in those cases. It is possible we could make a mistake. I take many precautions to avoid these types of errors. When searching for a lost cat, we try to work an area so that if we do dislodge the lost cat from a hiding place, the cat goes closer to home. When looking for a lost dog, if I have any doubts about the search dog's performance, I will tell the dog's owner to not put all of the search effort into the area we tracked to.

For people to say that Mu ever chased their cat away from home, resulting in the cat being lost forever, that person would have to be mistaken in their beliefs, or deliberately lying out of spite. Not only is it untrue, but it can take away a valuable resource from people who might be helped by the search dog. It is possible it could have happened, but there has never been an instance where it definitely did happen. I was there and I would have seen such evidence if anyone could have seen it. Misinformation about lost pets is the biggest hindrance to finding them, and misinformation about how search dogs work is a part of that problem.

Mu and I searched for Bronwyn in Snoqualmie. I will tell more details of that search in a later chapter. Mu located the cat under a bucket, six houses from home. I asked the cat's owner to check under the bucket very carefully and slowly, and I pulled Mu out of the area so that he wouldn't spook the cat. I wasn't there to witness it, but when the owner checked under the bucket, the cat ran off. Whether or not she peeked under there sufficiently slowly and carefully, I couldn't say. At any rate, we knew where the cat had been, and I started a visual search to locate her again. I did locate her, in the engine compartment of an old truck. When I found her, I was slow to react. I

should have shut the hood right away, and prepared a method to secure her. It was just a fraction of a second that I hesitated, and she jumped out of the truck before I could react. My fault. Not to say I did something wrong, but I could have done better. I located her again under the edge of a wood pile. I instructed the cat's owner on calming signals, and I had her sit with the cat for twenty minutes to see if the cat would come to her. When she didn't come, I set up a plan to get her into a humane trap. We covered the wood pile with a tarp, and set up a humane trap at an opening. We got everything lined up, and eased her toward the trap. She went halfway in, panicked, and squeezed out through a tiny gap between the tarp and the trap. In hindsight, I should have had a secondary containment set up. I could have put a net over myself and the tarp and the trap and the woodpile, so that she would be contained if she didn't go in the trap. Again, this isn't to say that my approach was wrong, or I made a mistake, but I could have done better. As far as I know, this cat still hasn't been found. It is very frustrating to me that Mu and I did so much good work for this cat and still didn't catch her. In hindsight, I could have done better.

Would it be fair to say that using the search dog ruined the chances of recovering this cat? That would definitely not be fair or accurate. If the search dog had not been used, they never would have known where to set a trap, six houses away from home. Also, they could have encountered similar problems with trapping even if they never used the search dog. The case of the Snoqualmie cat is one I have many regrets about, but it would not be accurate to say that using the search dog to find the cat resulted in her never being found. There are no other searches that we have done, out of over a thousand searches with Mu, there are none where I would say the use of a search dog definitely ruined the chances of finding the lost cat. Mu has found over 300 lost cats in seven years. In at least half of those cases, I can safely say the lost cat would not have been found by other means. Out of all of those times we found the

cat, there have been cases where the cat may have been found later, if the search dog was never used, it's hard to say. In about 25% of the searches we do, the lost cat is found in the next 12 to 24 hours after the search, apparently because the cat was dislodged from a hiding place and was then seen later. It is possible that Mu could have dislodged some lost cats, and we didn't see it, and that displacement was a key factor in the cat being found. It is also possible, in rare instances, that Mu displaced the cat and we didn't see it, and that was ultimately why the lost cat wasn't found. But, if we didn't see it, then the cat's owner didn't see it either, and there is no way anyone could claim with certainty that the search dog was the reason the cat was never found. It is a slight possibility, but if it ever happened at all, it was a rare occurrence.

When people make false criticisms of our work, it is unfair to Mu. He has done so much good for so many people and pets. Putting that aside, it is harmful to the cause of finding lost cats. If some people falsely say that using a search dog will reduce your chances of finding a cat, they will discourage some people from using the search dog, possibly ruining one of their best chances. I understand that people may be dissatisfied if they were hoping the search dog would be successful and they still don't find their cat. Certainly I wish Mu and I would find the cat every time. We work just as hard, or harder, when we don't find the cat. As long as we are working that hard, I would definitely rather find the cat. It doesn't help anyone for one or two people to spread false stories that Mu and I ruined their chances of finding their cat. Every year, I get over 300 requests from people asking me to bring a search dog to find their lost cat. In over half of those cases, I tell them that the search dog is not appropriate for their situation, and they would be better off using other means. I spend hundreds of hours every year consulting with cat owners, often at no charge, to help them set up the best plan to find their cat. If someone with a single experience with the search dog falsely claims that Mu was the reason their cat was never found, not only is it untrue and un-

fair, but it will probably take away a valuable resource from someone who might otherwise have been helped.

During the eleven years we have been searching for lost pets, there has always been at least one person in our area that is using search dogs in a fraudulent manner. I don't have irrefutable evidence of this, or I would have gone to the police long ago. Scent is invisible, and it would be difficult to prove that a particular dog was not actually following a scent. From years of experience, though, I know what it means to be on the scent trail. My dogs almost always lead me onto private property, where we need permission to continue. Quite often, the scent leads into a steep ravine full of blackberry vines, and we usually encounter difficult terrain, even in the city. I have heard hundreds of reports of a particular person with a search dog walking down the sidewalk several blocks, with maybe a right or a left turn, and then the search dog stops, and the handler says the cat or dog was picked up at that point, by a person or a predator. It's a variation of that story every time. It is my job, besides training the search dogs to work scent, to understand dog and cat behavior. Cats don't just decide one day to walk down the sidewalk four blocks and let someone pick them up. Dogs may decide to go for a walk one day, but they would typically run much farther. In any case, dogs and cats don't stick to sidewalks. They always, always go through people's yards if possible. I have never actually witnessed this person at work, so I can't prove that he is a fraud. I have had many people who used his services tell me they thought he was a fraud. The way they described him working, it seems highly improbable that his dogs were actually on a scent trail. It may be because of people like this that a small number of people tell others that my search dogs actually reduce the odds of finding a pet. I don't know. I'm sure it happens with every profession. I am very proud of the work my dogs do, even if we don't always locate the missing pet. Especially be-

cause we don't always locate the missing pet. They work hard even when success isn't guaranteed.

For search dogs that find humans, there are certification programs, and both the training techniques and the actual working dogs are audited. At the moment, I know of no such certification agency that regulates search dogs looking for cats and dogs. Although Mu passed a certification test, that simply means that he passed the course and proved his ability to one person, my instructor. Ideally, someday there will be a regulatory agency that will ensure working search dogs have verifiable skills.

For someone to say that my search dog was ineffective or even harmful to the chances of finding a lost pet, they would have to misunderstand two critical facts about me and my dogs. First, although I run this operation as a small business, I have a business so I can do my work. I don't do this work in order to have a business. I ask for payment, a fee lower than anyone else I know who does this job, in order that my dogs and I can continue to do the work. This isn't just a job for me. I work with my dogs because I enjoy working with them, and because I want to find the lost pet, above all else. Second, my client is the cat or dog that is lost, not the owner. Although it is the human that writes the check, I approach each job in a way that has the best chance of a positive outcome for the lost pet. If I knew of a way I could do my job for free, I certainly would. In every case, I approach the search as if it was my cat or dog that was missing. I think, How would I prioritize the search tasks to have the best chance of finding my cat or dog? If, under the circumstances, the services of my search dog would not be the best approach, then I would tell the pet's owner that. And I have, many times.

One area where I consistently fail is in my efforts to educate the owners of dogs and cats. About a third of the people who contact me for help say that they read my entire handbook, either *Three Retrievers' Guide to Finding Your Lost Dog* or *Three Re-*

trievers' Guide to Finding Your Lost Cat. Those who have read it said they found it very helpful in a variety of ways. For those people who didn't take the time to read it, I certainly understand that someone with a lost pet wants to spring into action, not read a guide. When I buy a device or furniture or whatever, I almost always just jump right in trying to use or assemble it without reading the instructions, figuring that I will intuitively know what to do. Or if I go to a doctor and receive advice on diet and exercise, there is a good chance I won't follow that advice optimally. I also offer plentiful free advice on how to prevent your cat or dog from going missing, and if all pet owners heeded that advice, I would be out of a job, which would be fine with me. When people don't hear everything I tell them, I don't blame them. I know it's human nature. Also, I know that stress and anxiety and lack of sleep can impair a person's memory and concentration. I could have a much higher success rate in helping lost pets if I were to find a better way to get through to people. That's another reason why I wanted to write a book about Mu's work. If people knew ahead of time how cats and dogs go missing and how they are found, more pets would be kept safe, and more pets would be found sooner. It has been frustrating for me that we fail as often as we do even though we do our best. I am always looking for better ways to get the information out.



10 Mu finds Snickers



I'm trying to write the story of how Mu found Snickers, but Mu is making it difficult. He came over to my chair, and looked deep into my eyes, as if he might tell me a profound secret, or tell me that he loves me, and then he burped. I said, "Thank you, Mu.

That was very nice.” Then he turned and sat with his back to me, so I could rub his shoulders. After a bit, he flopped his head over backwards and looked at me upside down. He has a very bendy neck, and can flop his head over any which way. So I’m trying to type, and Mu keeps nudging my hand with his upside down head, insisting that petting him is more important than work. I don’t disagree. Eventually, he goes to lie down for another nap so I can tell the story of Snickers.

On Tuesday, March 5th, 2019, Mu and I went to Kent, WA, to search for Snickers. Snickers has been blind from birth, and of course she is an indoor only cat. Four days earlier, she got out of a door that was accidentally left open. Her family searched thoroughly for her, and they were especially anxious to find her because of her being blind. They didn’t find out about Mu until the third day, and they called me right away. I told them that normally I wouldn’t say they need to be in a huge hurry to use the search dog for a lost cat, but I agreed that Snickers’ condition made it more urgent than usual, and I would be out the next day.

Snickers was lost in an condo complex in Kent. I had searched there before, and I knew about the swamp full of hiding places. They also said that some of the buildings had crawl space screens that were broken or missing, so a cat could get in there to hide. Mu and I started near their unit, checking around cars and shrubs, and checking the crawl spaces. This complex has a man made lake, with steep sides made of brick. The hard edge rises up about 16 inches above the water level. I worried about what would happen if a blind cat fell into the lake. I looked around for any signs of a body, or perhaps scratch marks of a cat trying to get out. Mu didn’t show any interest in the lake, so that was possibly a good sign.

As we worked our way around the complex, I had Mu check all of the screens to the crawl spaces. In the past, he has been able to pinpoint cats in crawl spaces, often telling me which corner the cat is in. Mu said there were no cats in the first four build-

ings we checked. When we got to the swamp, we went around the edges until we could find a break in the blackberries. When new buildings are constructed, these parcels are set aside as "Native Growth Protection Areas," as if it somehow compensates for the harm against the environment caused by the building and paved areas. If these set asides remained full of native plants and wildlife habitat, then it would certainly be some mitigation. Inevitably, these swampy areas fill up with invasive blackberries, and the native plants are almost always choked out. These "Native Growth Protection Areas" do very little to protect the environment, although I suppose it could be argued that they are better than more pavement or lawns. What these NGPAs are really good at is providing a place for lost cats to hide in impenetrable thickets of brambles. If you were a lost cat, looking for safety, you would only need to look for the nearest "Native Growth Protection Area" sign, and you would find acres of blackberries to hide in. As we worked our way around the edges, the wind was fairly strong coming off the artificial lake, helping Mu to smell a cat deeper into the brambles. He has been able to smell a cat from as far away as 100 feet when the wind is right. We found a break in the blackberries and made our way into the middle of the swampy thicket. We searched not only for Snickers, but also for any sign that she may have come to harm. I looked on the thorns, down at cat height, for any tufts of her gray and brown fluffy fur. Mu and I didn't find anything in the swamp, although we weren't able to easily access all of it. Before trying to hack our way into the heart of darkness, I wanted to check a few more buildings and their crawl spaces.

