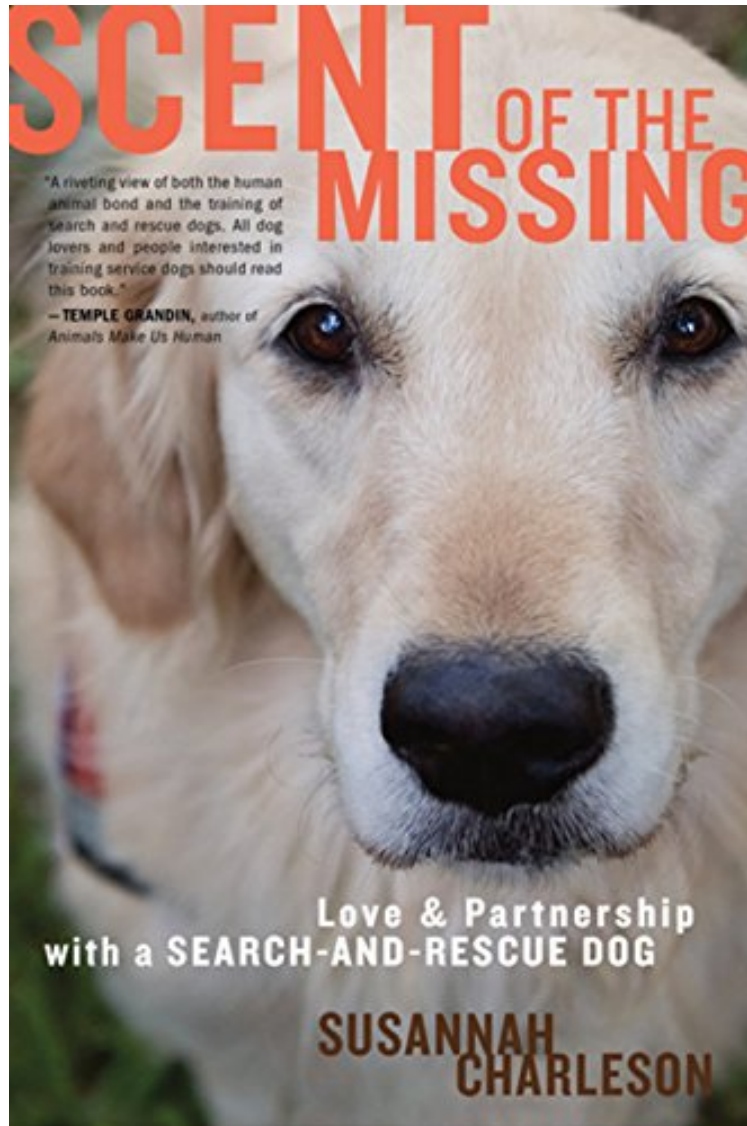


[E-BOOK] Scent of the Missing: Love and Partnership with a Search-and-Rescue Dog

Scent of the Missing: Love and Partnership with a Search-and-Rescue Dog

Susannah Charleson

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Susannah Charleson : Scent of the Missing: Love and Partnership with a Search-and-Rescue Dog before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Scent of the Missing: Love and Partnership with a Search-and-Rescue Dog:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Interesting, By R. Hellinga Susannah Charleson has been working for years as a volunteer assistant at a search and rescue dog unit when she decided to train her won dog, Puzzle. The book

