

REWARD

Lost Cat  
Missing

# Is Muffy Missing? Can't Find Fido?

## A Pet Detective Can Sniff Out Your Lost Pet.

by Mollie Cox Bryan Illustrations by Nancy Nimoy

After a long day at work, you arrive home, expecting to hear the pitter-pat of dog paws on the linoleum running up to greet you. Only something is wrong. Your dog is not there. You search all of her favorite places and check outside, ignoring the sick feeling in your stomach. You know if she were there, she would have been at the door. Finally, you realize she is gone. How could this have happened? What should you do?

According to the National Pet Detectives (NPD), a person whose pet has been lost or stolen should get the word out fast. Make flyers, place ads in newspapers, check the local shelters and rescue groups in the area, contact vet offices and pet groomers, contact all animal control agencies, and talk with everybody you see.

Over five million pets are reported missing every year. Most disturbingly, pet theft is rising at an increasing rate — some experts say 1.5 million pets are stolen every year. Why would someone want to steal a pet?

The NPD asserts that many dogs are taken abroad where

they are sold in the black market for large sums of money. Some are sent to the Far East for fur trade, while some are used for breeding purposes. If they remain in the U.S., research labs and dog fighting victims account for a large amount of pet thefts. A troubling notion, to say the least. But Captain Larry Maynard of NPD points out that the number one reason for pets to turn up missing is owner related.

“Guardians, through complacency, neglect, or incompetence usually create their misfortune,” says Maynard. “Some examples are leaving your pet in an unattended parked vehicle, giving your pet free reign without obedience training, allowing children to babysit the pet, and so on.”

Maynard says prevention is an issue that the NPD pushes. They offer dog obedience classes, for example, and a lost pet video. In addition, NPD offers registration for pets, which means that all the necessary information is entered into their computer database, so if the animal comes up missing, NPD already knows all about the pet — breed, sex, color, size and any special markings. And when searching for a missing pet, time is the most relevant factor.

“Statistics show the longer the pet is missing, lost, or stolen, finding and reuniting the pet with its owner becomes increasingly more difficult,” adds Maynard.

Maynard has been a dog trainer most of his life, which led him to this career. Other pet detectives have stumbled into the field, more or less, discovering that they have a knack for finding lost animals.

Carl Washington, for example, lives in Falls Church, Virginia, and is a member of the NPD. A painter by trade,



five years ago he helped his neighbor locate a missing diabetic cat. “He was so grateful and he insisted I take some money, and I thought it was great to feel good about what I was doing and be able to make some money,” he says.

Washington plans to close his paint company and focus on finding lost or stolen animals. Just in the past 18 months he has located 65 missing pets of all kinds — cats, dogs, mice, ferrets, and rabbits.

Like his colleague Maynard, Washington can’t decide which case was the most interesting or meaningful.

“The behavior of the pet owner gets to me the most,” he says, adding that owners will take off work, some won’t eat or sleep, and some will sleep in the woods all night if they feel there’s a chance the pet is there.

“I was a mess,” says Sherry Farnsworth, of Newell, WV, when she talks about losing her cat, Cali. As they were walking, a thunderstorm came up and frightened Cali, who was on a leash and a harness. As Farnsworth was attempting to deal with an umbrella, her beloved cat broke her leash and took off.

“When we got home to West

Virginia [this incident took place in Manassas, VA] I had to go to the hospital. I ended up being on two kinds of anti-depressants and nerve pills,” she says.

Farnsworth made flyers and ran ads in newspapers, including the *Washington Post*. Carl Washington saw this ad and called her. At first, she was suspicious, but Washington assured her she would not have to pay up front. She sent him a towel that Cali laid on frequently.

“It was amazing, all of the support we received and all

of the phone calls and emails we got,” she said. “Domino’s Pizza in Manassas distributed flyers for us. Someone offered me some money to increase the reward we were offering. We did get a lead that she was in Manassas. So I called Carl, who had still been working the case.”

Farnsworth drove down to Manassas, and for the first time met Washington. “I have to tell you that from the moment I met him, I trusted him completely. There is just something about him.”

But, they did not find Cali that night. A couple of nights later, after Farnsworth was back in West Virginia, Washington called her at 1:30 a.m. to tell her he had found Cali. Unfortunately, the local police would not let him stay in the area — a black man, in a white, upscale neighborhood. They did not believe what he was doing.