As we were finishing one building and coming around the corner of the next building, Mu whined as we passed a large SUV. It was an older model, a Suburban I think, and it seemed dusty, as if it hadn't moved in days. I let Mu work around all sides of the engine compartment and the wheel wells. The more he sniffed, the more he started to whine. He put his nose right up to the cracks and sniffed hard, pulling air

out of the engine compartment, as if he could extract the cat from her hiding place by sniffing her out, molecule by molecule. Mu's analysis told me there was a cat toward the front, fairly low. I looked underneath, and I saw long gray strands of fur caught on the axles and cross members in places. Although I couldn't see what cat was in the engine compartment, the presence of bits of fur similar to that of Snickers suggested this was most likely her. Also, it was about 100 feet from the point of escape, so it would be a plausible place for a blind cat to hide. I took Mu back to our car, and got the plumber's camera. This is a camera and light mounted on a long, flexible probe. Plumbers use it to check pipes for clogs, or to look inside walls for leaks. It's an excellent tool to find cats in certain situations. In this case, I poked it into an opening in the metal, and I saw fur. I couldn't see enough of the animal to say for sure that it was Snickers, but there was definitely some animal wedged in there.

The owners came, and the wife slid right under the SUV to see if it was Snickers. Using a flashlight, and peering through various cracks and gaps, she was finally able to find the head of the animal, and confirm that it was Snickers. She talked to Snickers, but her cat remained silent, as cats often do in stressful situations. We asked various residents if they knew who owned the truck, and it seemed that the owners weren't home yet. Snickers' owners called the police and animal control to see if there was any way to get into the SUV to pop the hood release, but there didn't seem to be anything to do but wait for the vehicle owners to come home from work. They thanked me for finding their cat, and they said I could leave. I was reluctant to go until I knew the cat was home safe. Cats can sometimes bolt from their hiding places, and we might be needed to track her down again. However, since Snickers is blind, I figured that she wouldn't be able to run very far or very fast, and as long as one person stood guard until they could pop the hood, it would probably be okay.

As we drove on to the next assignment, I couldn't help thinking of the last cat I had found in an engine compartment, Bronwyn. On Christmas Day, 2018, Mu and I went to search for a Siamese cat in Snoqualmie. It was an overcast day, upper thirties to low forties, perfect weather for searching. Bronwyn had been missing several days. She had gotten out a door that was left open accidentally. Mu and I started searching for her, looking in places that would offer concealment for a frightened cat. The crawl space of a nearby school was the perfect place, and I saw cat fur on the edge of the broken screen, but Mu said there were no cats in there. Behind Bronwyn's house, Mu found a Siamese cat that looked very much like Bronwyn to me. We stayed back, and I called the owner over. She said it was the cat who lived there, who just happened to look similar to Bronwyn. We worked our way around the neighborhood, and I kept track of our path on GPS so that, if we skipped over anything, we could come back and search it.

We came to the storm drain system in front of Bronwyn's house, and Mu sniffed at the one-inch hole in the manhole cover. Mu sniffed so deeply that I imagined a cat being sucked up and stuck to the bottom surface of the manhole cover. I put Mu in the car and used the plumber's camera to peek through the hole. I could see cat eyes. We got tools and pried the heavy cover off, and I went down into the storm drain system to see if it was Bronwyn. It turned out to be Junior, the black cat who lived in the neighborhood. We saw where he got in and out of the storm drain system through the outlet pipe that drained to the nearby Native Growth Protection Area.

We kept searching down the block, and Mu alerted strongly on an overturned metal tub. Knowing there was definitely a cat under there, I pulled him back away, so he wouldn't upset the cat. Bronwyn's owner came over, and I told her to check under the tub very slowly, so if the cat under there was Bronwyn, she wouldn't be spooked away. It was Bronwyn! In spite of her owner being very careful, Bronwyn did bolt. From

a distance, I saw her turn the corner. I put Mu in the car again, not wanting to make Bronwyn feel hunted, and I checked the hiding places closest to where she turned the corner. There were three trucks parked in a yard, and I asked the homeowner if we could pop the hoods to see if Bronwyn was in any of the engine compartments. In the third truck we checked, I opened up the hood, and there was Bronwyn, staring at me with her intense blue eyes. She froze and I froze, but before I could think of what to do, she bolted again. After 20 minutes or so, I found her again, under a board by a rotten fence. She scurried under, and hid under some boards in a pile of lumber. Knowing where she was, I wanted to proceed very slowly, to avoid making her run again. I had Bronwyn's owner come and sit on the ground, about ten feet away, where Bronwyn could see her, and just talk softly. This has worked in the past, and cats have come out to their owners if allowed 20-40 minutes to calm down. After at least half an hour of this, I had an idea to get Bronwyn into a humane trap. Using a fishing net on a pole, I could block her path of escape in all directions except into the trap. We got it all lined up, I gave Bronwyn a gentle nudge to get her moving, and she started to go into the trap. About half way in, she stopped, and she turned and wriggled out through a gap I hadn't thought she would fit through. She was on the run again.

Having dislodged her from four different hiding places, I didn't want to keep antagonizing her. I advised that we should set several traps with wildlife cameras, and she would probably go in during the night, when all was quiet and calm. We never saw Bronwyn again. She never showed up on any of the cameras. Mu and I came back two more times over the next month, to search again, widening the search area. We found many good hiding places where she could have been, but we never found her. Bronwyn's owner was crushed, to be so close to having her, and she escaped. Looking back on how I handled it, I see things that I could have done differently, hindsight being 20-20. Maybe my plan to get her in the trap was a good one, but it just didn't

work. I have told Bronwyn's owner that she is most likely still alive, according to the data I have collected over the years, and she still has a chance of finding her. Cats can survive all sorts of conditions, and Bronwyn had been on the streets before her most recent life as an indoor cat. They are still looking for her, but they are heartbroken about having lost her, found her, and lost her again. It was very painful to me to have to see the pain on Bronwyn's owner's face, knowing what she was going through, coming so close to finding her cat, working so hard, ultimately to fail.

I was really hoping not to hear about anything like that happening with Snickers, and I was very relieved to get the text message that Snickers was safe inside the house. It wasn't Mu's fault that Bronwyn was lost again, and it wouldn't have been Mu's fault if Snickers escaped the SUV. Maybe it would be nobody's fault. People do the best they can, and it doesn't always work out. Still, it felt redeeming for Mu to have found the concealed cat, and to have her successfully brought to safety.

I am telling these stories of Mu for selfish reasons, of course. I love him to pieces, and I enjoy bragging about him. I also want to tell stories of his adventures so others can learn from our experience. If people would check under the hoods of their cars to look for a lost cat, perhaps thousands more cats could be found safely and quickly. If people don't check under the hoods of nearby cars, how many lost cats are accidentally transported away, only to climb out of the engine compartment in a strange, distant neighborhood? According to records I have kept since 2008, and according to the experience of others who search for lost cats, most lost cats will be found within 500 feet of the point they were last seen. Indoor only cats, especially, are likely to be found close to home. Cats who roam outdoors are sometimes found farther away. Although I don't have exact numbers, I am confident that less than 15% of lost cats are found wandering more than a mile from home. I suspect, although I don't have con-

crete proof, that most of those cats got so far from home by being accidentally transported in a vehicle.

If your cat is missing, or if your neighbor's cat is missing, you should try to check under the hoods of as many cars as possible. Before your neighbors go to work the next day, you should spread the word to as many as possible that they should check under their hoods, or at least bang on the hood loudly before getting in and starting the engine. If my cat was missing, and I wasn't able to talk to all my neighbors quickly enough, I would put a flyer on each of their windshields, telling them of my lost cat, and asking them to bang on the hood before starting the engine. Although we didn't catch Bronwyn, at least she wasn't transported out of the area under the hood of that car. Snickers was lucky, a blind cat who happened to pick the one car in the complex that was parked for an extended period. Snickers' family walked right by her, looking for her, probably a dozen times, and they never knew she was there. A cat detection dog like Mu can find cats in engine compartments, but we can't find all of the dozens of cats that go missing every day in a typical city, so please check under hoods. If you hear of a neighbor who has lost a cat, or perhaps see a Facebook post about a lost cat, advise them to check under hoods sooner rather than later. If a cat is in a crawl-space or in the bushes or in a tree or in a Native Growth Protection Area, there is time find her there, eventually. If she is hiding in the engine compartment of a car, it is very important to have people check before any of those cars drive off.



11 Mu Finds Remains



If your cat is lost, before you talk to the tenth neighbor, to ask if they have seen your cat, someone will tell you that your cat was most likely killed by a predator, such as a coyote, or run over by a car. They are probably wrong, statistically speaking. I don't know why people persist in telling the owners of a lost cat that their cat is most likely dead. It does happen, certainly, but it is not even close to being the most probable outcome. According to my records, over 70% of lost cats will be found, alive and well. Lost cats would be found at a much higher rate if insensitive people would stop telling owners their cats are dead, convincing them to stop looking. The number one reason lost cats are not found is that people stop looking for them. Misinformation is much more dangerous than coyotes.

Because Mu has searched for at least 900 lost cats, it's not surprising that he has found the remains of over 100 cats. When cats are deceased, they aren't moving any more, and Mu can pinpoint their remains. While it's not the most likely outcome, that a cat would be killed by a predator, when it does happen, perhaps the only way someone would know for sure is if a search dog located evidence. When there is evidence of predation, it is usually hard to see. I certainly would have overlooked it in most cases if not for Mu pointing it out to me.

When we arrived to search for one particular lost cat, a long haired white cat, Mu hopped out of the car and pointed out fur right next to where we parked. When I looked closely, where Mu indicated, I could see little tufts of fur covering an area of grass about ten feet by ten feet. If you didn't look closely, it was virtually invisible. Indeed, it was right outside the front door of the cat's owner, and he hadn't seen it. He was looking for his cat, not tiny tufts of fur. Once Mu pointed it out to me, and I looked closely, it was obvious, but just looking around for a lost cat on several acres of grass and woods, it would be easy to overlook this evidence. I used Luminol to test for the presence of blood, and the white fur, which looked clean and white, did show the blue

glow that indicates the presence of the iron in the hemoglobin of the cat's blood. Because of Mu's nose, we were able to determine with a high degree of confidence that the white cat had been taken by the bobcat that was seen prowling the neighborhood.

Predators such as coyotes, bobcats, and owls can be a serious threat to our cats and dogs. However, most people misunderstand the dynamics of pet-predator interactions, and they usually make the wrong choices based on bad information. The myths about predators cause more harm than the predators themselves. In general, people overestimate the likelihood that a predator is responsible for their pet's disappearance, while at the same time they underestimate the threat from predators in their own yards. With a little understanding and care, you can greatly reduce your pet's risk of being taken by a coyote or another predator.

Since 2008, I have provided assistance or advice in the search for over 7,000 lost pets. My search dogs and I have found the remains of cats and dogs killed by predators on at least 120 occasions. In almost every case of a lost cat or dog, the owner was given wrong information about predator activity. Almost always, the pet owner is told by a friend, neighbor, or family member that there is no point in searching for a lost pet because he or she was definitely killed by a coyote. There is no basis for this persistent urban legend. Certainly, it is true that coyotes kill pets on occasion, but lost pets are found, alive and well, over 70% of the time, according to records I have kept. More pets would be found if their owners weren't discouraged from searching for them. Owners of missing pets mistakenly being told not to look for their lost pet because a predator undoubtedly killed it is horribly unfair, but that's just half of the problem.

The other half of the predator problem is exposing pets to predators in the first place. People think they can leave pets unattended outdoors and their chances of be-

ing taken by a predator are very small. That is true in a sense. The odds that your cat or dog will be taken by a predator on this particular day are very small. If your cat lives outdoors most of the time, he will probably live his whole life without being taken by a predator. Let's look at the numbers this way: of 100 cats living outdoors their whole lives, probably only 7% will be killed by predators. With just a 7% chance of being taken, in 17 years of living, the odds of your cat being taken by a predator on this particular day are really very small. But if you add up that small chance of death day after day after day, that risk accumulates. It's like playing Russian roulette with a revolver that has 5,000 chambers. On any given day, the odds of getting the chamber with the bullet is very small, but if you keep spinning the revolver and pulling the trigger, there's always the chance of death, and that is a chance you do not have to be taking. By limiting exposure to risk, you can limit the chances your pet will fall into that 7%. You could think of it like smoking: a single cigarette isn't going to kill you, but repeated exposure increases your risk of cancer or illness. Quitting smoking greatly reduces your risk of early death. Taking precautions against predators can greatly reduce the risk your cat or dog would be taken.

