

Dog Rescue

After a rain storm last summer, Emily Bennett noticed dog she didn't recognize wandering around her neighborhood. The dog was wet and tired, but healthy.

"The dog had a collar, but no tags. He looked well fed. My mom thought he was probably someone's pet. She thought he got scared and ran away during the storm." Emily wanted to help the dog get back to his owner.

"My mom called the local animal shelters. But no one had been looking for a dog that looked like the one we found."

The Bennett family was willing to keep the dog. But Emily knew it really belonged to someone else. "It made me sad to think that some other kid out there was missing his dog." They called the dog Stormy.

A week later, Emily's mom called the local shelters again. This time there was a match. A family had been looking for a dog that matched Stormy's description. After a few more phone calls, the two families met at the shelter. Stormy was reunited with his family.



"It was sad to say goodbye to Stormy," said Emily. "But his family looked so happy to have him back. I was really glad they had found each other again."

Anne Wilson runs one of the local shelters. She told Emily about the other dogs that were found and turned in after the storm. "Every time there is a big storm with a lot of lightning and thunder, we end up with at least three or four lost dogs coming to us. Dogs are often scared of the noise of the thunder, so they run away and end up lost."

"Most of the time," Miss Wilson explained, "the dog's owners come here and find their dog. But every year there are at least two or three that end up staying with us. They never make it back to their family."

Even after Stormy was back at home with his family, Emily couldn't stop thinking about him. She thought of the other dogs that had been lost. The weather forecast was calling for more storms.

"Emily was very upset by the idea that more dogs would end up lost," said Emily's mom. "She wanted to find a way to make it easier for owners to find their lost pets."

Emily had an idea. Her father is a computer programmer. He helped Emily create a new website. On the website, Emily posts photos of all of the dogs that are currently staying at each of the local shelters. "This way," she explains, "there is one place where a family can go to see if their dog has been found."

Anne Wilson and the other shelters owners' loved the idea. "We try to keep in contact with each other. But until now it's been the pet owner's responsibility to call each shelter and ask if their dog has been found and turned in

there. It's a hard process for the pets' owners. They are often told many times that they're dog isn't there before they find the right shelter."

"Dogs have been known to run many miles when they are scared. Sometimes the dogs end up at a shelter that is a long way from their homes. Their owners don't realize it's possible that the dog could have ended up so far away."

Whenever a new lost dog comes into the shelter, a person at the shelter takes a picture of the dog. The picture is sent in an e-mail to Emily and her dad. The e-mail also includes a description of the dog that tells the gender, color and other identifying features. Emily and her dad post the dog's picture on their website that same day.

"Now when someone calls to ask about a lost pet," said Miss Wilson, "and if the pet isn't here at our shelter, we tell the family to check the website."

In the six months that the website has been active, only one of the dogs featured has not been reunited with its family.

"It's amazing to see what a difference it makes," Miss Wilson said. "It's so sad when lost dogs and owners can't find each other. But now the process is much simpler. I'm so proud of what Emily and her family are doing to help."

Emily has a collection of thank you notes. She's received them from the owners of dogs who have been found through her website. She holds up one written with scribbled crayon. "This little girl's puppy ran away during a storm a couple weeks ago. The puppy ended up at a shelter. Then we put the picture on the website. The owners saw it and got the puppy back all within one day." Emily smiles. "It makes me happy that I could help this little girl get her puppy back."

Miss Wilson hopes that many more dogs will be reunited with their families. She also hopes that more families take precautions so that their pets don't get lost in the first place. She offers these tips for keeping your dog safe:

1. Make sure your dog wears a collar with tags. The tags should include your name and phone number so you can be contacted if the dog is found.
2. During a storm, allow your dog to come inside the house or make sure that the dog has a dog house or porch. Give him a place where he can feel safe and protected.
3. Put a fence around your yard so your dog has a safe place to play but can't get out and run away.