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Saturday, September 3, 2005

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SPECIAL REPORT



Another incredible journey



August 15, 2005 : 1:40 AM ET

We have only used the first name of some of the people that have played a part in Jocko's story to protect their privacy.

Laurissa Doonan knew that the odds of finding her beloved Jocko were slim to none. After six months of frantic searching and close calls, she had almost given up hope of locating her family's six-year-old Belgian Malinois. She had three other dogs and a family to take care of; she would just have to trust that Jocko found someone to take care of him. Little did she know that only a few hundred miles away from her home in Pennsylvania, Melanie was looking at a flyer for a "Lost Belgian Malinois" that looked suspiciously like Sam, the dog she and her husband just placed in a home.

Jocko came into the Doonan lives while they were staying with a relative in Mexico. He was a high-energy puppy who quickly became attached to his new family. Jocko already had a tattoo but to further safeguard their new pup, a veterinarian inserted a tiny microchip right under his skin that contained the Doonans' contact information. They were sure if he got lost, someone would scan for that microchip. They fell fast and hard for the dog that Laurissa describes as "a little freaky, a little intense."

In fact, she says, "If he were human, there would likely be restraining orders against him! He's needy, he's mouthy, he's energetic, he's got to be the center of attention, and he's pretty much a stalker."

At first Jocko's affection was entirely focused on Joe, the man in his life, but when the couple moved back to the states – with four dogs, two cats and an infant – Jocko turned all his attention to his mom.

"I became the primary care giver and lover of the dogs," Laurissa said. "Now he's obsessed with me. And I'm the one with the bruises from the

nose pokes, the one he follows everywhere – even into the bathroom – and the one he spoons with at night. Yes, I'm talking about the dog, not the husband!"

The morning of February 9, 2005, was like any other: after the dogs' morning romp Laurissa took them to their room – essentially a garage turned into a giant doghouse full of toys. Two of Laurissa and Joe's dogs were crated during the day. Jocko was given the run of the room, since he became quite vocal when left in a crate. With the dogs situated, Laurissa went to work.

But just a drop in temperature would turn Laurissa's world upside down. As the day got colder, the wooden door that leads to the Doonan's back yard shifted and gave Jocko the opportunity to check out the neighborhood.

When Laurissa got home she immediately knew something was wrong – the dogs were far too quiet. As she entered the garage she saw the open door, and no Jocko. She panicked.

Phone calls were made, emails sent and flyers distributed. Laurissa and Joe were frantic to find Jocko and followed dozens of leads. At first they received hundreds of phone calls and emails; not all of them were reports of seeing Jocko, some were from people who had been in the same situation or just wanted to say good luck.

They built the website www.jockodog.com and joined every Internet animal group they could, posting Jocko's information and photo whenever possible.

Many calls seemed legitimate, and Laurissa believes the callers did see her dog, but all of them came to a dead end. Almost six months had gone by and the phone calls were becoming fewer and farther between. Laurissa decided on one last big push before resigning herself to a life without her beloved Jocko.

"Around the middle of July I began to see the ads on TV for Animal Planet Expo [in Allentown, PA], and by the third time it ran I realized it would be a great opportunity to hand out fliers," said Laurissa. "By the six-month mark I figured someone was taking care of Jocko, not realizing he was dearly missed and still being sought after, so I focused the fliers on others who would come into contact with him ... neighbors, kennels, vets, trainers, etc. I included information that was quirky about him that would draw attention to him."

Hundreds of flyers were distributed that weekend. It only took one of them to bring Jocko home. Two days after the event Laurissa received a phone call. The woman on the other end said she thought she knew Jocko and could Laurissa give her more information?

The woman, Melanie, made a quick phone call to the couple that opened their home to Jocko – now known to them as Sam. The man, Greg, turned to the dog and called him Jocko. There was no reason to check the tattoo – by the dog's reaction he knew this was definitely Laurissa's dog. She tried not to get her hopes up but it was too late. She and Greg agreed on a meeting place and, 173 days after his disappearance, Laurissa went to bring Jocko home.

