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Scent Of The Missing: Love And Partnership With A Search-and-Rescue Dog



Synopsis

After the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, Susannah Charleson was so impressed by the newspaper photo of an exhausted handler and his search-and-rescue dog that she decided to train a dog of her own. A dog lover and pilot with search experience herself, Charleson got Puzzle, a strong, bright Golden Retriever, who from the start, exhibited a unique aptitude for search-and-rescue work. But the puppy's willfulness challenged even Susannah, who had raised dogs for years. Scent of the Missing is the story of Susannah's and Puzzle's adventures and the complex relationship they forge as they help in the pursuit and recovery of people who have fallen prey to crime, misadventure, or catastrophe: a missing teenager, an Alzheimer's patient wandering in the cold, the debris of the space shuttle Columbia disaster. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I learned two main things from this book. The first was, if I'm ever lost in the wilderness, or my senility increases until I wander aimlessly away from the house, or even, in the worst case, if I drown and my body gets stuck underwater (Yes, these dogs can help pinpoint a body at the bottom of a lake, from a boat on top of it), I want someone like Susannah Charleson and her dog Puzzle to come find me. The dedication that these people, and these animals, show to this grueling, heart-wrenching, UNPAID task, is nothing short of amazing. By the time Susannah and Puzzle gained their certification in Search and Rescue, they had spent thousands of hours going through

practice sessions and over different terrain, honing their communication and teamwork, building their unspoken connection, learning the ins and outs, the habits and tricks of the trade in all kinds of scenarios. Susannah spent years running behind other handler-dog teams before she even got the go-ahead to pick out a puppy to train; years spent handling radio communications and map navigation, years spent observing every other dog in her unit in Texas. And let us note: these are years spent doing these things on weekends, and in the middle of the night after being woken by a page and sprinting out of the house, from dead sleep to fully dressed, equipped, and ready to move in less than fifteen minutes -- and then going to work the next day. This woman, and every other person that is involved in this, is truly remarkable. The second thing I learned is that I don't ever want to do this job myself. Amazing to read about, but oh man -- I need more sleep than that.

I like Susannah Charleson and her dog; I like her book. She has an easy-going, genial kind of approach to her subject matter that makes it a warmly engaging read. She excels at descriptive elements, particularly of her dogs, who just absolutely come alive on the page; I read a few colorful scenes aloud to my husband and 12-year-old son and watched both of them quickly captured as well. Too, the book beautifully balances anecdote and information, managing to be very instructive about search and rescue work in general while still focusing nicely on *this* handler, *this* dog in particular. Charleson intersperses effortless exposition on how dogs work - the different strengths required for searching in different environments; the ways they are trained and motivated to succeed - with stories of her Puzzle's puppydom. She never focuses too long on either aspect, and as Puzzle grows in her understanding of her role, we grow right along with her. We get to both learn and enjoy. If there was one thing I would have wished to see more of, it would be Puzzle in the field. Puzzle the puppy is delightful, but as much time as I spent silently rooting her on, I would have liked to have seen a little more of her as an adult. I got attached to this pair, and I didn't feel quite ready to say goodbye. It's a small quibble, though, and illustrates the difference between a work of fiction and one of fact. A life in process doesn't always offer a reader a full sense of resolution. That said, the epilogue was much appreciated. It wasn't only Puzzle and Charleson that I hated to say goodbye to. The book is likely to appeal to those with an interest in realistic stories of heroism (and dogs). It is not gossipy or remotely lurid.

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