tells a lot about the difficulties of the work, the contact with the other volunteers and of course also something about the work with the dogs. But there, I have to admit, there are a lot of shortcomings too. For instance, when they have to search for pieces of the space shuttle Columbia, one hears a lot about the endless wait before to get into action, and how that affects the people. About the dogs, far less. One learns a lot about Puzzle as a pet (pretty stubborn animal) and about the other dogs she had, but far less about Puzzle as a search dog, except for the fact that she loves her work and is capable to commute what she is smelling. For instance, people and dogs have to learn to rappel, and I know that Susannah found that very scary the first time. But Puzzle? No idea. The book is well written, but somehow, I missed the click to really bond with dog or owner. What I also find frustrating, is that many search stories end after the search, and you never hear what eventually happened. In a murder case, for instance, it would be nice to know whether the killer ever got apprehended. So yes, it is an interesting book, but don't expect to learn too much about search and rescue dogs or read really moving stories. One good thing: Puzzle won't die, although it is not a complete all's well that ends well.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Most wonderful, riveting book I've read in a very long time! By StilettoStarlet This book is incredible. The author has a way of describing the most minute details in such glorious, exacting, 3 dimensional prose that your mind is filled with images so strong, it's if you are physically, mentally, and emotionally experiencing them yourself. She is able to dissect and vividly describe every move, every facial expression, every instance of body language, and no small amount of pure clairvoyance that is the relationship between her and her search and rescue (SAR) dog, Puzzle, and what makes them such a successful search and rescue team. Additionally, if you are an animal lover and have ever had a very special, close relationship with an animal that is not just your pet, but more a member of your family and the whole of your heart, you will read along, nodding your head, smiling, laughing, and crying as you recognize her descriptions of all the sweet, beautiful little things that are so remarkable about that kind of unconditional love and bond between human and animal ~ things that you have experienced yourself, but have never been able to put into words. You also realize right from the get-go that this is an extraordinarily intelligent, multi-talented, strong, determined, sensitive woman, who not only volunteers her SAR efforts, but who is also a pilot, pilot instructor, and now, a beautiful writer. During search and rescue missions, she is there in whatever capacity that is needed. When her beeper goes off and she hits the road in a well practiced, precise 20 minutes, bringing Puzzle with her and expecting to use her search and rescue skills on the ground with her dog, but when she is requested instead to pilot around the area for hours on end, she doesn't hesitate to accommodate. She is sensitive to the missing victims and their families in her writing and goes into just enough detail that you get the heart wrenching gist of the tragedy, but she does not sensationalize the tragedy to the point of exploitation. In some of the other reviews I've read, people wanted more of the gory details of each tragedy and count it against her that she did not give them those details. That's not the kind of book this is. It's more about the monumental, Herculean efforts these people and their dogs go through from training, testing, and then working a mission in order to offer a service to those most unfortunate among us. It's about learning how to communicate against unspeakable conditions with your dog in order to save a life, or find the missing. It's about trust, love, and unbreakable bonds with your canine partner. And, for me, the best parts of this book were her detailed observations about her dog: from the quizzical raised eyebrow and what it means; the furrowed eyebrow and what message that conveys; the relaxed trotting around compared to the stiffened stance, nose in the air indicating a find - to the prancing Alpha dog play time between Puzzle and her other dogs and cats; the clearly exhibited frustration of Puzzle when her human partner wasn't catching on quickly enough to what Puzzle was trying to tell her; the things Puzzle was never taught but was smart enough to figure out on her own to the surprise and amazement of her human partner; the many things Puzzle taught her human partner; and the most enjoyable of all: the laugh out loud moments when the author would describe her dog's expression and interpret it in words so that we readers could get the full story from Puzzle's point of view. I loved this book. I read it from cover to cover, and I frequently read certain passages over and over again just for the sheer high it gave me. I fell completely in love with Puzzle, her fellow Pomeranians, Maddie the cat, and all the other SAR dogs. I cried when some of them passed. I developed enormous respect for these wonderful dogs and their dedicated human partners. Despite the tragedies - both of the hapless victims and the author's own devastations, this was still a feel-good book in the end. You realize that as long as there are these dogs and these people doing what they do best out of their own selfless convictions, it makes the world a little less dark.

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. A job of tough answers and open-ended questions By Space Charge Effect I opened this book hoping it wouldn't be the typical dog book with the sad ending: that is, "I learned a big lesson and now my dog is dead." It wasn't. Scent of the Missing is really about the love and partnership between a woman and a dog. I expected stories about training and about searches and they are here. But I didn't expect them to be as beautifully written and powerful as they are, especially the searches. Some of them are more powerful because they don't have a final resolution. The author writes that sometimes they search and never find out the answers to what happened and she passes that "ache" (her word, Chapter 1) on to the reader. The book answers many questions I had about these dogs and how they are chosen and trained - and how they do the work - without being a textbook. I appreciated what seems to be a realistic look into the working life of a dog team where some conclusions are happy, some are very sad, and some may never resolve at all. I also like that the author tries to imagine what the dogs are thinking about things, but in this book the dogs don't seem like

humans. The people working here with the dogs also seem to be real people. For example the handler whose voice shakes after his search dog is nearly mauled by another dog. If you expect this book to be a roller coaster ride with a big drama at the end and all the questions wrapped up neatly, go to the movies. I think this book is more like the work it describes. A journey with a good dog into unfamiliar places, where good things and bad can happen.

An unforgettable memoir from a search-and-rescue pilot and her spirited canine partner In the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, Susannah Charleson clipped a photo from the newspaper of an exhausted canine handler, face buried in the fur of his search-and-rescue dog. A dog lover and pilot with search experience herself, Susannah was so moved by the image that she decided to volunteer with a local canine team and soon discovered firsthand the long hours, nonexistent pay, and often heart-wrenching results they face. Once she qualified to train a dog of her own, she adopted Puzzle, a strong, bright Golden Retriever puppy who exhibited unique aptitudes as a working dog but who was less interested in the role of compliant house pet. *Scent of the Missing* is the story of Susannah and Puzzle's adventures as they search for the missing a lost teen, an Alzheimers patient wandering in the cold, signs of the crew amid the debris of the space shuttle Columbia disaster and unravel the mystery of the bond between humans and dogs.