To properly understand the risk from predators, it may help to know how predators attack. I will try to describe the process without being too graphic. Of the deaths by predator, the large majority are coyote attacks, over 90%. About 7% of predator attacks on pets are by bobcats, 2.5% from owls, and .5% from others such as mountain lions, eagles, and hawks. Contrary to popular opinion, raccoons are responsible for less than .001% of pet deaths. A small dog named Cookie lived in Issaquah in a neighborhood surrounded by woods. Her owners called me to have my search dog Kelsy come out and look for Cookie. I interviewed them first, and got relevant details about the dog and the circumstances. Cookie was older, with a few health issues. She never wandered far from the front door, and she came in soon after her outdoor breaks. Af-

ter dark one evening, Cookie went out the front door while the owner stood in the doorway waiting. Cookie was last seen about 35 feet from the door. Then she was suddenly gone, with no noise. She was older, and couldn't move fast, and she hadn't been known to wander off in the past. Kelsy started on the scent trail at the point Cookie was last seen, and she followed the scent for about 150 feet, around the house, into the greenbelt behind the houses, and a little way southeast, behind the neighbor's house. There she found Cookie's vest, in the brambles, stained with blood, and a few internal organs nearby. There was no doubt that a predator had killed a pet there, and the presence of Cookie's vest confirmed that it had to be her. On dozens of occasions, my search dogs have confirmed the same scenario with coyote attacks: they were silent and sudden, usually in the pet's yard, often within fifty feet of a person. Almost no evidence was found at the point of attack, and a small but significant amount of remains was found within 200 feet of the point the pet was last seen.

This pattern of predation tells us how it usually happens, and gives us information that we can use to greatly reduce the risk. First, don't assume that your pet will not be taken by a predator just because you are standing 30 feet away. My dog Fozzie only weighs 13 pounds, and I would never leave him outdoors off-leash. If he is outside, I am right there with him, watching him every second. Although the risk of him being taken by a predator is small, I choose to eliminate that risk as much as possible by always being with him. If you can't always be with your small dog outside, actively keeping watch, or if you can't keep your cat indoors all the time, understanding how coyote attacks occur can help you minimize risk. Coyotes are lazy and smart. It appears, based on the evidence I've heard and seen, that they watch pets over time and learn their daily routines. Coyotes know that a certain dog is going to be left alone outside for a certain amount of time at a particular time of day. They know that a cat likes to lie in the sun in a particular sunny spot in the afternoon. Coyotes have wild rabbits and

rodents to prey on everywhere, so they don't need to prey on pets for survival. In case after case, the evidence shows they are most likely to take pets who have daily routine and who habitually wander or rest in a particular spot, creating an irresistible opportunity for a coyote. For the most part, coyotes do not hunt and chase down pets. They use stealth and cunning whenever possible.

Another noteworthy aspect of coyote attacks is that while coyotes usually do not take domestic pets, once a particular coyote begins preying on pets, he will most likely continue. You will see a rash of missing pet flyers in a particular neighborhood, as happened in Kirkland, WA, starting in December of 2015. There are few scientific studies of coyotes preying on pets, but one that is often cited is about coyotes in Arizona, where a pack of coyotes preyed on cats regularly. Although the study's findings are not in doubt, it is a small sample of single population, and not indicative of all coyotes. My records are not scientifically valid, in the sense that people who request my services are a self-selected population of people who want to do everything they can to find their pets, and not necessarily representative of the average pet owner. Based on my records and my awareness of other sources of information, my best guess is that coyotes and other predators are responsible for only about 7% to 10% of missing pets. I would be very surprised and skeptical if a scientific study found that more than 15% of lost pets had been taken by predators. I would want to see hard evidence to back up such a claim.

Bobcats cover large territories and don't hang around one place too long. Bobcat attacks are unpredictable and hard to guard against. Any steps you can take to reduce the chances of a coyote attack will also reduce the chances of a bobcat attack. Owl attacks are even rarer. Most owls cannot take away the average cat or small dog. In the Puget Sound area, the only owl that can lift an average cat would be the Great Horned Owl. Google Great Horned Owl sound if you hear any owls around your house, to see

if it might be this species. The most common owls you will hear are the Barred Owl and the Screech Owl, which are not a threat to your pet. If you do know you have Great Horned Owls in your area, don't let your small pet outside between one hour before sunset and one hour after sunrise unless you have them on a leash, under very close supervision.

Steps you can take to reduce the chances of your pet being taken by a predator:

–All cats should live indoors all the time. Indoor cats live twice as long as outdoor access cats, not only because of predators, but also because of diseases, toxins, traffic, and other hazards.

–If your cat must go outside, try to limit outdoor times to when you can be right there with the cat. If you are gardening or mowing the lawn, try to make sure you are between your cat and the woody greenbelt behind your house. However, people who have used this strategy still come to me for help when their cat finally decides to be more adventurous and strays out of the yard when the owner is distracted.

–Don't leave out food sources such as garbage or pet food that might attract predators or vermin. If you know of a neighbor who does feed wild animals, encourage them to stop, or simply don't let your pets outside unattended. If you compost food, do it in a covered container with vents that are too small for raccoons, coyotes, and bobcats to get into.

–Do not assume a tall fence protects your cat or small dog. A coyote can sail right over a six foot fence like it was nothing.

–If your dog weighs less than 20 pounds, always accompany him out in the yard and stay close to him, preferably on a leash.

–Pay attention to lost pet flyers in the area. If you suddenly start to see flyers for cats and small dogs missing within a mile of your house, seriously considering taking greater precautions with your pets, as listed above.

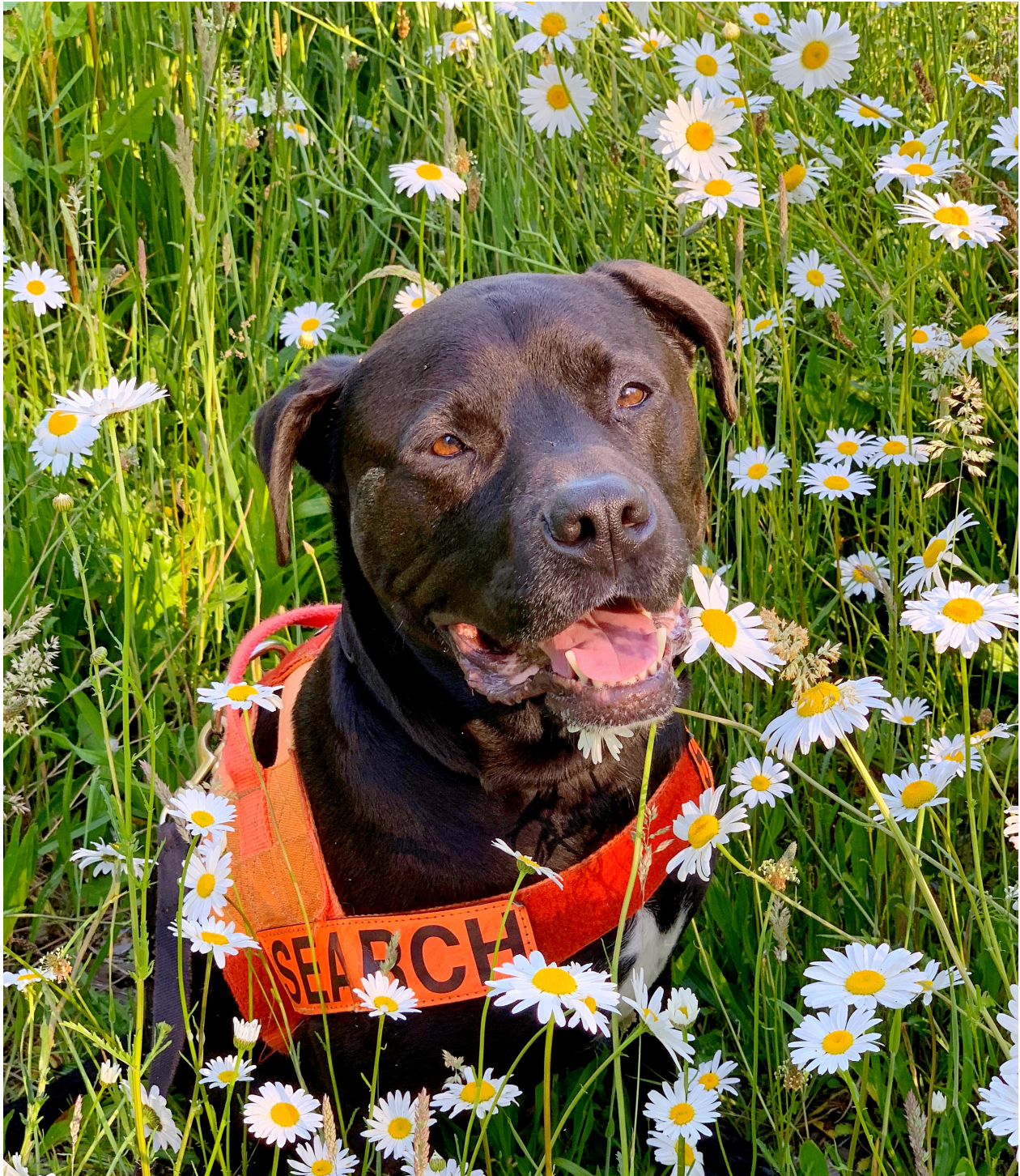
--Install cameras around your house so you can see if predators are coming around.

--Shooting or trapping coyotes will not protect your pets. Coyotes never go into humane traps, for one thing. Traps designed for coyotes are inhumane and dangerous, and likely to catch and injure a dog. Coyotes are too smart to be caught by most traps. If you do shoot coyotes around your home, more coyotes are bound to come around sooner or later. Killing coyotes in a stable population can actually trigger the remaining coyotes to breed more and have more pups, increasing the coyote population. Predator deterrents, like a sprinkler with a motion detector or solar powered red blinking LED lights (Google Nite Guard), are sometimes effective, but not always.

--If coyotes act very bold around you, seemingly unafraid of humans, haze them by throwing rocks at them or spraying them with the hose.

--Don't allow your cat to walk on your roof on a regular basis, as this would significantly elevate the chances of an owl attack.

If your pet has gone missing, don't automatically assume a predator is responsible. This will only discourage you and distract you from other strategies for finding your lost pet. When you are looking for a lost pet, you will undoubtedly meet someone who will tell you that a predator has definitely taken your pet. Ask for details. If they say they personally witnessed a predator going away with your pet in its mouth, then ask for more details and attempt to find physical evidence that corroborates this account. If they say something generic, like, "Everyone knows that coyotes kill cats around here," thank them for the information and move on. Remember, most lost pets are found, and the greatest danger a lost pet faces is if you stop looking for him.



12 What It Costs



Mu and I went to search for a cat in Mukilteo. Immediately, before we even got to the front door to talk to the owner, Mu went to a spot on the lawn. He sniffed for a long time, and he seemed to be reading a story from that spot. When you work with a search dog, your job is to be able to read your dog's behavior and interpret what he is reacting to. We accomplish this through many training sessions, but there are certain scenarios you can't really reproduce in a training session. One of those is the aftermath of a predator attack. We have trained for finding decomp material, meaning tissue obtained from a cat after a surgical procedure. This tissue is in a jar with holes in the lid, and the dog is trained to find it and give an alert signal. When a coyote attacks, often there is almost nothing left, other than a few tufts of fur. Nothing visible at least. Usually, blood will be present in the environment, but you can't see it with the naked eye. You need a chemical test called Luminol to show if blood is actually present or not. Mu has located the aftermath of a predator attack at least 115 times over the past 7.5 years. I have learned to suspect a predator attack just by watching his demeanor and the way he carefully examines a certain area. This wasn't accomplished through specific training, but just by observing Mu working actual cases.