“He was very choked-up about finding her, but he was broken-hearted,” she says.

In the meantime, a neighbor had actually taken Cali in and contacted her.

“It was all because of Carl that Cali was found,” says Farnsworth.

Even though helping to find a pet has its emotional rewards, both Washington and Captain Maynard are cool-headed professionals who approach each case with meticulous, methodical techniques. After the initial pet-guardian interviewing stage, they both consult the computer.

“I do an online profile,” says Washington. “I apply the information to past cases that are similar to the owner information. I also bring up the location on the computer and look at a map. They can be ten states away, but I am there, looking at the rivers, creeks, streams, highways, parks, hills, woods, and surrounding neighborhoods.”

Washington then estimates where the pet might be and narrows the search to three different places, and sixty percent of the time, the pet is found.

“Thank goodness for the computer,” he says. “Before I even get to the client’s home, I know where the sewers are, where the woods are, and the streams. I know the neighborhood.”

The computer is a valuable tool, but perhaps the most valuable tool for both Washington and Maynard is their own dogs.

Maynard uses K-9 tracking dogs trained exclusively to track missing pets.

“The environment, whether it is residential, urban, wilderness, dictates our course of action,” says Maynard. “If a hunting dog is lost two miles into the woods, we would probably initiate a K-9 tracking dog search immediately, compared to a dog lost in an apartment complex surrounded by interstate highways on three sides. In that situation, posters that have been proven to gain the most response would be saturated within a 3 mile radius immediately.”

Maynard also reaffirms that time is a factor. “We have had good luck when our office is called immediately and a



K-9 tracking search is initiated. But what usually happens is, a pet owner waits a day or two before they call us, then it is usually too late to utilize K-9 tracking dogs.”

Washington uses dogs, too, and thinks of them as part of his family. Cocoa, a two-year-old poodle, and Rocky, a two-year-old Jack Russell terrier, accompany him on his late-night forays.



“Hunting for pets is like hunting for vampires,” Washington says. “They come out late at night and feed and return to their nests before the sun comes up.”

Washington’s day begins around 10:00 a.m. Usually, there are several messages on his answering machine from frantic pet guardians wanting to know the status of their case. “They are really distressed and I want to help them all, but I am only one man and can only do so much.” He leaves his home everyday around 11:30 a.m. to check under decks wood sheds, sewers, storm drains, not returning home until the wee hours of the night or morning.

“Yep, here’s a kitty hiding under this deck, a block from where my dogs picked up its scent last night,” he says. And that is how it works, hopefully.

Both Maynard and Washington say the worst part about this job is the bad news they sometimes have to deliver.

“Any case we do not find, or succeed is tough. I don’t think one is any better or worse than another. We become quite emotionally involved in all of our cases,” says Maynard “At conclusion, you are either very high with emotion, or feel like the rug was pulled out from under you.

It is never, never easy to find a deceased pet knowing if help was there hours before, it could have possibly lived. That is tough.”

For more information (including fees)

on the Missing Pet People,” visit [www.nationalpetdetectives.com](http://www.nationalpetdetectives.com); write 18171 Third St. E., Redington Shores, Florida 33708; or phone 866-2RESCUE.

*Mollie Cox Bryan is a poet and freelance writer living in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. She shares her home with her husband Eric, two daughters, Emma and Tess, and two cats Isis and Troubles. Most recently, her work has been published in German Life and Frederick Magazines.*

#### EDITOR’S NOTE:

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## Protecting Your Pet

- Make sure your pet always wears a collar with a current ID tag. This includes indoor cats, in case they may run out when the door is open.
- Have your pet tattooed or microchipped, which are permanent ID systems. Be sure to keep your information up-to-date.
- Keep a file with descriptions of your pets and recent photos, which will aid in the search if your pet is lost.



## Finding a Lost Pet

- Begin the search immediately. You’ll have a much better chance of finding your pet.
- File a report with the animal shelters and animal control offices in your area. Be sure to check back with them daily.
- Search your neighborhood. Ask neighbors, postal delivery persons, and other regular visitors to your neighborhood if they’ve seen your pet. Hand out copies of a recent photograph with your contact information in case someone spots your pet.
- Post “lost pet” signs in your community in locations such as veterinary offices, grocery stores, etc., and offer a reward to encourage responses.
- Contact local radio stations and newspapers about placing a lost pet ad.