

A Tribute to Prissy

The little dog afraid of people but who touched the hearts of many

My first encounter with Prissy was May 30, 2012. I had gone to the CCC Animal Services in Martinez, CA. I was there to check out a poodle puppy with fungus on his face. After I met the puppy, Sue, the shelter manager, asked if I wouldn't mind looking at another small dog. This dog was on the euthanasia list because none of the attendants could get near her. She had been picked up as a stray on May 18, covered in ticks and fleas.

I was brought into a room with rows of kennels. In the very last kennel, huddled in a corner, was this little black dog about 8 months old. The attendant told me no one had been able to handle her and they were afraid of being bitten. I walked into the kennel and sat down. I tried to make myself appear small and unthreatening. It wasn't too hard since I'm only 5 ft tall. Slowly, I inched my way towards her. She stayed in the corner not moving. I reached out and started petting her gently. She still didn't move. I never felt like she was going to bite me, though. I said I would take her and work with her. I headed to the front counter to check my new rescues out of the shelter. Simon was brought out first. Then a big burly man came out with oven mitts up to his shoulders. "You better be careful with this one, she might bite you", he said. I laughed and said you take the puppy I'll take that one. I cradled her in my arms and proceeded to walk out the door. Suddenly a car door slammed. Prissy tried to jump out of my arms but I held tight, instead she pooped all over me. Just another day in the life of a rescue volunteer.

At that time, I was working with another rescue group. When I got to the facility, I put Prissy in the quiet room with other new small dogs. I placed a sign on her corral "frightened-do not touch". It was evident this poor little dog had a tough start to life and had been abused. We had several volunteers of all ages at this rescue. My sister, who also volunteered there, gave her the name Pricilla, after Pricilla Presley and her long black hair. She soon became Prissy for short. At first Prissy always had to have a light leash attached to her when let out of the corral so that we would never have to corner her to get her in and out. This way she would learn to trust us. Soon she was comfortable with the younger volunteers sitting in her corral to pet her, but not pick her up. While she was at the rescue's facility, she did start to open up but wouldn't allow anyone to pick her up but myself. I knew it would take a lot of time and patience to rehabilitate this little girl.

In July, the facility underwent some changes and I moved on. They asked me to take Prissy since they didn't have the ability to care for a dog that needed the help she did. A group of us got together and started our own rescue group. We selected the name Animal Rescue Recon and our tag line is "No Pet Left Behind". Prissy would be our first official rescue. I took Prissy into my own home. I knew this would either make or break her. She was afraid of men. At my house, there is my husband and 2 sons. Prissy got along great with my own dogs and the other fosters I would bring in. At first, she was scared of my husband and sons and would go to a corner or another room when they would enter. My husband used to grumble, "I used to like dogs till we had a house full of them". He is all talk. Soon he made it his mission to make Prissy like him. This was his first experience with a dog that was shut down. It took months, but Prissy got to the point she would no longer run when men walked in then she would sneak pieces of turkey from my husband. I don't know how to explain the connection I had with her. She was never frightened of me. Prissy would sit on my lap and lean against me for belly rubs. If I didn't pay attention to her, she would sit on the back of the couch and tap my head with her paws, then kiss my face. Maybe it was because I rescued her that we had a special bond. Finally, she would sit between my husband and I, and he would give her love. One day he said, "Priss, come give me a kiss". She got on the back of the couch, slowly walked over to him and licked his cheek. That was it - he was also won over by this little shy girl. He was never able to pick her up though. As she became more

comfortable with people coming in and out of the house and at adoption events, the time came to try and find her a forever home.

One day I received a call from a lady who wanted to meet Prissy. She said she had been looking at her picture and bio on Petfinder for weeks and couldn't get her out of her mind. I told her about Prissy's past and fears. It was just herself and her teenage daughter and they wanted to meet her. On Saturday, February 16, 2013, they came to our adoption event. They spent several hours getting to know Prissy. The mom was a special education instructor and very patient. Prissy seemed to be doing well with them. They decided they wanted to adopt her. This brought tears to both our eyes - she knew how much this dog meant to me. I went over all the rules in adopting a fearful dog and gave them clear instructions. We talked every day and things seemed to be going well.

On February 19th, just 3 days later, I got the call every foster mom dreads. They had let Prissy out in the backyard without her leash and unattended. She had escaped from their yard. My heart dropped, my knees buckled and the tears started coming. Not my Prissy!

It was pouring down rain on that dreadful day. I called Natalie, one of Animal Rescue Recon's volunteers, and we headed to Castro Valley where the adopter lived. We spent the afternoon combing a city we were unfamiliar with, looking for Prissy and calling her name. Sadly, we had to head back to Oakley without Prissy that evening. The next day I was back in Castro Valley hanging flyers and talking to any passerby I could. Once again, I had to leave for home without Prissy.

That evening I spoke Karin Tarowyn. Karin runs a service that helps people find missing pets. Unfortunately, she is not located in California but was still a big help. She explained how to canvas the area, not with flyers but large 11x17 color eye-popping posters. She also mapped out the area of Castro Valley that would be key points to hang the posters. Ready Print in Pittsburg came through on short notice and made the posters for us so we could start hanging the next day.

With the help of Prissy's adopter, we got the posters hung and by that evening, we started getting calls from people who had spotted Prissy. She was heading toward the Castro Valley Hills near Lake Chabot. We had many calls from people whom her saw her on Ewing Road, up in the hills area, but no one was able to coax her in. Susan, Natalie and I spent Saturday and Sunday in the area looking for her.