After he pointed out this area on the lawn, I had Mu go sit down and wait nearby, and I examined that area very closely. I took off my glasses, and my face was inches from the ground. I found just a couple of tufts of gray and white fur, and a few feet away I found several more tufts of white fur. I photographed the scene as I found it, and made note of the location by landmarks on the edge of the lawn. The length and color and texture of the fur seemed like a probable match for the missing cat. At least, the color and length were not so different that I could rule them out as coming from the missing cat. You would not see these tufts of fur if you were standing right over them. Looking at the whole expanse of lawn, which was at least half an acre, you

would have zero chance of finding five tufts of cat fur in all that lawn. Using the search dog's nose, we found this evidence in the first couple of minutes of the search.

Because we have had considerable experience with predator attacks, I was already fairly certain this cat had been taken by a predator, probably a coyote, possibly an owl or an eagle. If it had been a cat fight, the fur would have looked different, and there probably would have been fur from both cats. I couldn't see blood, but I suspected it would be there if we tested. Luminol only works in complete darkness, so we would have to wait for nightfall for testing.

Even though I thought Mu had solved the mystery of the lost cat in two minutes, evidence is not necessarily proof, and I still wanted to conduct a full search in case I was mistaken in my interpretation of Mu's behavior. I went and knocked on the door, and introduced myself and Mu, and explained what Mu had found on his way to the front door, telling her that it could be evidence of an attack, but not proof. We searched six or seven acres of yards and woods. Mu found coyote scat on a nearby trail, which is not unusual. We had actually done a few searches in that neighborhood in previous years, and had found evidence of predator attacks before. After several hours of searching, we did not find the lost cat, or any other evidence to prove or disprove the theory that there had been a predator attack. I explained about Luminol, and that I could mix the chemicals and spray it on that area of lawn to test for the presence of blood. This would tell us more clearly if this was a predator attack. If we didn't find any blood, then it would be possible the lost cat was just grooming himself and yanked out a few tufts, as cats have been known to do. We would have to wait until it was completely dark, though, which was about an hour away. It wouldn't make sense for me to drive an hour home and an hour back, so I decided to just wait until dark.

The cat's owner invited me in. She was very nice, with normal social skills, unlike me, and she had a lovely, clean home. I particularly noticed how clean her house was

because, with five dogs, my house is never clean. Not that I can blame it all on them. Even if I had no dogs, I probably wouldn't have a really clean house. I am jealous of people with clean, comfortable homes where they can just invite someone in without embarrassment. I don't remember what we talked about exactly, but I do remember that she was a kind person, someone who is easy to talk to. People often ask me about my work and my dogs, since I am something of a curiosity. I'm the only person they've ever met that does this job. I am used to telling people how I found Mu, how we train, how the other dogs work differently, and what it is like living with crazy dogs. An hour is a long time, though, to spend just talking to someone. As time went by, I guess I must have become increasingly uncomfortable about just having a pleasant conversation with this woman, like normal people do, under the circumstances. I was 99% certain I was going to tell her that my conclusion was that her cat was dead, taken by a predator, and it felt awkward to just be having a conversation like this was a social occasion. While we still had about half an hour to wait until complete darkness, I said I would like to go wait in the car with Mu, because I knew he would be cold and I wanted to turn on the heater. This was actually true, and although it seems like I was making an excuse, I really did want to go keep Mu warm. I didn't mean to offend her, but she had been fairly cheerful before and seemed somewhat saddened that I would chose to go sit in my dirty old car with a dog instead of staying to have a pleasant conversation with her in her nice, clean, well lit, comfortable home. I'm sure I'm not describing her state of mind accurately. But she said something to me to the effect of, It must be hard on you to have to give people bad news all the time.

No one had ever said that before, and I hadn't really thought about it too much up until that point. It's true that I do this work so that we can find cats and dogs alive, and I'm never looking forward to finding evidence of an attack. As I sat with Mu, in the gathering gloom, I started to consider, really for the first time, what is the cost of doing

a job where it is always a matter of life and death for a family member, and things often don't turn out for the best. I need to guide my mind down a narrow path where I'm not moved to tears every time we find the remains of a pet, but I'm not indifferent and numb to the loss. When darkness came, I was a little startled to see her outside my car because I didn't see her coming, having been lost in thought. I mixed the chemicals, and we tested the patch of lawn where Mu found the tufts of fur. As I was expecting, the blue glow of Luminol showed a pattern of blood that wasn't visible in the daylight. The blood spatter pattern and the smears were consistent with a predator attack. I could think of no other explanation that would fit the evidence of tufts of fur and a splatter of blood on the lawn there. It could be possible that a similar looking cat, not her cat, was attacked by a predator there, but that was not the most logical explanation. She was sad, of course, but she also seemed apologetic that I had to be the one to give her bad news. That hadn't happened before.

Since that time, over a year ago, I have occasionally stopped to consider the toll that this job takes on me. I had been aware, for a long time, that it is hard for me to answer the phone when someone calls for help. I do it, of course, but sometimes I let it go to voicemail and then call back later after I have a moment to prepare. I have received at least 7,000 requests for help in the past 12 years. This includes requests for help for missing cats and dogs, and also requests for assistance with stray dogs with no known owner. (Six years ago, I founded a nonprofit dedicated to helping stray dogs.) About half of these calls are calm and factual, and people state the problem and I give them the best plan to proceed. The other half of the time, the owner of the cat or dog is highly upset, sometimes almost unable to function. I find myself just listening, much of the time, as they describe the wonderful personality of their missing family member, talking about them in language as if it was their child. People have said I have a calming voice. That's not something I tried to do, but just the way it

worked out. I usually spend half an hour to an hour learning about the environment, history, and personality of the lost cat or dog. It is very common for people to cry while they are on the phone with me. I have to guide the conversation back to facts and plans so I don't end up crying with them.

Most pets are found, safe and sound. Many of them are found before we head out to do the search. I am grateful for all of the positive outcomes. The cases that I invest the most time and effort in often have a negative outcome. I still remember the first time Kelsy and I found the remains of a dog that had gone missing. It was a shock. I knew it would happen eventually, but I was not really prepared for it. Kelsy had nightmares that night, and she woke up Porter and Tess and me with her screaming in her dream. Now, after having found remains of cats and dogs at least 130 times, I am not shocked as much. In fact, I am often looking for clues that will lead me to remains, so that I can give the owner an answer to what happened to their lost pet.

Just last month, Tino was searching for a small dog. I presented the scent article to him, and I expected him to go crashing into the woods, the direction the dog had been reported going when last seen. Instead, he led me the other direction, moving rather carefully and deliberately. He sniffed the ground as if there might be a blood trail I wasn't seeing. Tino also sniffed the brambles at a certain height, and he pointed out tufts of hair caught on the thorns. These tufts were the color, length, and texture of the missing dog, and not of any wild animal I could think of. However, the 8 pound dog would have left fur much lower if he was walking, and the only way his fur would have been snagged on the brambles at 18 to 24 inches high would be if his body was being carried in the mouth of a coyote. Tino led me to a dead end in the scent trail, about half a mile away, and there was no more evidence to be found. I explained my interpretation of the evidence to the owner. When I first started doing this work, I don't think there would have been any chance of me seeing that evidence, even

though Tino pointed it out to me. It is the expectation, based on experience, that a certain percentage of cases will end badly, that allowed me to be on the lookout for evidence of predation.

To some extent, I have become accustomed to loss. Besides the work with the search dogs, I often just go out looking for dogs who are missing, even though no one has called us to ask for help. Just today, at the grocery store, I had to buy a new package of large garbage bags because I had run out of them in my car. I keep large garbage bags because it's not unusual for me to have to pick up dead dogs and cats from the freeway. (Putting them in garbage bags is in no way intended to mean I think of them as garbage, but I have to transport the remains without staining my car's interior.) Animal Control can't or won't do it because of some nonsense about jurisdictions. I'm not legally allowed to stop and pick up remains. Nevertheless, I've used up an entire package of large garbage bags. I was at the grocery store doing my weekly shopping, and looking at garbage bags trying to find some without that horrible perfume, which I now associate with death, and also a bag tough enough that a dog's claws won't poke through. This shouldn't be something anyone should have to think about.

Last night, I was out searching for a lost dog until three in the morning. By the time I got all my dogs walked, fed, and into bed, I was so exhausted that my legs were buckling. This lost dog had come from Texas on a transport van earlier in the day. Every day, transport trucks bring in dogs from California and Texas, from high-kill shelters. Dogs are flown in almost every day from Hawaii and Korea and Georgia and Louisiana and Egypt. It seems that Seattle is the dog capitol of the world, and adults have more dogs than children in the Seattle area. This particular dog, named Daddy, came from Texas, I think, along with nine of his puppies. They had escaped death in Texas,

and were bound for a life of luxury, hopefully, in Seattle. Only, Daddy got spooked and backed out of the slip lead when being taken out of the transport truck.

Tino and I responded after dark. Daddy had been seen at least fifty times, running through the Green Lake neighborhood of Seattle. He was right near the freeway, often passing under it. We were going to try to track him, but it turned out that the rescue group didn't have anything handy that had just the scent of Daddy, and not the puppies. They did have one potential scent article, but it would take a while to arrive. I drove around the area slowly, and I swept my flashlight beam over the landscape and the brambles, the places lost dogs typically hide. After about an hour of looking, I located Daddy in the brambles on a slope leading up to the fence next to the freeway. I only noticed him because his collar reflected. He was otherwise invisible. In the flashlight beam, he looked like Mu, although I knew he was about half Mu's size. The white blaze on his chest was a bit larger than Mu's. The shape of his face was very Mu-like. I could see his eyes, watching me out of the darkness. Since he had stopped running, I called volunteers from his rescue group to assist.

We decided to set the trap. I placed it about 20 feet from his hiding place, and I saw that the breeze was flowing so that the scent of the food would be carried to him. When that had no impact, after a while we decided to bring one of his puppies, that he had been living with since they were born nine weeks ago. In the past, the sound of crying puppies has lured out mothers, but I didn't have a lot of data on how fathers typically respond. We placed the puppy in a secure crate next to the humane trap. The puppy cried so loud that I worried we would get complaints from the neighbors. After twenty minutes of the puppy crying, and no movement from Daddy, we decided to bring the puppy out and walk him around to see if Daddy would approach. Instead, he bolted. He ran down the street and disappeared into the darkness. The volunteer took the puppy back to the foster home. I looked around for Daddy for another hour,

and then I saw him near the trap again. He went very close to it, so he had to know there was food in it. I had earlier asked if Daddy had ever been caught in a humane trap, but the rescue group didn't have that much detail about his history.

I waited across the street for a long time, figuring he would probably go in soon. I had my window down. I usually couldn't see or hear him, but Tino would perk up and follow something in the shadows, and if I followed Tino's gaze, I could then eventually see Daddy. Irrationally, it seems to be a pattern that a stray dog goes in the trap about the time I give up and go home. I don't think the data would support my suspicion, but it has happened a few times. I decided to just go home and let the trap work. Just before we were going to leave, I saw Daddy come out into the street. He sniffed the pavement where someone may have dropped a bit of food. In the street light, he looked so much like my Mu, but smaller. I was exhausted, and after Daddy disappeared into the shadows again, Tino and I went home.

The next morning, I got the call that Daddy might be back in the bushes near the trap. There was a shadow that could be him. When I went and looked, I was certainly convinced. When I moved closer, it turned out to be just a shadow. As I was driving around looking for him, I got the call that he had been seen on the freeway. The witness wasn't clear as to whether he was alive, on the side of the freeway, or deceased, hit by a car. I drove around to the other side and took the on-ramp. As I approached the location, I could see a car pulled over, and an animal's remains on the pavement. I pulled over and looked more closely. You could really only see his back and two feet. He was in bad shape, hit multiple times. Looking at the fur that I could see, I couldn't help thinking of Mu, imagining him out there. The body was on the stripe between the exit lane and the right lane on I-5 in Seattle, where traffic is almost always heavy. People could obviously see us on the shoulder, but no one would slow down or move over. I stood there for what seemed like a long time, trying to consider how to retrieve

the body. I couldn't call the police because they would just tell us to leave and let the department of public works handle it, eventually. As I tried to think of the best way to approach it, another car hit his body again, which was a horrible thing to witness. I knew I had to retrieve the body soon, or, after a while, the damage would be too extensive for us to identify him at all.