.com Product Description In the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, Susannah Charleson clipped a photo from the newspaper: an exhausted canine handler, face buried in the fur of his search-and-rescue dog. A dog lover and pilot with search experience herself, Susannah was so moved by the image that she decided to volunteer with a local canine team and soon discovered firsthand the long hours, nonexistent pay, and often heart-wrenching results they face. Still she felt the call, and once she qualified to train a dog of her own, she adopted Puzzle, a strong, bright Golden Retriever puppy who exhibited unique aptitudes as a working dog but who was less interested in the role of compliant house pet. Puzzle's willfulness and high drive, both assets in the field, challenged even Susannah, who had raised dogs for years. *Scent of the Missing* is the story of Susannah and Puzzle's adventures together and of the close relationship they forge as they search for the lost--a teen gone missing, an Alzheimer's patient wandering in the cold, signs of the crew amid the debris of the space shuttle Columbia disaster. From the earliest air-scent lessons to her final mastery of whole-body dialog, Puzzle emerges as a fully collaborative partner in a noble enterprise that unfolds across the forests, plains, and cityscapes of the Southwest. Along the way Susannah and Puzzle learn to read the clues in the field, and in each other, to accomplish together the critical work neither could do alone and to unravel the mystery of the human/canine bond.

A QA with Susannah Charleson, Author of *Scent of the Missing: Love and Partnership with a Search-and-Rescue Dog*

Q: *Scent of the Missing* follows the relationship between you and your search dog from her puppyhood to eighteen months of age and her first search. How does your relationship now differ from the one you had with her then? A: Puzzle is five and a half now. Though we had several hundred training searches together in the period covered in the book, we've had easily double that now. I have a lot more trust in her bond with me. She works pretty much exclusively off lead, and I no longer wonder if she'd abandon a search, run away from me to chase her own interests, or anything like that, as I did when she was very young. During her puppyhood, Puzzle was always interested in search work and joyful about finding people, but she seemed to regard me as an unnecessary chaperone for a job she'd do better alone. As she matured, Puzzle seemed to recognize that part of her job was to work with me, to communicate with me, to insist when I'd missed some signal from her--and she seems to find joy in that part of the job too.

Q: Is your relationship with Puzzle, as depicted in the book, typical of the kinds of relationships other SAR handlers have with their dogs? A: Some situations in the book probably resonate with other handlers--maybe a few make them wince, or laugh at my failings outright--but *Scent of the Missing* by no means represents a "standard" dog-and-handler relationship. It's not a template or a guidebook for best practice. I compare this book to a memoir about a marriage or raising a child: a portrait of one relationship over a period of time--ideally magical, meaningful, and worthy of being shared.

Q: What are these working dogs like at home as pets? What do they enjoy doing off duty? A: Most of them enjoy being pretty typical dogs. They have favorite toys and games and preferred sleeping spots. They mooch car rides and sneak drinks from the toilet. Puzzle is a creature of routine. She likes to play bitey-face with one of the Pomeranians first thing in the morning. She adopted a kitten a couple of years ago; that kitten is now a cat, and the two of them cuddle and play quite a bit. Puzzle enjoys playing fetch and tug with humans. On rainy days she is keen to go outside and find the perfect mud puddle. Puzzle is happiest when she's absolutely filthy--a good puddle wallow, followed by a roll in the grass.

Q: How long will Puzzle's search career run? A: Until she shows me she can no longer do the job, or she no longer wants to do it, or until my own strength forces us to retire from the field. This work is physically rigorous, and I wouldn't push a dog whose condition was not up to it. Nor would I run her if I couldn't do my part of the job. Usually the dogs grow too frail before they lose their interest, so it's likely the types of searches she could work would taper off as she ages. Some dogs retire from disaster or wilderness work, for example, but are still able to work for years on boat/drowning searches, which don't require running or climbing.

