

Miracles Can Happen

Misfortune is something that befalls others. At least in our own selfish way, we like to think so. However we know from experience that we do suffer misfortune, and sadly even tragedy, at times during our lives. For those in dogs one of the worst things is literally losing a dog! And I know now exactly how this feels for our older bitch, Susie (Gantocks Cardhu JW) who is coming on for eight, went missing recently.

We had been down at East of England in the heat wave and had toddled up with the caravan to a small Caravan Club CL, at Wessington, about three miles from Alfreton in Derbyshire, for a breed club show on the following Sunday. On the Friday evening we had thunder and Susie hates thunder as well as fireworks and any bangs. So after some sedation of her panting and agitation, she duly quieted down. On the Saturday she was still hung over although coming round OK. We had to go down town for some bits and pieces and, as the weather seemed to be returning to the scorching temperatures we had been having previously, we left Susie and our younger bitch, who was caged just in case anything went wrong between them, in the caravan. A couple of windows, well out of reach were left fully open, and the rest were left on the catches which allow a little air in, with blinds and flyscreens down. When in town, the thunder and lightening returned with a vengeance unexpectedly and we were, of course, at the far end of town from our car. So we got back to the car as quickly as we could and hurried back.

Imagine my horror when entering the caravan – there was no Susie! I had expected to find her cowering in the toilet compartment but all we had was an open window next to the bed and no dog. Whether we had simply not put the catches down properly, or even overlooked them completely, we

do not know. However the blind and flyscreen, which she had damaged slightly with frantic scratching, were up, and the window open wide enough to allow her escape.

I cannot describe the feeling at this point. It was not panic – that would do no good. It was not weeping and wailing – that would be a waste of energy. It was more a nothingness, probably because you realized you had to act and all energies were concentrated to that end. Of course, you were dismayed and annoyed with yourself because one way or another, despite the elements conspiring against you, you felt you had failed in your 'duty of care'.

Asking the farmer first, we found out he had seen a little black dog coming out of the stables opposite and, having braked to avoid it, he saw it dashing up the lane towards the open fields. He did not know we had dogs with us but could never have caught her anyway. Searches were under way immediately and here help beyond the call of duty arrived. We were joined by a couple of dog lovers. Yvonne and Ron who have a couple of elderly Labradors, from across the lane and who had admired Susie and Phoebe the previous evening, and their friend Anne, who lives a couple of lanes away and exhibits Irish Wolfhounds (the sort of dog to make you feel secure when out in the country lanes and fields!) They have been absolutely marvelous and in their efforts to find Susie have shown a degree of tenacity any Stafford would be proud of. They scoured the fields in case she was holed up there and then, after we had to return home for my wife's hospital appointment, kept putting up notices and following up any leads, even to dodgy areas, we might have had. I cannot praise them highly enough!

Of course the secretary of the local club, Notts and Derby SBTC, was

informed and they too have been excellent. Members, especially those in the area, were warned to keep an eye open and one lass, at least, worked hard informing vets and distributing posters at Bakewell Show and elsewhere. Support such as this was most welcome. Every possible step was taken; the police and local councils informed along with Stafford Rescue, the Missing Dogs Bureau (very helpful) and the RSPCA. Adverts were placed in the local papers and calls put out on local TV and radio. And of course the whole area was plastered with 'missing dog' notices.

The first response was a second-hand report of a small black dog covered in mud coming into a lady's kitchen at the village of South Wingfield a mile or so from where we were staying, on the day she fled. Even although Susie had gone in the opposite direction, she could easily have turned around so it was a possibility. Unfortunately the lady, perhaps being 'non-doggy', shooed her out of the house. The village was then 'posterred' and I managed to speak to the Parish Warden, who had had Staffords in the past, but this lady was not found. Other leads were received but Susie could be eliminated in all, even of probable Staffords on account of colour.

Come the fourteenth day of her departure, things were looking pretty bleak. Everything, we could think of, had been done and the various Environmental Health Departments and the police forces pestered at intervals (usually the 'terrier' ladies beat me to it) but with no luck. We had reached the point of simply hoping for something to turn up! And miracle of miracles, something did! Later that Saturday a lady reported a little black dog being collected by the Dog Warden so that would be followed up on the Monday but soon

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(continued)

after something better! Another lady, from Mansfield a few miles away but further than we thought Susie could have gone, phoned our daughter to say she thought she had her. Returning the call, our hopes rose dramatically. Everything pointed to Susie but there was a crucial question – was there a brass rose motif missing from her collar about three away from the 'D' ring? The answer was 'Yes!' So allowing hopes to be raised, and being too late to go on the Saturday evening, we toddled off the following morning, meeting up with 'the ladies' and Ron first, to see and to our delight it was Susie, safe and sound and not much the worse for wear – a very lucky little girl indeed.