I had my brightest flashlight in my hand. I waited for traffic to clear out a little in the two right lanes, although there was never much of a gap. I quickly stepped across the exit lane, grabbed the one intact foot I could grab, and dragged the remains over to the shoulder so we could get a better look. Out of high school, I worked in a slaughterhouse for a while, but this was more grotesque than anything I had seen before. I probably won't ever get the images out of my mind. I turned the body over, and the white blaze on the chest seemed to be a match for Daddy. I took a picture of one of his front feet, which was completely free of damage, and sent the picture to the rescue's founder. She confirmed the pattern of white on the toes was a match for Daddy. Then I used the last two trash bags in my car to gather his remains, as much as I could, and take them away from the freeway. We had come so close to saving this one, this mini-Mu, and we failed. I failed. Although I can't know for sure, I'm 99% certain that he ran onto the freeway because someone saw him running loose and they tried to catch him. Every day, I tell people, Don't chase a stray dog. I will tell people that every day of my life until I die, and people will still chase stray dogs, and some of them will run onto the freeway.

The stories I have collected here, of Mu and Tino and Fozzie and Kelsy, are mostly positive stories with good outcomes. I need the happy endings to remind me why we do this, and to divert my focus from the failures. However, it is my job, if I am to provide the best advice to people who've lost their pets, it is my job to see death. I can't turn away. When a dog dies on the freeway, I collect the body because, if it was my

Mu, I would want to take his body home. Even if I didn't have that sentimental reason, it is my job to see how dogs and cats die so that I can help prevent it, if possible. Hundreds of times, I have had to notify an owner that their cat or dog has died. If I'm serious about helping lost pets, I can't look away from the ones that died. If nothing else, we can learn from the circumstances of their deaths and take concrete steps to reduce mortality in the future.

Why did this sweet little dog, who looked like a little Mu, have to die on the freeway? I failed. I tried a strategy I thought would work, bringing a puppy as a lure, and it backfired. I used a certain cat food as bait in the trap, but what if I had tried rotisserie chicken instead? Did I place the trap in the best location? I didn't use Tino to track Daddy because I figured Daddy was known to be running in circles and would be back, which turned out to be true. If I had used the search dog, would we have located Daddy in a better place where we could possibly corner him with the big net? If I had been more assertive about getting the posters up that said DO NOT CHASE, would we have prevented someone from chasing him onto the freeway? Certainly the transporter and the rescue volunteers could have done something to ensure he didn't escape during transfer. Whatever ways we let Daddy down, however, the majority of the blame lies with the community he came from. Why are they not adequately taking care of their dog population? According to published estimates, Houston has more than one million stray dogs. (Some argue the actual number would be much smaller if accurately counted, but even 100,000 would be about 99,999 too many.) This is an unnecessary crisis. If those dogs were all valued like I love Mu, the resources would be allocated to protect all these dogs, and stop indiscriminate breeding. Only if dogs are viewed as disposable, as cheap consumer products, could we allow an American city to have one hundred thousand or a million stray dogs and a shelter capacity of several

hundred. Daddy didn't have to die, but a whole chain of people, including me, let him down. This is the cost of my job. If I want to help cats and dogs, I can't look away.



Another potential cost of this job is the risk to my dogs. I do everything I can to keep my dogs safe on searches. I can't know if I'm exposing them to chemicals that shorten their lives. If Mu steps in a shallow gutter during a light rain, is he being exposed to RoundUp that has washed out of someone's yard? Kelsy died of cancer at 11. Would she have developed cancer anyway, whether or not she had done those hundreds of searches? During a search in a rural area, I thought Mu and I had permission to search a particular field, but there had been a miscommunication. The property owner came out with a gun, although he was fairly understanding when we explained what we were doing. On two different searches, once with Kelsy and once with Mu, I got lost in a wilderness area with no cell reception to help us navigate back. I was never too worried, and we just followed the terrain until we found civilization again. I take redundant measures to keep my dogs safe, and I wouldn't do this work if I knew it posed risks I couldn't mitigate. I'm certainly aware of the risks when I go to retrieve bodies from freeways, but I try to minimize the risks as much as I can. There have been a couple that I didn't retrieve because there was just no safe way to do it.

I think the biggest risk is just the weight of failure. I do everything I can to ensure my dogs and I offer the best chance to recover a lost cat or dog. The biggest challenge is communicating to people how they can approach the search to give themselves the best odds of success. Some people are great at reading all the materials I send and following my instructions. Others just aren't in the right state of mind to follow a long list of instructions, some of which are counterintuitive. Worse than that, it shouldn't even be someone's job to find lost pets. We know enough about how cats and dogs go missing that 90% of the work we do is for circumstances that were avoidable. Although I would never say so to anyone who's lost a pet, I'm always aware that the cat or dog need not have been in this situation if certain precautions had been

taken. (Often, a pet owner has done everything right, and a third party made the error that caused the loss.)

But I wouldn't have to notify hundreds of families about the death of their well-loved cats and dogs if we as a society valued these creatures properly. One could argue that I am very fortunate that some people didn't value some dogs properly. Mu was left tied in a yard as an afterthought, and he became my best friend, a great working dog, with a wonderful life, a contributing member of society. I am blessed that they didn't want him. Fozzie was running down the freeway when I was first told about him. Mu and I went and caught him, and apparently Fozzie's previous owners weren't looking for him very hard because I couldn't locate them in two months of methodical searching. Fozzie became a successful search dog, and a perfect companion, so again I am blessed that they lost him and didn't go looking too hard. Sky had been living in a cemetery for four months when I first learned about her. It took me ten days to earn her trust and get her to come to me. Sky is too crazy to live a normal life in a normal home, so I am stuck with her. I am very happy to have her, and we accommodate her behavioral issues. Viktor was running loose for five weeks before we caught him. He had wandered twenty miles, as the crow flies, from Everett to Seattle, although with all of his circling, he must have wandered over a hundred miles in those weeks. Completely unadoptable because of his general fear around most people, Viktor makes a great addition to our pack. In the four years he has been with us, he has made slow and steady progress being comfortable in more situations. I'm glad to have him in our family, and lucky no one else wanted him. Tino's mother was running loose in the mountains when I first learned of her. I was able to catch her in a humane trap, and Tino was born the next day. A thorough search never located any owner for Tino's mom, and I ended up with a crazy German Shepherd puppy. Tino has become a great search dog, and has found many lost dogs. I am very lucky that no one claimed him.

You could say that I have benefitted from the indifference people have shown to these dogs. They are my family now, and I am thankful to have them. I really can't have any more than five dogs, so I'm ready for the rest of the world to step up and start caring for the rest of these strays. I would adopt every stray dog on the planet if I could, but that would make a very crowded house. It seems like the real solution is for society as a whole to see and appreciate the beauty, intelligence, and value of these perfect creatures, and finally give them the care they deserve. I hope I can make a difference, but I'm not optimistic the world will change quickly. I think that is the heaviest cost of my job, knowing that almost all of these losses are avoidable, and most of the cats and dogs that died didn't need to. Knowing that my experience and expertise could help prevent these tragedies, but the key people who could make a difference probably won't listen to me, even if I set myself on fire.











13 Mu Finds Stewart



Mu searched for Stewart in Bellevue on October 1st, 2019. Stewart fell from the third floor balcony of an apartment while his family was out of the country. The pet sitter looked for him a little, but certainly not adequately. By the time Mu and I started the search, Stewart had been missing 6 days. There had been reports of him around the swimming pool, and, oddly, Stewart was known to be particularly attracted to chlorine. That's the first time I'd heard of that. Other cats had been seen around the complex. As we started the search, I could hear a Husky howling in one of the apartments. He

had a beautiful voice, but I wondered if the other tenants appreciated his singing. As we searched around one of the pools, the husky sat on his deck with his head poked through the railing, silently watching us. I figured the Husky probably knew where Stewart was, if we could only ask him.

Mu and I searched around the complex for a couple of hours. Mu seemed attracted to the grounds of the church across the street. We searched over there, but he didn't find any cats or any evidence. We tried to search the giant laurel hedge in the cemetery behind the apartments, but we got kicked out fairly quickly because dogs aren't allowed in that particular cemetery. As we were walking from the cemetery back to the apartments, Stewart's owner notice the landscaping crew at the neighboring apartment complex, which reminded her that the landscapers would be coming to Stewart's complex that day. We were under pressure to hurry up and find Stewart before he was chased away by lawn mowers and leaf blowers.

As we searched around one of the pools, Mu sniffed at the base of the wall of one of the buildings, and he whined, indicating a cat. When we looked closer, we found, under the creeping vines, there was an access hatch to the crawl space, and it was pulled away from the building far enough that a gap was left, big enough for a cat. This gap was under a bump-out in the apartment building wall, and also obscured by shrubs and vines, so no one could see that cats were getting into the crawl space. Mu's nose revealed a hiding place no one had known about.

When I looked closer, I saw grey fur around the edge of the entrance to the crawl space, the color of Stewart's fur. A gray cat had rubbed against the rough wood and left a little fur behind. When we lifted the hatch, we could see many spiders that appeared to be black widows. I have been bitten by spiders plenty of times, and I know they won't kill me, but it's still not my favorite thing. I mean, I actually like spiders, in general. I prefer not to have them on me, if I have a choice. Mu whined at the opening,

so that meant I was going into the dark, smelly crawl space full of spiders. I took Mu back to the car, and then came back and slid through the narrow opening.

Down in the crawl space, it smelled of cat urine, which was actually a promising sign. I saw the skeletons of birds and small mammals, too old to be the work of Stewart. Other cats must have been going down there for quite a while. I felt spider webs on the back of my neck, and brushed them away. The crawl space had a series of short walls dividing it into smaller spaces, so I couldn't see all around under the entire apartment building. I thought I saw a shadow go by. It could have been the tail of a cat, or just the shadow of my flashlight as it passed behind a cable. I had been watching *Stranger Things*, so it also occurred to me that the fleeting shadow might be a predator from another dimension. The owner's fiancé came down into the crawl space and helped look. My flashlight started to die. I remembered several times on previous searches when Mu was able to pinpoint a cat in a crawl space by sniffing from the outside, checking all the vents. Working from the outside was seeming like a really good idea. I climbed out and went and got Mu.

As we searched around the building, Mu picked up the faint scent of a cat at the northwest corner. I reported it to the owners. We worked our way around, and Mu picked up a strong scent at the south side of the building, in the middle of the wall. Mu whined louder, and he sniffed at the vent as if he was trying to inhale the cat through the mesh and pull him out. I reported the location to them, and the fiancé in the crawl space looked to the south. There he saw Stewart, just hanging out, like it was the thing for a cat to do, loiter in a smelly crawl space with spiders and skeletons. Stewart's person was delighted that he was found, of course. They were moving to California, and they were supposed to fly out the next day, so it had been especially urgent to find him fast. She ran to get a carrier to put Stewart in.

Talking to the fiancée in the crawl space, it seemed that Stewart wasn't wanting to come to him. She was not too keen about getting into the crawl space where we had seen the black widows. I told her I would go down there, and I certainly understood if she couldn't make herself go down in the dark with the spiders and bones, but if she could go down there, Stewart would be much more likely to come to her. She ran back to the apartment to get a sweatshirt with a hood, and then she slid through the gap, down into the crawl space. "The things we do for love," she said. I watched from the opening, ready to block Stewart in if he tried to escape. She waited by one of the dividing walls in the middle, and she talked softly to Stewart. After about five minutes, he came up to her and rubbed against her. He let her pick him up. She wrapped him tightly in her arms and carried him to the opening. I held the cat carrier up to the opening, and she stuffed him in. Stewart was safe.

Stewart's people were very happy with Mu's nose. From the outside of the building, just looking at it, it appeared that all of the crawl space screens were intact, and there was no way under. Mu's nose found the gap where cats had been getting in. They had placed several traps around the complex, but they hadn't caught anything. They were up against a deadline for their moving date, and they had been trying to plan dates when they could fly back to Seattle to continue searching for Stewart. They were also worried about a possible injury since Stewart had fallen from the third floor. The search dog isn't always the best way to find a lost cat, and it certainly isn't the only way. In some cases, as with Stewart, a dog like Mu is definitely the right tool for the job. The Husky sang us a nice little song, to celebrate finding Stewart. Mu slept soundly on the drive home, snoring all the way.