Q: What happens to the dogs when they can no longer work searches? A: Though there are exceptions with some teams, most search dogs retire as much-loved family members, living with the handlers they've partnered. Some dogs are so driven to work that they learn new tasks. Puzzle is very pack-oriented, and though she's not a herder, I think she'd happily learn to round

up the other family pets or to "find" them all in the house on command. She already enjoys knowing what's what and who's where in the household. Q: What characteristics give a dog a special aptitude for SAR? A: This question sparks a lot of debate among handlers and evaluators, but most agree that a good SAR candidate demonstrates high energy, has natural curiosity, seems to enjoy scent games--and enjoys them enough to ignore distractions!--is willing to work on command for a human, and is confident in new situations. Physically, they need to be athletic and structurally sound, with no vision issues. While shepherds, retrievers, and hounds are popular breeds in the field, many breeds can do this work, and mixed breeds can certainly have the right gifts too. Q: When you first began working ground searches, was there anything that surprised you? A: The dogs surprised me. While I knew that dogs could do this job, I had no idea how well they communicated complex conditions of scent (for example, differences between "a little bit of old scent here" and "live scent, right here, right now" and "human scent here, but not live") and how difficult a job it is to decode them. The dogs communicate from nose to toes to tail, and they do it fast, so it's a lot of reading on the run. I was also surprised by how tough terrain can be even in a city. Urban SAR can become wilderness SAR pretty quickly. In our area, when a housing development stops, it stops, and just beyond that wall can be acres and acres of brutal scrub. I've walked past million-dollar houses and, twenty steps later, beyond the community gates, had to press through a sector on my hands and knees, cutting my way through thorns. Q: What aptitude do humans have to bring to this work? A: All kinds of stamina, physical, emotional, intellectual. A search can begin at what is, for search personnel, the end of a long workday. It can run all night and into the following day or days, in all kinds of weather across all kinds of terrain and in a state of emergency. Self control and a long fuse are useful. Physical soundness and a willingness to learn new things are important. It helps not to be afraid of snakes, spiders, the dark, or tight spaces. It's also good not to be squeamish. Handlers also need to really believe in the work of the dogs, to trust information that we humans can't see--or smell--and be able to let the dog do the work instead of trying to do it for him. Q: You began search-and-rescue-related work as a pilot. Are there any similarities between searching from the air and searching behind a dog? A: There are some surprising similarities. When I pass fields or wilderness areas in my car, I always think about how I'd land a plane on it, if I had to, or how I'd search it with a dog. Good pilots have an awareness of the ground they're flying over. In flight training, we sometimes look down at the terrain beneath us and hypothesize, "If my engine failed right now, where would I land? How would I set up that approach and that landing?" It's a matter of where the wind is coming from, how flat or rolling the terrain is, and what's growing on it. Working search with a dog, I have to take into account many of the same considerations. "If I had to search that valley, how would I set it up. Where would I start Puzzle, and which way would we work across it?" Again, it's a matter of where the wind is coming from, what kind of ground and vegetation has to be pressed through. Landing an aircraft is not just about managing the plane, it's about working the plane effectively across an environment. Working canine SAR is not just about running behind a dog; it's about making it possible for the dog to work well in an area that is always in a state of change, where scent is often twisted, lifted, or obstructed. Flying and dog handling both also require focus, a good deal of self-control, and the ability to interpret subtle cues from dog or airplane--while either one is moving quickly! Q: How will your partnership with Puzzle affect what you will do with your next search dog? A: I'd have to learn pretty quickly not to expect the next dog to be just like Puzzle, even if the two were the same breed. Other handlers on my team are partnering their second dogs, and though they were experienced handlers when they got dog number two and were able to sidestep some of the problems a new handler has to overcome, all agree that every dog is a completely new conversation, in a new language. Truly back to square one with a nose, four paws, and a tail. Puzzle learned very well from watching certified SAR dog role models, and I expect that if she is able to search and demonstrate the work in training searches to dog number two early on, it would be good for her--she is a proud dog--and it would be good for the new dog too. I have to say that even talking about a next dog is bittersweet. Though I'm a practical person, dedicated to this work, and know that dogs age and then leave us, it hurts to think I could ever step into a search field without Puzzle. (photo Chris Moseley) Exclusive: Personal Photos from Author Susannah Charleson of her Search and Rescue Dog, Puzzle (Click on Images to Enlarge) Puzzle at Work Misty, Susannah, and puppy Puzzle after her first training search Puzzle standing by, ready to run Puzzle loves her job Snow training, February 2010 Puzzle at Play Whaddy mean, I look guilty? The inverted nap. The ghoulish expression. Can't catch me! Puzzle and her adopted kitty, Thistle "Scent of the Missing contains wonderful writing about dogs and plenty of powerful, compassionate writing about the community of mankind. In its telling, it is respectful of life and celebrates the living." Rick Bass "The transformation of Puzzle the cuddly pup into Puzzle the professional search-and-rescue dog would be story enough, but Susannah Charleson gives us far more. With lean, lovely prose she takes us on a clear-eyed, compassionate journey into a mysterious world in which every story begins as a ghost story. When Charleson turns the search inward, she does so deftly, never straying more than a leash-length from the heart and soul of this book: Puzzle, and the all-too mortal ghosts she seeks." Michael Perry, author of Population: 485 and Coop