

Lost Dog Chooses Farm Life To Settle Down

Not all surprise packages come in a box, tied up with a ribbon. Kim Macey's gift arrived on four legs, wrapped up in a furry off-white coat, with big brown eyes and a lolling tongue. The yellow Labrador retriever also came with some baggage.

The dog, known now as "Cash," but previously as "Harpo," arrived in Newtown from Georgia as an adoption from Labs4Rescue, last summer. On July 24, as his new owner, Gail Giordano, stopped at the Your Healthy Pet store on Bryan Lane off of South Main Street, Harpo leaped out of the car and took off.

A timid dog not prone to answering to his name, Harpo eluded his owner. As the weeks passed, even efforts by animal rescue experts to trap the dog or lure him near when sighted, failed. Occasional sightings assured the searchers that the dog was somehow surviving in the wild, though, and raised hopes that he could be captured.

In October, Macey, whose farm is about one mile, as the crow flies, from Your Healthy Pet, came home to find a note on the windshield of her truck one day.

"It was from the Plainville Labs4Rescue group, and it said, 'Call us about the yellow Lab living behind your house.' I had no idea what they were talking about. I knew nothing about this lost dog," she said.

She called Labs4Rescue the next day, and began putting two and two together. "It was strange. I had noticed that buckets were missing from the farmyard and I'd find them in the field. Or things would be moved. Something was eating all of the cat food in the shed, and I knew it wasn't the cat," Macey said.

So she put a blanket and a bowl of food in the shed, and sprinkled flour on the floor. The next morning, the food was gone, and big footprints revealed that her visitor was a large dog. Even so, she still did not see hide nor hear of a yellow Labrador.



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Kim Macey pets Cash as he lays in the doorway to the barn. Even two months ago, Ms Macey would not have been able to touch the dog, who lived all winter in the woods behind her farm and slept in a donkey shed at night, after leaping from his previous owner's car last July. After months of observing Ms Macey, the shy dog finally approached her one day this past April. —Bee Photos, Crevier

"I kept putting food out twice a day, though, and it would disappear. It looked like he was hanging around the donkey pen, which is a little odd. Usually donkeys hate dogs, but they seemed comfortable with him around," she said.

It was November before she sighted the dog, watching her from a distance. "I just kept going about my business and let him be. Little by little, I tried to move the food bowl behind the shed door, in hopes that I could pull the door shut and trap him there. But he was too smart. For three days, he wouldn't go into the shed. He was spooked, so I gave up on that," Macey said.

Tom and Mary Kay Novak and their son, Ryan, who own Your Healthy Pet, were remarkably supportive this whole time, said Macey, donating food to her for the dog and offering advice. Labs4Rescue, Newtown Animal Control Officer Carolee Mason, and other animal rescue experts from town offered advice and assistance to capture Harpo, but still the wary dog would not be caught. "We caught raccoons, squirrels, woodchucks, and just about everything except the dog," said Macey.

The adoptive family had returned ownership of Harpo to Labs4Rescue, said Mason, but with winter approaching, there was great concern for the well-being of the dog, barely a year old. "We tried everything to capture him. He was on the run a long time, and we were a little worried."

Footprints In The Snow

During the long and snowy winter, Macey said that she rarely saw the dog. "I saw his footprints in the snow, so I knew he was still coming to the shed and hanging around. I put out extra food, so he would have the calories to get through the cold weather. When I did occasionally see him, he looked good to me," she said.

She kept Labs4Rescue updated as the winter went on, and even though she was caring for the dog, she had no intention at that time of keeping him, once he was captured. She had put down her German shepherd shortly before Harpo came onto the scene. "I've never been a 'Labrador' person. I thought I'd probably get another German shepherd sometime," Macey said. And this shy dog seemed chancy to ever have on a farm where most of the animals boarded there are retired show horses, high risk pregnancy equines, or other somewhat "misfit" animals.

"In April, all of a sudden, there he was again, watching me as I went about my chores

on the farm," Macey said. "Every day, he would get more visible, and I just kept doing my thing, and letting him be."

A representative of Labs4Rescue from Georgia, who had released Harpo the summer before for adoption, came up in the spring hoping that Harpo would recognize the dog he brought with him and feel comfortable enough to approach. "He told me the dog had been called 'Cash,' so that's what I called him. He told me that Cash had been raised on a farm, and he also said that Cash had loved playing with squeaky toys," she said. The Labs4Rescue rep was disappointed to leave empty handed, but Macey took his advice and tried playing with squeaky toys when the dog was watching her.

"I was tossing it around and squeaking it, and he was so excited, watching me. Then I just kind of crouched down with the toy, and he came crawling on his stomach to me, his eyes closed, and put his muzzle in my hand. I think he finally got so lonely and desperate for company," Macey said.

A Long, Slow Process

Despite his months on the lam, Cash seemed to be in good health, now that she could see him up close. "He has a lip injury, where apparently he ripped it on something at some point, but it healed okay. Other than that, he looked to be in pretty good shape," she said. A recent exam and vaccinations — "Kind of a traumatic experience for him," — confirmed that his weeks in the wild did the dog no long-term harm.

The relationship has been a slow process, though, said Macey, who did decide to adopt Cash. "It seemed kind of a given, at this point, that he would stay here. He is still very shy, and we are easing into things. But after two weeks, he would be so excited to see me when I came up to the barn," she said.

By June, Cash was comfortable enough around her to go in and out of the house, always with the door open for quick escape. "But during that hot stretch, I had to turn on the air conditioner, and shut the door. He stayed in and was okay. Now, he is even sleeping inside at night," said Macey.



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Initially frightened by the long-haired dachshund, Waldo, owned by Kim Macey, Cash has become fast friends with the tiny dog, as well as the other animals on the farm that the lost Lab has selected for a new home.

Her concerns about Cash and the other animals, including another rescue dog, a long-haired dachshund named Waldo, have been unfounded. At first afraid of Waldo and terrified of Macey's cat, he has come around and plays vigorously with the little dog now.

"Cash has been really good for Waldo. I think Waldo got a bit jealous, but now Waldo actually is more obedient and sticks closer by me than he used to. They get along so well," she said.

Cash is one of the few of five million pets lost in the United States each year with a happy ending to his tale. One pet in every three will be lost at some time in its life. According to the American Humane Association, less than 17 percent of dogs and two percent of lost cats ever find the way back to the original owners, or a new forever home.

Visitors to the farm are greeted by Cash's fierce barking and howling, as he makes clear that this is his home, his person, and his animal friends. But beneath the fearsome façade is the timid nature that continues to shrink away from anyone other than Macey.

"I am so grateful to everyone who helped me out through the winter," said Macey, "but Cash picked me. He is truly a gift to me."