14

Listening to Mu



Charlotte and Wilbur. Snoopy and Woodstock. Aslan. Mr. Ed. Batfink. Mickey and Minnie. Pluto and Goofy. Shelob. Smaug. The cowardly lion. Wiley Coyote and the Roadrunner. Bugs Bunny. Daffy Duck. Donald Duck. Mighty Mouse. Scooby Doo. Aragorn. Remus Lupin. Joey Castle. Chewbacca and the Ewoks. Boxer, Snowball, and Napoleon. The Serpent and Balaam's donkey. Eeyore, Tigger, Piglet, and Winnie. Mole, Rat, Toad, and Badger. Peter Rabbit. Rocket Raccoon. Hobbes. Babe. The White Rabbit, the Caterpillar, and the Cheshire Cat. Planet of the Apes. Flipper. Bambi and Thumper. The Cat in the Hat. Gromit. Kermit and Miss Piggy. Yogi and Booboo. Foghorn Leghorn. Rocky and Bullwinkle. Woody Woodpecker. Bagheera.

It is my job to listen to animals, and to pay attention to their behavior. It recently occurred to me that animals in literature, TV, and movies have been talking to me all my life. I wasn't consciously thinking of all of these talking animals when I decided to make Kelsy a talking dog in my novel, but it just felt natural. Dogs are people. They are so expressive with their actions, with their eyes. Valentino will sigh, and it conveys everything about the moment without the need for words.

Some people call me a dog whisperer, which I really don't like. I know they mean it in a good way, but The Dog Whisperer is Cesar Milan, whose whole philosophy is to let the dog know who is in charge. I am not in charge of my dogs, and I don't want to be. They are my friends. They are my family. They are not my servants. I am not a dog whisperer; I am a dog listener. I observe their behavior, and help them find their purpose in life. Every dog should have a job, even if they can't all be cat-detection dogs or scent trailing dogs. Viktor is a thief. I help him find work as a thief by setting up scenarios where he can find a box on the floor with one cookie in it. I set the box down, and say to the room, "I sure hope no one steals this box." As I walk away, he runs up and grabs the box and carries it away to a safe place where he can rip it open. If you

just gave him a cookie, he might eat it or he might not. A stolen cookie tastes so much better, to Viktor the Thief.

When I'm working with Mu, our success depends on our training, of course, but more than that, I have to pay attention to his behavior, his breathing, his pace. I need to notice what he notices. He has a whole range of whines, like a meter that goes from a cat was here fifteen minutes ago to there's a cat under that shed right now. We are only able to do our work if I listen to him. As we work, I also listen to the birds. They will tell me if there is a predator around. Sometimes they think Mu is a predator, but sometimes they will point out a hidden cat to us. When I interview the cat's owner before the search, I listen to so many details about the cat's history and behavior. I have a standard set of questions, but there's always one peculiar thing I wouldn't have found out from the standard questions, like a cat who likes chlorine. Sometimes you just have to listen and pay attention.

I realize that all of the fictional talking animals I grew up with were anthropomorphized, for the most part. Rabbits don't really act like Bugs Bunny or Peter Rabbit or the Monty Python rabbit. In *The Once and Future King*, Merlin turns young Arthur into a fish, a hawk, a goose, and a badger, so Wart is not so much talking to the animals as seeing things from their perspective. I see the world from the perspective of Mu, and also from the perspective of the lost cat. While I can't know exactly what a lost cat is thinking, I can know how they typically act, based on what I've learned from previous cases. I know that a frightened cat like Blaze is likely to run, so I take measures to try to minimize that risk. I know that a displaced cat like Mr. Kitty is likely to find a hiding place and stay silent for many days, so I led Mu to the rocks because the crevices offered a good hideout for a cat. I know from experience, from observations, that an indoor cat usually hides close to the point of escape, so I made sure to work Mu around

the cars near their apartment, increasing our chances of finding Snickers in the engine compartment. I see the world through the eyes of dogs and cats.

When you can see the world through the eyes of animals, it opens up a world of experience to you. I wish a wizard could actually transform me into a dog for a short time. I would really love to be a dog for an hour so I could play with Mu and Tino. If I were a dog, if I could be a dog for an hour or a day, I wouldn't be less than a human. Dogs have their own intelligence, their own way of talking. Dogs are absolutely brilliant at what they do, and they have capabilities way beyond mine in many respects. That they can't type on a keyboard doesn't make them second class. Humans are animals, and we lived for millions of years without language, without books and movies. We existed just fine in a wordless environment. I enjoy the quiet time I spend with dogs, and working, and playing, mostly without words. In a silent world, I can communicate with my dogs just fine.

Mu does sound effects. He is like a cartoon character. When he snores, he is much louder than the other dogs. I love his snore, and I could listen to it all day. Sometimes he adds a little whistle into his snore, which is quite musical. When you give Mu a treat, he makes snarfling sounds, and it seems like he really enjoys food, more than the average dog. Mu doesn't usually howl, but Tino howls at least once a day. When Tino starts howling, Mu often joins in with a high, sweet voice, like he's a backup singer to Tino's Mick Jagger. At breakfast time, Mu barks at me to hurry up and give him his cookies. None of the other dogs bark at this time, just Mu. It's annoying, but if he didn't do it, I would miss it. Sometimes I yell at him to shut up, but he just ignores me. It's like I'm barking along with him. Mu says strange words that kind of sound like Scooby Doo dubbed in French. Sometimes when I walk into the room, Mu has a toy in his mouth, doing a play bow, and shaking the toy while making ferocious monster growls. Other times, Mu is silent, and he just looks at me. I know what he wants, since it's really not all

that hard to figure out what a dog wants: food, walks, play, or a nap. Mu has me trained so that I look around the room for him until I find him silently watching me, expectantly, then I bring a cookie to where he is relaxing on the couch, or in the wing-back chair, or on the hearth in front of the fire that was turned on just for him.

I am with dogs and cats almost every moment of every day. They just make sense to me, even when they don't make sense. Mu will say a funny word, one that he has never said before, and yet somehow I seem to know how he feels, like he combined a bark and a moaning growl into a weird new sound and I understand how he feels about the situation. If a human made up a new word that was halfway in between two known words, I probably wouldn't understand. In fact, the more I hang out with dogs, the less I understand humans. I feel like I'm a dog in a human body, and when I'm in the grocery store, I am in alien territory. They seem like zombies. What are these strange two-legged creatures? Why is that man staring at the frozen dinners as if they will change into something good if he looks at them long enough? Human habits and rituals make less and less sense. My dogs don't always make sense, and just because I love them doesn't mean I don't find them highly annoying sometimes, but the ways of dogs seem more natural. Home is where my dogs are. I am of the tribe of the dog.

Recently, Mu and Tino and Fozzie went with me on a trip to Whidbey Island, and on the way home we stopped at the dog beach at Useless Bay. They ran around on the sandy beach like maniacs. Of course I took a hundred pictures. I shot a video in slow motion of Mu and Tino playing. Mu lunges at Tino with an expressionless face, and in slow motion you can see him don the mask of ferocious aggression. With foaming slobber and bared sharp teeth, he lunges at the neck of the German Shepherd, missing by a mile. He slams his body into Tino sideways and bounces off. He wheels around for another attack and you can see the happiness, the joy in his eyes as he calculates his next moves. He savagely chomps at Tino's right leg, missing by several

inches as Tino dances out of the way, and quickly chomps near his left leg. It is choreographed. It's an "I'm gonna kill you" dance that they both find hilarious. As Mu spins around for another mock attack, Tino wraps his arms around Mu's head and smothers him in thick German Shepherd fur. The exchange was just a few moments, but stretching it out in slow motion video lets me see all the micro expressions. What looks like a dog fight is really a dance of love. Then Mu wheels around and stands there, apparently laughing, looking around the empty beach. I've watched this video at least two dozen times, and it makes me want to be a dog. I think I have become a dog in a human body.

If I were to speak for Mu, what would I say? My purpose in writing this book is to tell his story, by reporting his actions and activities, but also, hopefully, by conveying how he feels about all of it. Mu is very brave sometimes, and I take him to all types of environments. He saves lives. He brings closure when he can't save a life. Does Mu feel heroic? Is he being altruistic? Absolutely not. To view Mu as intending to be a savior is to fundamentally misunderstand him. He does the work because he has a skill and he enjoys using it. Also, above all else, he wants to be near me, to go with me on adventures. Mu finds lost cats because, like many dogs, he has a natural interest and drive for finding small furry creatures. He also enjoys the work because of rewards and praise from me. Mu wants to have fun, explore, and run around, and then he wants to nap by the fire and sleep in the bed with all the other dogs. Mu enjoys life. If I have two cookies, and he's standing beside Tino, if I give Mu one cookie and wait, then he very much hopes I will give him the other cookie, too. If I offered it to him, he would take it without hesitation. He wouldn't say, Oh, no, that wouldn't be fair, I couldn't possibly eat Tino's cookie. Mu would eat Tino's cookie without a moment's hesitation, or a shred of remorse. This does not make him a bad dog, of course. He's exactly what he was bred to be over the centuries, by the artificial selection of humans.

To say that Mu is not heroic doesn't necessarily mean he is selfish. He can be selfish in some situations, especially situations involving cookies. One of the main lessons to learn from observing Mu is that he wants to be with his people and with his pack, and he wants to play. When Mu and Tino have toy, they fight over it and try to steal it from each other, but then each one gives it back again, so they can try to take it away again. Mu is always offering a toy to Tino, Sky, or Fozzie. Sometimes he even waves a toy at Viktor, even though the funny little dog doesn't know how to respond. Mu's work is not work to him. It's a game. Mu says, Let's play, then some cookies, and a nice long nap. Mu is not extraordinary. He is very ordinary. Although he means a great deal to me, and I make a big fuss over him, he is not more capable or more deserving than the average dog. Not every dog could be a cat detection dog, but every dog can do some job. Every dog needs work. Every dog is a Mu, with his own story to tell, deserving of work and love, deserving a dedicated biography.







15

The Soul of a Dog



Recently, Mu and I searched for a cat in Newport Shores, a neighborhood on Lake Washington. It has decommissioned railroad tracks along the perimeter. Mu and I searched a few yards near where this cat was last seen, and we found easy access to this unused rail corridor. It was the perfect pathway for predators to hunt rabbits and travel between patches of forest. Mu found coyote scat in several places, and it appeared that the coyotes had been eating rabbits mostly. Up on the railway grade behind the houses, Mu sniffed the air in the general direction of the house just to the south of the house where the cat lived. It was a steep slope covered with blackberries, so we couldn't approach from that direction. We went around to the street side. I knocked on the door and got no answer. We continued searching likely areas and ended up on the elevated grade of the railroad again, and again Mu was catching a scent from that yard. We searched a large area for almost three hours and didn't find the cat or any evidence suggesting what happened. We went back to the neighbor's house again, and finally got permission to search. Mu took me right back to the corner of the yard, up against the slope leading up to the tracks, and Mu pointed out the remains of the lost cat.

I could see the silver collar. Even though only about 10% of the cat was left, the presence of the unique collar seemed like a definite identifier. The remains were down in the ivy, in a grove of bamboo. Someone searching visually could have looked all day and never found this evidence. Mu's nose zeroed in right away. I told him he was a good boy and had him go sit on the grass nearby while I investigated. I gave him his cheese, his reward for a good job. Carefully, I removed the collar from the remains so that I could take a photograph to send to the owner, who was out of town, to make sure it was a positive ID. She said it was definitely his collar. I had to tell her that we had found her cat's remains, and the search was over.

Of course, she was devastated. I really thought we would find her cat alive, even with so many predators in the area. After I answered her questions as delicately as I could, without going into too much detail about the condition of the body, she asked me if I would bury her cat's remains for her. I told her of course I would, and she told me the spot that her cat liked, under the flowering tree.