Susie had been picked up by the lady, who owns a good mixture of a Stafford, a Patterdale and a couple of Chihuahuas, on going through Alfreton, near the very busy A38 on the previous Tuesday. She held her for a day or two to feed her up and was thinking of what to do next when a friend asked if she had seen the posters, which she had not – hence her phone call! So Susie is now back home and seems to have settled into her old routines.

...THE GREATEST WORRY YOU HAVE THROUGHOUT IS NOT KNOWING ...

There was a postscript to the saga. Three days after her return, a gentleman phoned and asked if she was still missing. Apparently he thought he had seen her on the day she fled. It appears she was running down the busy main Wessington to Alfreton road and a bus driver stopped, and she just jumped on. The man saw her at Alfreton bus station sitting behind the wheel and joked to a lady beside him "I hope that's not the driver!" Unfortunately he did not know what happened after that. Did she run off again? Did the driver look after her for a while? We simply will never know but the possible sighting in South Wingfield, being picked up on the main road and finishing up in the town itself has a logic to it.

We are all delighted with such a happy ending especially as hopes seemed so slim. The greatest worry you have throughout is not knowing. Could she have gone to the fields and collapsed exhausted? Could she have eventually overheated and died? What if she had been knocked down and lay in agony till she passed away? Could someone undesirable have picked her and been cruel to her or used her for fighting or puppy farming? None of this bears thinking about.

But are there lessons to be learned? Some may think we should have caged her too but in the past she has always

just curled up and slept when we went out. It was the unexpected return of the thunder that caught us out and the fact we were concerned about the heat. We will certainly make sure there are not future slip ups as far as this is concerned. She was only wearing an old show collar without a name tag in the caravan but maybe this should have had one attached too.

However all this has made me a little concerned. Tags are supposed by law to have owner's name, post code and contact number, but does this give too much away? After all the KC, quite sensibly, on request of the Saluki owners allowed names to be withheld from publication in catalogues to limit stealing of that breed for lurcher breeding and extended this to all breeds – let's face it other breeds can be targeted too. Anyone who does not want their details published will surely be unhappy if forced to do so by law on a dog's collar. If an undesirable character gets hold of this, then kennels can be targeted. If your name is common like Smith, for example, then it might not be so bad but what if rather uncommon like mine? There are only three of my name in our local phone directory, my son, my daughter and me! Even the post code can tell too much. If a criminal finds out exactly where it is, it could be simple to find out where the dogs live – look for doggy stickers in a car's windows may be all that is needed. The Lost Pet Bureau does give out tags with only a code number and a phone number giving a 24hr service. These appear to be perfectly legal and supported by the National Dog Warden Association. Would the KC consider a similar sort of system I wonder? Could arrangements be made whereby all members, associates and kennel name holders initially, are issued with identity numbers to use on collars, backed up with a 24hr help line with the aim of eventually extending it to all breeders and even individual registered owners? Would this be worth investigating? Would it be a valued service which could increase the KC's standing and sphere of influence?



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“The problem of fireworks is highlighted..”

Of course there is micro-chipping using data-bases such as PetLog and, before you ask, Susie was not chipped although we are considering it now even though it played no part in her return. There are concerns about the procedure, such as migration of the chip itself, and there is the risk of criminals attempting to remove chips and injuring the dog concerned. A 'turn off' for many has been the way chipping has been promoted by some, stressing claims, usually the only claim, that you can be reunited with your dog should it stray or get stolen. This is perfectly true but there is just the little problem of finding it in the first place! Some dogs have indeed been recovered thanks to chipping, but without other potential benefits the skeptics can be forgiven for thinking it is all a pious marketing ploy. The only other alternative is DNA profiling which I support for other reasons, but sadly it cannot give rapid identification of ownership.

From Susie's saga there are certain things that the public must be made more aware of. First there is the upsetting effect of thunder on some dogs. The problem of fireworks is highlighted every year but thunder is just as bad for many dogs and seldom, if ever, mentioned by the media. The second point is that strange dogs coming into homes, other buildings or possibly cars, might actually be in distress and disoriented. Putting them out is, sadly, a natural reaction, especially if one is not a dog lover, but folk need to be aware that this could actually be cruel, albeit unintentionally so. We always felt that Susie would seek out human company once her panic had subsided so if it was her who entered the woman's kitchen she was doing only what was expected.

Her tale has shown the best side of dogdom too. We have seen how others, including erstwhile strangers as well as those in the breed, can rally round and help in the hour of need. Would Susie have been found without such help? I simply do not know. She certainly had her hour of fame, or maybe infamy, and was the most talked about Stafford in the country – on one web site there were nine pages of messages of support and good luck while she was missing and at least three of relief after she was found! Now she can return to fireside retirement. But where was she and what was she up to during the ten days she was missing before the miracle of her being picked up? Sorry, folks, she is not saying!

ARCHIE & MARLENE BRYDEN

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L-Belle Staffords

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