

Scout's Sad Story. Please Help To Give It A Happy Ending.

March 30, 2008

On February 16, 2008 we handed off our hunting dog, and very special companion, Scout, to a "professional trainer," to begin training her towards winning an AKC field trials championship. On February 24th, she disappeared and has not been found.

Every morning when my wife would get up to let our dogs out, Scout would be the one to come over to the bed and make me acknowledge her with a pet and a kiss before she would go outside. She acted like a darn cat much of the time; you know how they like to rub their bodies against your legs while they purr. Scout loved to do this while she made contented little noises. She would stare at me and beg forever for me to acknowledge her so she could come over and flip on her back, wanting me to tickle her belly. She, as I think all Labs do, enjoyed having her back itched where the tail meets the backbone. She loved to stalk her brother in the yard. She would bolt after him and hit him with her body, rolling him even though he outweighed her by 20 pounds. She was quick as lightning, and he never stood a chance, even though they loved doing this every night when we returned home from work. Scout loved to chase balls or anything I would throw, on land or in water. She knew where every toy was and would go out in the garage with me and sit under the tennis ball thrower and look up at it, look at me, and moan, over and over, until I relented. She loved her mommy and was her protector.

At just three years old, Scout had developed into a pretty darn good all-around hunting dog. If there is one thing I could take back in my life, it would be the decision to send her to a "professional dog trainer" in Bennett, Colorado. A hunting acquaintance of mine had sent his female to this "trainer" quite a few years ago for this specific training and recommended the guy. I followed through by calling him and questioning him about his techniques, not using shock collars or heavy-handedness, etc. Originally, we were going to take Scout to the trainer's facility in the Bennett area. We live in the Grand Junction area. He somehow convinced us to meet him at Bass Pro Shops off of I-70 in Denver, and he would take Scout from there; that way we could "hop" back on I-70 and head back home. We hugged her, told her we loved her, shed some tears, and handed her over to be reluctantly put in a truck kennel which held twenty dogs, on the back of his pickup. It was Saturday; a day we will always remember. On Friday, February 22nd, I called the trainer to check one more time on how Scout was doing, because we were scheduled to take a business / vacation trip to Hawaii for a week, beginning the next day. He told me she was doing better and he was running her with a group of younger dogs, and that she was progressing.

We flew to Hawaii and settled in for a nice vacation. But in the backs of our minds we still worried about Scout. The next morning I received a phone call from the "trainer," who told me he had let Scout out and she tucked her tail and ran off. He said she would come back and he would continue to look for her. He told me he had alerted

all the neighbors in the area and they were also watching for her. I was stunned and in disbelief as I hung up the phone. Immediately, plans were put in motion to send a couple of friends from Grand Junction on Monday morning to Bennett, and for Wendy, my wife, to take the next flight back to Colorado. I would join her after a meeting I had to attend on Thursday. My Wife joined up with her nephew and father and had 750 flyers produced, with Scout's picture and the information where she was lost.

Wendy thought the "trainer" had notified all of the neighbors in the area, as we had been told. She soon discovered several bothersome details that we have not confirmed, but which we believe are true. The "trainer" told my wife that he had to wear gloves to get Scout out of the kennel in his truck the morning she ran away, because she was barking, growling, and threatening to bite him. What happened to "Scout doing fine" on Friday? After going to the place where the "trainer" was staying, we also learned that he had "moved" several days before and was staying at a client's house. What we believe now, although impossible to substantiate at this writing, is that Scout was kept in his truck box kennel along with twenty other dogs. We are sure that this situation traumatized her and was responsible for her behavior. I personally cannot believe that a trainer with twenty years of experience did not foresee this problem coming, especially considering the discussion we had had in the Bass Pro Shops parking lot prior to turning Scout over to him. He should have told me on Friday there were signs, or problems, and we would have arranged to pick her up.

My Wife received a tip from a hunting club dog trainer named Carl that he had seen Scout approximately 6 miles away. Because they thought everyone in the area she ran from had already been notified, they concentrated their efforts in the area where she had been last seen. I joined up with them on Friday, and immediately started walking the creek drainages while they drove the roads. That night we went back to the area where she ran from and started to put up flyers. Very soon afterwards we received a call from the Martins, who live across the street from where she ran. They told us Scout had been at their house on Tuesday and Wednesday, eating with her Great Pyrenees and hanging around. They identified her by her purple collar and cowlick. As we started to canvass the areas from where she had run, we discovered that most people had not been notified of Scout's disappearance. We missed the chance to reunite with our dog by two days. Wendy drove for miles, and continued posting flyers and meeting with the local people. We also called www.findtoto.com and had two "amber alerts" called out to 1,000 phone numbers in the area. All of these efforts have, as yet, not turned up a clue as to Scout's whereabouts. On Saturday, March 8th, we decided that we had done everything we could do by being in the area. With a storm approaching, we made the painful decision to drive back home, because we have two businesses to run and there just wasn't anything else we could do.

The one blessing we brought back home with us was the wonderful people we met. We talked to hundreds of people in subdivisions; ranchers, sheriff's deputies, construction workers, UPS & FedEx drivers, school bus drivers, etc. Many told us we could park our RV at their homes; we could look around their ranches anywhere we wanted; we could walk their properties, etc. We shed many tears with these people and know they are still watching for us. Gary Ruppel let us use his phone number and volunteered his help and support. He even went out and investigated a possible

sighting one evening. I would like to thank Carl the dog trainer, the Martins, the lady whose Heeler was killed by a car the night before we met her, Old Rancher Jim and the rancher who helped him with his cows, who offered to help us. I would like to thank Julie Henderson and her husband for putting us in contact with people, through the internet, who will continue to search and to check the area kennels and rescue facilities. My faith in the human spirit has been rekindled, and I hope I have learned to be less selfish because of all of these people who treated us so well.

The biggest lesson learned, that everyone should take with them from this sad story, is to make sure before you send a dog to a kennel, breeder, groomer or trainer, not to trust *anyone's* recommendations. The only way to truly know is to personally visit, interview and have a first-hand look at the facility where you are sending your pet, before entrusting it to anyone else. If you have any doubts, or reservations, *WALK AWAY*. It just isn't worth the risk and heartache, as we have learned. We made the mistake of sending our dog to a trainer who we believe put her in a truck box kennel, with twenty other dogs, and kept her there for the most part of 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, because he did not have a fenced yard/kennel setup that we *assumed* he did. Do not make the mistake I did, and have to live with this for the rest of your life.

Scout is a 3-year-old-female, AKC-registered Yellow Labrador Retriever, (registered as "Sedona's Dream Scout"). She is micro-chipped and has a distinctive cowlick running from on top of her nose to between her eyes. The cowlick is a darker stripe and slightly more curly. She also has a scar above her right eye, due to her having run into a receiver hitch on my pickup. She was last seen on Wednesday February 27, 2008, still wearing her purple collar with Redstone Vet tags, at 46122 CR53, in Elbert County, south of Bennett.

There have been several sightings of her in the area around the Parker area recently.

We pray for her rescue, and hope to be with her and to love her once again. We have offered a \$1,500 reward, no questions asked, and can be reached at markrichards@qecinc.net, or on our cell phones, 24/7, at 970-250-8962 and 970-250-2441.

Thank you,
W. Mark & Wendy Richards