I have buried plenty of pets, too many. As I dug a hole for this cat I had never met, I was reminded of the burials of my three black dogs, the original Three Retrievers that I named my company after. The day I buried Tess, a raven flew overhead, keeping me company. We don't usually have too many ravens near our home, and it seemed like the raven was there especially for Tess. When Kelsy died, too young, and I buried her next to Porter and Tess, on the edge of the woods, that was the hardest. Kelsy had been my working partner for 8 years. I talked to her, telling her that I was giving her to the earth, and that I would join her some day. Not being a practitioner of any particular religion, I didn't pray, when I buried Kelsy, but I spoke to her, as if she could hear me. I still talk to Kelsy, in my mind, as if she could hear me. That's the closest I come to praying. As I buried Kelsy, carefully placing the soil over her, I picked up a stone, about the size of my thumb to the first joint. For reasons I'm not entirely aware of, I felt compelled to keep that stone, and it has been in my pocket every day since then, more than three and a half years. I often turn it in my hand, thoughtfully, like prayer beads. It has become polished and smooth.

As I buried the remains of this black cat, I tried to keep in mind the wishes of the owner, as far as placement near the tree. I also tried not to disturb too many tree roots, nestling the remains down in, as if the tree was taking this body from me, accepting him, and holding him safe. I replace the dirt and smoothed it out. I thought of making a small cross out of stones, but I had never met the cat's owner, since we had arranged the search by phone, while she was away on a trip. I had no idea what she would like,

so I just left the grave smooth and bare. As I knelt there, my hands covered in dirt, I thought that this young cat, who was loved, deserved some words, although I didn't know what to say. I pulled Kelsy's stone from my pocket and turned it in my hands. I told Kelsy that I was giving this soul to her, relegating the cat to her world, and that she should take care of him. I replaced the shovel with the other tools, and went back to the car where Mu was waiting. I washed away the dirt from my hands with bottled water. Mu slept with his head on my leg as we drove home in silence.

Mu and I are a team. He does his part and I do mine. He searches an area, trying to catch the scent of any cat hidden nearby, and also investigating clues on the ground, such as tufts of fur, or blood in the soil. It's my job to read his behavior. Sometimes it's completely obvious when he has located a cat. Other times he takes an interest in something and I need to take a look at the evidence. Because it's my job to watch his behavior and read his mind as much as I can, I am in the habit of watching his facial expressions and body language all day long, off the clock too. Although Mu is accustomed to finding the remains of cats, having done so at least 120 times in 8 years, he does seem thoughtful and perhaps sad when he finds the kitty no longer alive. I can't know exactly what he thinks, but I can tell that he acts differently when we find a body. There seems to be an understanding, like maybe he thinks of Kelsy and how she went away one day. I wonder if he talks to Kelsy in his mind, the way I do. When I look at Mu, I see a soul.

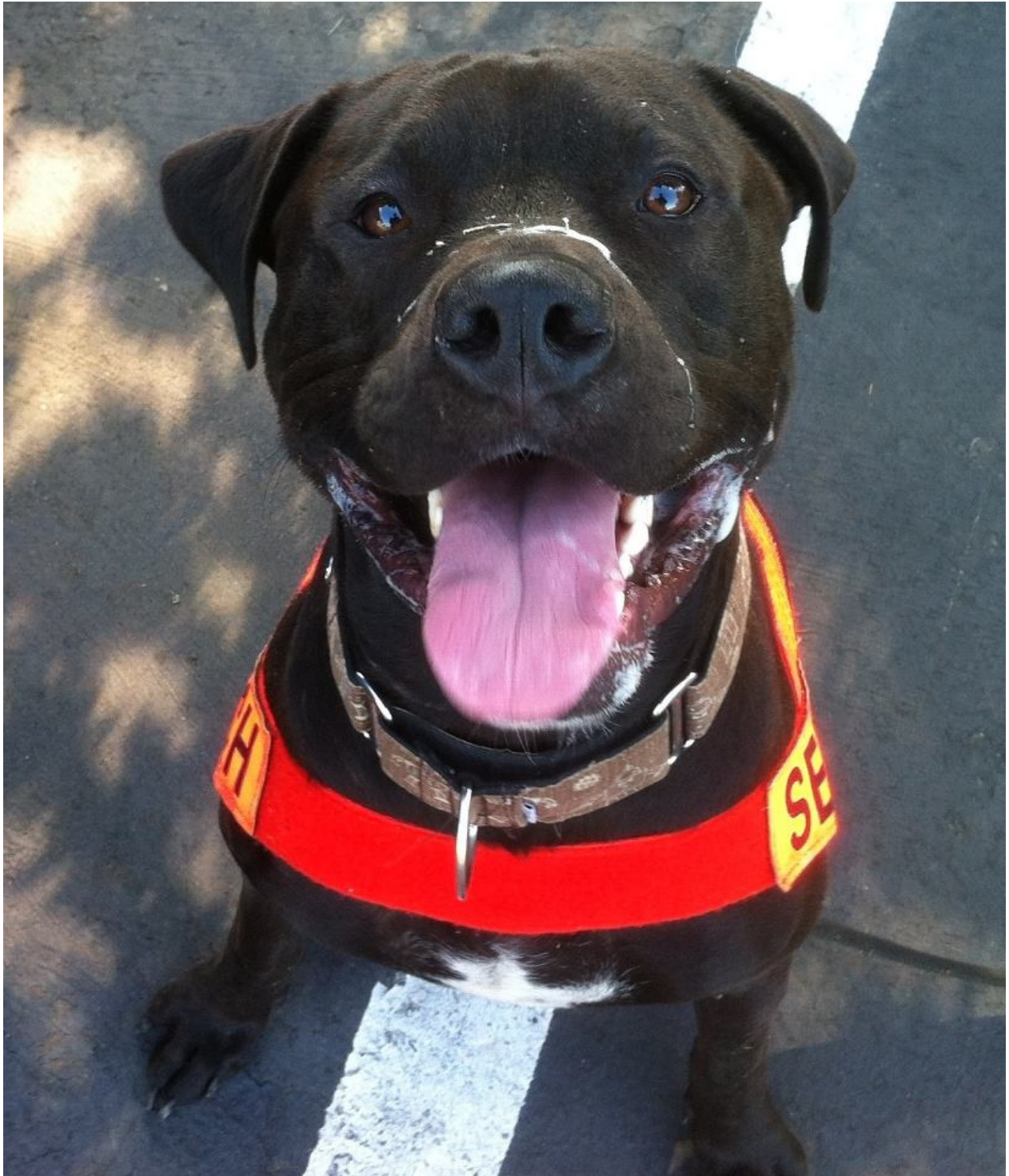
Shakespeare said the eyes are the window to the soul. He must have been thinking about a dog when he wrote that. When I look into the eyes of a human, I sometimes see kindness, and sometimes I see intention, deception, evasion, and, less often, a glimpse of something that could be called a soul. When I look into the eyes of a dog, it's just soul, all the way, deep down. Well, yes, I see that he wants a cookie, too, but who doesn't? If I were looking into the eyes of various animals looking for some-

thing I would call a soul, I would definitely see it most often in a dog. It's easy to imagine that the first poets to ponder a soul were inspired by dogs.

















The story of Mu is one of action, if you discount the fact that he sleeps about twenty hours a day. When he's not sleeping, Mu and I are always working together or playing together. Together, we save lives and we help people even when we can't save a life.

We have searched from Tillamook, Oregon, to Blaine, Washington, from Aberdeen to Ellensburg. We have searched in the dark at 4 AM, in the snow, in heavy rain, in swampy ravines with dense brambles, in industrial areas with broken glass. We cover about six acres on the average search, so Mu's nose has scanned more than 8,000 acres of land in search of cats.

All of our work amounts to almost nothing in the big picture of lost dogs and cats in the world. Mu and Fozzie and Tino can't find all of the lost cats and dogs that go missing every day. What those cats and dogs need is an elevation in status. They need equal souls. If a human child had been lost in a construction zone at an airport, all available resources, law enforcement, firefighters, volunteers, engineers, administrators, a whole army of people would have looked for that human child until he was found. They would have shut down the airport if they had to. To say that Mr. Kitty was not a priority implies that he was not really a part of the family in the eyes of society. We don't necessarily need to mobilize an army of experts and shut down an airport every time a cat goes missing, but there needs to be a recognition of the value of family members who don't happen to be human. The soul of a little cat hiding under a rock needs to matter to all of us. If my Mu became lost, what wouldn't I do to find him? I take many measures, redundancy upon redundancy, to make sure Mu is not lost. I protect him as if he is the embodiment of my soul.

I certainly hope that Mu is still in the middle of his career, with many years of searching ahead. He still gets wound up at the start of every search, so antsy that it is a challenge to get his search vest on him. I never know how close I am to the end of Mu's story. My previous dogs died at the ages of 9, 11, and 15. Mu could live to be 20, and I certainly hope he does. Whenever the end comes, I won't be ready, and it will be too soon.

When Kelsy died, it was horrible, and I assumed that I would go through a period of grief and then recover. I had already lived through the deaths of Porter and Tess. I would think of them often, but probably not every day. When Kelsy died, I never stopped thinking about her. Also, because I had taken so many pictures of her, and written stories about her, I couldn't forget about her for two minutes even if I wanted to. With Mu, it will be that way ten times more. I have 10 times as many pictures of Mu, simply because photography in the age of iPhones is so easy and ubiquitous. Also, Mu and I did about 10 times as many searches as I did with Kelsy. Also, and this is the key, before I lose Mu, before I say goodbye to him, I already know in advance that I'm going to think about him every day for the rest of my life, whether I want to or not. If I'm going to always be thinking of him, I want to remember, as clearly as possible, every good moment. By being selective in the memories I choose to capture, I am engineering the reality of my future.

If I have a soul, it doesn't resonate in a church or a mosque or a synagogue. If I have a soul, it lives in a dog. In modern life, you are tasked with finding a home for your soul. You can stay with the traditions of your family or your community, or you can move to another religion or spiritual practice. You can believe idiosyncratic ideas about the soul based on your personal experience. You can also avoid the question all together. For the most part, I would not ever tell anyone about my soul, for several reasons. First, I have no idea what it is, or to what extent it is real. All I know is that if I have a soul, it is irrevocably intertwined with the souls of dogs. Second, whatever you decide about your soul, you shouldn't be taking advice from me. This nation was founded on the idea of Freedom of Religion, which also includes freedom from religion, so I would be perfectly happy to leave your choices up to you entirely.

The reason I can't just remain silent at this point, the reason I need to tell you about my dog's soul even after stating that I'm no expert and you shouldn't listen to

me, is that, explicitly or implicitly, one of the ways that people allow themselves to marginalize dogs is to state or imply that they have no souls, or they have lesser souls. If dogs had equal souls, equal with human souls, it would be one of the worst crimes in human history to lock up millions of them in shelters and fill the dogs with terror and dread before killing them for no good reason. Is a dog a disposable consumer product, to be bought and sold, and the overstock is destroyed to make way for the next season's supply? If you decide a dog doesn't serve your purposes, are you free to dispose of him, to kill him? (Our current laws say you can.) Or is a dog a living being with a soul as deep and as true as any human you've ever met? Whether or not a dog has a soul is more than just a philosophical debate. It's a matter of life and death for dogs. The commercial production of dogs as a consumer good is the main driver of dogs going missing. If dogs were in shorter supply—if dogs were only ever bred in a manner that served the dogs' best interests—then we would be taking much better care of them. My dogs are family. Mu is family. Wakomu literally means "He is Family." My family doesn't have inferior souls. Because he can't speak for himself, it is my job to speak for him, and defend his soul. I can't tell you all of the parameters and dimensions of the soul, but I can tell you, whatever all of the other pieces of the puzzle turn out to be, they must fit in with this core, indisputable truth: no logical, empirical, or factual argument can be made to say that dogs lack souls or have inferior souls.

I started the idea of writing this book about Mu as a thought experiment: what if I was reincarnated as a dog and Mu was reincarnated as a human. Wouldn't it be nice if we could sit by the fire together, and while I snored, he could be reading about how much I loved him when I was a human and he was a dog. It would be a way for Mu to know that I think he is beautiful and amazing, and in no way inferior to any human. I still like that idea, but during the course of trying to put down in words my feelings about Mu, I've come to realize that a dog already has the capacity to see his own

beauty: he has his human to appreciate that for him. The dog and the human are not two entities, living separate lives. The dog and the human are one being in two bodies. It is the dog's job to be a dog, innocent, unaware of his beauty and majesty. It is the human's job to have the capacity to know and remember and see his beauty. It is the human's job to be the steward of the dog's soul, whatever that might be. It is the dog's job to be amazing, and the human's job to post him on Instagram.

