

Little Dog LOST!
by Gerianne Darnell

On Friday, July 17, 1998, I took three of my papillons for a quick walk before bedtime. This is something we do almost every night. As we came around the side of the agility yard the dogs scared up a rabbit and off they went, with me in hot pursuit. Zack and Rumor stopped at the edge of the cornfield and came right back, but Rudy kept going into the corn. My husband George was with me, and we heard two short barks, and then there was nothing.

George and I called and called for about half an hour, then began driving the nearby roads. As the night wore on, the chilling realization that Rudy was NOT coming back began to set in, and I knew I needed to start calling my friends for help. At 2 AM my tracking buddy Teri Lebens got out of bed and brought her TDX Terv "Token" over to try and track Rudy. Unfortunately George and I had both been over much of the area by that point, and Token couldn't find Rudy's scent, he could just scent George and me. I still can't imagine how Teri could stand to go out in the corn, alone, and in the dark. That is a real friend! I also got Kathy Ubben out of bed in the middle of the night to make color flyers with Rudy's picture on them, and Dee Nelson drove me around posting flyers and planning strategy before it was light out on Saturday morning.

After an hour of sleep we started back in early on Saturday. I called the radio stations, the animal shelter, and every veterinarian's office in the area, and put a "Lost Dog" ad in the next day's paper. Kathy and I drove around all morning knocking on doors and posting flyers, while George borrowed the neighbor's tractor and then my brother's fourwheeler to continue the search. I was floored when Kathy and I got back to the house around noon to find a bunch of my doggie friends ready to search the cornfields, headed up by Barb Farrell, Teri Lebens and a host of others. Barb brought a compass and a two way radio, so we could keep track of all of the people out in the corn, along with food and drinks for the searchers. My mom manned the phones back at the house, and with Barb's radio we were able to stay in touch with her, to see if anybody called with news of Rudy.

We walked the fields as much as we could stand in the oppressive heat and humidity. The corn that Rudy went in to was over ten feet high, and there was 120 acres of it. The field butted up to a bike path, gravel roads and MORE corn fields. He could have been anywhere. My biggest fear, as there was not one sign of him nor any sightings, was that the coyotes had gotten him, or that he was injured in some way and couldn't make it back to the house. As more time passed, hope dwindled that we would find Rudy, much less find him alive. As the afternoon wore on, we all became more and more discouraged. At one point Barb and I were the only ones out in the cornfield. We sat down to take a break, and that was really the worst time for me. As we sat in the middle of hundreds of acres of corn I broke down and sobbed; I just knew that I would never see Rudy again, and I would have given anything to just hold him in my lap once more.

On Saturday night Kathy and Bev Thorsteinson thought they heard a little dog barking way off in the distance. They tried to pinpoint where it was, and George took the fourwheeler out and he also heard the barking, and he thought it was Rudy. So, he came back for me and everybody else to help search the new area. This area was about 1 1/2 to two miles west of our house through the fields. It was beyond our corn, then a barbed wire fence and then ANOTHER field of corn, and then a stream surrounded by ten to twelve foot tall almost impenetrable weeds, with heavy sucking mud and God knows what else underneath. When we got to the top of the field where you had to go over the fence, we stopped to listen and I heard ONE bark. I was *positive* it was Rudy. I climbed over that barbed wire fence like the ten year old farm girl I used to be, and started running down the field. When I got

to the bottom I called and called, and then a little dog started barking in the distance, and it wasn't Rudy. We looked and called some more, and finally gave up. I was just crushed, as I had gotten my hopes up for the first time that maybe we would find him, and we didn't.

I was pretty sure at this point that my sweet Rudy was gone forever. Along with being my current competition and seminar dog, Rudy does some important therapy work at a local hospital. Rudy is also the most fantastic pet dog I have ever had, easy to get along with, loves all dogs and people, and is a joy to train and travel with. If Rudy never came home, not only would there be a huge hole in my heart, but in many other peoples' hearts as well. When I went to bed Saturday night, my eyes traveled to the spot at the foot of the bed next to George's legs where Rudy always slept, and I could hardly stand to look at the emptiness.

On Sunday morning the first searchers arrived very early, and I was still in bed. George said, there's people here, you've got to get up, and all I could think of was spending another day walking in the corn, and being afraid that we WOULD find a body, and not knowing if I would ever see Rudy again, and worse, not knowing what had ever happened to him. There's a lot of ways to imagine how a little dog could get killed out in the middle of nowhere! I was trying to will myself to get out of bed, and the next thing

I knew George was putting an extremely dirty Rudy in bed with me!!!!!! What a thrill. George had taken the fourwheeler back down to the stream Sunday morning, and called and called, and just as he was ready to move on he looked over his shoulder, and here came Rudy out of the weeds. As Rudy is George's favorite pet, how fitting that it was George who finally found him. It was so much fun to meet the searchers as they arrived Sunday morning with Rudy in my arms!

Rudy seemed perfectly fine when he first came home, but after the excitement wore off he began digging and scratching at the many insect bites he had received, and he then developed hot spots. He had to have a lot of his rear end shaved, and for a couple of weeks he was pretty miserable. As I write this, on Rudy's seventh birthday, it has been almost two months since he was found. I don't know if I will ever be able to look at him without a sense of wonder that he is actually HERE. I am so gratified to have found out how many friends I have. When the going gets tough, your doggie friends are there for you. I received so many calls and e-mails, both during and after our ordeal, and I cherish every one.

Rudy was the guest of honor at a "Welcome Home Rudy" party on August 8th. Thirty seven of his friends and rescuers came to celebrate his homecoming. Rudy enjoyed several bites of cake and other goodies, and sat in everybody's lap. His biological mother and father were even in attendance: his 14 1/2 year old dad "Zipper" and 8 year old mom "Goodie". We got some great pictures of Rudy and his rescuers (with Rudy on a flexi-lead!) in front of the corn.

This ordeal has given me a healthy dose of perspective on the dog sport; points, titles and ribbons are great, but the daily relationship we have with these wonderful animals is what is *really* important. Rudy did recently return to the obedience ring, where he has earned 17 more OTCH points, his UDX, a High Combined and a High in Trial. In fact, he has never worked better. But for me, to actually be able to walk in the ring with him at my side is most certainly the best prize of all.

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