The reunion couldn't have been a happier one, and immediately Jocko started talking his mom's ear off, telling her of his adventures over the last six months. With the help of her dog and the people who helped her find him Laurissa began to put the pieces together.

She can't put a date on Jocko's stay at a Leighton couple's home, just 30 miles north of the Doonans'. But sometime in July police from Pocono Mountain, just 10 miles further, were called to the couple's house (in a

totally unrelated matter). One of the officers, James who happened to be in the K9 unit, commented on the amazing Belgian Malinois watching the proceedings. The couple related that they found the dog wandering and really couldn't give him a home, would James like to take him?

The next chapter of Jocko's story took him to the Pocono Mountains K9 police academy! James started working with him and thought "Sam" would make an excellent police dog. Jocko didn't agree and, in fact, was miserable at the kennels. James and his girlfriend Melanie fostered the dog until they found him a new home – with Greg and his family.

Six months. It's a long time to go without your best friend. But Laurissa never gave up hope. But wait! Didn't Jocko have a microchip with all of the Doonans' contact information? The whole time Jocko was missing no one thought to scan him for that tiny chip that would have made all the difference in the world.

Now that Jocko is safe at home, Laurissa's new mission is to educate people about microchips and increase public access to the tiny information systems. She is hoping to form partnerships with the makers of the chips and to use Jocko's story as encouragement to people with pets, police and veterinary offices.

She is also using Jocko's website to help dogs find loving homes and to help others who have lost a family pet.

You can learn more about Jocko and his adventures on his [website](#) as well as see the smile in his eyes now that he's back with the family he loves.

Article by Lorraine Johnston.

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COMMENTS

August 17, 2005 : 9:46 PM ET
posted by: jocko

Jocko actually had tags on his collar, but his collar came off so no tags were available when he was found. I don't know at what point in the journey his collar got lost, but he did have tags on him as a matter of course. And he now has a new set which includes his microchip tag (which we had replaced), his license with the number and town, and his rabies tag, which has the phone number and ID for further identification. This is what he had before, as well.

That is why I want to ensure that the word gets out about microchips. He is Tattooed AND microchipped, and most of the shelters and vets around here routinely scan pets that come in, however, not all shelters or groups have scanners, and not all scanners are universal. The awareness simply isn't high enough to know to scan, and when a dog has been in a home for months, it's often assumed the dog is abandoned.

As for neutered, you're right, we should have him neutered. He was not neutered initially as he was a show dog, and we had intended to continue showing him. A requirement in the ring is that the dog is intact. At the point we decided that he would not continue showing, we should have had him neutered.

It is definitely on our short list of things to do!

August 16, 2005 : 11:25 AM ET
posted by: thurbersmom

It's easy to have a tag made in a few minutes at PetSmart--our local Wal-Mart even has a tag machine. Anyone with a microchipped pet could just make a tag that says "I have a microchip" and put it on the pet's collar.

August 15, 2005 : 10:17 PM ET

posted by: rowena

I am glad that this story has a happy ending and it is clear that the family loves the dog very much. But they are irresponsible in not having had him neutered. Not only is an intact male more likely to have roaming tendencies, but think how many unwanted puppies, who will end up dying in shelters, Jocko may have fathered during his adventures. It is extremely irresponsible of the family to leave him intact.

August 15, 2005 : 7:20 PM ET

posted by: Joyce F.

This was a happy ending to a very moving story. I agree with spreading the word about microchips. I work with greyhounds and they really need microchips in case they get away from their home. We have computer everything these days but pet microchips. I think when a dog or cat goes to a vet for a rabies shot the tag should also say this dog carries a microchip, of course the owners need to have the chip implanted. Animals are like little children who can't speak for themselves.

August 15, 2005 : 6:39 PM ET

posted by: utahorbust

What a crazy story!! Thank goodness your home now, Jocko! This gives so much hope to people who have lost dogs!