I want equality for dogs in terms of status in society. It doesn't mean that a dog votes, but I vote in the human political system with the dog's best interests in mind. I always vote for the biosphere, for the environment. To the extent that my vote has any impact, I will represent the voiceless, dogs and cats and trees and birds. I will always vote for the best interests of planet Earth. I'm always going to vote for environmental protection and for animal rights. That's not to say that animals don't have rights unless I vote for them. Animals do have rights, and my vote is a recognition of those rights. In the same way, animals must have equal souls. If anything has a soul, the soul of a dog is not inferior, or lacking, in comparison to the soul of a human. Does that mean every creature on earth has a soul equal to a humans? I'm not claiming to be an expert on all aspects of every creature's soul, but I do know a lot of people, and I know a lot of dogs. Whatever it is that you call a soul, it is not lesser, it is not lacking in a dog. If you knew a dog the way I know Mu, you would have to agree.

As the keeper of Mu's soul, i want him to live a long life. I want him to be an old dog who sleeps by the fire and doesn't chase squirrels any more. I will be happy to carry him outside to go to the bathroom, and I will carry him back in. I will be there on his last day. I will feel his heart stop beating. After that time, because we are one being, not just a dog and a human, he will go on living in me. I will keep him alive in my daily thoughts and in this book. His picture is going to pop up on Facebook everyday.

I couldn't not think about him even if I wanted to. The death of Mu's body is going to be the beginning of his afterlife in me.

I often think about and sometimes talk about the grief for a thing that hasn't happened yet. It is called Anticipatory Grief sometimes, and I didn't even know such a thing existed until I experienced it myself. I deal with it every day, with people who have lost their cats and dogs, and don't know if they will ever see them again. Are they heroically searching for a cat or dog they are going to find? Is it going to be the best day of their lives when they get their pet back? Or are they doing all this work in vain, only to be ultimately disappointed, crushed by bad news. Or perhaps worse, forever left in limbo, never knowing what happened. Will they eventually be overcome by a deep grief that lasts for a very long time. Before they know the answer, the pet owner is stuck in a churning cycle of hope and anticipatory grief. Tess was my first dog to get cancer. I knew she was going to die. We tried a treatment that had a low but significant chance of success. I knew I was probably going to lose her. Since that time, every day, at some point, I've had this fleeting thought that this dog I'm with today is going to die someday. I should just be enjoying my time with them, and I try to banish the thought, but I can't help thinking that I'm going to lose Mu eventually, perhaps to cancer, or a terrible accident, or old age. Statistically, it is very likely that he will die before I will. I'm going to witness the death of my child, my adopted child. I know that I will someday be in a very large amount of pain, almost unbearable. It's a byproduct of my work that makes me think of this so often. Too often.

By changing the status of the soul, our shared soul, I can be not so focused on the eventual loss of Mu, but I can be aware that he will live on in me. It is the role of the human part of the human-dog coevolved animal that the human holds the dog's life in his heart and remembers him. It is the role of the dog to have a shorter life, for various reasons, not all of them fair or logical, but it is unavoidable that most humans will out-

live most pets. I will be the afterlife of all my dogs and cats, and they will live in my brain for as long as the neurons keep firing.

Normally, I wouldn't bother anyone with my thoughts about the soul of a dog, but it is important for practical solutions to the real problems facing dogs and cat. The solution to lost cats and dogs, for 99% of them, is not for me to work harder to find them faster. The solution is not for me to train an army of people to go out with trained dogs and do this work, although I would like to do that. The actual solution is already available, if we would take advantage of it. We need to elevate the status of the dog, and the cat. We already know from experience and evidence, that people who have a stronger human-animal bond, have a higher chance, not 100%, but higher, of not losing their pet in the first place, and of finding their lost cat or dog if he does go missing. Some people won't even bother to go get their dogs from the shelter if they are found and turned in. Millions of dogs and cats die in shelters every year, completely unnecessarily. We can stop treating pets as disposable. We need to recognize and value that dogs were and are an essential component of our cultural evolution. We might still be living in caves if dogs hadn't partnered with us. We need to recognize that dogs have their own intelligence, different than ours, but not inferior. The genius of a dog is his ability to do his work and play his role. A dog can do many things I can't. We need to recognize dogs and cats as extensions of our souls, that the soul of a dog is in no measurable way less than the soul of a human.

Dogs need to be fully integrated into our lives and our society. This doesn't mean that every human has to have a dog, but there needs to be some recognition of the contribution and value of dogs. Even people who hate computers and never use them benefit from computer design, from computer logistics getting their vegetables to the grocery store, and a sea of computer data that impacts every aspect of their lives even if they never touch a computer. In a similar way, dogs impact everyone's lives even if

they hate dogs or are ambivalent about them. We need to help dogs find their future roles in society, if they can't keep the jobs they traditionally had. The solution to lost cats and dogs is for us to value them properly. They are family. They are beautiful souls, no matter if they look like AKC purebreds or if they look like mixed breed mutts. Sometimes they are troubled, through no fault of their own, and they need our help to find a suitable place. And certainly, without question, we need to stop breeding more cats and dogs for a profit while the public sector bears the burden of paying to house and euthanize the unwanted ones. Since we, the public, end up paying a high cost for people breeding unwanted dogs, maybe it would just be cheaper to pay them to not breed dogs in the first place. It would certainly reduce the spiritual cost.

At this moment, I have more than 89,000 pictures and videos on my iPhone. Scrolling through them, it appears that about 5% of those pictures are work related, such as screenshots of maps, craigslist posts about lost or found dogs, or the glowing blue spatter patterns of blood evidence sprayed with luminol during searches for lost pets. Another 2% of the pictures, maybe, are nature scenes, such as clouds, sunsets, native plants, flowers, rocks, and trees. I love to take pictures without any trace of human impact and imagine that I live in a time when the earth is not marred by the damage people do. About 1% of the pictures are of my nephews, capturing moments of their lives that pass so quickly, and ought to be preserved. More than 90% of the 89,000 pictures and videos on my phone are of dogs, mostly my dogs, and some of the dogs I have helped in my work, lost pet rescue. And some cats. Why do I need 80,000 pictures of dogs? Because I like them, obviously. Because they are important to me. Dogs are beautiful. They are funny and entertaining. One of my key reasons for documenting the significant and the mundane moments of my dogs lives is that I want to immortalize them. I want to capture their souls, if I can.

Significantly, my phone's memory contains almost no selfies, in the typical sense. As part of my work, I am an admin on a Facebook page dedicated to aiding lost dogs in King County, the greater Seattle area. When someone asks to join the group, I have to review their Facebook page and see if they really have a connection to lost dogs in King County, or if they are spammers trying to join the group so they can post an ad for counterfeit sunglasses. Many of these Facebook pages are an endless stream of selfies, and I eventually see a Seahawks shirt or a *Pseudotsuga menziesii* in the background and admit them to the group. Looking at my Facebook page, it's almost all dogs. Of the 89,000 pictures on my iPhone, about ten show my face. I would argue that the 80,000 pictures of dogs, plus the pictures of trees and clouds and rocks, are my selfies. This is who I am. I am my dogs, first and foremost. I am of The Tribe of the Dog. I have my own pack of five dogs, I work with dogs every day, and my job, lost pet rescue, serves dogs and cats, and their families.

Knowing that I will lose Mu before I am ready, knowing that I will think about him every day, whether I want to or not, I am living my life and experiencing my time with him while keeping in mind that it is a continuum, that I will possibly expend more mental energy thinking about Mu after he is gone than I did during his life. I have a memory palace, in the sense that I use a system of loci to remember things. I have a trail in the forest that I can walk down at any time, and I see clearly each of those animals I shared my life with. Chena by the spruce tree, Gizmo near the Oregon grape, Heidi, Tanzy, Duck, Charlie by the oak tree, Smookler, Norbert, Porter near the Douglas-fir, Max, Boots, Jinx, Wolfgang, Tess, Bear, Kelsy under the dogwood on the little knoll, Olive, Wakomu, Fozzie, Sky, Viktor, Tino by the cedar, and Dexter. It's not just that I have a memory palace, where those cats and dogs help me remember things; I am a memory palace in the sense that my mind is the location where those animals live after their bodies have been buried in the earth. I am the afterlife of my cats and dogs.

If I want recognition for the souls of dogs and cats, in order for them to live more equal lives and not be treated as disposable consumer products, then I ought to help people deal with the loss of a soulmate. If I'm asking someone to treat a dog as an extension of her soul, I also ought to help her deal with the probable loss of such a valuable treasure. So far, I don't have the answer to that, but I would still ask that dogs and cats be treated as equal souls even if it meant a pet owner would suffer immeasurable pain later. It is my hope that Mu will have a long and happy afterlife in the memory palace of my brain, and that the grief and sorrow I will undoubtedly feel will be a small fraction of the comfort I gain by visiting him in my memories. I can't tell you yet how that experiment is going to work out. This book is a part of a work in progress.

I want immortality for my dogs, during my lifetime, so that I can continue to involve them in my life in meaningful ways after they are gone. I also want them to be remembered when I am gone. I hope at least one person finds this book on a shelf 100 years from now, or 1,000 years, and reads about these excellent souls, bringing them back to life in at least one person's mind. But my dogs are not more worthy of the status of immortality than any other dogs. Indeed, I wish every dog owner would assemble a biographical sketch of every pet they ever had, with pictures and memories. Maybe most people won't write extensive essays about the moral significance of how dogs are treated, but all dogs deserve to be remembered, and to live their lives as if they are eternal souls, not disposable commercial commodities. Plus, dogs are just beautiful. Young or old, purebred or mutt, healthy or disabled, I have never met a dog that wasn't beautiful in some way. So, I want my dogs to be on someone's bookshelf, to give them a shot at immortality, but I hope others are inspired by this book to immortalize their own dogs. If enough people see and appreciate the true value of a dog, maybe we can finally begin to address the problem of millions of stray dogs and millions of dogs euthanized in shelters.

I'm not asking you to believe one particular thing or another about the soul of a dog, except that a dog's soul is not less than a human's soul. One of my favorite pictures of Mu is of him leaping into the Sammamish Slough after a ball. In the picture, he is suspended in air, flying effortlessly. Mu is all about action, not words, even though he does have his own funny words sometimes. In this picture, you can see the rings of waves spreading out from the ball and also where the droplets have landed, shaken off of Mu. You know there's going to be a big splash with white spray. When I think of Mu's soul, I think of the impacts and repercussions of his life, and the choices I made or didn't make. More than 350 families located their lost family members because of Mu, because of our partnership, and I think of the rippling consequences of finding those answers. As I'm writing this, Mu is asleep on the bed. Even when he does nothing, he does it with style. Not only is he smack in the middle of the bed, but he has his head on the pillow, like a little person. His relaxed limbs and gentle snore fill me with peace. All of the hours we spent searching, driving, playing, visiting the beach or the park, I will remember all of it, I hope. I know that some people don't like to be constantly reminded of the dog or cat that they lost because it brings back too much pain. Recently, a friend's dog died. He was nine years old, the same age as Mu. He seemed perfectly healthy, and in just a matter of hours something seemed wrong. She took him to the emergency vet, and they discovered tumors on his spleen, which were determined to be inoperable, and in less than half a day he was gone. I hope Mu lives to be 18, but my job makes me acutely aware that I could lose him at any time, without warning. The desire to avoid the pain of loss might make one pull away and be less tightly bound to someone they could lose at any moment. I have no choice but to be fully, deeply bound to Mu. He is woven throughout my life. He is who I am. I am Mu. Mu is family. I will do everything I can to keep him with me as long as possible, but even knowing that I will lose him one day, sooner or later, I am never going to distance

myself from him to soften the blow. I am going to be with him in all those silent moments. I will try to fully appreciate him now, and I will keep him at the forefront of my thoughts when he is gone. I have a duty to keep him alive in my thoughts. Who he is and who he was will always be a part of who I am, waves rippling out from the impacts of actions. He will be my spirit guide someday, and I will always be the keeper of his soul.



I have written this book on behalf of Mu, since he can't write, and it is written for other cats and dogs. Since they can't read, it is up to the families of those animals to read the stories and look at the pictures for them.