We were getting a tremendous response from total strangers that lived in the area, asking how they could help. They would go out and search on their own. There was Roger, who saw Prissy three times but couldn't get close, Mary and Melissa who would drive around nightly and Erin would go walking during the day. So many, who I never knew their names but they wanted to help and others made a point of letting us know they were praying for our little Prissy and her safe return. She was put on the prayer list of three churches that I know of, and who knows how many others.

Monday, day 6, I was heading up to Ewing Rd again when I got a call from a gal named Brandi. She lives on Columbia and had just seen Prissy near her home. I was only minutes away. I received more calls in the next few minutes claiming the same thing. I knew at that point by the direction she was going she was heading back towards Oakley. That day, God granted me the privilege to see her once more. I was driving up Columbia Drive and Prissy came out a side street. I jumped out of the car got down low and called her name. She stopped, looked at me, even took a few steps towards me, then got startled and ran off. I will never know if it was a man who had stepped out of his seats to help me, or what startled her that day. I did know she was alive and she

was the dog people had been seeing. I called my sister and she got on the phone to Ready Press. They stopped what they were doing and made us more posters. I think it was in record time, maybe an hour, and my sister was there with more posters to hang. We then canvassed all of Columbia Drive.

I was driving out to the Castro Valley area every day at this point. It always seemed like I was one step behind. On Thursday the 28th I got a call from Park Rangers Allie and Ken who had heard Prissy's story, offering me their home to stay in so I wouldn't have to keep making the drive. That evening I got a call from a rancher in Cull Canyon saying he had seen Prissy the night before at 5:30 pm at his ranch. She was on the move again and heading closer to home. Friday morning a man called me at 8am and said he had seen Prissy at 6:30 am on San Ramon Valley Blvd, heading towards Danville. He described her down to the tag on her collar. Since I was in Cull Canyon going against traffic it didn't take long to get to San Ramon. I thought I could finally get in front of her.

I started hanging posters in San Ramon and Danville heading towards Alamo. I met some ladies who told me to hang a sign in the shoe store, Forward Motion. I would have never known that store was there. Not more than 15 minutes after I left that store, a man walked in, saw the poster and told the counter person he just saw the dog on Diablo Road in Danville. They called me - I was about 15 minutes down the street. I headed back to the area but she was nowhere in sight. There was a creek nearby and I figured she might try to follow the path of the creek.

My sister joined me and we thought we might be able to head her off at the pass. We walked from Alamo to Danville looking for our Prissy. Saturday, now missing 11 days, there more confirmed sightings of her in Danville. At least we weren't traveling as far now. Susan was back on the trail with me and many days, we searched well into the night. Several Animal Rescue Recon Volunteers and strangers were again searching on their own time as well. Who knew one little dog could bring out the good in so many people and bring whole communities together? Mary from Castro Valley was still calling me daily. Erin was even coming out to San Ramon and Danville to help. Everyone was on the same mission bring Prissy home! The Lord was answering all our prayers but still we were always behind.

At 1:30am Sunday morning March 3rd, I got a call Prissy was seen in Walnut Creek near South Main and 680 in a planted area where the deer hang out. While I was there a women called confirming the same sighting. Prissy had traveled so far. We spent Sunday and Monday canvassing Pleasant Hill and Concord, there were so many directions she could travel.

While heading home Tuesday evening, I prayed to God to please give me another sighting so I would know how close she is. My phone rang a man's voice was on the other end, his name Ali. "Are you Tamara the one looking for the little black dog?" "Yes", I responded. He said, "did she have on a red collar with a pink tag?" I thought this is it! Someone has finally caught her.

Then came the most horrible words. "I found her but she didn't make it. She was hit by a car near the 680/24 freeway." I couldn't believe the words I was hearing. It can't be, she was so close. Why God, would you let her get so close just to take her away? Ali could tell how distressed I was, and he just kept repeating, "I'm so sorry". He asked if I wanted her collar and tag. He then took it one step farther and said he would bring her body to his house if someone could pick it up. My dear friend Susan drove out to his house, crying all the way to bring her home. Ali had taken great care in wrapping her up and placing our Prissy in a box.

The next day Renee and I took her to Antioch Veterinary Hospital, so they could send her to be cremated. Lisa, who works at the vet and her mom Laurie, who works at Antioch Shelter, decided to pay for the cremation in honor of Prissy. Even though Prissy was gone from this earth she was still bringing people together.

So many of us have a big hole in our heart from this experience - we miss Prissy so much. We still cry together and support each other. Prissy's ashes are now on my fireplace mantel with the following inscription:

In Loving Memory
Prissy
No Pet Left Behind

Even in death, we all stood by Prissy. We didn't leave her behind. We brought her home to the house she was trying so desperately to get back to.

There are still so many unanswered questions - I have days when I'm not sure if I can continue to rescue because of the pain in my heart. Then I go to the shelter and see another scared, frightened dog, and know if I don't continue, that dog might not have a chance. The guilt I feel for adopting Prissy out is tremendous. I know that's what we do. We rescue, rehabilitate then find them a forever home. I know this deep down but it still hurts.

I thought Prissy was coming home to me. In reality, God was bringing her back to him. This was her journey. Even though she couldn't let many people get close to her in life, she brought so many friends and complete strangers together in her journey. This is God's way of showing don't give up on humanity. There is still good out there even in the bleakest of times.

Instead of feeling sad about Prissy, I need to feel privileged that I was the one she chose to let in and love her. The support I have received from all of you, words cannot express my gratitude.

God Bless you all and God Bless Prissy. You will always be in my heart and the heart of so many.

Rest in Peace, little girl. One day I shall see you again!